THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

"SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA"

By Mahendranath Gupta ("M"), His Disciple

Translated from the Bengali by Swami Nikhilananda

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FOREWORD

by *Aldous Huxley*

IN THE HISTORY of the arts, genius is a thing of very rare occurrence. Rarer still, however, are the competent reporters and recorders of that genius. The world has had many hundreds of admirable poets and philosophers; but of these hundreds only a very few have had the fortune to attract a Boswell or an Eckermann.

When we leave the field of art for that of spiritual religion, the scarcity of competent reporters becomes even more strongly marked. Of the day-to-day life of the great theocentric saints and contemplatives we know, in the great majority of cases, nothing whatever. Many, it is true, have recorded their doctrines in writing, and a few, such as St. Augustine, Suso and St. Teresa, have left us autobiographies of the greatest value. But, all doctrinal writing is in some measure formal and impersonal, while the autobiographer tends to omit what he regards as trifling matters and suffers from the further disadvantage of being unable to say how he strikes other people and in what way he affects their lives. Moreover, most saints have left neither writings nor self-portraits, and for knowledge of their lives, their characters and their teachings, we are forced to rely upon the records made by their disciples who, in most cases, have proved themselves singularly incompetent as reporters and biographers. Hence the special interest attaching to this enormously detailed account of the daily life and conversations of Sri Ramakrishna.

"M", as the author modestly styles himself, was peculiarly qualified for his task. To a reverent love for his master, to a deep and experiential knowledge of that master's teaching, he added a prodigious memory for the small happenings of each day and a happy gift for recording them in an interesting and realistic way. Making good use of his natural gifts and of the circumstances in which he found himself, "M" produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography. No other saint has had so able and indefatigable a Boswell. Never have the small events of a contemplative's daily life been described with such a wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity. To Western readers, it is true, this fidelity and this wealth of detail are sometimes a trifle disconcerting; for the social, religious and intellectual frames of reference within which Sri Ramakrishna did his thinking and expressed his feelings were entirely Indian. But after the first few surprises and bewilderments, we begin to find something peculiarly stimulating and instructive about the very strangeness and, to our eyes, the eccentricity of the man revealed to us in "M's" narrative. What a scholastic philosopher would call the "accidents" of Ramakrishna's life were intensely Hindu and therefore, so far as we in the West are concerned, unfamiliar and hard to understand; its "essence", however, was intensely mystical and therefore universal. To read through these conversations in which mystical doctrine alternates with an unfamiliar kind of humour, and where discussions of the oddest aspects of Hindu mythology give place to the most profound and subtle utterances about the nature of Ultimate Reality, is in itself a liberal, education in humility, tolerance and suspense of

judgment. We must be grateful to the translator for his excellent version of a book so curious and delightful as a biographical document, so precious, at the same time, for what it teaches us of the life of the spirit.

PREFACE

by Swāmi Nikhilānanda

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is the English translation of the *Sri Sri Rāmakrishna Kathāmrita,* the conversations of Sri Ramakrishna with his disciples, devotees, and visitors, recorded by Mahendranāth Gupta, who wrote the book under the pseudonym of "M." The conversations in Bengali fill five volumes, the first of which was published in 1897 and the last shortly after M.'s death in 1932. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, has published in two volumes an English translation of selected chapters from the monumental Bengali work. I have consulted these while preparing my translation.

M., one of the intimate disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, was present during all the conversations recorded in the main body of the book and noted them down in his diary. They therefore have the value of almost stenographic records. In Appendix A are given several conversations which took place in the absence of M., but of which he received a first-hand record from persons concerned. The conversations will bring before the reader's mind an intimate picture of the Master's eventful life from March 1882 to April 24, 1886, only a few months before his passing away. During this period he came in contact chiefly with English-educated Bengālis; from among them he selected his disciples and the bearers of his message, and with them he shared his rich spiritual experiences.

I have made a literal translation, omitting only a few pages of no particular interest to English-speaking readers. Often literary grace has been sacrificed for the sake of literal translation. No translation can do full justice to the original. This difficulty is all the more felt in the present work, whose contents are of a deep mystical nature and describe the inner experiences of a great seer. Human language is an altogether inadequate vehicle to express supersensuous perception. Sri Ramakrishna was almost illiterate. He never clothed his thoughts in formal language. His words sought to convey his direct realization of Truth. His conversation was in a village patois. Therein lies its charm. In order to explain to his listeners an abstruse philosophy, he, like Christ before him, used with telling effect homely parables and illustrations, culled from his observation of the daily life around him.

The reader will find mentioned in this work many visions and experiences that fall outside the ken of physical science and even psychology. With the development of modern knowledge the border line between the natural and the supernatural is ever shifting its position. Genuine mystical experiences are not as suspect now as they were half a century ago. The words of Sri Ramakrishna have already exerted a tremendous influence in the land of his birth. Savants of Europe have found in his words the ring of universal truth.

But these words were not the product of intellectual cogitation; they were rooted in direct experience. Hence, to students of religion, psychology, and physical science, these experiences of the Master are of immense value for the understanding of religious

phenomena in general. No doubt Sri Ramakrishna was a Hindu of the Hindus; yet his experiences transcended the limits of the dogmas and creeds of Hinduism. Mystics of religions other than Hinduism will find in Sri Ramakrishna's experiences a corroboration of the experiences of their own prophets and seers. And this is very important today for the resuscitation of religious values. The sceptical reader may pass by the supernatural experiences; he will yet find in the book enough material to provoke his serious thought and solve many of his spiritual problems.

There are repetitions of teachings and parables in the book. I have kept them purposely. They have their charm and usefulness, repeated as they were in different settings. Repetition is unavoidable in a work of this kind. In the first place, different seekers come to a religious teacher with questions of more or less identical nature; hence the answers will be of more or less identical pattern. Besides, religious teachers of all times and climes have tried, by means of repetition, to hammer truths into the stony soil of the recalcitrant human mind. Finally, repetition does not seem tedious if the ideas repeated are dear to a man's heart.

I have thought it necessary to write a rather lengthy Introduction to the book. In it I have given the biography of the Master, descriptions of people who came in contact with him, short explanations of several systems of Indian religious thought intimately connected with Sri Ramakrishna's life, and other relevant matters which, I hope, will enable the reader better to understand and appreciate the unusual contents of this book. It is particularly important that the Western reader, unacquainted with Hindu religious thought, should first read carefully the introductory chapter, in order that he may fully enjoy these conversations. Many Indian terms and names have been retained in the book for want of suitable English equivalents. Their meaning is given either in the Glossary or in the foot-notes. The Glossary also gives explanations of a number of expressions unfamiliar to Western readers. The diacritical marks are explained under Notes on Pronunciation.

In the Introduction I have drawn much material from the Life of Sri Ramakrishna, published by the Advaita Ashrama, Māyāvati, India. I have also consulted the excellent article on Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Nirvedānanda, in the second volume of the Cultural Heritage of India.

The book contains many songs sung either by the Master or by the devotees. These form an important feature of the spiritual tradition of Bengal and were for the most part written by men of mystical experience. For giving the songs their present form I am grateful to Mr. John Moffitt, Jr.

In the preparation of this manuscript I have received ungrudging help from several friends. Miss Margaret Woodrow Wilson and Mr.Joseph Campbell have worked hard in editing my translation. Mrs.Elizabeth Davidson has typed, more than once, the entire manuscript and rendered other valuable help. Mr.Aldous Huxley has laid me under a debt of gratitude by writing the Foreword. I sincerely thank them all.

In the spiritual firmament Sri Ramakrishna is a waxing crescent. Within one hundred years of his birth and fifty years of his death his message has spread across land and sea. Romain Rolland has described him as the fulfilment of the spiritual aspirations of the three hundred millions of Hindus for the last two thousand years. Mahatma Gandhi has written: "His life enables us to see God face to face. . . . Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness." He is being recognized as a compeer of Krishna, Buddha, and Christ.

The life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna have redirected the thoughts of the denationalized Hindus to the spiritual ideals of their forefathers. During the latter part of the nineteenth century his was the time-honoured role of the Saviour of the Eternal Religion of the Hindus. His teachings played an important part in liberalizing the minds of orthodox pundits and hermits. Even now he is the silent force that is moulding the spiritual destiny of India. His great disciple, Swami Vivekananda, was the first Hindu missionary to preach the message of Indian culture to the enlightened minds of Europe and America. The full consequence of Swami Vivekānandā work is still in the womb of the future.

May this translation of the first book of its kind in the religious history of the world, being the record of the direct words of a prophet, help stricken humanity to come nearer to the Eternal Verity of life and remove dissension and quarrel from among the different faiths! May it enable seekers of Truth to grasp the subtle laws of the supersensuous realm, and unfold before man's restricted vision the spiritual foundation of the universe, the unity of existence, and the divinity of the soul!

- Swāmi Nikhilānanda

New York
Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday
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The Recorder of the Gospel

MAHENDRANĀTH GUPTA

In the life of the great Saviours and Prophets of the world it is often found that they are accompanied by souls of high spiritual potency who play a conspicuous part in the furtherance of their Master's mission. They become so integral a part of the life and work of these great ones that posterity can think of them only in mutual association. Such is the case with Sri Ramakrishna and M., whose diary has come to be known to the world as the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in English and as *Sri Rāmakrishna Kathāmrita* in the original Bengali version.

Sri Mahendra Nath Gupta, familiary known to the readers of the Gospel by his pen name M., and to the devotees as Master Mahashay, was born on the 14th of July, 1854 as the son of Madhusudan Gupta, an officer of the Calcutta High Court, and his wife, Swarnamayi Devi. He had a brilliant scholastic career at Hare School and the Presidency College at Calcutta. The range of his studies included the best that both occidental and oriental learning had to offer. English literature, history, economics, western philosophy and law on the one hand, and Sanskrit literature and grammar, Darsanas, Puranas, Smritis, Jainism, Buddhism, astrology and Ayurveda on the other were the subjects in which he attained considerable proficiency.

He was an educationist all his life both in a spiritual and in a secular sense. After he passed out of College, he took up work as headmaster in a number of schools in succession Narail High School, City School, Ripon College School, Metropolitan School, Aryan School, Oriental School, Oriental Seminary and Model School. The causes of his migration from school to school were that he could not get on with some of the managements on grounds of principles and that often his spiritual mood drew him away to places of pilgrimage for long periods. He worked with some of the most noted public men of the time like Iswar Chandra Vidyāsāgar and Surendranath Banerjee. The latter appointed him as a professor in the City and Ripon Colleges where he taught subjects like English, philosophy, history and economics. In his later days he took over the Morton School, and he spent his time in the staircase room of the third floor of it, administering the school and preaching the message of the Master. He was much respected in educational circles where he was usually referred to as Rector Mahashay. A teacher who had worked under him writes thus in warm appreciation of his teaching methods: "Only when I worked with him in school could I appreciate what a great educationist he was. He would come down to the level of his students when teaching, though he himself was so learned, so talented. Ordinarily teachers confine their instruction to what is given in books without much thought as to whether the student can accept it or not. But M., would first of all gauge how much the student could take in and by what means. He would employ aids to teaching like maps, pictures and diagrams, so that his students could learn by seeing. Thirty years ago (from 1953) when the question of imparting education through the medium of the mother tongue was being

discussed, M. had already employed Bengali as the medium of instruction in the Morton School." (M *The Apostle and the Evangelist* by Swami Nityatmananda Part I. P. 15.)

Imparting secular education was, however, only his profession ; his main concern was with the spiritual regeneration of man a calling for which Destiny seems to have chosen him. From his childhood he was deeply pious, and he used to be moved very much by Sādhus, temples and Durga Puja celebrations. The piety and eloquence of the great Brahmo leader of the times, Keshab Chander Sen, elicited a powerful response from the impressionable mind of Mahendra Nath, as it did in the case of many an idealistic young man of Calcutta, and prepared him to receive the great Light that was to dawn on him with the coming of Sri Ramakrishna into his life.

This epoch-making event of his life came about in a very strange way. M. belonged to a joint family with several collateral members. Some ten years after he began his career as an educationist, bitter quarrels broke out among the members of the family, driving the sensitive M. to despair and utter despondency. He lost all interest in life and left home one night to go into the wide world with the idea of ending his life. At dead of night he took rest in his sister's house at Baranagar, and in the morning, accompanied by a nephew Siddheswar, he wandered from one garden to another in Calcutta until Siddheswar brought him to the Temple Garden of Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna was then living. After spending some time in the beautiful rose gardens there, he was directed to the room of the Paramahamsa, where the eventful meeting of the Master and the disciple took place on a blessed evening (the exact date is not on record) on a Sunday in March 1882. As regards what took place on the occasion, the reader is referred to the opening section of the first chapter of the *Gospel*.

The Master, who divined the mood of desperation in M, his resolve to take leave of this 'play-field of deception', put new faith and hope into him by his gracious words of assurance: "God forbid! Why should you take leave of this world? Do you not feel blessed by discovering your Guru? By His grace, what is beyond all imagination or dreams can be easily achieved!" At these words the clouds of despair moved away from the horizon of M.'s mind, and the sunshine of a new hope revealed to him fresh vistas of meaning in life. Referring to this phase of his life, M. used to say, "Behold! where is the resolve to end life, and where, the discovery of God! That is, sorrow should be looked upon as a friend of man. God is all good." (*Ibid* P.33.)

After this re-settlement, M's life revolved around the Master, though he continued his professional work as an educationist. During all holidays, including Sundays, he spent his time at Dakshineswar in the Master's company, and at times extended his stay to several days.

It did not take much time for M. to become very intimate with the Master, or for the Master to recognise in this disciple a divinely commissioned partner in the fulfilment of his spiritual mission. When M. was reading out the Chaitanya Bhagavata, the Master discovered that he had been, in a previous birth, a disciple and companion of the great Vaishnava Teacher, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and the Master even saw him 'with his naked eye' participating in the ecstatic mass-singing of the Lord's name under the leadership of that Divine personality. So the Master told M, "You are my own, of the same substance as the father and the son," indicating thereby that M. was one of the chosen few and a part and parcel of his Divine mission.

There was an urge in M. to abandon the household life and become a Sannyāsin. When he communicated this idea to the Master, he forbade him saying," Mother has told me that you have to do a little of Her work you will have to teach Bhagavata, the word of God to humanity. The Mother keeps a Bhagavata Pandit with a bondage in the world!" (*Ibid* P.36.)

An appropriate allusion indeed! Bhagavata, the great scripture that has given the word of Sri Krishna to mankind, was composed by the Sage Vyāsa under similar circumstances. When caught up in a mood of depression like that of M, Vyāsa was advised by the sage Nārada that he would gain peace of mind only qn composing a work exclusively devoted to the depiction of the Lord's glorious attributes and His teachings on Knowledge and Devotion, and the result was that the world got from Vyāsa the invaluable gift of the Bhagavata Purana depicting the life and teachings of Sri Krishna. From the mental depression of the modem Vyāsa, the world has obtained the *Kathāmrita* (Bengali Edition) the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in English.

Sri Ramakrishna was a teacher for both the Orders of mankind, Sannyāsins and householders. His own life offered an ideal example for both, and he left behind disciples who followed the highest traditions he had set in respect of both these ways of life. M., along with Nag Mahashay, exemplified how a householder can rise to the highest level of sagehood. M. was married to Nikunja Devi, a distant relative of Keshab Chander Sen, even when he was reading at College, and he had four children, two sons and two daughters. The responsibility of the family, no doubt, made him dependent on his professional income, but the great devotee that he was, he never compromised with ideals and principles for this reason. Once when he was working as the headmaster in a school managed by the great Vidyāsāgar, the results of the school at the public examination happened to be rather poor, and Vidyāsāgar attributed it to M's pre-occupation with the Master and his consequent failure to attend adequately to the school work. M. at once resigned his post without any thought of the morrow. Within a fortnight the family was in poverty, and M. was one day pacing up and down the verandah of his house, musing how he would feed his children the next day. Just then a man came with a letter addressed to 'Mahendra Babu', and on opening it, M. found that it was a letter

from his friend Sri Surendra Nath Banerjee, asking whether he would like to take up a professorship in the Ripon College. In this way three or four times he gave up the job that gave him the wherewithal to support the family, either for upholding principles or for practising spiritual Sadhanas in holy places, without any consideration of the possible dire worldly consequences; but he was always able to get over these difficulties somehow, and the interests of his family never suffered. In spite of his disregard for worldly goods, he was, towards the latter part of his life, in a fairly flourishing condition as the proprietor of the Morton School which he developed into a noted educational institution in the city. The Lord has said in the Bhagavad Gitā that in the case of those who think of nothing except Him, He Himself would take up all their material and spiritual responsibilities. M. was an example of the truth of the Lord's promise.

Though his children received proper attention from him, his real family, both during the Master's life-time and after, consisted of saints, devotees, Sannyāsins and spiritual aspirants. His life exemplifies the Master's teaching that an ideal householder must be like a good maid-servant of a family, loving and caring properly for the children of the house, but knowing always that her real home and children are elsewhere. During the Master's life-time he spent all his Sundays and other holidays with him and his devotees, and besides listening to the holy talks and devotional music, practised meditation both on the Personal and the Impersonal aspects of God under the direct guidance of the Master. In the pages of the Gospel the reader gets a picture of M.'s spiritual relationship with the Master how from a hazy belief in the Impersonal God of the Brahmos, he was step by step brought to accept both Personality and Impersonality as the two aspects of the same Non-dual Being, how he was convinced of the manifestation of that Being as Gods, Goddesses and as Incarnations, and how he was established in a life that was both of a Jnāni and of a Bhakta. This Jnāni-Bhakta outlook and way of living became so dominant a feature of his life that Swami Raghavananda, who was very closely associated with him during his last six years, remarks: "Among those who lived with M. in latter days, some felt that he always lived in this constant and conscious union with God even with open eyes (i.e., even in waking consciousness)." (Swami Raghavananda's article on M. in *Prabuddha Bharata* vol. XXXVII. P. 442.)

Besides undergoing spiritual disciplines at the feet of the Master, M. used to go to holy places during the Master's life-time itself and afterwards too as a part of his *Sādhanā*. He was one of the earliest of the disciples to visit Kamarpukur, the birthplace of the Master, in the latter's life-time itself; for he wished to practise contemplation on the Master's early life in its true original setting. His experience there is described as follows by Swami Nityatmananda: "By the grace of the Master, he saw the entire Kamarpukur as a holy place bathed in an effulgent Light. Trees and creepers, beasts and birds and men all were made of effulgence. So he prostrated to all on the road. He saw a torn cat, which appeared to him luminous with the Light of Consciousness. Immediately he fell to the ground and saluted it" (M *The Apostle and the Evangelist* by Swami Nityatmananda vol. I. P. 40.) He had similar experience in Dakshineswar also. At the instance of the Master he also visited Puri, and in the words of Swami Nityatmananda, "with indomitable courage, M. embraced the image of Jagannath out of season."

The life of *Sādhanā* and holy association that he started on at the feet of the Master, he continued all through his life. He has for this reason been most appropriately described as a Grihastha-Sannyāsi (householder-Sannyāsin). Though he was forbidden by the Master to become a Sannyāsin, his reverence for the Sannyāsa ideal was whole-hearted and was without any reservation. So after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, while several of the Master's householder devotees considered the young Sannyāsin disciples of the Master as inexperienced and inconsequential, M. stood by them with the firm faith that the Master's life and message were going to be perpetuated only through them. Swami Vivekananda wrote from America in a letter to the inmates of the Math: "When Sri Thākur (Master) left the body, every one gave us up as a few unripe urchins. But M. and a few others did not leave us in the lurch. We cannot repay our debt to them." (Swami Raghavananda's article on M. in *Prabuddha Bharata* vol. XXX P. 442.)

M. spent his weekends and holidays with the monastic brethren who, after the Master's demise, had formed themselves into an Order with a Math at Baranagore, and participated in the intense life of devotion and meditation that they followed. At other times he would retire to Dakshineswar or some garden in the city and spend several days in spiritual practice taking simple self-cooked food. In order to feel that he was one with all mankind he often used to go out of his home at dead of night, and like a wandering Sannyāsin, sleep with the waifs on some open verandah or footpath on the road.

After the Master's demise, M. went on pilgrimage several times. He visited Banāras, Vrindāvan, Ayodhyā and other places. At Banāras he visited the famous Trailinga Swāmi and fed him with sweets, and he had long conversations with Swami Bhaskarananda, one of the noted saintly and scholarly Sannyāsins of the time. In 1912 he went with the Holy Mother to Banāras, and spent about a year in the company of Sannyāsins at Banāras, Vrindāvan, Hardwar, Hrishikesh and Swargashram. But he returned to Calcutta, as that city offered him the unique opportunity of associating himself with the places hallowed by the Master in his life-time. Afterwards he does not seem to have gone to any far-off place, but stayed on in his room in the Morton School carrying on his spiritual ministry, speaking on the Master and his teachings to the large number of people who flocked to him after having read his famous *Kathāmrita* known to English readers as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

This brings us to the circumstances that led to the writing and publication of this monumental work, which has made M. one of the immortals in hagiographic literature. While many educated people heard Sri Ramakrishna's talks, it was given to this illustrious personage alone to leave a graphic and exact account of them for posterity, with details like date, hour, place, names and particulars about participants. Humanity owes this great book to the ingrained habit of diary-keeping with which M. was endowed. Even as a boy of about thirteen, while he was a student in the 3rd class of the Hare School, he was in the habit of keeping a diary. "Today on rising," he wrote in his diary, "I

greeted my father and mother, prostrating on the ground before them" (Swami Nityatmananda's 'M The Apostle and the Evangelist' Part I. P 29.) At another place he wrote, "Today, while on my way to school, I visited, as usual, the temples of Kāli, the Mother at Tharitharia, and of Mother Sitala, and paid my obeisance to them." About twenty-five years after, when he met the Great Master in the spring of 1882, it was the same instinct of a born diary-writer that made him begin his book, 'unique in the literature of hagiography', with the memorable words: "When hearing the name of Hari or Rāma once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform devotions such as Sandhya any more."

In addition to this instinct for diary-keeping, M. had great endowments contributing to success in this line. Writes Swami Nityatmananda who lived in close association with M., in his book entitled *M - The Apostle and Evangelist*: "M.'s prodigious memory combined with his extraordinary power of imagination completely annihilated the distance of time and place for him. Even after the lapse of half a century he could always visualise vividly, scenes from the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Superb too was his power to portray pictures by words."

Besides the prompting of his inherent instinct, the main inducement for M. to keep this diary of his experiences at Dakshineswar was his desire to provide himself with a means for living in holy company at all times. Being a school teacher, he could be with the Master only on Sundays and other holidays, and it was on his diary that he depended for 'holy company' on other days. The devotional scriptures like the Bhagavata say that holy company is the first and most important means for the generation and growth of devotion. For, in such company man could hear talks on spiritual matters and listen to the glorification of Divine attributes, charged with the fervour and conviction emanating from the hearts of great lovers of God. Such company is therefore the one certain means through which Sraddha (Faith), Rati (attachment to God) and Bhakti (loving devotion) are generated. The diary of his visits to Dakshineswar provided M. with material for re-living, through reading and contemplation, the holy company he had had earlier, even on days when he was not able to visit Dakshineswar. The wealth of details and the vivid description of men and things in the midst of which the sublime conversations are set, provide excellent material to re-live those experiences for any one with imaginative powers. It was observed by M.'s disciples and admirers that in later life also whenever he was free or alone, he would be pouring over his diary, transporting himself on the wings of imagination to the glorious days he spent at the feet of the Master.

During the Master's life-time M. does not seem to have revealed the contents of his diary to any one. There is an unconfirmed tradition that when the Master saw him taking notes, he expressed apprehension at the possibility of his utilising these to publicise him like Keshab Sen; for the Great Master was so full of the spirit of renunciation and humility that he disliked being lionised. It must be for this reason that no one knew about this precious diary of M. for a decade until he brought out selections from it as a pamphlet in English in 1897 with the Holy Mother's blessings and permission. The Holy Mother, being very much pleased to hear parts of the diary read to her in Bengali, wrote

to M.: "When I heard the *Kathāmrita*, (Bengali name of the book) I felt as if it was he, the Master, who was saying all that." (*Ibid* Part I. P 37.)

The two pamphlets in English entitled the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* appeared in October and November 1897. They drew the spontaneous acclamation of Swami Vivekananda, who wrote on 24th November of that year from Dehra Dun to M.:"Many many thanks for your second leaflet. It is indeed wonderful. The move is quite original, and never was the life of a Great Teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind, as you are doing. The language also is beyond all praise, so fresh, so pointed, and withal so plain and easy. I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed them. I am really in a transport when I read them. Strange, isn't it? Our Teacher and Lord was so original, and each one of us will have to be original or nothing. I now understand why none of us attempted His life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work. He is with you evidently." (*Vedānta Kesari* Vol. XIX P. 141. Also given in the first edition of the *Gospel* published from Ramakrishna Math, Madras in 1911.)

And Swamiji added a post script to the letter: "Socratic dialogues are Plato all over you are entirely hidden. Moreover, the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful. Everybody likes it here or in the West." Indeed, in order to be unknown, Mahendranath had used the pen-name M., under which the book has been appearing till now. But so great a book cannot remain obscure for long, nor can its author remain unrecognised by the large public in these modern times. M. and his book came to be widely known very soon and to meet the growing demand, a full-sized book, Vol. I of the *Gospel*, translated by the author himself, was published in 1907 by the Brahmavadin Office, Madras. A second edition of it, revised by the author, was brought out by the Ramakrishna Math, Madras in December 1911, and subsequently a second part, containing new chapters from the original Bengali, was published by the same Math in 1922. The full English translation of the *Gospel* by Swami Nikhilananda appeared first in 1942.

In Bengali the book is published in five volumes, the first part having appeared in 1902 and the others in 1905, 1907, 1910 and 1932 respectively.

It looks as if M. was brought to the world by the Great Master to record his words and transmit them to posterity. Swami Sivananda, a direct disciple of the Master and the second President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, says on this topic: "Whenever there was an interesting talk, the Master would call Master Mahashay if he was not in the room, and then draw his attention to the holy words spoken. We did not know then why the Master did so. Now we can realise that this action of the Master had an important significance, for it was reserved for Master Mahashay to give to the world at large the sayings of the Master." (*Vedānta Kesari* Vol. XIX P 141.) Thanks to M., we get, unlike in the case of the great teachers of the past, a faithful record with date, time, exact report of conversations, description of concerned men and places, references to contemporary

events and personalities and a hundred other details for the last four years of the Master's life (1882-'86), so that no one can doubt the historicity of the Master and his teachings at any time in the future.

M. was, in every respect, a true missionary of Sri Ramakrishna right from his first acquaintance with him in 1882. As a school teacher, it was a practice with him to direct to the Master such of his students as had a true spiritual disposition. Though himself prohibited by the Master to take to monastic life, he encouraged all spiritually inclined young men he came across in his later life to join the monastic Order. Swami Vijnanananda, a direct Sannyāsin disciple of the Master and a President of the Ramakrishna Order, once remarked to M.: "By enquiry, I have come to the conclusion that eighty percent and more of the Sannyāsins have embraced the monastic life after reading the *Kathāmrita* (Bengali name of the book) and coming in contact with you." (*M The Apostle and the Evangelist* by Swami Nityatmananda Part I, P 37.)

In 1905 he retired from the active life of a Professor and devoted his remaining twenty-seven years exclusively to the preaching of the life and message of the Great Master. He bought the Morton Institution from its original proprietors and shifted it to a commodious four-storeyed house at 50 Amherst Street, where it flourished under his management as one of the most efficient educational institutions in Calcutta. He generally occupied a staircase room at the top of it, cooking his own meal which consisted only of milk and rice without variation, and attended to all his personal needs himself. His dress also was the simplest possible. It was his conviction that limitation of personal wants to the minimum is an important aid to holy living. About one hour in the morning he would spend in inspecting the classes of the school, and then retire to his staircase room to pour over his diary and live in the divine atmosphere of the earthly days of the Great Master, unless devotees and admirers had already gathered in his room seeking his holy company.

In appearance, M. looked a Vedic Rishi. Tall and stately in bearing, he had a strong and well-built body, an unusually broad chest, high forehead and arms extending to the knees. His complexion was fair and his prominent eyes were always tinged with the expression of the divine love that filled his heart. Adorned with a silvery beard that flowed luxuriantly down his chest, and a shining face radiating the serenity and gravity of holiness, M. was as imposing and majestic as he was handsome and engaging in appearance. Humorous, sweet-tongued and eloquent when situations required, this great Maharishi of our age lived only to sing the glory of Sri Ramakrishna day and night. Though a very well versed scholar in the Upanishads, Gitā and the philosophies of the East and the West, all his discussions and teachings found their culmination in the life and the message of Sri Ramakrishna, in which he found the real explanation and illustration of all the scriptures. Both consciously and unconsciously, he was the teacher of the *Kathāmrita* the nectarine words of the Great Master.

Though a much-sought-after spiritual guide, an educationist of repute, and a contemporary and close associate of illustrious personages like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Keshab Chander Sen and Iswar Chander Vidyāsāgar, he was always moved by the noble humanity of a lover of God, which consists in respecting the personalities of all as receptacles of the Divine Spirit. So he taught without the consciousness of a teacher, and no bar of superiority stood in the way of his doing the humblest service to his students and devotees. "He was a commission of love," writes his close devotee, Swami Raghavananda, "and yet his soft and sweet words would pierce the stoniest heart, make the worldly-minded weep and repent and turn Godwards." (*Prabuddha Bharata* Vol. XXXVII P 499.)

As time went on and the number of devotees increased, the staircase room and terrace of the 3rd floor of the Morton Institution became a veritable Naimisaranya of modern times, resounding during all hours of the day, and sometimes of night, too, with the word of God coming from the Rishi-like face of M. addressed to the eager God-seekers sitting around. To the devotees who helped him in preparing the text of the *Gospel*, he would dictate the conversations of the Master in a meditative mood, referring now and then to his diary. At times in the stillness of midnight he would awaken a nearby devotee and tell him: "Let us listen to the words of the Master in the depths of the night as he explains the truth of the Pranava." (*Vedānta Kesari* XIX P. 142.) Swami Raghavananda, an intimate devotee of M., writes as follows about these devotional sittings: "In the sweet and warm months of April and May, sitting under the canopy of heaven on the roof-garden of 50 Amherst Street, surrounded by shrubs and plants, himself sitting in their midst like a Rishi of old, the stars and planets in their courses beckoning us to things infinite and sublime, he would speak to us of the mysteries of God and His love and of the yearning that would rise in the human heart to solve the Eternal Riddle, as exemplified in the life of his Master. The mind, melting under the influence of his soft sweet words of light, would almost transcend the frontiers of limited existence and dare to peep into the infinite. He himself would take the influence of the setting and say,'What a blessed privilege it is to sit in such a setting (pointing to the starry heavens), in the company of the devotees discoursing on God and His love!' These unforgettable scenes will long remain imprinted on the minds of his hearers." (Prabuddha Bharata Vol XXXVII P 497.)

About twenty-seven years of his life he spent in this way in the heart of the great city of Calcutta, radiating the Master's thoughts and ideals to countless devotees who flocked to him, and to still larger numbers who read his *Kathāmrita* (English Edition : *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna)*, the last part of which he had completed before June 1932 and given to the press. And miraculously, as it were, his end also came immediately after he had completed his life's mission. About three months earlier he had come to stay at his home at 13/2 Gurdasprasad Chaudhuary Lane at Thakur Bari, where the Holy Mother had herself installed the Master and where His regular worship was being conducted for the previous 40 years. The night of 3rd June being the *Phalahārini Kāli Pooja* day, M.

had sent his devotees who used to keep company with him, to attend the special worship at Belur Math at night. After attending the service at the home shrine, he went through the proof of the *Kathāmrita* for an hour. Suddenly he got a severe attack of neuralgic pain, from which he had been suffering now and then, of late. Before 6 a.m. in the early hours of **4th June 1932** he passed away, fully conscious and chanting: *'Gurudeva-Ma, Kole tule na-o* (Take me in your arms! O Master! O Mother!!)'

SWĀMI TAPASYĀNANDA
Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras
March 1974.

INTRODUCTION

by Swāmi Nikhilānanda

Sri Ramakrishna, the God-man of modern India, was born at Kāmārpukur. This village in the Hooghly District preserved during the last century the idyllic simplicity of the rural areas of Bengāl. Situated far from the railway, it was untouched by the glamour of the city. It contained rice-fields, tall palms, royal banyans, a few lakes, and two cremation grounds. South of the village a stream took its leisurely course. A mango orchard dedicated by a neighbouring zamindār to the public use was frequented by the boys for their noonday sports. A highway passed through the village to the great temple of Jagannāth at Puri, and the villagers, most of whom were farmers and craftsmen, entertained many passing holy men and pilgrims. The dull round of the rural life was broken by lively festivals, the observance of sacred days, religious singing, and other innocent pleasures.

About his parents Sri Ramakrishna once said: "My mother was the personification of rectitude and gentleness. She did not know much about the ways of the world; innocent of the art of concealment, she would say what was in her mind. People loved her for open-heartedness. My father, an orthodox brāhmin, never accepted gifts from the Śudrās. He spent much of his time in worship and meditation, and in repeating God's name and chanting His glories. Whenever in his daily prayers he invoked the Goddess Gāyatri, his chest flushed and tears rolled down his cheeks. He spent his leisure hours making garlands for the Family Deity, Raghuvir."

Khudirām Chattopādhyāya and Chandra Devi, the parents of Sri Ramakrishna, were married in 1799. At that time Khudirām was living in his ancestral village of Derepore, not far from Kāmārpukur. Their first son, Rāmkumār, was born in 1805, and their first daughter, Kātyāyani, in 1810. In 1814 Khudirām was ordered by his landlord to bear false witness in court against a neighbour. When he refused to do so, the landlord brought a false case against him and deprived him of his ancestral property. Thus dispossessed, he arrived, at the invitation of another landlord, in the quiet village of Kāmārpukur, where he was given a dwelling and about an acre of fertile land. The crops from this little property were enough to meet his family's simple needs. Here he lived in simplicity, dignity, and contentment.

Ten years after his coming to Kāmārpukur, Khudirām made a pilgrimage on foot to Rāmeswar, at the southern extremity of India. Two years later was born his second son, whom he named Rāmeśwar. Again in 1835, at the age of sixty, he made a pilgrimage, this time to Gayā. Here, from ancient times, Hindus have come from the four corners of India to discharge their duties to their departed ancestors by offering them food and drink at the sacred footprint of the Lord Vishnu. At this holy place Khudirām had a dream in which the Lord Vishnu promised to be born as his son. And Chandrā Devi, too, in front of the Śiva temple at Kāmārpukur, had a vision indicating the birth of a divine child. Upon his return the husband found that she had conceived.

It was on February 18, 1836, that the child, to be known afterwards as Ramakrishna, was born. In memory of the dream at Gayā he was given the name of Gadādhar, the "Bearer of the Mace", an epithet of Vishnu. Three years later a little sister was born.

Boyhood

Gadādhar grew up into a healthy and restless boy, full of fun and sweet mischief. He was intelligent and precocious and endowed with a prodigious memory. On his father's lap he learnt by heart the names of his ancestors and the hymns to the gods and goddesses, and at the village school he was taught to read and write. But his greatest delight was to listen to recitations of stories from Hindu mythology and the epics. These he would afterwards recount from memory, to the great joy of the villagers. Painting he enjoyed; the art of moulding images of the gods and goddesses he learnt from the potters. But arithmetic was his great aversion.

At the age of six or seven Gadādhar had his first experience of spiritual ecstasy. One day in June or July, when he was walking along a narrow path between paddy-fields, eating the puffed rice that he carried in a basket, he looked up at the sky and saw a beautiful, dark thunder-cloud. As it spread, rapidly enveloping the whole sky, a flight of snow-white cranes passed in front of it. The beauty of the contrast overwhelmed the boy. He fell to the ground, unconscious, and the puffed rice went in all directions. Some villagers found him and carried him home in their arms. Gadādhar said later that in that state he had experienced an indescribable joy.

Gadādhar was seven years old when his father died. This incident profoundly affected him. For the first time the boy realized that life on earth was impermanent. Unobserved by others, he began to slip into the mango orchard or into one of the cremation grounds, and he spent hours absorbed in his own thoughts. He also became more helpful to his mother in the discharge of her household duties. He gave more attention to reading and hearing the religious stories recorded in the Purānās. And he became interested in the wandering monks and pious pilgrims who would stop at Kāmārpukur on their way to Puri. These holy men, the custodians of India's spiritual heritage and the living witnesses of the ideal of renunciation of the world and all-absorbing love of God, entertained the little boy with stories from the Hindu epics, stories of saints and prophets, and also stories of their own adventures. He, on his part, fetched their water and fuel and served them in various ways. Meanwhile, he was observing their meditation and worship.

At the age of nine, Gadādhar was invested with the *Sacred Thread.* This ceremony conferred upon him the privileges of his brāhmin lineage, including the worship of the Family Deity, Raghuvir, and imposed upon him the many strict disciplines of a brāhmin's life. During the ceremony of investiture he shocked his relatives by accepting a meal cooked by his nurse, a Śudrā woman. His father would never have dreamt of doing such a thing. But in a playful mood Gadādhar had once promised this woman that he would eat her food, and now he fulfilled his plighted word. The woman had piety and religious sincerity, and these were more important to the boy than the conventions of society.

Gadādhar was now permitted to worship Raghuvir. Thus began his first training in meditation. He so gave his heart and soul to the worship that the stone image very soon appeared to him as the living Lord of the Universe. His tendency to lose himself in contemplation was first noticed at this time. Behind his boyish light-heartedness was seen a deepening of his spiritual nature.

About this time, on the Śivarātri night, consecrated to the worship of Śiva, a dramatic performance was arranged. The principal actor, who was to play the part of Śiva, suddenly fell ill, and Gadādhar was persuaded to act in his place. While friends were dressing him for the role of Śiva - smearing his body with ashes, matting his locks, placing a trident in his hand and a string of rudrākaśa beads around his neck - the boy appeared to become absent-minded. He approached the stage with slow and measured step, supported by his friends. He looked the living image of Śiva. The audience loudly applauded what it took to be his skill as an actor, but it was soon discovered that he was really lost in meditation. His countenance was radiant and tears flowed from his eyes. He was lost to the outer world. The effect of this scene on the audience was tremendous. The people felt blessed as by a vision of Śiva Himself. The performance had to be stopped, and the boy's mood lasted till the following morning.

Gadādhar himself now organized a dramatic company with his young friends. The stage was set in the mango orchard. The themes were selected from the stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Gadādhar knew by heart almost all the roles, having heard them from professional actors. His favourite theme was the Vrindāvan episode of Krishna's life, depicting those exquisite love-stories of Krishna and the milkmaids and the cowherd boys. Gadādhar would play the parts of Rādhā or Krishna and would often lose himself in the character he was portraying. His natural feminine grace heightened the dramatic effect. The mango orchard would ring with the loud kirtan of the boys. Lost in song and merry-making, Gadādhar became indifferent to the routine of school.

In 1849 Rāmkumār, the eldest son, went to Calcutta to improve the financial condition of the family.

Gadādhar was on the threshold of youth. He had become the pet of the women of the village. They loved to hear him talk, sing, or recite from the holy books. They enjoyed his knack of imitating voices. Their woman's instinct recognized the innate purity and guilelessness of this boy of clear skin, flowing hair, beaming eyes, smiling face, and inexhaustible fun. The pious elderly women looked upon him as Gopālā, the Baby Krishna, and the younger ones saw in him the youthful Krishna of Vrindāvan. He himself so idealised the love of the gopis for Krishna that he sometimes yearned to be born as a woman, if he must be born again, in order to be able to love Sri Krishna with all his heart and soul.

Coming to Calcutta

At the age of sixteen Gadādhar was summoned to Calcutta by his elder brother Rāmkumār, who wished assistance in his priestly duties. Rāmkumār had opened a Sanskrit academy to supplement his income, and it was his intention gradually to turn

his younger brother's mind to education. Gadādhar applied himself heart and soul to his new duty as family priest to a number of Calcutta families. His worship was very different from that of the professional priests. He spent hours decorating the images and singing hymns and devotional songs; he performed with love the other duties of his office. People were impressed with his ardour. But to his studies he paid scant attention.

Rāmkumār did not at first oppose the ways of his temperamental brother. He wanted Gadādhar to become used to the conditions of city life. But one day he decided to warn the boy about his indifference to the world. After all, in the near future Gadādhar must, as a householder, earn his livelihood through the performance of his brāhminical duties; and these required a thorough knowledge of Hindu law, astrology, and kindred subjects. He gently admonished Gadādhar and asked him to pay more attention to his studies. But the boy replied spiritedly: "Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education? I would rather acquire that wisdom which will illumine my heart and give me satisfaction for ever."

Bread-winning Education

The anguish of the inner soul of India found expression through these passionate words of the young Gadādhar. For what did his unsophisticated eyes see around him in Calcutta, at that time the metropolis of India and the centre of modern culture and learning? Greed and lust held sway in the higher levels of society, and the occasional religious practices were merely outer forms from which the soul had long ago departed. Gadādhar had never seen anything like this at Kāmārpukur among the simple and pious villagers. The *sādhus* and wandering monks whom he had served in his boyhood had revealed to him an altogether different India. He had been impressed by their devotion and purity, their self-control and renunciation. He had learnt from them and from his own intuition that the ideal of life as taught by the ancient sages of India was the realization of God.

When Rāmkumār reprimanded Gadādhar for neglecting a "bread-winning education", the inner voice of the boy reminded him that the legacy of his ancestors - the legacy of Rāmā, Krishna, Buddha, Sankara, Rāmānuja, Chaitanya - was not worldly security but the Knowledge of God. And these noble sages were the true representatives of Hindu society. Each of them was seated, as it were, on the crest of the wave that followed each successive trough in the tumultuous course of Indian national life. All demonstrated that the life current of India is spirituality. This truth was revealed to Gadādhar through that inner vision which scans past and future in one sweep, unobstructed by the barriers of time and space. But he was unaware of the history of the profound change that had taken place in the land of his birth during the previous one hundred years.

Hindu society during the eighteenth century had been passing through a period of decadence. It was the twilight of the Mussalman rule. There were anarchy and confusion in all spheres. Superstitious practices dominated the religious life of the people. Rites and rituals passed for the essence of spirituality. Greedy priests became the custodians of heaven. True philosophy was supplanted by dogmatic opinions. The pundits took delight in vain polemics.

In 1757 English traders laid the foundation of British rule in India. Gradually the Government was systematized and lawlessness suppressed. The Hindus were much impressed by the military power and political acumen of the new rulers. In the wake of the merchants came the English educators, and social reformers, and Christian missionaries - all bearing a culture completely alien to the Hindu mind. In different parts of the country educational institutions were set up and Christian churches established. Hindu young men were offered the heady wine of the Western culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and they drank it to the very dregs.

The first effect of the draught on the educated Hindus was a complete effacement from their minds of the time-honoured beliefs and traditions of Hindu society. They came to believe that there was no transcendental Truth. The world perceived by the senses was all that existed. God and religion were illusions of the untutored mind. True knowledge could be derived only from the analysis of nature. So atheism and agnosticism became the fashion of the day. The youth of India, taught in English schools, took malicious delight in openly breaking the customs and traditions of their society. They would do away with the caste-system and remove the discriminatory laws about food. Social reform, the spread of secular education, widow remarriage, abolition of early marriage - they considered these the panacea for the degenerate condition of Hindu society.

The Christian missionaries gave the finishing touch to the process of transformation. They ridiculed as relics of a barbarous age the images and rituals of the Hindu religion. They tried to persuade India that the teachings of her saints and seers were the cause of her downfall, that her Vedas, Purānās, and other scriptures were filled with superstition. Christianity, they maintained, had given the white races position and power in this world and assurance of happiness in the next; therefore Christianity was the best of all religions. Many intelligent young Hindus became converted. The man in the street was confused. The majority of the educated grew materialistic in their mental outlook. Everyone living near Calcutta or the other strongholds of Western culture, even those who attempted to cling to the orthodox traditions of Hindu society, became infected by the new uncertainties and the new beliefs.

But the soul of India was to be resuscitated through a spiritual awakening. We hear the first call of this renascence in the spirited retort of the young Gadādhar: "Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education?"

Rāmkumār could hardly understand the import of his young brother's reply. He described in bright colours the happy and easy life of scholars in Calcutta society. But Gadādhar intuitively felt that the scholars, to use one of his own vivid illustrations, were like so many vultures, soaring high on the wings of their uninspired intellect, with their eyes fixed on the charnel-pit of greed and lust. So he stood firm and Rāmkumār had to give way.

Kāli Temple at Dakshineśwar

At that time there lived in Calcutta a rich widow named Rāni Rāsmani, belonging to the Śudrā caste, and known far and wide not only for her business ability, courage, and

intelligence, but also for her largeness of heart, piety, and devotion to God. She was assisted in the management of her vast property by her son-in-law Mathur Mohan.

In 1847 the Rāni purchased twenty acres of land at Dakshineśwar, a village about four miles north of Calcutta. Here she created a temple garden and constructed several temples. Her Ishta, or Chosen Ideal, was the Divine Mother, Kāli.

The temple garden stands directly on the east bank of the Ganges. The northern section of the land and a portion to the east contain an orchard, flower gardens, and two small reservoirs. The southern section is paved with brick and mortar. The visitor arriving by boat ascends the steps of an imposing bathing-Ghāt, which leads to the *Chāndni,* a roofed terrace, on either side of which stand in a row six temples of Śiva. East of the terrace and the Śiva temples is a large court, paved, rectangular in shape, and running north and south. Two temples stand in the centre of this court, the larger one, to the south and facing south, being dedicated to Kāli, and the smaller one, facing the Ganges, to Radhākānta, that is, Krishna, the Consort of Rādhā. Nine domes with spires surmount the temple of Kāli, and before it stands the spacious Natmandir, or music hall, the terrace of which is supported by stately pillars. At the northwest and southwest corners of the temple compound are two *Nahabats,* or music towers, from which music flows at different times of day, especially at sunup, noon, and sundown, when the worship is performed in the temples. Three sides of the paved courtyard -all except the west - are lined with rooms set apart for kitchens, store-rooms, dining-rooms, and quarters for the temple staff and guests. The chamber in the northwest angle, just beyond the last of the Śiva temples, is of special interest to us; for here Sri Ramakrishna was to spend a considerable part of his life. To the west of this chamber is a semicircular porch overlooking the river. In front of the porch runs a foot-path, north and south, and beyond the path is a large garden and, below the garden, the Ganges. The orchard to the north of the buildings contains the Panchavati, the banyan, and the bel-tree, associated with Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices. Outside and to the north of the temple compound proper is the *Kuthi,* or bungalow, used by members of Rāni Rāsmani's family visiting the garden. And north of the temple garden, separated from it by a high wall, is a powder-magazine belonging to the British Government.

Śiva

In the twelve Śiva temples are installed the emblems of the Great God of renunciation in His various aspects, worshipped daily with proper rites. Śiva requires few articles of worship. White flowers and bel-leaves and a little Ganges water offered with devotion are enough to satisfy the benign Deity and win from Him the boon of liberation.

Radhākānta

The temple of Radhākānta, also known as the temple of Vishnu, contains the images of Rādhā and Krishna, the symbol of union with God through ecstatic love. The two images stand on a pedestal facing the west. The floor is paved with marble. From the ceiling of the porch hang chandeliers protected from dust by coverings of red cloth. Canvas screens shield the images from the rays of the setting sun. Close to the threshold of the

inner shrine is a small brass cup containing holy water. Devoted visitors reverently drink a few drops from the vessel.

Kāli

The main temple is dedicated to Kāli, the Divine Mother, here worshipped as *Bhavatārini,* the Saviour of the Universe. The floor of this temple also is paved with marble. The basalt image of the Mother, dressed in gorgeous gold brocade, stands on a white marble image of the prostrate body of Her Divine Consort, Śiva, the symbol of the Absolute. On the feet of the Goddess are, among other ornaments, anklets of gold. Her arms are decked with jeweled ornaments of gold. She wears necklaces of gold and pearls, a golden garland of human heads, and a girdle of human arms. She wears a golden crown, golden ear-rings, and a golden nose-ring with a pearl-drop. She has four arms. The lower left hand holds a severed human head and the upper grips a blood-stained *sabre.* One right hand offers boons to Her children; the other allays their fear. The majesty of Her posture can hardly be described. It combines the terror of destruction with the reassurance of motherly tenderness. For She is the Cosmic Power, the totality of the universe, a glorious harmony of the pairs of opposites. She deals out death, as She creates and preserves. She has three eyes, the third being the symbol of Divine Wisdom; they strike dismay into the wicked, yet pour out affection for Her devotees.

The whole symbolic world is represented in the temple garden - the Trinity of the Nature Mother (Kāli), the Absolute (Śiva), and Love (Radhākānta), the Arch spanning heaven and earth. The terrific Goddess of the Tantra, the soul-enthralling Flute-Player of the Bhāgavata, and the Self-absorbed Absolute of the Vedas live together, creating the greatest synthesis of religions. All aspects of Reality are represented there. But of this divine household, Kāli is the pivot, the sovereign Mistress. She is *Prakriti,* the Procreatrix, Nature, the Destroyer, the Creator. Nay, She is something greater and deeper still for those who have eyes to see. She is the Universal Mother, "my Mother" as Ramakrishna would say, the All-powerful, who reveals Herself to Her children under different aspects and Divine Incarnations, the Visible God, who leads the elect to the Invisible Reality; and if it so pleases Her, She takes away the last trace of ego from created beings and merges it in the consciousness of the Absolute, the undifferentiated God. Through Her grace "the finite ego loses itself in the illimitable Ego-Ātman-Brahman".

Rāni Rāsmani spent a fortune for the construction of the temple garden and another fortune for its dedication ceremony, which took place on May 31, 1855.

Sri Ramakrishna - henceforth we shall call Gadādhar by this familiar name - came to the temple garden with his elder brother Rāmkumār, who was appointed priest of the Ka1i temple. Sri Ramakrishna did not at first approve of Rāmkumār's working for the Śudrā Rāsmani. The example of their orthodox father was still fresh in Sri Ramakrishna's mind. He objected also to the eating of the cooked offerings of the temple, since, according to orthodox Hindu custom, such food can be offered to the Deity only in the house of a brāhmin. But the holy atmosphere of the temple grounds, the solitude of the surrounding wood, the loving care of his brother, the respect shown him by Rāni Rāsmani and Mathur

Bābu, the living presence of the Goddess Kāli in the temple, and, above all, the proximity of the sacred Ganges, which Sri Ramakrishna always held in the highest respect, gradually overcame his disapproval, and he began to feel at home.

Within a very short time Sri Ramakrishna attracted the notice of Mathur Bābu, who was impressed by the young man's religious fervour and wanted him to participate in the worship in the Kāli temple. But Sri Ramakrishna loved his freedom and was indifferent to any worldly career. The profession of the priesthood in a temple founded by a rich woman did not appeal to his mind. Further, he hesitated to take upon himself the responsibility for the ornaments and jewellery of the temple. Mathur had to wait for a suitable occasion.

At this time there came to Dakshineśwar a youth of sixteen, destined to play an important role in Sri Ramakrishna's life. Hriday, a distant nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, hailed from Sihore, a village not far from Kāmārpukur, and had been his boyhood friend. Clever, exceptionally energetic, and endowed with great presence of mind, he moved, as will be seen later, like a shadow about his uncle and was always ready to help him, even at the sacrifice of his personal comfort. He was destined to be a mute witness of many of the spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna and the caretaker of his body during the stormy days of his spiritual practice. Hriday came to Dakshineśwar in search of a job, and Sri Ramakrishna was glad to see him.

Unable to resist the persuasion of Mathur Bābu, Sri Ramakrishna at last entered the temple service, on condition that Hriday should be asked to assist him. His first duty was to dress and decorate the image of Kāli.

One day the priest of the Radhākānta temple accidentally dropped the image of Krishna on the floor, breaking one of its legs. The pundits advised the Rāni to install a new image, since the worship of an image with a broken limb was against the scriptural injunctions. But the Rāni was fond of the image, and she asked Sri Ramakrishna's opinion. In an abstracted mood, he said: "This solution is ridiculous. If a son-in-law of the Rāni broke his leg, would she discard him and put another in his place? Wouldn't she rather arrange for his treatment? Why should she not do the same thing in this case too? Let the image be repaired and worshipped as before." It was a simple, straightforward solution and was accepted by the Rāni. Sri Ramakrishna himself mended the break. The priest was dismissed for his carelessness, and at Mathur Bābu's earnest request, Sri Ramakrishna accepted the Office of priest in the Radhākānta temple.

Sri Ramakrishna as a priest

Born in an orthodox brāhmin family, Sri Ramakrishna knew the formalities of worship, its rites and rituals. The innumerable gods and goddesses of the Hindu religion are the human aspects of the indescribable and incomprehensible Spirit, as conceived by the finite human mind. They understand and appreciate human love and emotion, help men to realize their secular and spiritual ideals, and ultimately enable men to attain liberation from the miseries of phenomenal life. The Source of light, intelligence, wisdom, and strength is the One alone from whom comes the fulfilment of desire. Yet, as long as a

man is bound by his human limitations, he cannot but worship God through human forms. He must use human symbols. Therefore Hinduism asks the devotees to look on God as the ideal father, the ideal mother, the ideal husband, the ideal son, or the ideal friend. But the name ultimately leads to the Nameless, the form to the Formless, the word to the Silence, the emotion to the serene realization of Peace in Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. The gods gradually merge in the one God. But until that realization is achieved, the devotee cannot dissociate human factors from his worship. Therefore the Deity is bathed and clothed and decked with ornaments. He is fed and put to sleep. He is propitiated with hymns, songs, and prayers. And there are appropriate rites connected with all these functions. For instance, to secure for himself external purity, the priest bathes himself in holy water and puts on a holy cloth. He purifies the mind and the sense organs by appropriate meditations. He fortifies the place of worship against evil forces by drawing around it circles of fire and water. He awakens the different spiritual centres of the body and invokes the Supreme Spirit in his heart. Then he transfers the Supreme Spirit to the image before him and worships the image, regarding it no longer as clay or stone, but as the embodiment of Spirit, throbbing with Life and Consciousness. After the worship the Supreme Spirit is recalled from the image to Its true sanctuary, the heart of the priest. The real devotee knows the absurdity of worshipping the Transcendental Reality with material articles - clothing That which pervades the whole universe and the beyond, putting on a pedestal That which cannot be limited by space, feeding That which is disembodied and incorporeal, singing before That whose glory the music of the spheres tries vainly to proclaim. But through these rites the devotee aspires to go ultimately beyond rites and rituals, forms and names, words and praise, and to realize God as the All-pervading Consciousness.

Hindu priests are thoroughly acquainted with the rites of worship, but few of them are aware of their underlying significance. They move their hands and limbs mechanically, in obedience to the letter of the scriptures, and repeat the holy mantras like parrots. But from the very beginning the inner meaning of these rites was revealed to Sri Ramakrishna. As he sat facing the image, a strange transformation came over his mind. While going through the prescribed ceremonies, he would actually find himself encircled by a wall of fire protecting him and the place of worship from unspiritual vibrations, or he would feel the rising of the mystic Kundalini through the different centres of the body. The glow on his face, his deep absorption, and the intense atmosphere of the temple impressed everyone who saw him worship the Deity.

Rāmkumār wanted Sri Ramakrishna to learn the intricate rituals of the worship of Kāli. To become a priest of Kāli one must undergo a special form of initiation from a qualified guru, and for Sri Ramakrishna a suitable brāhmin was found. But no sooner did the brāhmin speak the holy word in his ear than Sri Ramakrishna, overwhelmed with emotion, uttered a loud cry and plunged into deep concentration.

Mathur begged Sri Ramakrishna to take charge of the worship in the Kāli temple. The young priest pleaded his incompetence and his ignorance of the scriptures. Mathur insisted that devotion and sincerity would more than compensate for any lack of formal

knowledge and make the Divine Mother manifest Herself through the image. In the end, Sri Ramakrishna had to yield to Mathur's request. He became the priest of Kāli.

In 1856 Rāmkumār breathed his last. Sri Ramakrishna had already witnessed more than one death in the family. He had come to realize how impermanent is life on earth. The more he was convinced of the transitory nature of worldly things, the more eager he became to realize God, the Fountain of Immortality.

The First Vision of Kāli

And, indeed, he soon discovered what a strange Goddess he had chosen to serve. He became gradually enmeshed in the web of Her all-pervading presence. To the ignorant She is to be sure, the image of destruction: but he found in Her the benign, all-loving Mother. Her neck is encircled with a garland of heads, and Her waist with a girdle of human arms and two of Her hands hold weapons of death, and Her eyes dart a glance of fire; but, strangely enough, Ramakrishna felt in Her breath the soothing touch of tender love and saw in Her the Seed of Immortality. She stands on the bosom of Her Consort, Śiva; it is because She is the Śakti, the Power, inseparable from the Absolute. She is surrounded by jackals and other unholy creatures, the denizens of the cremation ground. But is not the Ultimate Reality above holiness and unholiness? She appears to be reeling under the spell of wine. But who would create this mad world unless under the influence of a divine drunkenness? She is the highest symbol of all the forces of nature, the synthesis of their antinomies, the Ultimate Divine in the form of woman. She now became to Sri Ramakrishna the only Reality, and the world became an unsubstantial shadow. Into Her worship he poured his soul. Before him She stood as the transparent portal to the shrine of Ineffable Reality.

The worship in the temple intensified Sri Ramakrishna's yearning for a living vision of the Mother of the Universe. He began to spend in meditation the time not actually employed in the temple service; and for this purpose he selected an extremely solitary place. A deep jungle, thick with underbrush and prickly plants, lay to the north of the temples. Used at one time as a burial ground, it was shunned by people even during the day-time for fear of ghosts. There Sri Ramakrishna began to spend the whole night in meditation, returning to his room only in the morning with eyes swollen as though from much weeping. While meditating, he would lay aside his cloth and his brāhminical thread. Explaining this strange conduct, he once said to Hriday: "Don't you know that when one thinks of God one should be freed from all ties? From our very birth we have the eight fetters of hatred, shame, lineage, pride of good conduct, fear, secretiveness, caste, and grief. The sacred thread reminds me that I am a brāhmin and therefore superior to all. When calling on the Mother one has to set aside all such ideas." Hriday thought his uncle was becoming insane.

As his love for God deepened, he began either to forget or to drop the formalities of worship. Sitting before the image, he would spend hours singing the devotional songs of great devotees of the Mother, such as Kamalākānta and Rāmprasād. Those rhapsodical songs, describing the direct vision of God, only intensified Sri Ramakrishna's longing. He felt the pangs of a child separated from its mother. Sometimes, in agony, he would rub

his face against the ground and weep so bitterly that people, thinking he had lost his earthly mother, would sympathize with him in his grief. Sometimes, in moments of scepticism, he would cry: "Art Thou true, Mother, or is it all fiction - mere poetry without any reality? If Thou dost exist, why do I not see Thee? Is religion a mere fantasy and art Thou only a figment of man's imagination?" Sometimes he would sit on the prayer carpet for two hours like an inert object. He began to behave in an abnormal manner, most of the time unconscious of the world. He almost gave up food; and sleep left him altogether.

But he did not have to wait very long. He has thus described his first vision of the Mother: "I felt as if my heart were being squeezed like a wet towel. I was overpowered with a great restlessness and a fear that it might not be my lot to realize Her in this life. I could not bear the separation from Her any longer. Life seemed to be not worth living. Suddenly my glance fell on the sword that was kept in the Mother's temple. I determined to put an end to my life. When I jumped up like a madman and seized it, suddenly the blessed Mother revealed Herself. The buildings with their different parts, the temple, and everything else vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their stead I saw a limitless, infinite, effulgent Ocean of Consciousness. As far as the eye could see, the shining billows were madly rushing at me from all sides with a terrific noise, to swallow me up! I was panting for breath. I was caught in the rush and collapsed, unconscious. What was happening in the outside world I did not know; but within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss, altogether new, and I felt the presence of the Divine Mother." On his lips when he regained consciousness of the world was the word "Mother".

God-Intoxicated State

Yet this was only a foretaste of the intense experiences to come. The first glimpse of the Divine Mother made him the more eager for Her uninterrupted vision. He wanted to see Her both in meditation and with eyes open. But the Mother began to play a teasing game of hide-and-seek with him, intensifying both his joy and his suffering. Weeping bitterly during the moments of separation from Her, he would pass into a trance and then find Her standing before him, smiling, talking, consoling, bidding him be of good cheer, and instructing him. During this period of spiritual practice he had many uncommon experiences. When he sat to meditate, he would hear strange clicking sounds in the joints of his legs, as if someone were locking them up, one after the other, to keep him motionless; and at the conclusion of his meditation he would again hear the same sounds, this time unlocking them and leaving him free to move about. He would see flashes like a swarm of fire-flies floating before his eyes, or a sea of deep mist around him, with luminous waves of molten silver. Again, from a sea of translucent mist he would behold the Mother rising, first Her feet, then Her waist, body, face, and head, finally Her whole person; he would feel Her breath and hear Her voice. Worshipping in the temple, sometimes he would become exalted, sometimes he would remain motionless as stone, sometimes he would almost collapse from excessive emotion. Many of his actions, contrary to all tradition, seemed sacrilegious to the people. He would take a flower and touch it to his own head, body, and feet, and then offer it to the Goddess. Or, like a drunkard, he would reel to the throne of the Mother, touch Her chin by way of

showing his affection for Her, and sing, talk, joke, laugh, and dance. Or he would take a morsel of food from the plate and hold it to Her mouth, begging Her to eat it, and would not be satisfied till he was convinced that She had really eaten. After the Mother had been put to sleep at night, from his own room he would hear Her ascending to the upper storey of the temple with the light steps of a happy girl, Her anklets jingling. Then he would discover Her standing with flowing hair, Her black form silhouetted against the sky of the night looking at the Ganges or at the distant lights of Calcutta.

Naturally the temple officials took him for an insane person. His worldly well-wishers brought him to skilled physicians; but no medicine could cure his malady. Many a time he doubted his sanity himself. For he had been sailing across an uncharted sea, with no earthly guide to direct him. His only haven of security was the Divine Mother Herself. To Her he would pray: "I do not know what these things are. I am ignorant of mantras and the scriptures. Teach me, Mother, how to realize Thee. Who else can help me? Art Thou not my only refuge and guide?" And the sustaining presence of the Mother never failed him in his distress or doubt. Even those who criticized his conduct were greatly impressed with his purity, guilelessness, truthfulness, integrity, and holiness. They felt an uplifting influence in his presence.

It is said that Samādhi, or trance, no more than opens the portal of the spiritual realm. Sri Ramakrishna felt an unquenchable desire to enjoy God in various ways. For his meditation he built a place in the northern wooded section of the temple garden. With Hriday's help he planted there five sacred trees. The spot, known as the Panchavati, became the scene of many of his visions.

As his spiritual mood deepened he more and more felt himself to be a child of the Divine Mother. He learnt to surrender himself completely to Her will and let Her direct him.

"O Mother," he would constantly pray, "I have taken refuge in Thee. Teach me what to do and what to say. Thy will is paramount everywhere and is for the good of Thy children. Merge my will in Thy will and make me Thy instrument."

His visions became deeper and more intimate. He no longer had to meditate to behold the Divine Mother. Even while retaining consciousness of the outer world, he would see Her as tangibly as the temples, the trees, the river, and the men around him.

On a certain occasion Mathur Bābu stealthily entered the temple to watch the worship. He was profoundly moved by the young priest's devotion and sincerity. He realized that Sri Ramakrishna had transformed the stone image into the living Goddess.

Sri Ramakrishna one day fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to Kāli. This was too much for the manager of the temple garden, who considered himself responsible for the proper conduct of the worship. He reported Sri Ramakrishna's insane behaviour to Mathur Bābu.

Sri Ramakrishna has described the incident: "The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kāli temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything

was full of Consciousness. The image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness - all was Consciousness. I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss - the Bliss of God. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kāli temple; but in him also I saw the power of the Divine Mother vibrating. That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that all this was the Divine Mother - even the cat. The manager of the temple garden wrote to Mathur Bābu saying that I was feeding the cat with the offering intended for the Divine Mother. But Mathur Bābu had insight into the state of my mind. He wrote back to the manager: 'Let him do whatever he likes. You must not say anything to him.' "

One of the painful ailments from which Sri Ramakrishna suffered at this time was a burning sensation in his body, and he was cured by a strange vision. During worship in the temple, following the scriptural injunctions, he would imagine the presence of the "sinner" in himself and the destruction of this "sinner". One day he was meditating in the Panchavati, when he saw come out of him a red-eyed man of black complexion, reeling like a drunkard. Soon there emerged from him another person, of serene countenance, wearing the ochre cloth of a sannyāsi and carrying in his hand a trident. The second person attacked the first and killed him with the trident. Thereafter Sri Ramakrishna was free of his pain.

About this time he began to worship God by assuming the attitude of a servant toward his master. He imitated the mood of Hanuman, the monkey chieftain of the Ramayana, the ideal servant of Rāmā and traditional model for this self-effacing form of devotion. When he meditated on Hanuman his movements and his way of life began to resemble those of a monkey. His eyes became restless. He lived on fruits and roots. With his cloth tied around his waist, a portion of it hanging in the form of a tail, he jumped from place to place instead of walking. And after a short while he was blessed with a vision of Sitā, the divine consort of Rāmā, who entered his body and disappeared there with the words, "I bequeath to you my smile."

Mathur had faith in the sincerity of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual zeal, but began now to doubt his sanity. He had watched him jumping about like a monkey. One day, when Rāni Rāsmani was listening to Sri Ramakrishna's singing in the temple, the young priest abruptly turned and slapped her. Apparently listening to his song, she had actually been thinking of a lawsuit. She accepted the punishment as though the Divine Mother Herself had imposed it; but Mathur was distressed. He begged Sri Ramakrishna to keep his feelings under control and to heed the conventions of society. God Himself, he argued, follows laws. God never permitted, for instance, flowers of two colours to grow on the same stalk. The following day Sri Ramakrishna presented Mathur Bābu with two hibiscus flowers growing on the same stalk, one red and one white.

Mathur and Rāni Rāsmani began to ascribe the mental ailment of Sri Ramakrishna in part, at least, to his observance of rigid continence. Thinking that a natural life would relax the tension of his nerves, they engineered a plan with two women of ill fame. But as soon as the women entered his room, Sri Ramakrishna beheld in them the

manifestation of the Divine Mother of the Universe and went into Samādhi uttering Her name.

Haladhāri

In 1858 there came to Dakshineśwar a cousin of Sri Ramakrishna, Haladhāri by name, who was to remain there about eight years. On account of Sri Ramakrishna's indifferent health, Mathur appointed this man to the office of priest in the Kāli temple. He was a complex character, versed in the letter of the scriptures, but hardly aware of their spirit. He loved to participate in hair-splitting theological discussions and, by the measure of his own erudition, he proceeded to gauge Sri Ramakrishna. An orthodox brāhmin, he thoroughly disapproved of his cousin's unorthodox actions, but he was not unimpressed by Sri Ramakrishna's purity of life, ecstatic love of God, and yearning for realization.

One day Haladhāri upset Sri Ramakrishna with the statement that God is incomprehensible to the human mind. Sri Ramakrishna has described the great moment of doubt when he wondered whether his visions had really misled him: "With sobs I prayed to the Mother, 'Canst Thou have the heart to deceive me like this because I am a fool?' A stream of tears flowed from my eyes. Shortly afterwards I saw a volume of mist rising from the floor and filling the space before me. In the midst of it there appeared a face with flowing beard, calm, highly expressive, and fair. Fixing its gaze steadily upon me, it said solemnly, 'Remain in *Bhāva-mukha,* on the threshold of relative consciousness.' This it repeated three times and then it gently disappeared in the mist, which itself dissolved. This vision reassured me."

A garbled report of Sri Ramakrishna's failing health, indifference to worldly life, and various abnormal activities reached Kāmārpukur and filled the heart of his poor mother with anguish. At her repeated request he returned to his village for a change of air. But his boyhood friends did not interest him any more. A divine fever was consuming him. He spent a great part of the day and night in one of the cremation grounds, in meditation. The place reminded him of the impermanence of the human body, of human hopes and achievements. It also reminded him of Kāli, the Goddess of destruction.

Marriage and After

But in a few months his health showed improvement, and he recovered to some extent his natural buoyancy of spirit. His happy mother was encouraged to think it might be a good time to arrange his marriage. The boy was now twenty-three years old. A wife would bring him back to earth. And she was delighted when her son welcomed her suggestion. Perhaps he saw in it the finger of God.

Saradāmani, a little girl of five, lived in the neighbouring village called Jayrāmbāti. Even at this age she had been praying to God to make her character as stainless and fragrant as the white tuberose. Looking at the full moon, she would say: "O God, there are dark spots even on the moon. But make my character spotless." It was she who was selected as the bride for Sri Ramakrishna.

The marriage ceremony was duly performed. Such early marriage in India is in the nature of a betrothal, the marriage being consummated when the girl attains puberty. But in this case the marriage remained for ever unconsummated. Sri Ramakrishna lived at Kāmārpukur about a year and a half and then returned to Dakshineśwar.

Hardly had he crossed the threshold of the Kāli temple when he found himself again in the whirlwind. His madness reappeared tenfold. The same meditation and prayer, the same ecstatic moods, the same burning sensation, the same weeping, the same sleeplessness, the same indifference to the body and the outside world, the same divine delirium. He subjected himself to fresh disciplines in order to eradicate greed and lust, the two great impediments to spiritual progress. With a rupee in one hand and some earth in the other, he would reflect on the comparative value of these two for the realization of God, and finding them equally worthless he would toss them, with equal indifference, into the Ganges. Women he regarded as the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Never even in a dream did he feel the impulses of lust. And to root out of his mind the idea of caste superiority, he cleaned a pariah's house with his long and neglected hair. When he would sit in meditation, birds would perch on his head and peck in his hair for grains of food. Snakes would crawl over his body, and neither would he aware of the other. Sleep left him altogether. Day and night, visions flitted before him. He saw the sannyāsi who had previously killed the "sinner" in him again coming out of his body, threatening him with the trident, and ordering him to concentrate on God. Or the same sannyāsi would visit distant places, following a luminous path, and bring him reports of what was happening there. Sri Ramakrishna used to say later that in the case of an advanced devotee the mind itself becomes the guru, living and moving like an embodied being.

Rāni Rāsmani, the foundress of the temple garden, passed away in 1861. After her death her son-in-law Mathur became the sole executor of the estate. He placed himself and his resources at the disposal of Sri Ramakrishna and began to look after his physical comfort. Sri Ramakrishna later spoke of him as one of his five "suppliers of stores" appointed by the Divine Mother. Whenever a desire arose in his mind, Mathur fulfilled it without hesitation.

The Brāhmani

There came to Dakshineśwar at this time a brāhmin woman who was to play an important part in Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual unfoldment. Born in East Bengāl, she was an adept in the Tāntrik and Vaishnava methods of worship. She was slightly over fifty years of age, handsome, and garbed in the orange robe of a nun. Her sole possessions were a few books and two pieces of wearing-cloth.

Sri Ramakrishna welcomed the visitor with great respect, described to her his experiences and visions, and told her of people's belief that these were symptoms of madness. She listened to him attentively and said: "My son, everyone in this world is mad. Some are mad for money, some for creature comforts, some for name and fame; and you are mad for God." She assured him that he was passing through the almost unknown spiritual experience described in the scriptures as *Mahā–bhāva,* the most

exalted rapture of divine love. She told him that this extreme exaltation had been described as manifesting itself through nineteen physical symptoms, including the shedding of tears, a tremor of the body, horripilation, perspiration, and a burning sensation. The Bhakti scriptures, she declared, had recorded only two instances of the experience, namely, those of Sri Rādhā and Sri Chaitanya.

Very soon a tender relationship sprang up between Sri Ramakrishna and the Brāhmani, she looking upon him as the Baby Krishna, and he upon her as mother. Day after day, she watched his ecstasy during the kirtan and meditation, his Samādhi, his mad yearning; and she recognized in him a power to transmit spirituality to others. She came to the conclusion that such things were not possible for an ordinary devotee, not even for a highly developed soul. Only an Incarnation of God was capable of such spiritual manifestations. She proclaimed openly that Sri Ramakrishna, like Sri Chaitanya, was an Incarnation of God.

When Sri Ramakrishna told Mathur what the Brāhmani had said about him, Mathur shook his head in doubt. He was reluctant to accept him as an Incarnation of God, an Avatar comparable to Rāmā, Krishna, Buddha, and Chaitanya, though he admitted Sri Ramakrishna's extraordinary spirituality. Whereupon the Brāhmani asked Mathur to arrange a conference of scholars who should discuss the matter with her. He agreed to the proposal and the meeting was arranged. It was to be held in the Natmandir in front of the Kāli temple.

Two famous pundits of the time were invited: Vaishnavcharan, the leader of the Vaishnava society, and Gauri. The first to arrive was Vaishnavcharan, with a distinguished company of scholars and devotees. The Brāhmani, like a proud mother, proclaimed her view before him and supported it with quotations from the scriptures. As the pundits discussed the deep theological question, Sri Ramakrishna, perfectly indifferent to everything happening around him, sat in their midst like a child, immersed in his own thoughts, sometimes smiling, sometimes chewing a pinch of spices from a pouch, or again saying to Vaishnavcharan with a nudge: "Look here. Sometimes I feel like this, too." Presently Vaishnavcharan arose to declare himself in total agreement with the view of the Brāhmani. He declared that Sri Ramakrishna had undoubtedly experienced *Mahā-bhāva* and that this was the certain sign of the rare manifestation of God in a man. The people assembled there, especially the officers of the temple garden, were struck dumb. Sri Ramakrishna said to Mathur, like a boy: "Just fancy, he too says so! Well, I am glad to learn that, after all, it is not a disease."

When, a few days later, Pundit Gauri arrived, another meeting was held, and he agreed with the view of the Brāhmani and Vaishnavcharan. To Sri Ramakrishna's remark that Vaishnavcharan had declared him to be an *Avatār,* Gauri replied: "Is that all he has to say about you? Then he has said very little. I am fully convinced that you are that Mine of Spiritual Power, only a small fraction of which descends on earth, from time to time, in the form of an Incarnation."

"Ah!" said Sri Ramakrishna with a smile, "You seem to have quite outbid Vaishnavcharan in this matter. What have you found in me that makes you entertain such an idea?"

Gauri said: "I feel it in my heart and I have the scriptures on my side. I am ready to prove it to anyone who challenges me."

"Well," Sri Ramakrishna said, "it is you who say so; but, believe me, I know nothing about it."

Thus, the insane priest was, by verdict of the great scholars of the day, proclaimed a Divine Incarnation. His visions were not the result of an over heated brain; they had precedent in spiritual history. And how did the proclamation affect Sri Ramakrishna himself? He remained the simple child of the Mother that he had been since the first day of his life. Years later, when two of his householder disciples openly spoke of him as a Divine Incarnation and the matter was reported to him, he said with a touch of sarcasm: "Do they think they will enhance my glory that way? One of them is an actor on the stage and the other a physician. What do they know about Incarnations? Why years ago pundits like Gauri and Vaishnavcharan declared me to be an Avatar. They were great scholars and knew what they said. But that did not make any change in my mind."

Sri Ramakrishna was a learner all his life. He often used to quote a proverb to his disciples: "Friend, the more I live the more I learn." When the excitement created by the Brāhmani's declaration was over, he set himself to the task of practising spiritual disciplines according to the traditional methods laid down in the Tantra and Vaishnava scriptures. Hitherto he had pursued his spiritual ideal according to the promptings of his own mind and heart. Now he accepted the Brāhmani as his guru and set foot on the traditional highways.

Tantra

According to the Tantra, the Ultimate Reality is *Chit,* or Consciousness, which is identical with *Sat,* or Being, and with *Ānanda,* or Bliss. This Ultimate Reality, *Satchidānanda,* Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, is identical with the Reality preached in the Vedas. And man is identical with this Reality; but under the influence of *Māyā,* or illusion, he has forgotten his true nature. He takes to be real a merely apparent world of subject and object, and this error is the cause of his bondage and suffering. The goal of spiritual discipline is the rediscovery of his true identity with the divine Reality.

For the achievement of this goal the Vedānta prescribes an austere negative method of discrimination and renunciation, which can be followed by only a few individuals endowed with sharp intelligence and unshakeable will-power. But Tantra takes into consideration the natural weakness of human beings, their lower appetites, and their love for the concrete. It combines philosophy with rituals, meditation with ceremonies, renunciation with enjoyment. The underlying purpose is gradually to train the aspirant to meditate on his identity with the Ultimate.

The average man wishes to enjoy the material objects of the world. Tantra bids him enjoy these, but at the same time, discover in them the presence of God. Mystical rites

are prescribed by which, slowly, the sense objects become spiritualized and sense attraction is transformed into a love of God. So the very "bonds" of man are turned into "releasers". The very poison that kills is transmuted into the elixir of life. Outward renunciation is not necessary. Thus, the aim of Tantra is to sublimate *Bhoga,* or enjoyment, into *Yoga,* or union with Consciousness. For, according to this philosophy, the world with all its manifestations is nothing but the sport of Śiva and Śakti, the Absolute and Its inscrutable Power.

The disciplines of Tantra are graded to suit aspirants of all degrees. Exercises are prescribed for people with "animal", "heroic", and "divine" outlooks. Certain of the rites require the presence of members of the opposite sex. Here the aspirant learns to look on woman as the embodiment of the Goddess Kāli, the Mother of the Universe. The very basis of Tantra is the Motherhood of God and the glorification of woman. Every part of a woman's body is to be regarded as incarnate Divinity. But the rites are extremely dangerous. The help of a qualified guru is absolutely necessary. An unwary devotee may lose his foothold and fall into a pit of depravity.

According to the Tantra, Śakti is the active creative force in the universe. Śiva, the Absolute, is a more or less passive principle. Further, Śakti is as inseparable from Śiva as fire's power to burn is from fire itself. Śakti, the Creative Power, contains in Its womb the universe, and therefore is the Divine Mother. All women are Her symbols. Kāli is one of Her several forms. The meditation on Kāli, the Creative Power, is the central discipline of the Tantra. While meditating, the aspirant at first regards himself as one with the Absolute and then thinks that out of that Impersonal Consciousness emerge two entities, namely, his own self and the living form of the Goddess. He then projects the Goddess into the tangible image before him and worships it as the Divine Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna set himself to the task of practising the disciplines of Tantra; and at the bidding of the Divine Mother Herself he accepted the Brāhmani as his guru. He performed profound and delicate ceremonies in the Panchavati and under the bel-tree at the northern extremity of the temple compound. He practised all the disciplines of the sixty-four principal Tantra books, and it took him never more than three days to achieve the result promised in any one of them. After the observance of a few preliminary rites, he would be overwhelmed with a strange divine fervour and would go into Samādhi, where his mind would dwell in exaltation. Evil ceased to exist for him. The word "carnal" lost its meaning. The whole world and everything in it appeared as the Lila, the sport, of Śiva and Śakti. He beheld everywhere manifest the power and beauty of the Mother, the whole world, animate and inanimate, appeared to him as pervaded with Chit, Consciousness, and with Ānanda, Bliss.

He saw in a vision the Ultimate Cause of the universe as a huge luminous triangle giving birth every moment to an infinite number of worlds. He heard the *Anāhata Śabda,* the great sound **Om,** of which the innumerable sounds of the universe are only so many echoes. He acquired the eight supernatural powers of Yoga, which make a man almost omnipotent, and these he spurned as of no value whatsoever to the Spirit. He had a vision of the divine Māyā, the inscrutable Power of God, by which the universe is created

and sustained, and into which it is finally absorbed. In this vision he saw a woman of exquisite beauty, about to become a mother, emerging from the Ganges and slowly approaching the Panchavati. Presently she gave birth to a child and began to nurse it tenderly. A moment later she assumed a terrible aspect, seized the child with her grim jaws and crushed it. Swallowing it, she re-entered the waters of the Ganges.

But the most remarkable experience during this period was the awakening of the *Kundalini Śakti,* the "Serpent Power". He actually saw the Power, at first lying asleep at the bottom of the spinal column, then waking up and ascending along the mystic *Sushumna* canal and through its six centres, or lotuses, to the *Sahasrāra,* the thousand-petalled lotus in the top of the head. He further saw that as the Kundalini went upward the different lotuses bloomed. And this phenomenon was accompanied by visions and trances. Later on he described to his disciples and devotees the various movements of the Kundalini: the fishlike, birdlike, monkey like, and so on. The awakening of the Kundalini is the beginning of spiritual consciousness, and its union with Śiva in the *Sahasrāra,* ending in Samādhi, is the consummation of the Tāntrik disciplines.

About this time it was revealed to him that in a short while many devotees would seek his guidance.

Vaishnava Disciplines

After completing the Tāntrik sādhana Sri Ramakrishna followed the Brāhmani in the disciplines of Vaishnavism. The Vaishnavas are worshippers of Vishnu, the "All-pervading", the Supreme God, who is also known as Hari and Nārāyana. Of Vishnu's various Incarnations the two with the largest number of followers are Rāmā and Krishna.

Vaishnavism is exclusively a religion of bhakti. Bhakti is intense love of God, attachment to Him alone; it is of the nature of bliss and bestows upon the lover immortality and liberation. God, according to Vaishnavism, cannot be realized through logic or reason; and, without bhakti, all penances, austerities, and rites are futile. Man cannot realize God by self-exertion alone. For the vision of God His grace is absolutely necessary, and this grace is felt by the pure of heart. The mind is to be purified through bhakti. The pure mind then remains for ever immersed in the ecstasy of God-vision. It is the cultivation of this divine love that is the chief concern of the Vaishnava religion.

There are three kinds of formal devotion: tāmasic, rājasic, and sāttvic. If a person, while showing devotion to God, is actuated by malevolence, arrogance, jealousy, or anger, then his devotion is tāmasic, since it is influenced by tamas, the quality of inertia. If he worships God from a desire for fame or wealth, or from any other worldly ambition, then his devotion is rājasic, since it is influenced by rajas, the quality of activity. But if a person loves God without any thought of material gain, if he performs his duties to please God alone and maintains toward all created beings the attitude of friendship, then his devotion is called sāttvic, since it is influenced by sattva, the quality of harmony. But the highest devotion transcends the three *gunās,* or qualities, being a spontaneous, uninterrupted inclination of the mind toward God, the Inner Soul of all beings; and it wells up in the heart of a true devotee as soon as he hears the name of God or mention

of God's attributes. A devotee possessed of this love would not accept the happiness of heaven if it were offered him. His one desire is to love God under all conditions - in pleasure and pain, life and death, honour and dishonour, prosperity and adversity.

There are two stages of bhakti. The first is known as *Vaidhi–Bhakti,* or love of God qualified by scriptural injunctions. For the devotees of this stage are prescribed regular and methodical worship, hymns, prayers, the repetition of God's name, and the chanting of His glories. This lower bhakti in course of time matures into *Parā–Bhakti,* or supreme devotion, known also as *Prema,* the most intense form of divine love. Divine love is an end in itself. It exists potentially in all human hearts, but in the case of bound creatures it is misdirected to earthly objects.

To develop the devotee's love for God, Vaishnavism humanises God. God is to be regarded as the devotee's Parent, Master, Friend, Child, Husband, or Sweetheart, each succeeding relationship representing an intensification of love. These *Bhāvās,* or attitudes toward God, are known as Śānta, Dāsya, Sakhya, Vātsalya, and Madhur. The rishis of the Vedās, Hanumān, the cowherd boys of Vrindāvan, Rāmā's mother Kausalya, and Rādhika, Krishna's sweetheart, exhibited, respectively, the most perfect examples of these forms. In the ascending scale the glories of God are gradually forgotten and the devotee realizes more and more the intimacy of divine communion. Finally he regards himself as the mistress of his Beloved, and no artificial barrier remains to separate him from his Ideal. No social or moral obligation can bind to the earth his soaring spirit. He experiences perfect union with the Godhead. Unlike the Vedantist, who strives to transcend all varieties of the subject-object relationship, a devotee of the Vaishnava path wishes to retain both his own individuality and the personality of God. To him God is not an intangible Absolute, but the *Purushottama,* the Supreme Person.

While practising the discipline of the Madhur Bhāva, the male devotee often regards himself as a woman, in order to develop the most intense form of love for Sri Krishna, the only *Purusha,* or man, in the universe. This assumption of the attitude of the opposite sex has a deep psychological significance. It is a matter of common experience that an idea may be cultivated to such an intense degree that every idea alien to it is driven from the mind. This peculiarity of the mind may he utilised for the subjugation of the lower desires and the development of the spiritual nature. Now, the idea which is the basis of all desires and passions in a man is the conviction of his indissoluble association with a male body. If he can inoculate himself thoroughly with the idea that he is a woman, he can get rid of the desires peculiar to his male body. Again, the idea that he is a woman may in turn be made to give way to another higher idea, namely, that he is neither man nor woman, but the Impersonal Spirit. The Impersonal Spirit alone can enjoy real communion with the Impersonal God. Hence the highest realization of the Vaishnava draws close to the transcendental experience of the Vedantist.

A beautiful expression of the Vaishnava worship of God through love is to be found in the Vrindāvan episode of the Bhāgavata. The gopis, or milk-maids, of Vrindāvan regarded the six-year-old Krishna as their Beloved. They sought no personal gain or happiness from this love. They surrendered to Krishna their bodies, minds, and souls. Of all the

gopis, Rādhika, or Rādhā, because of her intense love for Him, was the closest to Krishna. She manifested Mahā–bhāva and was united with her Beloved. This union represents, through sensuous language, a supersensuous experience.

Sri Chaitanya, also known as Gaurānga, Gorā, or Nimāi, born in Bengāl in 1485 and regarded as an Incarnation of God, is a great prophet of the Vaishnava religion. Chaitanya declared the chanting of God's name to be the most efficacious spiritual discipline for the Kali–Yuga.

Sri Ramakrishna, as the monkey Hanumān, had already worshipped God as his Master. Through his devotion to Kāli he had worshipped God as his Mother. He was now to take up the other relationships prescribed by the Vaishnava scriptures.

Ramlālā

About the year 1864 there came to Dakshineśwar a wandering Vaishnava monk, Jatādhāri, whose Ideal Deity was Rāmā. He always carried with him a small metal image of the Deity, which he called by the endearing name of Ramlālā, the Boy Rāmā. Toward this little image he displayed the tender affection of Kausalya for her divine Son, Rāmā. As a result of lifelong spiritual practice he had actually found in the metal image the presence of his Ideal. Ramlālā was no longer for him a metal image, but the living God. He devoted himself to nursing Rāmā, feeding Rāmā, playing with Rāmā, taking Rāmā for a walk, and bathing Rāmā. And he found that the image responded to his love.

Sri Ramakrishna, much impressed with his devotion, requested Jatādhāri to spend a few days at Dakshineśwar. Soon Ramlālā became the favourite companion of Sri Ramakrishna too. Later on he described to the devotees how the little image would dance gracefully before him, jump on his back, insist on being taken in his arms, run to the fields in the sun, pluck flowers from the bushes, and play pranks like a naughty boy. A very sweet relationship sprang up between him and Ramlālā, for whom he felt the love of a mother.

One day Jatādhāri requested Sri Ramakrishna to keep the image and bade him adieu with tearful eyes. He declared that Ramlālā had fulfilled his innermost prayer and that he now had no more need of formal worship. A few days later Sri Ramakrishna was blessed through Ramlālā with a vision of Rāmachandra, whereby he realized that the Rāmā of the Ramayana, the son of Daśaratha, pervades the whole universe as Spirit and Consciousness; that He is its Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer; that, in still another aspect, He is the transcendental Brahman, without form, attribute, or name.

While worshipping Ramlālā as the Divine Child, Sri Ramakrishna's heart became filled with motherly tenderness, and he began to regard himself as a woman. His speech and gestures changed. He began to move freely with the ladies of Mathur's family, who now looked upon him as one of their own sex. During this time he worshipped the Divine Mother as Her companion or handmaid.

In Communion with the Divine Beloved

Sri Ramakrishna now devoted himself to scaling the most inaccessible and dizzy heights of dualistic worship, namely, the complete union with Sri Krishna as the Beloved of the heart. He regarded himself as one of the gopis of Vrindāvan, mad with longing for her divine Sweetheart. At his request Mathur provided him with woman's dress and jewellery. In this love pursuit, food and drink were forgotten. Day and night he wept bitterly. The yearning turned into a mad frenzy; for the divine Krishna began to play with him the old tricks He had played with the gopis. He would tease and taunt, now and then revealing Himself, but always keeping at a distance. Sri Ramakrishna's anguish brought on a return of the old physical symptoms: the burning sensation, an oozing of blood through the pores, a loosening of the joints, and the stopping of physiological functions.

The Vaishnava scriptures advise one to propitiate Rādhā and obtain her grace in order to realize Sri Krishna. So the tortured devotee now turned his prayer to her. Within a short time he enjoyed her blessed vision. He saw and felt the figure of Rādhā disappearing into his own body.

He said later on: "It is impossible to describe the heavenly beauty and sweetness of Rādhā. Her very appearance showed that she had completely forgotten herself in her passionate attachment to Krishna. Her complexion was a light yellow."

Now one with Rādhā, he manifested the great ecstatic love, the Mahā–bhāva which had found in her its fullest expression. Later Sri Ramakrishna said: "The manifestation in the same individual of the nineteen different kinds of emotion for God is called, in the books on bhakti, Mahā–bhāva. An ordinary man takes a whole lifetime to express even a single one of these. But in this body [meaning himself] there has been a complete manifestation of all nineteen."

The love of Rādhā is the precursor of the resplendent vision of Sri Krishna, and Sri Ramakrishna soon experienced that vision. The enchanting form of Krishna appeared to him and merged in his person. He became Krishna; he totally forgot his own individuality and the world; he saw Krishna in himself and in the universe. Thus he attained to the fulfilment of the worship of the Personal God. He drank from the fountain of Immortal Bliss. The agony of his heart vanished forever. He realized Amrita, Immortality, beyond the shadow of death.

One day, listening to a recitation of the Bhāgavata on the verandah of the Radhākānta temple he fell into a divine mood and saw the enchanting form of Krishna. He perceived the luminous rays issuing from Krishna's Lotus Feet in the form of a stout rope, which touched first the Bhāgavata and then his own chest, connecting all three - God, the scripture, and the devotee. "After this vision," he used to say, "I came to realize that *Bhagavān–Bhakta–and–Bhāgavata* -- God–Devotee–and–Scripture -- are in reality, one and the same."

Vedānta

The Brāhmani was the enthusiastic teacher and astonished beholder of Sri Ramakrishna in his spiritual progress. She became proud of the achievements of her unique pupil. But

the pupil himself was not permitted to rest; his destiny beckoned him forward. His Divine Mother would allow him no respite till he had left behind the entire realm of duality with its visions, experiences, and ecstatic dreams. But for the new ascent the old tender guides would not suffice. The Brāhmani, on whom he had depended for three years saw her son escape from her to follow the command of a teacher with masculine strength, a sterner mien, a gnarled physique, and a virile voice. The new guru was a wandering monk, the sturdy Totāpuri, whom Sri Ramakrishna learnt to address affectionately as *Nangta,* the "Naked One", because of his total renunciation of all earthly objects and attachments, including even a piece of wearing-cloth.

Totāpuri was the bearer of a philosophy new to Sri Ramakrishna, the non-dualistic Vedānta philosophy, whose conclusions Totāpuri had experienced in his own life. This ancient Hindu system designates the Ultimate Reality as Brahman, also described as *Satchidānanda,* Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Brahman is the only Real Existence. In It there is no time, no space, no causality, no multiplicity. But through Māyā, Its inscrutable Power, time, space, and causality are created and the One appears to break into the many. The eternal Spirit appears as a manifold of individuals endowed with form and subject to the conditions of time. The Immortal becomes a victim of birth and death. The Changeless undergoes change. The sinless Pure Soul, hypnotised by Its own Māyā, experiences the joys of heaven and the pains of hell. But these experiences based on the duality of the subject-object relationship are unreal. Even the vision of a Personal God is, ultimately speaking, as illusory as the experience of any other object. Man attains his liberation, therefore, by piercing the veil of Māyā and rediscovering his total identity with Brahman. Knowing himself to be one with the Universal Spirit, he realizes ineffable Peace. Only then does he go beyond the fiction of birth and death; only then does he become immortal. And this is the ultimate goal of all religions - to dehypnotize the soul now hypnotized by its own ignorance.

The path of the Vedāntic discipline is the path of negation, *"Neti",* in which, by stern determination, all that is unreal is both negated and renounced. It is the path of jnāna, knowledge, the direct method of realizing the Absolute. After the negation of everything relative, including the discriminating ego itself, the aspirant merges in the One without a Second, in the bliss of nirvikalpa Samādhi, where subject and object are alike dissolved. The soul goes beyond the realm of thought. The domain of duality is transcended. Māyā is left behind with all its changes and modifications. The Real Man towers above the delusions of creation, preservation, and destruction. An avalanche of indescribable Bliss sweeps away all relative ideas of pain and pleasure, good and evil. There shines in the heart the glory of the Eternal Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Knower, knowledge, and known are dissolved in the Ocean of one eternal Consciousness; love, lover, and beloved merge in the unbounded Sea of supreme Felicity; birth, growth, and death vanish in infinite Existence. All doubts and misgivings are quelled for ever; the oscillations of the mind are stopped; the momentum of past actions is exhausted. Breaking down the ridge-pole of the tabernacle in which the soul has made its abode for untold ages, stilling the body, calming the mind, drowning the ego, the sweet joy of Brahman wells up in that superconscious state. Space disappears into nothingness, time

is swallowed in eternity, and causation becomes a dream of the past. Only Existence is. Ah! Who can describe what the soul then feels in its communion with the Self?

Even when man descends from this dizzy height, he is devoid of ideas of "I" and "mine"; he looks on the body as a mere shadow, an outer sheath encasing the soul. He does not dwell on the past, takes no thought for the future, and looks with indifference on the present. He surveys everything in the world with an eye of equality; he is no longer touched by the infinite variety of phenomena; he no longer reacts to pleasure and pain. He remains unmoved whether he - that is to say, his body - is worshipped by the good or tormented by the wicked; for he realizes that it is the one Brahman that manifests Itself through everything. The impact of such an experience devastates the body and mind. Consciousness becomes blasted, as it were, with an excess of Light. In the Vedānta books it is said that after the experience of nirvikalpa Samādhi the body drops off like a dry leaf. Only those who are born with a special mission for the world can return from this height to the valleys of normal life. They live and move in the world for the welfare of mankind. They are invested with a supreme spiritual power. A divine glory shines through them.

Totāpuri

Totāpuri arrived at the Dakshineśwar temple garden toward the end of 1864. Perhaps born in the Punjab, he was the head of a monastery in that province of India and claimed leadership of seven hundred sannyāsis. Trained from early youth in the disciplines of the Advaita Vedānta, he looked upon the world as an illusion. The gods and goddesses of the dualistic worship were to him mere fantasies of the deluded mind. Prayers, ceremonies, rites, and rituals had nothing to do with true religion, and about these he was utterly indifferent. Exercising self-exertion and unshakable will-power, he had liberated himself from attachment to the sense-objects of the relative universe. For forty years he had practised austere discipline on the bank of the sacred Narmada and had finally realized his identity with the Absolute. Thenceforward he roamed in the world as an unfettered soul, a lion free from the cage. Clad in a loin-cloth, he spent his days under the canopy of the sky alike in storm and sunshine, feeding his body on the slender pittance of alms. He had been visiting the estuary of the Ganges. On his return journey along the bank of the sacred river, led by the inscrutable Divine Will, he stopped at Dakshineśwar.

Totāpuri, discovering at once that Sri Ramakrishna was prepared to be a student of Vedānta, asked to initiate him into its mysteries. With the permission of the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna agreed to the proposal. But Totāpuri explained that only a sannyāsi could receive the teaching of Vedānta. Sri Ramakrishna agreed to renounce the world, but with the stipulation that the ceremony of his initiation into the monastic order be performed in secret, to spare the feelings of his old mother, who had been living with him at Dakshineśwar.

On the appointed day, in the small hours of the morning, a fire was lighted in the Panchavati. Totāpuri and Sri Ramakrishna sat before it. The flame played on their faces. "Ramakrishna was a small brown man with a short beard and beautiful eyes, long dark

eyes, full of light, obliquely set and slightly veiled, never very wide open, but seeing half-closed a great distance both outwardly and inwardly. His mouth was open over his white teeth in a bewitching smile, at once affectionate and mischievous. Of medium height, he was thin to emaciation and extremely delicate. His temperament was high-strung, for he was supersensitive to all the winds of joy and sorrow, both moral and physical. He was indeed a living reflection of all that happened before the mirror of his eyes, a two-sided mirror, turned both out and in." Facing him, the other rose like a rock. He was very tall and robust, a sturdy and tough oak. His constitution and mind were of iron. He was the strong leader of men.

In the burning flame before him Sri Ramakrishna performed the rituals of destroying his attachment to relatives, friends, body, mind, sense-organs, ego, and the world. The leaping flame swallowed it all, making the initiate free and pure. The sacred thread and the tuft of hair were consigned to the fire, completing his severance from caste, sex, and society. Last of all he burnt in that fire, with all that is holy as his witness, his desire for enjoyment here and hereafter. He uttered the sacred mantras giving assurance of safety and fearlessness to all beings, who were only manifestations of his own Self. The rites completed, the disciple received from the guru the loincloth and ochre robe, the emblems of his new life.

The teacher and the disciple repaired to the meditation room near by. Totāpuri began to impart to Sri Ramakrishna the great truths of Vedānta. "Brahman", he said, "is the only Reality, ever pure, ever illumined, ever free, beyond the limits of time, space, and causation. Though apparently divided by names and forms through the inscrutable power of Māyā, that enchantress who makes the impossible possible, Brahman is really One and undivided. When a seeker merges in the beatitude of Samādhi, he does not perceive time and space or name and form, the offspring of Māyā. Whatever is within the domain of Māyā is unreal. Give it up. Destroy the prison-house of name and form and rush out of it with the strength of a lion. Dive deep in search of the Self and realize It through Samādhi. You will find the world of name and form vanishing into void, and the puny ego dissolving in Brahman-Consciousness. You will realize your identity with Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute." Quoting the Upanishad, Totāpuri said "That knowledge is shallow by which one sees or hears or knows another. What is shallow is worthless and can never give real felicity. But the Knowledge by which one does not see another or hear another or know another, which is beyond duality, is great, and through such Knowledge one attains the Infinite Bliss. How can the mind and senses grasp That which shines in the heart of all as the Eternal Subject?"

Totāpuri asked the disciple to withdraw his mind from all objects of relative world, including the gods and goddesses, and to concentrate on the Absolute. But the task was not easy even for Sri Ramakrishna. He found it impossible to take his mind beyond Kāli, the Divine Mother of the Universe. "After the initiation", Sri Ramakrishna once said, describing the event, "Nangta began to teach me the various conclusions of the Advaita Vedānta and asked me to withdraw the mind completely from all objects and dive deep into the Ātman. But in spite of all my attempts I could not altogether cross the realm of name and form and bring my mind to the unconditioned state. I had no difficulty in

taking the mind from all the objects of the world. But the radiant and too familiar figure of the Blissful Mother, the Embodiment of the essence of Pure Consciousness, appeared before me as a living reality. Her bewitching smile prevented me from passing into the Great Beyond. Again and again I tried, but She stood in my way every time. In despair I said to Nangta: 'It is hopeless. I cannot raise my mind to the unconditioned state and come face to face with Ātman.' He grew excited and sharply said: 'What? You can't do it? But you have to.' He cast his eyes around. Finding a piece of glass he took it up and stuck it between my eyebrows. 'Concentrate the mind on this point!' he thundered. Then with stern determination I again sat to meditate. As soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my discrimination as a sword and with it clove Her in two. The last barrier fell. My spirit at once soared beyond the relative plane and I lost myself in Samādhi."

Sri Ramakrishna remained completely absorbed in Samādhi for three days. "Is it really true?" Totāpuri cried out in astonishment. "Is it possible that he has attained in a single day what it took me forty years of strenuous practice to achieve? Great God! It is nothing short of a miracle!" With the help of Totāpuri, Sri Ramakrishna's mind finally came down to the relative Plane.

Totāpuri, a monk of the most orthodox type, never stayed at a place more than three days. But he remained at Dakshineśwar eleven months. He too had something to learn.

Totāpuri had no idea of the struggles of ordinary men in the toils of passion and desire. Having maintained all through life the guilelessness of a child, he laughed at the idea of a man's being led astray by the senses. He was convinced that the world, was Māyā and had only to be denounced to vanish for ever. A born non-dualist, he had no faith in a Personal God. He did not believe in the terrible aspect of Kāli, much less in Her benign aspect. Music and the chanting of God's holy name were to him only so much nonsense. He ridiculed the spending of emotion on the worship of a Personal God.

Kāli and Māyā

Sri Ramakrishna, on the other hand, though fully aware, like his guru, that the world is an illusory appearance, instead of slighting Māyā, like an orthodox monist, acknowledged its power in the relative life. He was all love and reverence for Māyā, perceiving in it a mysterious and majestic expression of Divinity. To him Māyā itself was God, for everything was God. It was one of the faces of Brahman. What he had realized on the heights of the transcendental plane, he also found here below, everywhere about him, under the mysterious garb of names and forms. And this garb was a perfectly transparent sheath, through which he recognized the glory of the Divine Immanence. Māyā, the mighty weaver of the garb, is none other than Kāli, the Divine Mother. She is the primordial Divine Energy, Śakti, and She can no more be distinguished from the Supreme Brahman than can the power of burning be distinguished from fire. She projects the world and again withdraws it. She spins it as the spider spins its web. She is the Mother of the Universe, identical with the Brahman of Vedānta, and with the Ātman of Yoga. As eternal Lawgiver, She makes and unmakes laws; it is by Her imperious will that karma yields its fruit. She ensnares men with illusion and again releases them from

bondage with a look of Her benign eyes. She is the supreme Mistress of the cosmic play, and all objects, animate and inanimate, dance by Her will. Even those who realize the Absolute in nirvikalpa Samādhi are under Her jurisdiction as long as they still live on the relative plane.

Thus, after Nirvikalpa Samādhi, Sri Ramakrishna realized Māyā in an altogether new role. The binding aspect of Kāli vanished from before his vision. She no longer obscured his understanding. The world became the glorious manifestation of the Divine Mother. Māyā became Brahman. The Transcendental Itself broke through the Immanent. Sri Ramakrishna discovered that Māyā operates in the relative world in two ways, and he termed these "Avidyā–Māyā" and "Vidyā–Māyā". Avidyā–Māyā represents the dark forces of creation: sensuous desires, evil passions, greed, lust, cruelty, and so on. It sustains the world system on the lower planes. It is responsible for the round of man's birth and death. It must be fought and vanquished. But Vidyā–Māyā is the higher force of creation: the spiritual virtues, the enlightening qualities, kindness, purity, love, devotion. Vidyā–Māyā elevates man to the higher planes of consciousness. With the help of Vidyā–Māyā the devotee rids himself of Avidyā–Māyā; he then becomes *Māyātita*, free of Māyā. The two aspects of Māyā are the two forces of creation, the two powers of Kāli; and She stands beyond them both. She is like the effulgent sun, bringing into existence and shining through and standing behind the clouds of different colours and shapes, conjuring up wonderful forms in the blue autumn heaven.

The Divine Mother asked Sri Ramakrishna not to be lost in the featureless Absolute but to remain in *Bhāva–mukha,* on the threshold of relative consciousness, the border line between the Absolute and the Relative. He was to keep himself at the "sixth centre" of Tantra, from which he could see not only the glory of the seventh, but also the divine manifestations of the Kundalini in the lower centres. He gently oscillated back and forth across the dividing line. Ecstatic devotion to the Divine Mother alternated with serene absorption in the Ocean of Absolute Unity. He thus bridged the gulf between the Personal and the Impersonal, the immanent and the transcendent aspects of Reality. This is a unique experience in the recorded spiritual history of the world.

Totāpuri's Lesson

From Sri Ramakrishna Totāpuri had to learn the significance of Kāli, the Great Fact of the relative world, and of Māyā, Her indescribable Power.

One day, when guru and disciple were engaged in an animated discussion about Vedānta, a servant of the temple garden came there and took a coal from the sacred fire that had been lighted by the great ascetic. He wanted it to light his tobacco. Totāpuri flew into a rage and was about to beat the man. Sri Ramakrishna rocked with laughter. "What a shame!" he cried. "You are explaining to me the reality of Brahman and the illusoriness of the world; yet now you have so far forgotten yourself as to be about to beat a man in a fit of passion. The power of Māyā is indeed inscrutable!" Totāpuri was embarrassed.

About this time Totāpuri was suddenly laid up with a severe attack of dysentery. On account of this miserable illness he found it impossible to meditate. One night the pain became excruciating. He could no longer concentrate on Brahman. The body stood in the way. He became incensed with its demands. A free soul, he did not at all care for the body. So he determined to drown it in the Ganges. Thereupon he walked into the river. But, lo! He walks to the other bank. Is there not enough water in the Ganges? Standing dumbfounded on the other bank he looks back across the water. The trees, the temples, the houses, are silhouetted against the sky. Suddenly, in one dazzling moment, he sees on all sides the presence of the Divine Mother. She is in everything; She is everything. She is in the water; She is on land. She is the body; She is the mind. She is pain; She is comfort. She is knowledge; She is ignorance. She is life; She is death. She is everything that one sees, hears, or imagines. She turns "yea" into "nay", and "nay" into "yea". Without Her grace no embodied being can go beyond Her realm. Man has no free will. He is not even free to die. Yet, again, beyond the body and mind She resides in Her Transcendental Absolute aspect. She is the Brahman that Totāpuri had been worshipping all his life.

Totāpuri returned to Dakshineśwar and spent the remaining hours of the night meditating on the Divine Mother. In the morning he went to the Kāli temple with Sri Ramakrishna and prostrated himself before the image of the Mother. He now realized why he had spent eleven months at Dakshineśwar. Bidding farewell to the disciple, he continued on his way, enlightened.

Sri Ramakrishna later described the significance of Totāpuri's lessons: "When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive - neither creating nor preserving nor destroying -, I call Him Brahman or *Purusha,* the Impersonal God. When I think of Him as active - creating, preserving, and destroying -, I call Him Śakti or Māyā or *Prakriti,* the Personal God. But the distinction between them does not mean a difference. The Personal and the Impersonal are the same thing, like milk and its whiteness, the diamond and its lustre, the snake and its wriggling motion. It is impossible to conceive of the one without the other. The Divine Mother and Brahman are one."

After the departure of Totāpuri, Sri Ramakrishna remained for six months in a state of absolute identity with Brahman. "For six months at a stretch", he said, "I remained in that state from which ordinary men can never return; generally the body falls off, after three weeks, like a sere leaf. I was not conscious of day and night. Flies would enter my mouth and nostrils just as they do a dead body's, but I did not feel them. My hair became matted with dust."

His body would not have survived but for the kindly attention of a monk who happened to be at Dakshineśwar at that time and who somehow realized that for the good of humanity Sri Ramakrishna's body must be preserved. He tried various means, even physical violence, to recall the fleeing soul to the prison-house of the body, and during the resultant fleeting moments of consciousness he would push a few morsels of food down Sri Ramakrishna's throat. Presently Sri Ramakrishna received the command of the Divine Mother to remain on the threshold of relative consciousness. Soon thereafter he

was afflicted with a serious attack of dysentery. Day and night the pain tortured him, and his mind gradually came down to the physical plane.

Company of Holy Men and Devotees

From now on Sri Ramakrishna began to seek the company of devotees and holy men. He had gone through the storm and stress of spiritual disciplines and visions. Now he realized an inner calmness and appeared to others as a normal person. But he could not bear the company of worldly people or listen to their talk. Fortunately the holy atmosphere of Dakshineśwar and the liberality of Mathur attracted monks and holy men from all parts of the country. *Sādhus* of all denominations - monists and dualists, Vaishnavas and Vedāntists, Śāktās and worshippers of Rāmā - flocked there in ever increasing numbers. Ascetics and visionaries came to seek Sri Ramakrishna's advice. Vaishnavas had come during the period of his Vaishnava sādhana, and Tāntriks when he practised the disciplines of Tantra. Vedāntists began to arrive after the departure of Totāpuri. In the room of Sri Ramakrishna, who was then in bed with dysentery, the Vedāntists engaged in scriptural discussions, and, forgetting his own physical suffering, he solved their doubts by referring directly to his own experiences. Many of the visitors were genuine spiritual souls, the unseen pillars of Hinduism, and their spiritual lives were quickened in no small measure by the sage of Dakshineśwar. Sri Ramakrishna in turn learnt from them anecdotes concerning the ways and the conduct of holy men, which he subsequently narrated to his devotees and disciples. At his request Mathur provided him with large stores of foodstuffs, clothes, and so forth, for distribution among the wandering monks.

Sri Ramakrishna had not read books, yet he possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge of religions and religious philosophies. This he acquired from his contacts with innumerable holy men and scholars. He had a unique power of assimilation; through meditation he made this knowledge a part of his being. Once, when he was asked by a disciple about the source of his seemingly inexhaustible knowledge, he replied: "I have not read; but I have heard the learned. I have made a garland of their knowledge, wearing it round my neck, and I have given it as an offering at the feet of the Mother."

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that when the flower blooms the bees come to it for honey of their own accord. Now many souls began to visit Dakshineśwar to satisfy their spiritual hunger. He, the devotee and aspirant, became the Master. Gauri, the great scholar who had been one of the first to proclaim Sri Ramakrishna an Incarnation of God, paid the Master a visit in 1870 and with the Master's blessings renounced the world. Nārāyan Śāstri, another great pundit, who had mastered the six systems of Hindu philosophy and had been offered a lucrative post by the Maharaja of Jaipur, met the Master and recognized in him one who had realized in life those ideals which he himself had encountered merely in books. Sri Ramakrishna initiated Nārāyan Śastri, at his earnest request, into the life of sannyās. Pundit Padmalochan, the court pundit of the Maharaja of Burdwan, well known for his scholarship in both the Vedānta and the *Nyāya* systems of philosophy, accepted the Master as an Incarnation of God. Krishnakishore, a Vedantist scholar, became devoted to the Master. And there arrived Viśwanāth Upādhyāya, who was to become a favourite devotee; Sri Ramakrishna always addressed

him as "Captain". He was a high officer of the King of Nepal and had received the title of Colonel in recognition of his merit. A scholar of the Gita, the Bhāgavata, and the Vedānta philosophy, he daily performed the worship of his Chosen Deity with great devotion. "I have read the Vedas and the other scriptures", he said. "I have also met a good many monks and devotees in different places. But it is in Sri Ramakrishna's presence that my spiritual yearnings have been fulfilled. To me he seems to be the embodiment of the truths of the scriptures."

The Knowledge of Brahman in nirvikalpa Samādhi had convinced Sri Ramakrishna that the gods of the different religions are but so many readings of the Absolute, and that the Ultimate Reality could never be expressed by human tongue. He understood that all religions lead their devotees by differing paths to one and the same goal. Now he became eager to explore some of the alien religions; for with him understanding meant actual experience.

Islām

Toward the end of 1866 he began to practise the disciplines of Islām. Under the direction of his Mussalman guru he abandoned himself to his new sādhana. He dressed as a Mussalman and repeated the name of Allah.

His prayers took the form of the Islamic devotions. He forgot the Hindu gods and goddesses - even Kāli - and gave up visiting the temples. He took up his residence outside the temple precincts. After three days he saw the vision of a radiant figure, perhaps Mohammed. This figure gently approached him and finally lost himself in Sri Ramakrishna. Thus he realized the Mussalman God. Thence he passed into communion with Brahman. The mighty river of Islam also led him back to the Ocean of the Absolute.

Christianity

Eight years later, some time in November 1874, Sri Ramakrishna was seized with an irresistible desire to learn the truth of the Christian religion. He began to listen to readings from the Bible, by Śambhu Charan Mallick, a gentleman of Calcutta and a devotee of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna became fascinated by the life and teachings of Jesus. One day he was seated in the parlour of Jadu Mallick's garden house at Dakshineśwar, when his eyes became fixed on a painting of the Madonna and Child. Intently watching it, he became gradually overwhelmed with divine emotion. The figures in the picture took on life, and the rays of light emanating from them entered his soul. The effect of this experience was stronger than that of the vision of Mohammed. In dismay he cried out, "O Mother! What are You doing to me?" And, breaking through the barriers of creed and religion, he entered a new realm of ecstasy. Christ possessed his soul. For three days he did not set foot in the Kāli temple. On the fourth day, in the afternoon, as he was walking in the Panchavati, he saw coming toward him a person with beautiful large eyes, serene countenance, and fair skin. As the two faced each other, a voice rang out in the depths of Sri Ramakrishna's soul: "Behold the Christ who shed His heart's blood for the redemption of the world, who suffered a sea of anguish for love of men. It is He, the Master Yogi, who is in eternal union with God. It is Jesus, Love Incarnate." The Son of Man embraced the Son of the Divine Mother and merged in him.

Sri Ramakrishna realized his identity with Christ, as he had already realized his identity with Kāli, Rāmā, Hanuman, Rādhā, Krishna, Brahman, and Mohammed. The Master went into Samādhi and communed with the Brahman with attributes. Thus he experienced the truth that Christianity, too, was a path leading to God-Consciousness. Till the last moment of his life he believed that Christ was an Incarnation of God. But Christ, for him, was not the only Incarnation; there were others - Buddha, for instance, and Krishna.

Attitude toward Different Religions

Sri Ramakrishna accepted the divinity of Buddha and used to point out the similarity of his teachings to those of the Upanishads. He also showed great respect for the Tirthankarās, who founded Jainism, and for the ten Gurus of Sikhism. But he did not speak of them as Divine Incarnations. He was heard to say that the Gurus of Sikhism were the reincarnations of King Janaka of ancient India. He kept in his room at Dakshineśwar a small statue of Tirthankara Mahāvira and a picture of Christ, before which incense was burnt morning and evening.

Without being formally initiated into their doctrines, Sri Ramakrishna thus realized the ideals of religions other than Hinduism. He did not need to follow any doctrine. All barriers were removed by his overwhelming love of God. So he became a Master who could speak with authority regarding the ideas and ideals of the various religions of the world. "I have practised", said he, "all religions - Hinduism, Islam, Christianity - and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God toward whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. You must try all beliefs and traverse all the different ways once. Wherever I look, I see men quarrelling in the name of religion - Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmos, Vaishnavās, and the rest. But they never reflect that He who is called Krishna is also called Śiva, and bears the name of the Primal Energy, Jesus, and Allah as well - the same Rāmā with a thousand names. A lake has several G*hāts*. At one, the Hindus take water in pitchers and call it *'Jal'*; at another the Mussalmans take water in leather bags and call it *'pāni'*. At a third the Christians call it *'water'*. Can we imagine that it is not 'jal', but only 'pāni' or 'water'? How ridiculous! The substance is One under different names, and everyone is seeking the same substance; only climate, temperament, and name create differences. Let each man follow his own path. If he sincerely and ardently wishes to know God, peace be unto him! He will surely realize Him."

In 1867, Sri Ramakrishna returned to Kāmārpukur to recuperate from the effect of his austerities. The peaceful countryside, the simple and artless companions of his boyhood, and the pure air did him much good. The villagers were happy to get back their playful, frank, witty, kind-hearted, and truthful Gadādhar, though they did not fail to notice the great change that had come over him during his years in Calcutta. His wife, Sāradā Devi, now fourteen years old, soon arrived at Kāmārpukur. Her spiritual development was much beyond her age and she was able to understand immediately her husband's state of mind. She became eager to learn from him about God and to live with him as his attendant. The Master accepted her cheerfully both as his disciple and as his spiritual companion. Referring to the experiences of these few days, she once said: "I used to

feel always as if a pitcher full of bliss were placed in my heart. The joy was indescribable."

Pilgrimage

On January 27, 1868, Mathur Bābu with a party of some one hundred and twenty-five persons set out on a pilgrimage to the sacred places of northern India. At Vaidyanāth in Behar, when the Master saw the inhabitants of a village reduced by poverty and starvation to mere skeletons, he requested his rich patron to feed the people and give each a piece of cloth. Mathur demurred at the added expense. The Master declared bitterly that he would not go on to Banāras, but would live with the poor and share their miseries. He actually left Mathur and sat down with the villagers.

Whereupon Mathur had to yield. On another occasion, two years later, Sri Ramakrishna showed a similar sentiment for the poor and needy. He accompanied Mathur on a tour to one of the latter's estates at the time of the collection of rents. For two years the harvests had failed and the tenants were in a state of extreme poverty. The Master asked Mathur to remit their rents, distribute help to them, and in addition give the hungry people a sumptuous feast. When Mathur grumbled, the Master said: "You are only the steward of the Divine Mother. They are the Mother's tenants. You must spend the Mother's money. When they are suffering, how can you refuse to help them? You must help them." Again Mathur had to give in. Sri Ramakrishna's sympathy for the poor sprang from his perception of God in all created beings. His sentiment was not that of the humanist or philanthropist. To him the service of man was the same as the worship of God.

The party entered holy Banāras by boat along the Ganges. When Sri Ramakrishna's eyes fell on this city of Śiva, where had accumulated for ages the devotion and piety of countless worshippers, he saw it to be made of gold, as the scriptures declare. He was visibly moved. During his stay in the city he treated every particle of its earth with utmost respect. At the Manikarnikā Ghāt, the great cremation ground of the city, he actually saw Śiva, with ash-covered body and tawny matted hair, serenely approaching each funeral pyre and breathing into the ears of the corpses the mantra of liberation; and then the Divine Mother removing from the dead their bonds. Thus he realized the significance of the scriptural statement that anyone dying in Banāras attains salvation through the grace of Śiva. He paid a visit to Trailanga Swāmi, the celebrated monk, whom he later declared to be a real paramahamsa, a veritable image of Śiva.

Sri Ramakrishna visited Allahābad, at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jamuna, and then proceeded to Vrindāvan and Mathura, hallowed by the legends, songs, and dramas about Krishna and the gopis. Here he had numerous visions and his heart overflowed with divine emotion. He wept and said: "O Krishna! Everything here is as it was in the olden days. You alone are absent." He visited the great woman saint Gangāmāyi, regarded by Vaishnava devotees as the reincarnation of an intimate attendant of Rādhā. She was sixty years old and had frequent trances. She spoke of Sri Ramakrishna as an incarnation of Rādhā. With great difficulty he was persuaded to leave her.

On the return journey Mathur wanted to visit Gayā, but Sri Ramakrishna declined to go. He recalled his father's vision at Gayā before his own birth and felt that in the temple of Vishnu he would become permanently absorbed in God. Mathur, honouring the Master's wish, returned with his party to Calcutta.

From Vrindāvan the Master had brought a handful of dust. Part of this he scattered in the Panchavati; the rest he buried in the little hut where he had practised meditation. "Now this place", he said, "is as sacred as Vrindāvan."

In 1870 the Master went on a pilgrimage to Nadia, the birth-place of Sri Chaitanya. As the boat by which he travelled approached the sand-bank close to Nadia, Sri Ramakrishna had a vision of the "two brothers", Sri Chaitanya and his companion Nityānanda, "bright as molten gold" and with haloes, rushing to greet him with uplifted hands. "There they come! There they come!" he cried. They entered his body and he went into a deep trance.

Relation with His Wife

In 1872, Sāradā Devi paid her first visit to her husband at Dakshineśwar. Four years earlier she had seen him at Kāmārpukur and had tasted the bliss of his divine company. Since then she had become even more gentle, tender, introspective, serious, and unselfish. She had heard many rumours about her husband's insanity. People had shown her pity in her misfortune. The more she thought, the more she felt that her duty was to be with him, giving him, in whatever measure she could, a wife's devoted service. She was now eighteen years old. Accompanied by her father, she arrived at Dakshineśwar, having come on foot the distance of eighty miles. She had had an attack of fever on the way. When she arrived at the temple garden the Master said sorrowfully: "Ah! You have come too late. My Mathur is no longer here to look after you." Mathur had passed away the previous year.

The Master took up the duty of instructing his young wife, and this included everything from housekeeping to the Knowledge of Brahman. He taught her how to trim a lamp, how to behave toward people according to their differing temperaments, and how to conduct herself before visitors. He instructed her in the mysteries of spiritual life - prayer, meditation, japa, deep contemplation, and Samādhi. The first lesson that Sāradā Devi received was: "God is everybody's Beloved, just as the moon is dear to every child. Everyone has the same right to pray to Him. Out of His grace He reveals Himself to all who call upon Him. You too will see Him if you but pray to Him."

Totāpuri, coming to know of the Master's marriage, had once remarked: "What does it matter? He alone is firmly established in the Knowledge of Brahman who can adhere to his spirit of discrimination and renunciation even while living with his wife. He alone has attained the supreme illumination who can look on man and woman alike as Brahman. A man with the idea of sex may be a good aspirant, but he is still far from the goal." Sri Ramakrishna and his wife lived together at Dakshineśwar, but their minds always soared above the worldly plane. A few months after Sāradā Devi's arrival Sri Ramakrishna arranged, on an auspicious day, a special worship of Kāli, the Divine Mother. Instead of

an image of the Deity, he placed on the seat the living image, Sāradā Devi herself. The worshipper and the worshipped went into deep Samādhi and in the transcendental plane their souls were united. After several hours Sri Ramakrishna came down again to the relative plane, sang a hymn to the Great Goddess, and surrendered, at the feet of the living image, himself, his rosary, and the fruit of his life-long sādhana. This is known in Tantra as the *Shodasi Puja,* the "Adoration of Woman". Sri Ramakrishna realized the significance of the great statement of the Upanishad: "O Lord, Thou art the woman, Thou art the man; Thou art the boy, Thou art the girl; Thou art the old, tottering on their crutches. Thou pervadest the universe in its multiple forms."

By his marriage Sri Ramakrishna admitted the great value of marriage in man's spiritual evolution, and by adhering to his monastic vows he demonstrated the imperative necessity of self-control, purity, and continence, in the realization of God. By his unique spiritual relationship with his wife he proved that husband and wife can live together as spiritual companions. Thus his life is a synthesis of the ways of life of the householder and the monk.

The "Ego" of the Master

In the nirvikalpa Samādhi Sri Ramakrishna had realized that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. By keeping his mind six months on the plane of the non-dual Brahman, he had attained to the state of the *Vijnani,* the Knower of Truth in a special and very rich sense, who sees Brahman not only in himself and in the transcendental Absolute, but in everything of the world. In this state of *Vijnāna,* sometimes, bereft of body-consciousness, he would regard himself as one with Brahman; sometimes, conscious of the dual world, he would regard himself as God's devotee, servant, or child. In order to enable the Master to work for the welfare of humanity, the Divine Mother had kept in him a trace of ego, which he described - according to his mood - as the "ego of Knowledge", the "ego of Devotion", the "ego of a child", or the "ego of a servant". In any case this ego of the Master, consumed by the fire of the Knowledge of Brahman, was an appearance only, like a burnt string. He often referred to this ego as the "ripe ego" in contrast with the ego of the bound soul, which he described as the "unripe" or "green" ego. The ego of the bound soul identifies itself with the body, relatives, possessions, and the world; but the "ripe ego", illumined by Divine Knowledge, knows the body, relatives, possessions, and the world to be unreal and establishes a relationship of love with God alone. Through this "ripe ego" Sri Ramakrishna dealt with the world and his wife. One day, while stroking his feet, Sāradā Devi asked the Master, "What do you think of me?" Quick came the answer: "The Mother who is worshipped in the temple is the mother who has given birth to my body and is now living in the Nahabat, and it is She again who is stroking my feet at this moment. Indeed, I always look on you as the personification of the Blissful Mother Kāli."

Sāradā Devi, in the company of her husband, had rare spiritual experiences. She said: "I have no words to describe my wonderful exaltation of spirit as I watched him in his different moods. Under the influence of divine emotion he would sometimes talk on abstruse subjects, sometimes laugh, sometimes weep, and sometimes become perfectly motionless in Samādhi. This would continue throughout the night. There was such an

extraordinary divine presence in him that now and then I would shake with fear and wonder how the night would pass. Months went by in this way. Then one day he discovered that I had to keep awake the whole night lest, during my sleep, he should go into Samādhi - for it might happen at any moment -, and so he asked me to sleep in the Nahabat."

Summary of the Master's Spiritual Experiences

We have now come to the end of Sri Ramakrishna's sādhana, the period of his spiritual discipline. As a result of his supersensuous experiences he reached certain conclusions regarding himself and spirituality in general. His conclusions about himself may be summarised as follows:

First, he was an Incarnation of God, a specially commissioned person, whose spiritual experiences were for the benefit of humanity. Whereas it takes an ordinary man a whole life's struggle to realize one or two phases of God, he had in a few years realized God in all His phases.

Second, he knew that he had always been a free soul, that the various disciplines through which he had passed were really not necessary for his own liberation but were solely for the benefit of others. Thus the terms liberation and bondage were not applicable to him. As long as there are beings who consider themselves bound, God must come down to earth as an Incarnation to free them from bondage, just as a magistrate must visit any part of his district in which there is trouble.

Third, he came to foresee the time of his death. His words with respect to this matter were literally fulfilled.

About spirituality in general the following were his conclusions :

First, he was firmly convinced that all religions are true, that every doctrinal system represents a path to God. He had followed all the main paths and all had led him to the same goal. He was the first religious prophet recorded in history to preach the harmony of religions.

Second, the three great systems of thought known as Dualism, Qualified Non-dualism, and Absolute Non-dualism - *Dvaita, Visishtādvaita, and Advaita* - he perceived to represent three stages in man's progress toward the Ultimate Reality. They were not contradictory but complementary and suited to different temperaments. For the ordinary man with strong attachment to the senses, a dualistic form of religion, prescribing a certain amount of material support, such as music and other symbols, is useful. A man of God-realization transcends the idea of worldly duties, but the ordinary mortal must perform his duties, striving to be unattached and to surrender the results to God. The mind can comprehend and describe the range of thought and experience up to the Viśiśtādvaita, and no further. The Advaita, the last word in spiritual experience, is something to be felt in Samādhi, for it transcends mind and speech. From the highest standpoint, the Absolute and Its manifestation are equally real - the Lord's Name, His

Abode, and the Lord Himself are of the same spiritual Essence. Everything is Spirit, the difference being only in form.

Third, Sri Ramakrishna realized the wish of the Divine Mother that through him She should found a new Order, consisting of those who would uphold the universal doctrines illustrated in his life.

Fourth, his spiritual insight told him that those who were having their last birth on the mortal plane of existence and those who had sincerely called on the Lord even once in their lives must come to him.

During this period Sri Ramakrishna suffered several bereavements. The first was the death of a nephew named, Akshay. After the young man's death Sri Ramakrishna said: "Akshay died before my very eyes. But it did not affect me in the least. I stood by and watched a man die. It was like a sword being drawn from its scabbard. I enjoyed the scene, and laughed and sang and danced over it. They removed the body and cremated it. But the next day as I stood there (pointing to the southeast verandah of his room), I felt a racking pain for the loss of Akshay, as if somebody were squeezing my heart like a wet towel. I wondered at it and thought that the Mother was teaching me a lesson. I was not much concerned even with my own body - much less with a relative. But if such was my pain at the loss of a nephew, how much more must be the grief of the householders at the loss of their near and dear ones!" In 1871 Mathur died, and some five years later Śambhu Mallick - who, after Mathur's passing away, had taken care of the Master's comfort. In 1873 died his elder brother Rāmeśwar, and in 1876, his beloved mother. These bereavements left their imprint on the tender human heart of Sri Ramakrishna albeit he had realized the immortality of the soul and the illusoriness of birth and death.

In March 1875, about a year before the death of his mother, the Master met Keshab Chandra Sen. The meeting was a momentous event for both Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab. Here the Master for the first time came into actual contact with a worthy representative of modern India.

Brāhmo Samāj

Keshab was the leader of the Brāhmo Samāj, one of the two great movements that, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, played an important part in shaping the course of the renascence of India. The founder of the Brāhmo movement had been the great Rājā Rāmmohan Roy (1774-1833). Though born in an orthodox brāhmin family, Rāmmohan Roy had shown great sympathy for Islam and Christianity. He had gone to Tibet in search of the Buddhist mysteries. He had extracted from Christianity its ethical system, but had rejected the divinity of Christ as he had denied the Hindu Incarnations. The religion of Islam influenced him, to a great extent, in the formulation of his monotheistic doctrines. But he always went back to the Vedas for his spiritual inspiration. The Brāhmo Samāj, which he founded in 1828, was dedicated to the "worship and adoration of the Eternal, the Unsearchable, the Immutable Being, who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe". The Samāj was open to all without distinction of colour, creed, caste, nation, or religion.

The real organizer of the Samāj was Devendranāth Tāgore (1817-1905), the father of the poet Rabindranāth. His physical and spiritual beauty, aristocratic aloofness, penetrating intellect, and poetic sensibility made him the foremost leader of the educated Bengālis. These addressed him by the respectful epithet of *Maharshi,* the "Great Seer". The Maharshi was a Sanskrit scholar and, unlike Rājā Rāmmohan Roy, drew his inspiration entirely from the Upanishads. He was an implacable enemy of image worship and also fought to stop the infiltration of Christian ideas into the Samāj. He gave the movement its faith and ritual. Under his influence the Brāhmo Samāj professed One Self-existent Supreme Being who had created the universe out of nothing, the God of Truth, Infinite Wisdom, Goodness, and Power, the Eternal and Omnipotent, the One without a Second. Man should love Him and do His will, believe in Him and worship Him, and thus merit salvation in the world to come.

By far the ablest leader of the Brāhmo movement was Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884). Unlike Rājā Rāmmohan Roy and Devendranāth Tāgore, Keshab was born of a middle-class Bengāli family and had been brought up in an English school. He did not know Sanskrit and very soon broke away from the popular Hindu religion. Even at an early age he came under the spell of Christ and professed to have experienced the special favour of John the Baptist, Christ, and St. Paul. When he strove to introduce Christ to the Brāhmo Samāj, a rupture became inevitable with Devendranāth. In 1868 Keshab broke with the older leader and founded the Brāhmo Samāj of India, Devendra retaining leadership of the first Brāhmo Samāj, now called the Ādi Samāj.

Keshab possessed a complex nature. When passing through a great moral crisis, he spent much of his time in solitude and felt that he heard the voice of God. When a devotional form of worship was introduced into the Brāhmo Samāj, he spent hours in singing kirtan with his followers. He visited England in 1870 and impressed the English people with his musical voice, his simple English, and his spiritual fervour. He was entertained by Queen Victoria. Returning to India, he founded centres of the Brāhmo Samāj in various parts of the country. Not unlike a professor of comparative religion in a European university, he began to discover, about the time of his first contact with Sri Ramakrishna, the harmony of religions. He became sympathetic toward the Hindu gods and goddesses, explaining them in a liberal fashion. Further, he believed that he was called by God to dictate to the world God's newly revealed law, the New Dispensation, the **Nava-vidhān.**

In 1878 a schism divided Keshab's Samāj. Some of his influential followers accused him of infringing the Brāhmo principles by marrying his daughter to a wealthy man before she had attained the marriageable age approved by the Samāj. This group seceded and established the Sādhāran Brāhmo Samāj, Keshab remaining the leader of the Navavidhān. Keshab now began to be drawn more and more toward the Christ ideal, though under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna his devotion to the Divine Mother also deepened. His mental oscillation between Christ and the Divine Mother of Hinduism found no position of rest. In Bengāl and some other parts of India the Brāhmo movement took the form of Unitarian Christianity, scoffed at Hindu rituals, and preached a crusade against image worship. Influenced by Western culture, it declared the

supremacy of reason, advocated the ideals of the French Revolution, abolished the caste-system among, its own members, stood for the emancipation of women, agitate for the abolition of early marriage, sanctioned the remarriage of widows, and encouraged various educational and social-reform movements. The immediate effect of the Brāhmo movement in Bengāl was the checking of the proselytising activities of the Christian missionaries. It also raised Indian culture in the estimation of its English masters. But it was an intellectual and eclectic religious ferment born of the necessity of the time. Unlike Hinduism, it was not founded on the deep inner experiences of sages and prophets. Its influence was confined to a comparatively few educated men and women of the country, and the vast masses of the Hindus remained outside it. It sounded monotonously only one of the notes in the rich gamut of the Eternal Religion of the Hindus.

Ārya Samāj

The other movement playing an important part in the nineteenth-century religious revival of India was the Ārya Samāj. The Brāhmo Samāj, essentially a movement of compromise with European culture, tacitly admitted the superiority of the West. But the founder of the Ārya Samāj was a pugnacious Hindu sannyāsi who accepted the challenge of Islam and Christianity and was resolved to combat all foreign influence in India. Swāmi Dayānanda (1824-1883) launched this movement in Bombay in 1875, and soon its influence was felt throughout western India. The Swāmi was a great scholar of the Vedas, which he explained as being strictly mono-theistic. He preached against the worship of images and re-established the ancient Vedic sacrificial rites. According to him the Vedas were the ultimate authority on religion, and he accepted every word of them as literally true. The Ārya Samāj became a bulwark against the encroachments of Islam and Christianity, and its orthodox flavour appealed to many Hindu minds. It also assumed leadership in many movements of social reform. The caste-system became a target of its attack. Women it liberated from many of their social disabilities. The cause of education received from it a great impetus. It started agitation against early marriage and advocated the remarriage of Hindu widows. Its influence was strongest in the Punjab, the battle-ground of the Hindu and Islamic cultures. A new fighting attitude was introduced into the slumbering Hindu society. Unlike the Brāhmo Samāj, the influence of the Ārya Samāj was not confined to the intellectuals. It was a force that spread to the masses. It was a dogmatic movement intolerant of those disagreed with its views, and it emphasized only one way, the Ārya Samāj way, to the realization of Truth. Sri Ramakrishna met Swāmi Dayānanda when the latter visited Bengāl.

Keshab Chandra Sen

Keshab Chandra Sen and Sri Ramakrishna met for the first time in the garden house of Jaygopāl Sen at Belgharia, a few miles from Dakshineśwar, where the great Brāhmo leader was staying with some of his disciples. In many respects the two were poles apart, though an irresistible inner attraction was to make them intimate friends. The Master had realized God as Pure Spirit and Consciousness, but he believed in the various forms of God as well. Keshab, on the other hand, regarded image worship as idolatry and gave allegorical explanations of the Hindu deities. Keshab was an orator and a writer of books and magazine articles; Sri Ramakrishna had a horror of lecturing and hardly

knew how to write his own name. Keshab's fame spread far and wide, even reaching the distant shores of England; the Master still led a secluded life in the village of Dakshineśwar. Keshab emphasized social reforms for India's regeneration; to Sri Ramakrishna God-realization was the only goal of life. Keshab considered himself a disciple of Christ and accepted in a diluted form the Christian sacraments and Trinity; Sri Ramakrishna was the simple child of Kāli, the Divine Mother, though he too, in a different way, acknowledged Christ's divinity. Keshab was a house-holder and took a real interest in the welfare of his children, whereas Sri Ramakrishna was a paramahamsa and completely indifferent to the life of the world. Yet, as their acquaintance ripened into friendship, Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab held each other in great love and respect. Years later, at the news of Keshab's death, the Master felt as if half his body had become paralysed. Keshab's concepts of the harmony of religions and the Motherhood of God were deepened and enriched by his contact with Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna, dressed in a red-bordered dhoti, one end of which was carelessly thrown over his left shoulder, came to Jaygopal's garden house accompanied by Hriday. No one took notice of the unostentatious visitor. Finally the Master said to Keshab, "People tell me you have seen God; so I have come to hear from you about God." A magnificent conversation followed. The Master sang a thrilling song about Kāli and forthwith went into Samādhi. When Hriday uttered the sacred "Om" in his ears, he gradually came back to consciousness of the world, his face still radiating a divine brilliance. Keshab and his followers were amazed. The contrast between Sri Ramakrishna and the Brāhmo devotees was very interesting. There sat this small man, thin and extremely delicate. His eyes were illumined with an inner light. Good humour gleamed in his eyes and lurked in the corners of his mouth. His speech was Bengāli of a homely kind with a slight, delightful stammer, and his words held men enthralled by their wealth of spiritual experience, their inexhaustible store of simile and metaphor, their power of observation, their bright and subtle humour, their wonderful catholicity, their ceaseless flow of wisdom. And around him now were the sophisticated men of Bengāl, the best products of Western education, with Keshab, the idol of young Bengāl, as their leader.

Keshab's sincerity was enough for Sri Ramakrishna. Henceforth the two saw each other frequently, either at Dakshineśwar or at the temple of the Brāhmo Samāj. Whenever the Master was in the temple at the time of divine service, Keshab would request him to speak to the congregation. And Keshab would visit the saint, in his turn, with offerings of flowers and fruits.

Other Brāhmo Leaders

Gradually other Brāhmo leaders began to feel Sri Ramakrishna's influence. But they were by no means uncritical admirers of the Master. They particularly disapproved of his ascetic renunciation and condemnation of, "woman and gold".7 They measured him according to their own ideals of the householder's life. Some could not understand his Samādhi and described it as a nervous malady. Yet they could not resist his magnetic personality.

Among the Brāhmo leaders who knew the Master closely were Pratāp Chandra Mazumdār, Vijay Krishna Goswāmi, Trailokyanāth Sannyāl and Śivanāth Śastri.

Śivanāth, one day, was greatly impressed by the Master's utter simplicity and abhorrence of praise. He was seated with Sri Ramakrishna in the latter's room when several rich men of Calcutta arrived. The Master left the room for a few minutes. In the mean time Hriday, his nephew, began to describe his Samādhi to the visitors. The last few words caught the Master's ear as he entered the room. He said to Hriday: "What a mean-spirited fellow you must be to extol me thus before these rich men! You have seen their costly apparel and their gold watches and chains, and your object is to get from them as much money as you can. What do I care about what they think of me? (Turning to the gentlemen) No, my friends, what he has told you about me is not true. It was not love of God that made me absorbed in God and indifferent to external life. I became positively insane for some time. The *sādhus* who frequented this temple told me to practise many things. I tried to follow them, and the consequence was that my austerities drove me to insanity." This is a quotation from one of Śivanāth's books. He took the Master's words literally and failed to see their real import.

Śivanāth vehemently criticized the Master for his other-worldly attitude toward his wife. He writes: "Ramakrishna was practically separated from his wife, who lived in her village home. One day when I was complaining to some friends about the virtual widowhood of his wife, he drew me to one side and whispered in my ear: 'Why do you complain? It is no longer possible; it is all dead and gone.' Another day as I was inveighing against this part of his teaching, and also declaring that our program of work in the Brāhmo Samāj includes women, that ours is a social and domestic religion, and that we want to give education and social liberty to women, the saint became very much excited, as was his way when anything against his settled conviction was asserted - a trait we so much liked in him - and exclaimed, 'Go, thou fool, go and perish in the pit that your women will dig for you.' Then he glared at me and said: 'What does a gardener do with a young plant? Does he not surround it with a fence, to protect it from goats and cattle? And when the young plant has grown up into a tree and it can no longer be injured by cattle, does he not remove the fence and let the tree grow freely?' I replied, 'Yes, that is the custom with gardeners.' Then he remarked, 'Do the same in your spiritual life; become strong, be full-grown; then you may seek them.' To which I replied, 'I don't agree with you in thinking that women's work is like that of cattle, destructive; they are our associates and helpers in our spiritual struggles and social progress' - a view with which he could not agree, and he marked his dissent by shaking his head. Then referring to the lateness of the hour he jocularly remarked, 'It is time for you to depart; take care, do not be late; otherwise your woman will not admit you into her room.' This evoked hearty laughter."

Pratāp Chandra Mazumdār, the right-hand man of Keshab and an accomplished Brāhmo preacher in Europe and America, bitterly criticized Sri Ramakrishna's use of uncultured language and also his austere attitude toward his wife. But he could not escape the spell of the Master's personality. In the course of an article about Sri Ramakrishna, Pratāp wrote in the "Theistic Quarterly Review": "What is there in common between him and me? I, a Europeanized, civilized, self-centered, semi-sceptical, so-called educated

reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, unpolished, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee? Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I, who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Muller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines? … And it is not I only, but dozens like me, who do the same. … He worships Śiva, he worships Kāli, he worships Rāmā, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedāntic doctrines. … He is an idolater, yet is a faithful and most devoted Meditator on the perfections of the One Formless, Absolute, Infinite Deity. … His religion is ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight, his whole nature burns day and night with a permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling. … So long as he is spared to us, gladly shall we sit at his feet to learn from him the sublime precepts of purity, unworldliness, spirituality, and inebriation in the love of God. … He, by his childlike bhakti, by his strong conceptions of an ever-ready Motherhood, helped to unfold it [God as our Mother] in our minds wonderfully. … By associating with him we learnt to realize better the divine attributes as scattered over the three hundred and thirty millions of deities of mythological India, the gods of the Purānās."

The Brāhmo leaders received much inspiration from their contact with Sri Ramakrishna. It broadened their religious views and kindled in their hearts the yearning for God-realization; it made them understand and appreciate the rituals and symbols of Hindu religion, convinced them of the manifestation of God in diverse forms, and deepened their thoughts about the harmony of religions. The Master, too, was impressed by the sincerity of many of the, Brāhmo devotees. He told them about his own realizations and explained to them the essence of his teachings, such as the necessity of renunciation, sincerity in the pursuit of one's own course of discipline, faith in God, the performance of one's duties without thought of results, and discrimination between the Real and the unreal.

This contact with the educated and progressive Bengālis opened Sri Ramakrishna's eyes to a new realm of thought. Born and brought up in a simple village, without any formal education, and taught by the orthodox holy men of India in religious life, he had had no opportunity to study the influence of modernism on the thoughts and lives of the Hindus. He could not properly estimate the result of the impact of Western education on Indian culture. He was a Hindu of the Hindus, renunciation being to him the only means to the realization of God in life. From the Brahmos he learnt that the new generation of India made a compromise between God and the world. Educated young men were influenced more by the Western philosophers than by their own prophets. But Sri Ramakrishna was not dismayed, for he saw in this, too, the hand of God. And though he expounded to the Brahmos all his ideas about God and austere religious disciplines, yet he bade them accept from his teachings only as much as suited their tastes and temperaments.

The Master's Yearning for His Own Devotees

Contact with the Brahmos increased Sri Ramakrishna's longing to encounter aspirants who would be able to follow his teachings in their purest form. "There was no limit", he once declared, "to the longing I felt at that time. During the day-time I somehow managed to control it. The secular talk of the worldly-minded was galling to me, and I would look wistfully to the day when my own beloved companions would come. I hoped

to find solace in conversing with them and relating to them my own realizations. Every little incident would remind me of them, and thoughts of them wholly engrossed me. I was already arranging in my mind what I should say to one and give to another, and so on. But when the day would come to a close I would not be able to curb my feelings. The thought that another day had gone by, and they had not come, oppressed me. When, during the evening service, the temples rang with the sound of bells and conch-shells, I would climb to the roof of the *Kuthi* in the garden and, writhing in anguish of heart, cry at the top of my voice: 'Come, my children! Oh, where are you? I cannot bear to live without you.' A mother never longed so intensely for the sight of her child, nor a friend for his companions, nor a lover for his sweetheart, as I longed for them. Oh, it was indescribable! Shortly after this period of yearning the devotees began to come."

In the year 1879 occasional writings about Sri Ramakrishna by the Brahmos, in the Brāhmo magazines, began to attract his future disciples from the educated middle-class Bengālis, and they continued to come till 1884. But others, too, came, feeling the subtle power of his attraction. They were an ever shifting crowd of people of all castes and creeds: Hindus and Brahmos, Vaishnavas and Śāktās, the educated with university degrees and the illiterate, old and young, maharajas and beggars, journalists and artists, pundits and devotees, philosophers and the worldly-minded, jnānis and yogis, men of action and men of faith, virtuous women and prostitutes, office-holders and vagabonds, philanthropists and self-seekers, dramatists and drunkards, builders-up and pullers-down. He gave to them all, without stint, from his illimitable store of realization. No one went away empty-handed. He taught them the lofty knowledge of the Vedānta and the soul-melting love of the Purānā. Twenty hours out of twenty-four he would speak without rest or respite. He gave to all his sympathy and enlightenment, and he touched them with that strange power of the soul which could not but melt even the most hardened. And people understood him according to their powers of comprehension.

The Master's Method of Teaching

But he remained as ever the willing instrument in the hand of God, the child of the Divine Mother, totally untouched by the idea of being a teacher. He used to say that three ideas - that he was a guru, a father, and a master - pricked his flesh like thorns. Yet he was an extraordinary teacher. He stirred his disciples' hearts more by a subtle influence than by actions or words. He never claimed to be the founder of a religion or the organizer of a sect. Yet he was a religious dynamo. He was the verifier of all religions and creeds. He was like an expert gardener, who prepares the soil and removes the weeds, knowing that the plants will grow because of the inherent power of the seeds, producing each its appropriate flowers and fruits. He never thrust his ideas on anybody. He understood people's limitations and worked on the principle that what is good for one may be bad for another. He had the unusual power of knowing the devotees' minds, even their inmost souls, at the first sight. He accepted disciples with the full knowledge of their past tendencies and future possibilities. The life of evil did not frighten him, nor did religious squeamishness raise anybody in his estimation. He saw in everything the unerring finger of the Divine Mother. Even the light that leads astray was to him the light from God.

To those who became his intimate disciples the Master was a friend, companion, and playmate. Even the chores of religious discipline would be lightened in his presence. The devotees would be so inebriated with pure joy in his company that they would have no time to ask themselves whether he was an Incarnation, a perfect soul, or a yogi. His very presence was a great teaching; words were superfluous. In later years his disciples remarked that while they were with him they would regard him as a comrade, but afterwards would tremble to think of their frivolities in the presence of such a great person. They had convincing proof that the Master could, by his mere wish, kindle in their hearts the love of God and give them His vision.

Through all this fun and frolic, this merriment and frivolity, he always kept before them the shining ideal of God-Consciousness and the path of renunciation. He prescribed ascents steep or graded according to the powers of the climber. He permitted no compromise with the basic principles of purity. An aspirant had to keep his body, mind, senses, and soul unspotted; had to have a sincere love for God and an ever mounting spirit of yearning. The rest would be done by the Mother.

His disciples were of two kinds: the householders, and the young men, some of whom were later to become monks. There was also a small group of women devotees.

House Holder Devotees

For the householders Sri Ramakrishna did not prescribe the hard path of total renunciation. He wanted them to discharge their obligations to their families. Their renunciation was to be mental. Spiritual life could not he acquired by flying away from responsibilities. A married couple should live like brother and sister after the birth of one or two children, devoting their time to spiritual talk and contemplation. He encouraged the householders, saying that their life was, in a way, easier than that of the monk, since it was more advantageous to fight the enemy from inside a fortress than in an open field. He insisted, however, on their repairing into solitude every now and then to strengthen their devotion and faith in God through prayer, japa, and meditation. He prescribed for them the companionship of *sādhus*. He asked them to perform their worldly duties with one hand, while holding to God with the other, and to pray to God to make their duties fewer and fewer so that in the end they might cling to Him with both hands. He would discourage in both the householders and the celibate youths any lukewarmness in their spiritual struggles. He would not ask them to follow indiscriminately the ideal of non-resistance, which ultimately makes a coward of the unwary.

Future Monks

But to the young men destined to be monks he pointed out the steep path of renunciation, both external and internal. They must take the vow of absolute continence and eschew all thought of greed and lust. By the practice of continence, aspirants develop a subtle nerve through which they understand the deeper mysteries of God. For them self-control is final, imperative, and absolute. The sannyāsis are teachers of men, and their lives should be totally free from blemish. They must not even look at a picture which may awaken their animal passions. The Master selected his future monks from

young men untouched by "woman and gold" and plastic enough to be cast in his spiritual mould. When teaching them the path of renunciation and discrimination, he would not allow the householders to be any where near them.

Rām and Manomohan

The first two householder devotees to come to Dakshineśwar were Rām Chandra Dutta and Manomohan Mitra. A medical practitioner and chemist, Rām was sceptical about God and religion and never enjoyed peace of soul. He wanted tangible proof of God's existence. The Master said to him: "God really exists. You don't see the stars in the day-time, but that doesn't mean that the stars do not exist. There is butter in milk. But can anybody see it by merely looking at the milk? To get butter you must churn milk in a quiet and cool place. You cannot realize God by a mere wish; you must go through some mental disciplines." By degrees the Master awakened Rām's spirituality and the latter became one of his foremost lay disciples. It was Rām who introduced Narendranāth to Sri Ramakrishna. Narendra was a relative of Rām.

Manomohan at first met with considerable opposition from his wife and other relatives, who resented his visits to Dakshineśwar. But in the end the unselfish love of the Master triumphed over worldly affection. It was Manomohan who brought Rākhāl to the Master.

Surendra

Suresh Mitra, a beloved disciple whom the Master often addressed as Surendra, had received an English education and held an important post in an English firm. Like many other educated young men of the time, he prided himself on his atheism and led a Bohemian life. He was addicted to drinking. He cherished an exaggerated notion about man's free will. A victim of mental depression, he was brought to Sri Ramakrishna by Rāmchandra Dutta. When he heard the Master asking a disciple to practise the virtue of self-surrender to God, he was impressed. But though he tried thenceforth to do so, he was unable to give up his old associates and his drinking. One day the Master said in his presence, "Well, when a man goes to an undesirable place, why doesn't he take the Divine Mother with him?" And to Surendra himself Sri Ramakrishna said: "Why should you drink wine as wine? Offer it to Kāli, and then take it as Her *Prasād,* as consecrated drink. But see that you don't, become intoxicated; you must not reel and your thoughts must not wander. At first you will feel ordinary excitement, but soon you will experience spiritual exaltation." Gradually Surendra's entire life was changed. The Master designated him as one of those commissioned by the Divine Mother to defray a great part of his expenses. Surendra's purse was always open for the Master's comfort.

Kedār

Kedarnāth Chatterji was endowed with a spiritual temperament and had tried various paths of religion, some not very commendable. When he met the Master at Dakshineśwar he understood the true meaning of religion. It is said that the Master, weary of instructing devotees who were coming to him in great numbers for guidance, once prayed to the Goddess Kāli: "Mother, I am tired of speaking to people. Please give power to Kedār, Girish, Rām, Vijay, and Mahendra to give them the preliminary instruction, so that just a little teaching from me will be enough." He was aware,

however, of Kedār's lingering attachment to worldly things and often warned him about it.

Harish

Harish, a young man in affluent circumstances, renounced his family and took shelter with the Master, who loved him for his sincerity, singleness of purpose, and quiet nature. He spent his leisure time in prayer and meditation, turning a deaf ear to the entreaties and threats of his relatives. Referring to his undisturbed peace of mind, the Master would say: "Real men are dead to the world though, living. Look at Harish. He is an example." When one day the Master asked him to be a little kind to his wife, Harish said: "You must excuse me on this point. This is not the place to show kindness. If I try to be sympathetic to her, there is a possibility of my forgetting the ideal and becoming entangled in the world."

Bhavanāth

Bhavanāth Chatterji visited the Master while he was still in his teens. His parents and relatives regarded Sri Ramakrishna as an insane person and tried their utmost to prevent him from becoming intimate with the Master. But the young boy was very stubborn and often spent nights at Dakshineśwar. He was greatly attached to Narendra, and the Master encouraged their friendship. The very sight of him often awakened Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual emotion.

Balarām Bose

Balarām Bose came of a wealthy Vaishnava family. From his youth he had shown a deep religious temperament and had devoted his time to meditation, prayer, and the study of the Vaishnava scriptures. He was very much impressed by Sri Ramakrishna even at their first meeting. He asked Sri Ramakrishna whether God really existed and, if so, whether a man could realize Him. The Master said: "God reveals Himself to the devotee who thinks of Him as his nearest and dearest. Because you do not draw response by praying to Him once, you must not conclude that He does not exist. Pray to God, thinking of Him as dearer than your very self. He is much attached to His devotees. He comes to a man even before He is sought. There is none more intimate and affectionate than God." Balarām had never before heard God spoken of in such forceful words; every one of the words seemed true to him. Under the Master's influence he outgrew the conventions of the Vaishnava worship and became one of the most beloved of the disciples. It was at his home that the Master slept whenever he spent a night in Calcutta.

Mahendra or M.

Mahendranāth Gupta, known as "M.", arrived at Dakshineśwar in February 1882. He belonged to the Brāhmo Samāj and was headmaster of the Vidyāsāgar High School at Śyāmbazār, Calcutta. At the very first sight the Master recognized him as one of his "marked" disciples. Mahendra recorded in his diary Sri Ramakrishna's conversations with his devotees. These are the first directly recorded words, in the spiritual history of the world, of a man recognized as belonging in the class of Buddha and Christ. The present volume is a translation of this diary. Mahendra was instrumental, through his personal contacts, in spreading the Master's message among many young and aspiring souls.

Nāg Mahāshay

Durgācharan Nāg, also known as Nāg Mahāshay, was the ideal householder among the lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He was the embodiment of the Master's ideal of life in the world, unstained by worldliness. In spite of his intense desire to become a sannyāsi, Sri Ramakrishna asked him to live in the world in the spirit of a monk, and the disciple truly carried out this injunction. He was born of a poor family and even during his boyhood often sacrificed everything to lessen the sufferings of the needy. He had married at an early age and after his wife's death had married a second time to obey his father's command. But he once said to his wife: "Love on the physical level never lasts. He is indeed blessed who can give his love to God with his whole heart. Even a little attachment to the body endures for several births. So do not be attached to this cage of bone and flesh. Take shelter at the feet of the Mother and think of Her alone. Thus your life here and hereafter will he ennobled." The Master spoke of him as a "blazing light". He received every word of Sri Ramakrishna in dead earnest. One day he heard the Master saying that it was difficult for doctors, lawyers, and brokers to make much progress in spirituality. Of doctors he said, "If the mind clings to the tiny drops of medicine, how can it conceive of the Infinite?" That was the end of Durgācharan's medical practice and he threw his chest of medicines into the Ganges. Sri Ramakrishna assured him that he would not lack simple food and clothing. He bade him serve holy men. On being asked where he would find real holy men, the Master said that the *sādhus* themselves would seek his company. No sannyāsi could have lived a more austere life than Durgācharan.

Girish Ghosh

Girish Chandra Ghosh was a born rebel against God, a sceptic, a Bohemian, a drunkard. He was the greatest Bengāli dramatist of his time, the father of the modern Bengāli stage. Like other young men he had imbibed all the vices of the West. He had plunged into a life of dissipation and had become convinced that religion was only a fraud. Materialistic philosophy he justified as enabling one to get at least a little fun out of life. But a series of reverses shocked him and he became eager to solve the riddle of life. He had heard people say that in spiritual life the help of a guru was imperative and that the guru was to be regarded as God Himself. But Girish was too well acquainted with human nature to see perfection in a man. His first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna did not impress him at all. He returned home feeling as if he had seen a freak at a circus; for the Master, in a semi-conscious mood, had inquired whether it was evening, though the lamps were burning in the room. But their paths often crossed, and Girish could not avoid further encounters. The Master attended a performance in Girish's Star Theatre. On this occasion, too, Girish found nothing impressive about him. One day, however, Girish happened to see the Master dancing and singing with the devotees. He felt the contagion and wanted to join them, but restrained himself for fear of ridicule. Another day Sri Ramakrishna was about to give him spiritual instruction, when Girish said: "I don't want to listen to instructions. I have myself written many instructions. They are of no use to me. Please help me in a more tangible way if you can." This pleased the Master and he asked Girish to cultivate faith.

As time passed, Girish began to learn that the guru is the one who silently unfolds the disciple's inner life. He became a steadfast devotee of the Master.

He often loaded the Master with insults, drank in his presence, and took liberties which astounded the other devotees. But the Master knew that at heart Girish was tender, faithful, and sincere. He would not allow Girish to give up the theatre. And when a devotee asked him to tell Girish to give up drinking, he sternly replied: "That is none of your business. He who has taken charge of him will look after him. Girish is a devotee of heroic type. I tell you, drinking will not affect him." The Master knew that mere words could not induce a man to break deep-rooted habits, but that the silent influence of love worked miracles. Therefore he never asked him to give up alcohol, with the result that Girish himself eventually broke the habit. Sri Ramakrishna had strengthened Girish's resolution by allowing him to feel that he was absolutely free.

One day Girish felt depressed because he was unable to submit to any routine of spiritual discipline. In an exalted mood the Master said to him: "All right, give me your power of attorney. Henceforth I assume responsibility for you. You need not do anything." Girish heaved a sigh of relief. He felt happy to think that Sri Ramakrishna had assumed his spiritual responsibilities. But poor Girish could not then realize that he also, on his part, had to give up his freedom and make of himself a puppet in Sri Ramakrishna's hands. The Master began to discipline him according to this new attitude. One day Girish said about a trifling matter, "Yes, I shall do this." "No, no!" the Master corrected him. "You must not speak in that egotistic manner. You should say, 'God willing, I shall do it'." Girish understood. Thenceforth he tried to give up all idea of personal responsibility and surrender himself to the Divine Will. His mind began to dwell constantly on Sri Ramakrishna. This unconscious meditation in time chastened his turbulent spirit.

The householder devotees generally visited Sri Ramakrishna on Sunday afternoons and other holidays. Thus a brotherhood was gradually formed, and the Master encouraged their fraternal feeling. Now and then he would accept an invitation to a devotee's home, where other devotees would also be invited. Kirtan would be arranged and they would spend hours in dance and devotional music. The Master would go into trances or open his heart in religious discourses and in the narration of his own spiritual experiences. Many people who could not go to Dakshineśwar participated in these meetings and felt blessed. Such an occasion would be concluded with a sumptuous feast.

But it was in the company of his younger devotees, pure souls yet unstained by the touch of worldliness, that Sri Ramakrishna took greatest joy. Among the young men who later embraced the householder's life were Nārāyan, Paltu, the younger Naren, Tejchandra and Purna. These visited the Master sometimes against strong opposition from home.

Purna

Purna was a lad of thirteen, whom Sri Ramakrishna described as an *Iśvarakoti,* a soul born with special spiritual qualities. The Master said that Purna was the last of the group

of brilliant devotees who, as he once had seen in a trance, would come to him for spiritual illumination. Purna said to Sri Ramakrishna during their second meeting, "You are God Himself incarnated in flesh and blood." Such words coming from a mere youngster proved of what stuff the boy was made.

Mahimācharan and Pratāp Hazra

Mahimācharan and Pratāp Hazra were two devotees outstanding for their pretentiousness and idiosyncrasies. But the Master showed them his unfailing love and kindness, though he was aware of their shortcomings. Mahimācharan Chakravarty had met the Master long before the arrival of the other disciples. He had had the intention of leading a spiritual life, but a strong desire to acquire name and fame was his weakness. He claimed to have been initiated by Totāpuri and used to say that he had been following the path of knowledge according to his guru's instructions. He possessed a large library of English and Sanskrit books. But though he pretended to have read them, most of the leaves were uncut. The Master knew all his limitations, yet enjoyed listening to him recite from the Vedas and other scriptures. He would always exhort Mahimā to meditate on the meaning of the scriptural texts and to practise spiritual discipline.

Pratāp Hazra, a middle-aged man, hailed from a village near Kāmārpukur. He was not altogether unresponsive to religious feelings. On a moment's impulse he had left his home, aged mother, wife, and children, and had found shelter in the temple garden at Dakshineśwar, where he intended to lead a spiritual life. He loved to argue, and the Master often pointed him out as an example of barren argumentation. He was hypercritical of others and cherished an exaggerated notion of his own spiritual advancement. He was mischievous and often tried to upset the minds of the Master's young disciples, criticizing them for their happy and joyous life and asking them to devote their time to meditation. The Master teasingly compared Hazra to Jatila and Kutila, the two women who always created obstructions in Krishna's sport with the gopis, and said that Hazra lived at Dakshineśwar to "thicken the plot" by adding complications.

Some noted Men

Sri Ramakrishna also became acquainted with a number of people whose scholarship or wealth entitled them everywhere to respect. He had met, a few years before, **Devendranāth Tāgore,** famous all over Bengāl for his wealth, scholarship, saintly character, and social position. But the Master found him disappointing; for, whereas Sri Ramakrishna expected of a saint complete renunciation of the world, Devendranāth combined with his saintliness a life of enjoyment. Sri Ramakrishna met the great poet **Michael Madhusudan,** who had embraced Christianity "for the sake of his stomach". To him the Master could not impart instruction, for the Divine Mother "pressed his tongue". In addition he met **Mahārāja Jatindra Mohan Tāgore,** a titled aristocrat of Bengāl; **Kristodās Pāl,** the editor, social reformer, and patriot; **Iswar Chandra Vidyāsāgar,** the noted philanthropist and educator; **Pundit Śaśadhar,** a great champion of Hindu orthodoxy; **Aświni Kumār Dutta,** a headmaster, moralist, and leader of Indian Nationalism; and **Bankim Chatterji,** a deputy magistrate, novelist, and essayist, and one of the fashioners of modern Bengāli prose. Sri Ramakrishna was not the man to be dazzled by outward show, glory, or eloquence. A pundit without discrimination he

regarded as a mere straw. He would search people's hearts for the light of God, and if that was missing, he would have nothing to do with them.

Kristodās Pāl

The Europeanized Kristodās Pāl did not approve of the Master's emphasis on renunciation and said: "Sir, this cant of renunciation has almost ruined the country. It is for this reason that the Indians are a subject nation today. Doing good to others, bringing education to the door of the ignorant, and above all, improving the material conditions of the country - these should be our duty now. The cry of religion and renunciation would, on the contrary, only weaken us. You should advise the young men of Bengāl to resort only to such acts as will uplift the country." Sri Ramakrishna gave him a searching look and found no divine light within. "You man of poor understanding!" Sri Ramakrishna said sharply. "You dare to slight in these terms renunciation and piety, which our scriptures describe as the greatest of all virtues! After reading two pages of English you think you have come to know the world! You appear to think you are omniscient. Well, have you seen those tiny crabs that are born in the Ganges just when the rains set in? In this big universe you are even less significant than one of those small creatures. How dare you talk of helping the world? The Lord will look to that. You haven't the power in you to do it." After a pause the Master continued: "Can you explain to me how you can work for others? I know what you mean by helping them. To feed a number of persons, to treat them when they are sick, to construct a road or dig a well - Isn't that all? These are good deeds, no doubt, but how trifling in comparison with the vastness of the universe! How far can a man advance in this line? How many people can you save from famine? Malaria has ruined a whole province; what could you do to stop its onslaught? God alone looks after the world. Let a man first realize Him. Let a man get the authority from God and be endowed with His power; then, and then alone, may he think of doing good to others. A man should first be purged of all egotism. Then alone will the Blissful Mother ask him to work for the world." Sri Ramakrishna mistrusted philanthropy that presumed to pose as charity. He warned people against it. He saw in most acts of philanthropy nothing but egotism, vanity, a desire for glory, a barren excitement to kill the boredom of life, or an attempt to soothe a guilty conscience. True charity, he taught, is the result of love of God - service to man in a spirit of worship.

Monastic Disciples

The disciples whom the Master trained for monastic life were the following:

1. Narendranāth Dutta (Swāmi Vivekānanda)
2. Nitya Niranjan Sen (Swāmi Niranjanānanda)
3. Rākhāl Chandra Ghosh (Swāmi Brahmānanda)
4. Kāliprasād Chandra (Swāmi Abhedānanda)
5. Gopāl Chandra Ghosh (Swāmi Advaitānanda)
6. Harināth Chattopādhyāya (Swāmi Turiyānanda)
7. Bāburām Ghosh (Swāmi Premānanda)
8. Sāradā Prasanna (Swāmi Trigunātitānanda)
9. Tāraknāth Ghoshāl (Swāmi Shivānanda)
10. Gangādhar Ghatak (Swāmi Akhandānanda)
11. Jogindranāth Choudhury (Swāmi Yogānanda)

12. Subodh Ghosh (Swāmi Subodhānanda)
13. Śashibhushan Chakravarty (Swāmi Rāmakrishnānanda)
14. Śaratchandra Chakravarty (Swāmi Sāradānanda)
15. Hariprasanna Chatterji (Swāmi Vijnānānanda)
16. Lātu (Swāmi Adhhutānanda)

Lātu

The first of these young men to come to the Master was Lātu. Born of obscure parents, in Behar, he came to Calcutta in search of work and was engaged by Rāmchandra Dutta as house-boy. Learning of the saintly Sri Ramakrishna, he visited the Master at Dakshineśwar and was deeply touched by his cordiality. When he was about to leave, the Master asked him to take some money and return home in a boat or carriage. But Lātu declared he had a few pennies and jingled the coins in his pocket. Sri Ramakrishna later requested Rām to allow Lātu to stay with him permanently. Under Sri Ramakrishna's guidance Lātu made great progress in meditation and was blessed with ecstatic visions, but all the efforts of the Master to give him a smattering of education failed. Lātu was very fond of kirtan and other devotional songs but remained all his life illiterate.

Rākhāl

Even before Rākhāl's coming to Dakshineśwar, the Master had had visions of him as his spiritual son and as a playmate of Krishna at Vrindāvan. Rākhāl was born of wealthy parents. During his childhood he developed wonderful spiritual traits and used to play at worshipping gods and goddesses. In his teens he was married to a sister of Manomohan Mitra, from whom he first heard of the Master. His father objected to his association with Sri Ramakrishna but afterwards was reassured to find that many celebrated people were visitors at Dakshineśwar. The relationship between the Master and this beloved disciple was that of mother and child. Sri Ramakrishna allowed Rākhāl many liberties denied to others. But he would not hesitate to chastise the boy for improper actions. At one time Rākhāl felt a childlike jealousy because he found that other boys were receiving the Master's affection. He soon got over it and realized his guru as the Guru of the whole universe. The Master was worried to hear of his marriage, but was relieved to find that his wife was a spiritual soul who would not be a hindrance to his progress.

The Elder Gopāl

Gopāl Chandra Ghosh came to Dakshineśwar at a rather advanced age and was called the elder Gopāl. He had lost his wife, and the Master assuaged his grief. Soon he renounced the world and devoted himself fully to meditation and prayer. Some years later Gopāl gave the Master the ochre cloths with which the latter initiated several of his disciples into monastic life.

Narendra

To spread his message to the four corners of the earth Sri Ramakrishna needed a strong instrument. With his frail body and delicate limbs he could not make great journeys across wide spaces. And such an instrument was found in Narendranāth Dutta, his beloved Naren, later known to the world as Swāmi Vivekānanda. Even before meeting Narendranāth, the Master had seen him in a vision as a sage, immersed in the

meditation of the Absolute, who at Sri Ramakrishna's request had agreed to take human birth to assist him in his work.

Narendra was born in Calcutta on January 12, 1863, of an aristocratic *Kāyastha* family. His mother was steeped in the great Hindu epics, and his father, a distinguished attorney of the Calcutta High Court, was an agnostic about religion, a friend of the poor, and a mocker at social conventions. Even in his boyhood and youth Narendra possessed great physical courage and presence of mind, a vivid imagination, deep power of thought, keen intelligence, an extraordinary memory, a love of truth, a passion for purity, a spirit of independence, and a tender heart. An expert musician, he also acquired proficiency in physics, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, history, and literature. He grew up into an extremely handsome young man. Even as a child he practised meditation and showed great power of concentration. Though free and passionate in word and action, he took the vow of austere religious chastity and never allowed the fire of purity to be extinguished by the slightest defilement of body or soul.

As he read in college the rationalistic Western philosophers of the nineteenth century, his boyhood faith in God and religion was unsettled. He would not accept religion on mere faith; he wanted demonstration of God. But very soon his passionate nature discovered that mere Universal Reason was cold and bloodless. His emotional nature, dissatisfied with a mere abstraction, required a concrete support to help him in the hours of temptation. He wanted an external power, a guru, who by embodying perfection in the flesh would still the commotion of his soul. Attracted by the magnetic personality of Keshab, he joined the Brāhmo Samāj and became a singer in its choir. But in the Samāj he did not find the guru who could say that he had seen God.

In a state of mental conflict and torture of soul, Narendra came to Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineśwar. He was then eighteen years of age and had been in college two years. He entered the Master's room accompanied by some light-hearted friends. At Sri Ramakrishna's request he sang a few songs, pouring his whole soul into them, and the Master went into Samādhi. A few minutes later Sri Ramakrishna suddenly left his seat, took Narendra by the hand, and led him to the screened verandah north of his room. They were alone. Addressing Narendra most tenderly, as if he were a friend of long acquaintance, the Master said: "Ah! You have come very late. Why have you been so unkind as to make me wait all these days? My ears are tired of hearing the futile words of worldly men. Oh, how I have longed to pour my spirit into the heart of someone fitted to receive my message!" He talked thus, sobbing all the time. Then, standing before Narendra with folded hands, he addressed him as **Nārāyana**, born on earth to remove the misery of humanity. Grasping Narendra's hand, he asked him to come again, alone, and very soon. Narendra was startled. "What is this I have come to see?" he said to himself. "He must be stark mad. Why, I am the son of Viswanāth Dutta. How dare he speak this way to me?"

When they returned to the room and Narendra heard the Master speaking to others, he was surprised to find in his words an inner logic, a striking sincerity, and a convincing proof of his spiritual nature. In answer to Narendra's question, "Sir, have you seen

God?" the Master said: "Yes, I have seen God. I have seen Him more tangibly than I see you. I have talked to Him more intimately than I am talking to you." Continuing, the Master said: "But, my child, who wants to see God? People shed jugs of tears for money, wife, and children. But if they would weep for God for only one day they would surely see Him." Narendra was amazed. These words he could not doubt. This was the first time he had ever heard a man saying that he had seen God. But he could not reconcile these words of the Master with the scene that had taken place on the verandah only a few minutes before. He concluded that Sri Ramakrishna was a monomaniac, and returned home rather puzzled in mind.

During his second visit, about a month later, suddenly, at the touch of the Master, Narendra felt overwhelmed and saw the walls of the room and everything around him whirling and vanishing. "What are you doing to me?" he cried in terror. "I have my father and mother at home." He saw his own ego and the whole universe almost swallowed in a nameless void. With a laugh the Master easily restored him. Narendra thought he might have been hypnotized, but he could not understand how a monomaniac could cast a spell over the mind of a strong person like himself. He returned home more confused than ever, resolved to be henceforth on his guard before this strange man.

But during his third visit Narendra fared no better. This time, at the Master's touch, he lost consciousness entirely. While he was still in that state, Sri Ramakrishna questioned him concerning his spiritual antecedents and whereabouts, his mission in this world, and the duration of his mortal life. The answers confirmed what the Master himself had known and inferred. Among other things, he came to know that Narendra was a sage who had already attained perfection, and that the day he learnt his real nature he would give up his body in yoga, by an act of will.

A few more meetings completely removed from Narendra's mind the last traces of the notion that Sri Ramakrishna might be a monomaniac or wily hypnotist. His integrity, purity, renunciation, and unselfishness were beyond question. But Narendra could not accept a man, an imperfect mortal, as his guru. As a member of the Brāhmo Samāj, he could not believe that a human intermediary was necessary between man and God. Moreover, he openly laughed at Sri Ramakrishna's visions as hallucinations. Yet in the secret chamber of his heart he bore a great love for the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna was grateful to the Divine Mother for sending him one who doubted his own realizations. Often he asked Narendra to test him as the money-changers test their coins. He laughed at Narendra's biting criticism of his spiritual experiences and Samādhi. When at times Narendra's sharp words distressed him, the Divine Mother Herself would console him, saying: "Why do you listen to him? In a few days he will believe your every word." He could hardly bear Narendra's absences. Often he would weep bitterly for the sight of him. Sometimes Narendra would find the Master's love embarrassing; and one day he sharply scolded him, warning him that such infatuation would soon draw him down to the level of its object. The Master was distressed and prayed to the Divine Mother. Then he said to Narendra: "You rogue, I won't listen to you any more. Mother

says that I love you because I see God in you, and the day I no longer see God in you I shall not be able to bear even the sight of you."

The Master wanted to train Narendra in the teachings of the non-dualistic Vedānta philosophy. But Narendra, because of his Brāhmo upbringing, considered it wholly blasphemous to look on man as one with his Creator. One day at the temple garden he laughingly said to a friend: "How silly! This jug is God! This cup is God! Whatever we see is God! And we too are God! Nothing could be more absurd." Sri Ramakrishna came out of his room and gently touched him. Spellbound, he immediately perceived that everything in the world was indeed God. A new universe opened around him. Returning home in a dazed state, he found there too that the food, the plate, the eater himself, the people around him, were all God. When he walked in the street, he saw that the cabs, the horses, the streams of people, the buildings, were all Brahman. He could hardly go about his day's business. His parents became anxious about him and thought him ill. And when the intensity of the experience abated a little, he saw the world as a dream. Walking in the public square, he would strike his head against the iron railings to know whether they were real. It took him a number of days to recover his normal self. He had a foretaste of the great experiences yet to come and realized that the words of the Vedānta were true.

At the beginning of 1884 Narendra's father suddenly died of heart-failure, leaving the family in a state of utmost poverty. There were six or seven mouths to feed at home. Creditors were knocking at the door. Relatives who had accepted his father's unstinted kindness now became enemies, some even bringing suit to deprive Narendra of his ancestral home. Actually starving and barefoot, Narendra searched for a job, but without success. He began to doubt whether anywhere in the world there was such a thing as unselfish sympathy. Two rich women made evil proposals to him and promised to put an end to his distress; but he refused them with contempt.

Narendra began to talk of his doubt of the very existence of God. His friends thought he had become an atheist and piously circulated gossip adducing unmentionable motives for his unbelief. His moral character was maligned. Even some of the Master's disciples partly believed the gossip, and Narendra told these to their faces that only a coward believed in God through fear of suffering or hell. But he was distressed to think that Sri Ramakrishna, too, might believe these false reports. His pride revolted. He said to himself: "What does it matter? If a man's good name rests on such slender foundations, I don't care." But later on he was amazed to learn that the Master had never lost faith in him. To a disciple who complained about Narendra's degradation, Sri Ramakrishna replied: "Hush, you fool! The Mother has told me it can never be so. I won't look at you if you speak that way again."

The moment came when Narendra's distress reached its climax. He had gone the whole day without food. As he was returning home in the evening he could hardly lift his tired limbs. He sat down in front of a house in sheer exhaustion, too weak even to think. His mind began to wander. Then, suddenly, a divine power lifted the veil over his soul. He found the solution of the problem of the coexistence of divine justice and misery, the

presence of suffering in the creation of a blissful Providence. He felt bodily refreshed, his soul was bathed in peace, and he slept serenely.

Narendra now realized that he had a spiritual mission to fulfil. He resolved to renounce the world, as his grandfather had renounced it, and he came to Sri Ramakrishna for his blessing. But even before he had opened his mouth, the Master knew what was in his mind and wept bitterly at the thought of separation. "I know you cannot lead a worldly life," he said, "but for my sake live in the world as long as I live."

One day, soon after, Narendra requested Sri Ramakrishna to pray to the Divine Mother to remove his poverty. Sri Ramakrishna bade him pray to Her himself, for She would certainly listen to his prayer. Narendra entered the shrine of Kāli. As he stood before the image of the Mother, he beheld Her as a living Goddess, ready to give wisdom and liberation. Unable to ask Her for petty worldly things, he prayed only for knowledge and renunciation, love and liberation. The Master rebuked him for his failure to ask the Divine Mother to remove his poverty and sent him back to the temple. But Narendra, standing in Her presence, again forgot the purpose of his coming. Thrice he went to the temple at the bidding of the Master, and thrice he returned, having forgotten in Her presence why he had come. He was wondering about it when it suddenly flashed in his mind that this was all the work of Sri Ramakrishna; so now he asked the Master himself to remove his poverty, and was assured that his family would not lack simple food and clothing.

This was a very rich and significant experience for Narendra. It taught him that Śakti, the Divine Power, cannot be ignored in the world and that in the relative plane the need of worshipping a Personal God is imperative. Sri Ramakrishna was overjoyed with the conversion. The next day, sitting almost on Narendra's lap, he said to a devotee, pointing first to himself, then to Narendra: "I see I am this, and again that. Really I feel no difference. A stick floating in the Ganges seems to divide the water; but in reality the water is one. Do you see my point? Well, whatever is, is the Mother - isn't that so?" In later years Narendra would say: "Sri Ramakrishna was the only person who, from the time he met me, believed in me uniformly throughout. Even my mother and brothers did not. It was his unwavering trust and love for me that bound me to him for ever. He alone knew how to love. Worldly people only make a show of love for selfish ends."

Tārak

Others destined to be monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna came to Dakshineśwar. Tāraknāth Ghoshāl had felt from his boyhood the noble desire to realize God. Keshab and the Brāhmo Samāj had attracted him but proved inadequate. In 1882 he first met the Master at Rāmchandra's house and was astonished to hear him talk about Samādhi, a subject which always fascinated his mind. And that evening he actually saw a manifestation of that superconscious state in the Master. Tārak became a frequent visitor at Dakshineśwar and received the Master's grace in abundance. The young boy often felt ecstatic fervour in meditation. He also wept profusely while meditating on God. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "God favours those who can weep for Him. Tears shed for God wash away the sins of former births."

Bāburām

Bāburām Ghosh came to Dakshineśwar accompanied by Rākhāl, his classmate. The Master, as was often his custom, examined the boy's physiognomy and was satisfied about his latent spirituality. At the age of eight Bāburām had thought of leading a life of renunciation, in the company of a monk, in a hut shut out from the public view by a thick wall of trees. The very sight of the Panchavati awakened in his heart that dream of boyhood. Bāburām was tender in body and soul. The Master used to say that he was pure to his very bones. One day Hazra in his usual mischievous fashion advised Bāburām and some of the other young boys to ask Sri Ramakrishna for some spiritual powers and not waste their life in mere gaiety and merriment. The Master, scenting mischief, called Bāburām to his side, and said: "What can you ask of me? Isn't everything that I have already yours? Yes, everything I have earned in the shape of realizations is for the sake of you all. So get rid of the idea of begging, which alienates by creating a distance. Rather realize your kinship with me and gain the key to all the treasures."

Niranjan

Nitya Niranjan Sen was a disciple of heroic type. He came to the Master when he was eighteen years old. He was a medium for a group of spiritualists. During his first visit the Master said to him: "My boy, if you think always of ghosts you will become a ghost, and if you think of God you will become God. Now, which do you prefer?" Niranjan severed all connections with the spiritualists. During his second visit the Master embraced him and said warmly: "Niranjan, my boy, the days are flitting away. When will you realize God? This life will be in vain if you do not realize Him. When will You devote your mind wholly to God?" Niranjan was surprised to see the Master's great anxiety for his spiritual welfare. He was a young man endowed with unusual spiritual parts. He felt disdain for worldly pleasures and was totally guileless, like a child. But he had a violent temper. One day, as he was coming in a country boat to Dakshineśwar, some of his fellow passengers began to speak ill of the Master. Finding his protest futile, Niranjan began to rock the boat, threatening to sink it in midstream. That silenced the offenders. When he reported the incident to the Master, he was rebuked for his inability to curb his anger.

Jogindra

Jogindranāth, on the other hand, was gentle to a fault. One day, under circumstances very like those that had evoked Niranjan's anger, he curbed his temper and held his peace instead of threatening Sri Ramakrishna's abusers. The Master, learning of his conduct, scolded him roundly. Thus to each the fault of the other was recommended as a virtue. The guru was striving to develop, in the first instance, composure, and in the second, mettle. The secret of his training was to build up, by a tactful recognition of the requirements of each given case, the character of the devotee.

Jogindranāth came of an aristocratic brāhmin family of Dakshineśwar. His father and relatives shared the popular mistrust of Sri Ramakrishna's sanity. At a very early age the boy developed religious tendencies, spending two or three hours daily in meditation, and his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna deepened his desire for the realization of God. He had a perfect horror of marriage. But at the earnest request of his mother he had had to

yield, and he now believed that his spiritual future was doomed. So he kept himself away from the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna employed a ruse to bring Jogindra to him. As soon as the disciple entered the room, the Master rushed forward to meet the young man. Catching hold of the disciple's hand, he said: "What if you have married, Haven't I too married? What is there to be afraid of in that?" Touching his own chest he said: "If this [meaning himself] is propitious, then even a hundred thousand marriages cannot injure you. It you desire to lead a householder's life, then bring your wife here one day, and I shall see that she becomes a real companion in your spiritual progress. But if you want to lead a monastic life, then I shall eat up your attachment to the world." Jogin was dumbfounded at these words. He received new strength, and his spirit of renunciation was re-established.

Śashi and Śarat

Śashi and Śarat were two cousins who came from a pious brāhmin family of Calcutta. At an early age they had joined the Brāhmo Samāj and had come under the influence of Keshab Sen. The Master said to them at their first meeting: "If bricks and tiles are burnt after the trade-mark has been stamped on them, they retain the mark for ever. Similarly, man should be stamped with God before entering the world. Then he will not become attached to worldliness." Fully aware of the future course of their life, he asked them not to marry. The Master asked Śashi whether he believed in God with form or in God without form. Śashi replied that he was not even sure about the existence of God; so he could not speak one way or the other. This frank answer very much pleased the Master.

Śarat's soul longed for the all-embracing realization of the Godhead. When the Master inquired whether there was any particular form of God he wished to see, the boy replied that he would like to see God in all the living beings of the world. "But", the Master demurred, "that is the last word in realization. One cannot have it at the very outset." Śarat stated calmly: "I won't be satisfied with anything short of that. I shall trudge on along the path till I attain that blessed state." Sri Ramakrishna was very much pleased.

Harināth

Harināth had led the austere life of a *brahmachāri* even from his early boyhood -bathing in the Ganges every day, cooking his own meals, waking before sunrise, and reciting the Gita from memory before leaving bed. He found in the Master the embodiment of the Vedānta scriptures. Aspiring to be a follower of the ascetic Śankara, he cherished a great hatred for women. One day he said to the Master that he could not allow even small girls to come near him. The Master scolded him and said: "You are talking like a fool. Why should you hate women? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Regard them as your own mother and you will never feel their evil influence. The more you hate them, the more you will fall into their snares." Hari said later that these words completely changed his attitude toward women.

The Master knew Hari's passion for Vedānta. But he did not wish any of his disciples to become a dry ascetic or a mere bookworm. So he asked Hari to practise Vedānta in life

by giving up the unreal and following the Real. "But it is not so easy", Sri Ramakrishna said, "to realize the illusoriness of the world. Study alone does not help one very much. The grace of God is required. Mere personal effort is futile. A man is a tiny creature after all, with very limited powers. But he can achieve the impossible if he prays to God for His grace." Whereupon the Master sang a song in praise of grace. Hari was profoundly moved and shed tears. Later in life Hari achieved a wonderful synthesis of the ideals of the Personal God and the Impersonal Truth.

Gangādhar

Gangādhar, Harināth's friend, also led the life of a strict *brahmachari*, eating vegetarian food cooked by his own hands and devoting himself to the study of the scriptures. He met the Master in 1884 and soon became a member of his inner circle. The Master praised his ascetic habit and attributed it to the spiritual disciplines of his past life. Gangādhar became a close companion of Narendra.

Hariprasanna

Hariprasanna, a college student, visited the Master in the company of his friends Śashi and Śarat. Sri Ramakrishna showed him great favour by initiating him into spiritual life. As long as he lived, Hariprasanna remembered and observed the following drastic advice of the Master: "Even if a woman is pure as gold and rolls on the ground for love of God, it is dangerous for a monk ever to look at her."

Kāli

Kāliprasād visited the Master toward the end of 1883. Given to the practice of meditation and the study of the scriptures, Kāli was particularly interested in yoga. Feeling the need of a guru in spiritual life, he came to the Master and was accepted as a disciple. The young boy possessed a rational mind and often felt sceptical about the Personal God. The Master said to him: "Your doubts will soon disappear. Others, too, have passed through such a state of mind. Look at Naren. He now weeps at the names of Rādhā and Krishna." Kāli began to see visions of gods and goddesses. Very soon these disappeared and in meditation he experienced vastness, infinity, and the other attributes of the Impersonal Brahman.

Subodh

Subodh visited the Master in 1885. At the very first meeting Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "You will succeed. Mother says so. Those whom She sends here will certainly attain spirituality." During the second meeting the Master wrote something on Subodh's tongue, stroked his body from the navel to the throat, and said, "Awake, Mother! Awake." He asked the boy to meditate. At once Subodh's latent spirituality was awakened. He felt a current rushing along the spinal column to the brain. Joy filled his soul.

Sāradā and Tulasi

Two more young men, Sāradā Prasanna and Tulasi, complete the small band of the Master's disciples later to embrace the life of the wandering monk. With the exception of the elder Gopāl, all of them were in their teens or slightly over. They came from middle-

class Bengāli families, and most of them were students in school or college. Their parents and relatives had envisaged for them bright worldly careers. They came to Sri Ramakrishna with pure bodies, vigorous minds, and uncontaminated souls. All were born with unusual spiritual attributes. Sri Ramakrishna accepted them, even at first sight, as his children, relatives, friends, and companions. His magic touch unfolded them. And later each according to his measure reflected the life of the Master, becoming a torch-bearer of his message across land and sea.

Woman Devotees

With his woman devotees Sri Ramakrishna established a very sweet relationship. He himself embodied the tender traits of a woman; he had dwelt on the highest plane of Truth, where there is not even the slightest trace of sex; and his innate purity evoked only the noblest emotion in men and women alike. His woman devotees often said: "We seldom looked on Sri Ramakrishna as a member of the male sex. We regarded him as one of us. We never felt any constraint before him, He was our best confidant." They loved him as their child, their friend, and their teacher. In spiritual discipline he advised them to renounce lust and greed and especially warned them not to fall into the snares of men.

Gopāl Mā

Unsurpassed among the woman devotees of the Master in the richness of her devotion and spiritual experiences was Aghoramani Devi, an orthodox brāhmin woman. Widowed at an early age, she had dedicated herself completely to spiritual pursuits. Gopālā, the Baby Krishna, was her Ideal Deity, whom she worshipped following the *Vātsalya* attitude of the Vaishnava religion, regarding Him as her own child. Through Him she satisfied her unassuaged maternal love, cooking for Him, feeding Him, bathing Him, and putting Him to bed. This sweet intimacy with Gopālā won her the sobriquet of Gopāl Mā, or Gopālā's Mother. For forty years she had lived on the bank of the Ganges in a small bare room, her only companions being a threadbare copy of the Ramayana and a bag containing her rosary. At the age of sixty, in 1884, she visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineśwar. During the second visit, as soon as the Master saw her, he said: "Oh, you have come! Give me something to eat." With great hesitation she gave him some ordinary sweets that she had purchased for him on the way. The Master ate them with relish and asked her to bring him simple curries or sweets prepared by her own hands. Gopāl Mā thought him a queer kind of monk, for, instead of talking of God, he always asked for food. She did not want to visit him again, but an irresistible attraction brought her back to the temple garden. She carried with her some simple curries that she had cooked herself.

One early morning at three o'clock, about a year later, Gopāl Mā was about to finish her daily devotions, when she was startled to find Sri Ramakrishna sitting on her left, with his right hand clenched, like the hand of the image of Gopālā. She was amazed and caught hold of the hand, whereupon the figure vanished and in its place appeared the real Gopālā, her Ideal Deity. She cried aloud with joy. Gopālā begged her for butter. She pleaded her poverty and gave Him some dry coconut candies. Gopālā sat on her lap, snatched away her rosary, jumped on her shoulders, and moved all about the room. As soon as the day broke she hastened to Dakshineśwar like an insane woman. Of course

Gopālā accompanied her, resting His head on her shoulder. She clearly saw His tiny ruddy feet hanging over her breast. She entered Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master had fallen into Samādhi. Like a child, he sat on her lap, and she began to feed him with butter, cream, and other delicacies. After some time he regained consciousness and returned to his bed. But the mind of Gopālā's Mother was still roaming in another plane. She was steeped in bliss. She saw Gopālā frequently entering the Master's body and again coming out of it. When she returned to her hut, still in a dazed condition, Gopālā accompanied her.

She spent about two months in uninterrupted communion with God, the Baby Gopālā never leaving her for a moment. Then the intensity of her vision was lessened; had it not been, her body would have perished. The Master spoke highly of her exalted spiritual condition and said that such vision of God was a rare thing for ordinary mortals. The fun-loving Master one day confronted the critical Narendranāth with this simple-minded woman. No two could have presented a more striking contrast. The Master knew of Narendra's lofty contempt for all visions, and he asked the old lady to narrate her experiences to Narendra. With great hesitation she told him her story. Now and then she interrupted her maternal chatter to ask Narendra: "My son, I am a poor ignorant woman. I don't understand anything. You are so learned. Now tell me if these visions of Gopālā are true." As Narendra listened to the story he was profoundly moved. He said, "Yes, mother, they are quite true." Behind his cynicism Narendra, too, possessed a heart full of love and tenderness.

The March of Events

In 1882 Hriday was, dismissed from service in the Ka1i temple, for an act of indiscretion, and was ordered by the authorities never again to enter the garden. In a way the hand of the Divine Mother may be seen even in this. Having taken care of Sri Ramakrishna during the stormy days of his spiritual discipline, Hriday had come naturally to consider himself the sole guardian of his uncle. None could approach the Master without his knowledge. And he would be extremely jealous if Sri Ramakrishna paid attention to anyone else. Hriday's removal made it possible for the real devotees of the Master to approach him freely and live with him in the temple garden.

During the week-ends the householders, enjoying a respite from their office duties, visited the Master. The meetings on Sunday afternoons were of the nature of little festivals. Refreshments were often served. Professional musicians now and then sang devotional songs. The Master and the devotees sang and danced, Sri Ramakrishna frequently going into ecstatic moods. The happy memory of such a Sunday would linger long in the minds of the devotees. Those whom the Master wanted for special instruction he would ask to visit him on Tuesdays and Saturdays. These days were particularly auspicious for the worship of Kāli.

The young disciples destined to be monks, Sri Ramakrishna invited on week-days, when the householders were not present. The training of the householders and of the future monks had to proceed along entirely different lines. Since M. generally visited the Master

on week-ends, the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna does not contain much mention of the future monastic disciples.

Finally, there was a handful of fortunate disciples, householders as well as youngsters, who were privileged to spend nights with the Master in his room. They would see him get up early in the morning and walk up and down the room, singing in his sweet voice and tenderly communing with the Mother.

Injury to the Master's Arm

One day, in January 1884, the Master was going toward the pine-grove when he went into a trance. He was alone. There was no one to support him or guide his footsteps. He fell to the ground and dislocated a bone in his left arm. This accident had a significant influence on his mind, the natural inclination of which was to soar above the consciousness of the body. The acute pain in the arm forced his mind to dwell on the body and on the world outside. But he saw even in this a divine purpose; for, with his mind compelled to dwell on the physical plane, he realized more than ever that he was an instrument in the hand of the Divine Mother, who had a mission to fulfil through his human body and mind. He also distinctly found that in the phenomenal world God manifests Himself, in an inscrutable way, through diverse human beings, both good and evil. Thus he would speak of God in the guise of the wicked, God in the guise of the pious, God in the guise of the hypocrite, God in the guise of the lewd. He began to take a special delight in watching the divine play in the relative world. Sometimes the sweet human relationship with God would appear to him more appealing than the all-effacing Knowledge of Brahman. Many a time he would pray: "Mother, don't make me unconscious through the Knowledge of Brahman. Don't give me *Brahmajnāna,* Mother. Am I not Your child, and naturally timid? I must have my Mother. A million salutations to the Knowledge of Brahman! Give it to those who want it." Again he prayed: "O Mother, let me remain in contact with men! Don't make me a dried-up ascetic. I want to enjoy Your sport in the world." He was able to taste this very rich divine experience and enjoy the love of God and the company of His devotees because his mind, on account of the injury to his arm, was forced to come down to the consciousness of the body. Again, he would make fun of people who proclaimed him as a Divine Incarnation, by pointing to his broken arm. He would say, "Have you ever heard of God breaking His arm?" It took the arm about five months to heal.

Beginning of His Illness

In April 1885 the Master's throat became inflamed. Prolonged conversation or absorption in Samādhi, making the blood flow into the throat, would aggravate the pain. Yet when the annual Vaishnava festival was celebrated at Pānihāti, Sri Ramakrishna attended it against the doctor's advice. With a group of disciples he spent himself in music, dance, and ecstasy. The illness took a turn for the worse and was diagnosed as "clergyman's sore throat". The patient was cautioned against conversation and ecstasies. Though he followed the physician's directions regarding medicine and diet, he could neither control his trances nor withhold from seekers the solace of his advice. Sometimes, like a sulky child, he would complain to the Mother about the crowds, who gave him no rest day or night. He was overheard to say to Her: "Why do You bring here all these worthless

people, who are like milk diluted with five times its own quantity of water? My eyes are almost destroyed with blowing the fire to dry up the water. My health is gone. It is beyond my strength. Do it Yourself, if You want it done. This (pointing to his own body) is but a perforated drum, and if you go on beating it day in and day out, how long will it last?"

But his large heart never turned anyone away. He said, "Let me be condemned to be born over and over again, even in the form of a dog, if I can be of help to a single soul." And he bore the pain, singing cheerfully, "Let the body be preoccupied with illness, but, O mind, dwell for ever in God's Bliss!"

One night he had a haemorrhage of the throat. The doctor now diagnosed the illness as cancer. Narendra was the first to break this heart-rending news to the disciples. Within three days the Master was removed to Calcutta for better treatment. At Balarām's house he remained a week until a suitable place could be found at Śyāmpukur, in the northern section of Calcutta. During this week he dedicated himself practically without respite to the instruction of those beloved devotees who had been unable to visit him oftener at Dakshineśwar. Discourses incessantly flowed from his tongue, and he often went into Samādhi. Dr. Mahendra Sarkār, the celebrated homeopath of Calcutta, was invited to undertake his treatment.

Śyāmpukur

In the beginning of September 1885 Sri Ramakrishna was moved to Śyāmpukur. Here Narendra organized the young disciples to attend the Master day and night. At first they concealed the Master's illness from their guardians; but when it became more serious they remained with him almost constantly, sweeping aside the objections of their relatives and devoting themselves whole-heartedly to the nursing of their beloved guru. These young men, under the watchful eyes of the Master and the leadership of Narendra, became the *Antaranga* Bhaktās, the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna's inner circle. They were privileged to witness many manifestations of the Master's divine powers. Narendra received instructions regarding the propagation of his message after his death.

The Holy Mother - so Sāradā Devi had come to be affectionately known by Sri Ramakrishna's devotees - was brought from Dakshineśwar to look after the general cooking and to prepare the special diet of the patient. The dwelling space being extremely limited, she had to adapt herself to cramped conditions. At three o'clock in the morning she would finish her bath in the Ganges and then enter a small covered place on the roof, where she spent the whole day cooking and praying. After eleven at night, when the visitors went away, she would come down to her small bedroom on the first floor to enjoy a few hours' sleep. Thus she spent three months, working hard, sleeping little, and praying constantly for the Master's recovery.

At Śyāmpukur the devotees led an intense life. Their attendance on the Master was in itself a form of spiritual discipline. His mind was constantly soaring to an exalted plane of consciousness. Now and then they would catch the contagion of his spiritual fervour.

They sought to divine the meaning of this illness of the Master, whom most of them had accepted as an Incarnation of God. One group, headed by Girish with his robust optimism and great power of imagination, believed that the illness was a mere pretext to serve a deeper purpose. The Master had willed his illness in order to bring the devotees together and promote solidarity among them. As soon as this purpose was served, he would himself get rid of the disease. A second group thought that the Divine Mother, in whose hand the Master was an instrument, had brought about this illness to serve Her own mysterious ends. But the young rationalists, led by Narendra, refused to ascribe a supernatural cause to a natural phenomenon. They believed that the Master's body, a material thing, was subject, like all other material things, to physical laws. Growth, development, decay, and death were laws of nature to which the Master's body could not but respond. But though holding differing views, they all believed that it was to him alone that they must look for the attainment of their spiritual goal.

In spite of the physician's efforts and the prayers and nursing of the devotees, the illness rapidly progressed. The pain sometimes appeared to be unbearable. The Master lived only on liquid food, and his frail body was becoming a mere skeleton. Yet his face always radiated joy, and he continued to welcome the visitors pouring in to receive his blessing. When certain zealous devotees tried to keep the visitors away, they were told by Girish, "You cannot succeed in it; he has been born for this very purpose - to sacrifice himself for the redemption of others."

The more the body was devastated by illness, the more it became the habitation of the Divine Spirit. Through its transparency the gods and goddesses began to shine with ever increasing luminosity. On the day of the Kāli Puja the devotees clearly saw in him the manifestation of the Divine Mother.

It was noticed at this time that some of the devotees were making an unbridled display of their emotions. A number of them, particularly among the householders, began to cultivate, though at first unconsciously, the art of shedding tears, shaking the body, contorting the face, and going into trances, attempting thereby to imitate the Master. They began openly to declare Sri Ramakrishna a Divine Incarnation and to regard themselves as his chosen people, who could neglect religious disciplines with impunity. Narendra's penetrating eye soon sized up the situation. He found out that some of these external manifestations were being carefully practised at home, while some were the outcome of malnutrition, mental weakness, or nervous debility. He mercilessly exposed the devotees who were pretending to have visions, and asked all to develop a healthy religious spirit. Narendra sang inspiring songs for the younger devotees, read with them the Imitation of Christ and the Gita, and held before them the positive ideals of spirituality.

Last Days at Cossipore

When Sri Ramakrishna's illness showed signs of aggravation, the devotees, following the advice of Dr. Sarkār, rented a spacious garden house at Cossipore, in the northern suburbs of Calcutta. The Master was removed to this place on December 11, 1885.

It was at Cossipore that the curtain fell on the varied activities of the Master's life on the physical plane. His soul lingered in the body eight months more. It was the period of his great Passion, a constant crucifixion of the body and the triumphant revelation of the Soul. Here one sees the humanity and divinity of the Master passing and repassing across a thin border line. Every minute of those eight months was suffused with touching tenderness of heart and breath-taking elevation of spirit. Every word he uttered was full of pathos and sublimity.

It took the group only a few days to become adjusted to the new environment. The Holy Mother, assisted by Sri Ramakrishna's niece, Lakshmi Devi, and a few woman devotees, took charge of the cooking for the Master and his attendants. Surendra willingly bore the major portion of the expenses, other householders contributing according to their means. Twelve disciples were constant attendants of the Master: Narendra, Rākhāl, Bāburām, Niranjan, Jogin, Lātu, Tārak, the elder Gopāl, Kāli, Śashi, Śarat, and the younger Gopāl. Sāradā, Harish, Hari, Gangādhar, and Tulasi visited the Master from time to time and practised sādhana at home. Narendra, preparing for his law examination, brought his books to the garden house in order to continue his studies during the infrequent spare moments. He encouraged his brother disciples to intensify their meditation, scriptural studies, and other spiritual disciplines. They all forgot their relatives and their worldly duties.

Among the attendants Śashi was the embodiment of service. He did not practise meditation, japa, or any of the other disciplines followed by his brother devotees. He was convinced that service to the guru was the only religion for him. He forgot food and rest and was ever ready at the Master's bedside.

Pundit Śaśadhar one day suggested to the Master that the latter could remove the illness by concentrating his mind on the throat, the scriptures having declared that yogis had power to cure themselves in that way. The Master rebuked the pundit. "For a scholar like you to make such a proposal!" he said. "How can I withdraw the mind from the Lotus Feet of God and turn it to this worthless cage of flesh and blood?" "For our sake at least", begged Narendra and the other disciples. "But", replied Sri Ramakrishna, "do you think I enjoy this suffering? I wish to recover, but that depends on the Mother."

NARENDRA: "Then please pray to Her. She must listen to you."
MASTER: "But I cannot pray for my body."
NARENDRA: "You must do it, for our sake at least."
MASTER: "Very well, I shall try."

A few hours later the Master said to Narendra: "I said to Her: 'Mother, I cannot swallow food because of my pain. Make it possible for me to eat a little.' She pointed you all out to me and said: 'What? You are eating enough through all these mouths. Isn't that so?' I was ashamed and could not utter another word." This dashed all the hopes of the devotees for the Master's recovery.

"I shall make the whole thing public before I go", the Master had said some time before. On January 1, 1886, he felt better and came down to the garden for a little stroll. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. Some thirty lay disciples were in the hall or sitting about under the trees. Sri Ramakrishna said to Girish, "Well, Girish, what have you seen in me, that you proclaim me before everybody as an Incarnation of God?" Girish was not the man to be taken by surprise. He knelt before the Master and said with folded hands, "What can an insignificant person like myself say about the One whose glory even sages like Vyāsa and Vālmiki could not adequately measure?" The Master was profoundly moved. He said: "What more shall I say? I bless you all. Be illumined!" He fell into a spiritual mood. Hearing these words the devotees, one and all, became overwhelmed with emotion. They rushed to him and fell at his feet. He touched them all, and each received an appropriate benediction. Each of them, at the touch of the Master, experienced ineffable bliss. Some laughed, some wept, some sat down to meditate, some began to pray. Some saw light, some had visions of their Chosen Ideals, and some felt within their bodies the rush of spiritual power.

Narendra, consumed with a terrific fever for realization, complained to the Master that all the others had attained peace and that he alone was dissatisfied. The Master asked what he wanted. Narendra begged for Samādhi, so that he might altogether forget the world for three or four days at a time. "You are a fool", the Master rebuked him. "There is a state even higher than that. Isn't it you who sing, 'All that exists art Thou'? First of all settle your family affairs and then come to me. You will experience a state even higher than Samādhi."

The Master did not hide the fact that he wished to make Narendra his spiritual heir. Narendra was to continue the work after Sri Ramakrishna's passing. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "I leave these young men in your charge. See that they develop their spirituality and do not return home." One day he asked the boys, in preparation for a monastic life, to beg their food from door to door without thought of caste. They hailed the Master's order and went out with begging-bowls. A few days later he gave the ochre cloth of the sannyāsi to each of them, including Girish, who was now second to none in his spirit of renunciation. Thus the Master himself laid the foundation of the future Ramakrishna Order of monks.

Sri Ramakrishna was sinking day by day. His diet was reduced to a minimum and he found it almost impossible to swallow. He whispered to M.: "I am bearing all this cheerfully, for otherwise you would be weeping. If you all say that it is better that the body should go rather than suffer this torture, I am willing." The next morning he said to his depressed disciples seated near the bed: "Do you know what I see? I see that God alone has become everything. Men and animals are only frameworks covered with skin, and it is He who is moving through their heads and limbs. I see that it is God Himself who has become the block, the executioner, and the victim for the sacrifice." He fainted with emotion. Regaining partial consciousness, he said: "Now I have no pain. I am very well." Looking at Lātu he said: "There sits Lātu resting his head on the palm of his hand. To me it is the Lord who is seated in that posture."

The words were tender and touching. Like a mother he caressed Narendra and Rākhāl, gently stroking their faces. He said in a half whisper to M., "Had this body been allowed to last a little longer, many more souls would have been illumined." He paused a moment and then said: "But Mother has ordained otherwise. She will take me away lest, finding me guileless and foolish, people should take advantage of me and persuade me to bestow on them the rare gifts of spirituality." A few minutes later he touched his chest and said: "Here are two beings. One is She and the other is Her devotee. It is the latter who broke his arm, and it is he again who is now ill. Do you understand me?" After a pause he added: "Alas! To whom shall I tell all this? Who will understand me?" "Pain", he consoled them again, "is unavoidable as long as there is a body. The Lord takes on the body for the sake of His devotees."

Yet one is not sure whether the Master's soul actually was tortured by this agonizing disease. At least during his moments of spiritual exaltation - which became almost constant during the closing days of his life on earth - he lost all consciousness of the body, of illness and suffering. One of his attendants said later on: "While Sri Ramakrishna lay sick he never actually suffered pain. He would often say: 'O mind! Forget the body, forget the sickness, and remain merged in Bliss.' No, he did not really suffer. At times, he would be in a state when the thrill of joy was clearly manifested in his body. Even when he could not speak he would let us know in some way that there was no suffering, and this fact was clearly evident to all who watched him. People who did not understand him thought that his suffering was very great. What spiritual joy he transmitted to us at that time! Could such a thing have been possible if he had been suffering physically? It was during this period that he taught us again these truths. 'Brahman is always unattached. The three *gunās* are in It, but It is unaffected by them, just as the wind carries odour yet remains odourless.' 'Brahman is Infinite Being, In finite Wisdom, Infinite Bliss. In It there exist no delusion, no misery, no disease, no death, no growth, no decay.' 'The Transcendental Being and the being within are one and the same. There is one indivisible Absolute Existence.' "

The Holy Mother secretly went to a Śiva temple across the Ganges to intercede with the Deity for the Master's recovery. In a revelation she was told to prepare herself for the inevitable end.

One day when Narendra was on the ground floor, meditating, the Master was lying awake in his bed upstairs. In the depths of his meditation Narendra felt as though a lamp were burning at the back of his head. Suddenly he lost consciousness. It was the yearned-for, all-effacing experience of nirvikalpa Samādhi, when the embodied soul realizes its unity with the Absolute. After a very long time he regained partial consciousness but was unable to find his body. He could see only his head. "Where is my body?" he cried. The elder Gopāl entered the room and said, "Why, it is here, Naren!" But Narendra could not find it. Gopāl, frightened, ran upstairs to the Master. Sri Ramakrishna only said: "Let him stay that way for a time. He has worried me long enough."

After another long period Narendra regained full consciousness. Bathed in peace, he went to the Master, who said: "Now the Mother has shown you everything. But this revelation will remain under lock and key, and I shall keep the key. When you have accomplished the Mother's work you will find the treasure again."

Some days later, Narendra being alone with the Master, Sri Ramakrishna looked at him and went into Samādhi. Narendra felt the penetration of a subtle force and lost all outer consciousness. Regaining presently the normal mood, he found the Master weeping.

Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "Today I have given you my all and I am now only a poor fakir, possessing nothing. By this power you will do immense good in the world, and not until it is accomplished will you return." Henceforth the Master lived in the disciple.

Doubt, however, dies hard. After one or two days Narendra said to himself, "If in the midst of this racking physical pain he declares his Godhead, then only shall I accept him as an Incarnation of God." He was alone by the bedside of the Master. It was a passing thought, but the Master smiled. Gathering his remaining strength, he distinctly said, "He who was Rāmā and Krishna is now, in this body, Ramakrishna - but not in your Vedāntic sense." Narendra was stricken with shame.

Mahā–samādhi

Sunday, August 15, 1886. The Master's pulse became irregular. The devotees stood by the bedside. Toward dusk Sri Ramakrishna had difficulty in breathing. A short time afterwards he complained of hunger. A little liquid food was put into his mouth; some of it he swallowed, and the rest ran over his chin. Two attendants began to fan him. All at once he went into Samādhi of a rather unusual type. The body became stiff. Śaśi burst into tears. But after midnight the Master revived. He was now very hungry and helped himself to a bowl of porridge. He said he was strong again. He sat up against five or six pillows, which were supported by the body of Śashi, who was fanning him. Narendra took his feet on his lap and began to rub them. Again and again, the Master repeated to him, "Take care of these boys." Then, he asked to lie down. Three times in ringing tones he cried the name of **Kāli,** his life's Beloved, and lay back. At two minutes past one there was a low sound in his throat and he fell a little to one side. A thrill passed over his body. His hair stood on end. His eyes became fixed on the tip of his nose. His face was lighted with a smile. The final ecstasy began. It was *Mahā–samādhi,* total absorption, from which his mind never returned. Narendra, unable to bear it, ran downstairs.

Dr. Sarkār arrived the following noon and pronounced that life had departed not more than half an hour before. At five o'clock the Master's body was brought downstairs, laid on a cot, dressed in ochre clothes, and decorated with sandal-past and flowers. A procession was formed. The passers-by wept as the body was taken to the cremation ground at the Bārānagore Ghāt on the Ganges.

While the devotees were returning to the garden house, carrying the urn with the sacred ashes, a calm resignation came to their souls and they cried, "Victory unto the Guru!"

The Holy Mother was weeping in her room, not for her husband, but because she felt that Mother Kāli had left her. As she was about to put off the marks of a Hindu widow, in a moment of revelation she heard the words of faith "I have only passed from one room to another."

Chapter 1

MASTER AND DISCIPLE

February 1882

M.'s first visit to the Master

IT WAS ON A SUNDAY in spring, a few days after Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, that M. met him the first time. Sri Ramakrishna lived at the Kailibari, the temple garden of Mother Kali, on the bank of the Ganges at Dakshineswar.

M., being at leisure on Sundays, had gone with his friend Sidhu to visit several gardens at Baranagore. As they were walking in Prasanna Bannerji's garden, Sidhu said: "There is a charming place on the bank of the Ganges where a paramahamsa lives. Should you like to go there?" M. assented and they started immediately for the Dakshineswar temple garden. They arrived at the main gate at dusk and went straight to Sri Ramakrishna's room. And there they found him seated on a wooden couch, facing the east. With a smile on his face he was talking of God. The room was full of people, all seated on the floor, drinking in his words in deep silence.

M. stood there speechless and looked on. It was as if he were standing where all the holy places met and as if Sukadeva himself were speaking the word of God, or as if Sri Chaitanya were singing the name and glories of the Lord in Puri with Ramananda, Swarup, and the other devotees.

Formalities and essentials of religion

Sri Ramakrishna said: "When, hearing the name of Hari or Rāma once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform such devotions as the sandhya any more. Then only will you have a right to renounce rituals; or rather, rituals will drop away of themselves. Then it will be enough if you repeat only the name of Rāma or Hari, or even simply Om." Continuing, he said, "The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, and the Gayatri merges in Om."

M. looked around him with wonder and said to himself: "What a beautiful place! What a charming man! How beautiful his words are! I have no wish to move from this spot." After a few minutes he thought, "Let me see the place first; then I'll come back here and sit down."

As he left the room with Sidhu, he heard the sweet music of the evening service arising in the temple from gong, bell, drum, and cymbal. He could hear music from the nahabat, too, at the south end of the garden. The sounds travelled over the Ganges, floating away and losing themselves in the distance. A soft spring wind was blowing, laden with the fragrance of flowers; the moon had just appeared. It was as if nature and man together were preparing for the evening worship. M. and Sidhu visited the twelve

Siva temples, the Radhakanta temple, and the temple of Bhavatarini. And as M. watched the services before the images his heart was filled with joy.

On the way back to Sri Ramakrishna's room the two friends talked. Sidhu told M. that the temple garden had been founded by Rani Rasmani. He said that God was worshipped there daily as Kali, Krishna, and Siva, and that within the gates sadhus and beggars were fed. When they reached Sri Ramakrishna's door again, they found it shut, and Brinde, the Maid, standing outside. M., who had been trained in English manners and would not enter a room without permission, asked her, "Is the holy man in?" Brinde replied, "Yes he's in the room."

M: "How long has he lived here?"

BRINDE: "Oh, he has been here a long time."

M: "Does he read many books?"

BRINDE: "Books? Oh, dear no! They're all on his tongue."

M. had just finished his studies in college. It amazed him to hear that Sri Ramakrishna read no books.

M: "Perhaps it is time for his evening worship. May we go into the room? Will you tell him we are anxious to see him?"

BRINDE: "Go right in, children. Go in and sit down."

Entering the room, they found Sri Ramakrishna alone, seated on the wooden couch. Incense had just been burnt and all the doors were shut. As he entered, M. with folded hands saluted the Master. Then, at the Master's bidding, he and Sidhu sat on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna asked them: "Where do you live? What is your occupation? Why have you come to Baranagore?" M. answered the questions, but he noticed that now and then the Master seemed to become absent-minded. Later he learnt that this mood is called bhava, ecstasy. It is like the state of the angler who has been sitting with his rod: the fish comes and swallows the bait, and the float begins to tremble; the angler is on the alert; he grips the rod and watches the float steadily and eagerly; he will not speak to anyone. Such was the state of Sri Ramakrishna's mind. Later M. heard, and himself noticed, that Sri Ramakrishna would often go into this mood after dusk, sometimes becoming totally unconscious of the outer world.

M: "Perhaps you want to perform your evening worship. In that case may we take our leave?"

SRI RAMAKRISHNA (still in ecstasy): "No-evening worship? No, it is not exactly that."

After a little conversation M. saluted the Master and took his leave. "Come again", Sri Ramakrishna said.

On his way home M. began to wonder: "Who is this serene-looking man who is drawing me back to him? Is it possible for a man to be great without being a scholar? How wonderful it is! I should like to see him again. He himself said, 'Come again.' I shall go tomorrow or the day after."

Second visit

M.'s second visit to Sri Ramakrishna took place on the southeast verandah at eight o'clock in the morning. The Master was about to be shaved, the barber having just arrived. As the cold season still lingered he had put on a moleskin shawl bordered with red. Seeing M., the Master said: "So you have come. That's good. Sit down here." He was smiling. He stammered a little when he spoke.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA (to M.): "Where do you live?"

M: "In Calcutta, sir."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: "Where are you staying here?"

M: "I am at Baranagore at my older sister's-Ishan Kaviraj's house."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: "Oh, at Ishan's? Well, how is Keshab now? He was very ill."

M: "Indeed, I have heard so too, but I believe he is well now."

Master's love for Keshab

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: "I made a vow to worship the Mother with green coconut and sugar on Keshab's recovery. Sometimes, in the early hours of the morning, I would wake up and cry before Her: 'Mother, please make Keshab well again. If Keshab doesn't live, whom shall I talk with when I go to Calcutta?' And so it was that I resolved to offer Her the green coconut and sugar.

"Tell me, do you know of a certain Mr. Cook who has come to Calcutta? Is it true that he is giving lectures? Once Keshab took me on a steamer, and this Mr. Cook, too was in the party."

M: "Yes, sir, I have heard something like that; but I have never been to his lectures. I don't know much about him."

Sri Ramakrishna on M.'s marriage

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: "Pratap's brother came here. He stayed a few days. He had nothing to do and said he wanted to live here. I came to know that he had left his wife and children with his father-in-law. He has a whole brood of them! So I took him to task. Just fancy! He is the father of so many children! Will people from the neighbourhood feed them and bring them up? He isn't even ashamed that someone else

is feeding his wife and children, and that they have been left at his father-in-law's house. I scolded him very hard and asked him to look for a job. Then he was willing to leave here.

"Are you married?"

M: "Yes, sir."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA (with a shudder): "Oh, Ramlal! Alas, he is married!"

Like one guilty of a terrible offence, M. sat motionless, his eyes fixed on the ground. He thought, "Is it such a wicked thing to get married?"

The Master continued, "Have you any children?"

M. this time could hear the beating of his own heart. He whispered in a trembling voice, "Yes, sir, I have children."

Very sadly Sri Ramakrishna said, "Ah me! He even has children!"

Thus rebuked M. sat speechless. His pride had received a blow. After a few minutes Sri Ramakrishna looked at him kindly and said affectionately: "You see, you have certain good signs. I know them by looking at a person's forehead, his eyes, and so on. Tell me, now, what kind of person is your wife? Has she spiritual attributes, or is she under the power of avidya?"

M: "She is all right. But I am afraid she is ignorant."

MASTER (with evident displeasure): "And you are a man of knowledge!"

M. had yet to learn the distinction between knowledge and ignorance. Up to this time his conception had been that one got knowledge from books and schools. Later on he gave up this false conception. He was taught that to know God is knowledge, and not to know Him, ignorance. When Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed, "And you are a man of knowledge!", M.'s ego was again badly shocked.

God with and without form

MASTER: "Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?"

M., rather surprised, said to himself: "How can one believe in God without form when one believes in God with form? And if one believes in God without form, how can one believe that God has a form? Can these two contradictory ideas be true at the same time? Can a white liquid like milk be black?"

M: "Sir, I like to think of God as formless."

MASTER: "Very good. It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite all right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction."

The assertion that both are equally true amazed M.; he had never learnt this from his books. Thus his ego received a third blow; but since it was not yet completely crushed, he came forward to argue with the Master a little more.

God and the clay image

M: "Sir, suppose one believes in God with form. Certainly He is not the clay image!"

MASTER (interrupting): "But why clay? It is an image of Spirit."

M. could not quite understand the significance of this "image of Spirit". "But, sir," he said to the Master, "one should explain to those who worship the clay image that it is not God, and that, while worshipping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image. One should not worship clay."

God the only real teacher

MASTER (sharply): "That's the one hobby of you Calcutta people - giving lectures and bringing others to the light! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others?

"He who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone. He alone teaches us, who has created this universe; who has made the sun and moon, men and beasts, and all other beings; who has provided means for their sustenance; who has given children parents and endowed them with love to bring them up. The Lord has done so many things - will He not show people the way to worship Him? If they need teaching, then He will be the Teacher. He is our Inner Guide.

"Suppose there is an error in worshipping the clay image; doesn't God know that through it He alone is being invoked? He will he pleased with that very worship. Why should you get a headache over it? You had better try for knowledge and devotion yourself."

This time M. felt that his ego was completely crushed. He now said to himself: "Yes, he has spoken the truth. What need is there for me to teach others? Have I known God? Do I really love Him? 'I haven't room enough for myself in my bed, and I am inviting my friend to share it with me!' I know nothing about God, yet I am trying to teach others. What a shame! How foolish I am! This is not mathematics or history or literature, that one can teach it to others. No, this is the deep mystery of God. What he says appeals to me."

This was M.'s first argument with the Master, and happily his last.

MASTER: "You were talking of worshipping the clay image. Even if the image is made of clay, there is need for that sort of worship. God Himself has provided different forms of worship. He who is the Lord of the Universe has arranged all these forms to suit different men in different stages of knowledge.

"The mother cooks different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children. Suppose she has five children. If there is a fish to cook, she prepares various dishes from it - pilau, pickled fish, fried fish, and so on - to suit their different tastes and powers of digestion.

"Do you understand me?"

Need of holy company & Meditation in solitude

M. (humbly): "Yes, sir. How, sir, may we fix our minds on God?"

MASTER: "Repeat God's name and sing His glories, and keep holy company; and now and then visit God's devotees and holy men. The mind cannot dwell on God if it is immersed day and night in worldliness, in worldly duties and responsibilities; it is most necessary to go into solitude now and then and think of God. To fix the mind on God is very difficult, in the beginning, unless one practises meditation in solitude. When a tree is young it should be fenced all around; otherwise it may be destroyed by cattle.

"To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest. And you should always discriminate between the Real and the unreal. God alone is real, the Eternal Substance; all else is unreal, that is, impermanent. By discriminating thus, one should shake off impermanent objects from the mind."

God and worldly duties

M. (humbly):"How ought we to live in the world?"

MASTER: "Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all - with wife and children, father and mother - and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you.

"A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. She brings up her Master's children as if they were her own. She even speaks of them as 'my Rāma' or 'my Hari'. But in her own mind she knows very well that they do not belong to her at all.

"The tortoise moves about in the water. But can you guess where her thoughts are? There on the bank, where her eggs are lying. Do all your duties in the world, but keep your mind on God.

"If you enter the world without first cultivating love for God, you will be entangled more and more. You will be overwhelmed with its danger, its grief, its sorrows. And the more you think of worldly things, the more you will be attached to them.

"First rub your hands with oil and then break open the jack-fruit; otherwise they will be smeared with its sticky milk. First secure the oil of divine love, and then set your hands to the duties of the world.

"But one must go into solitude to attain this divine love. To get butter from milk you must let it set into curd in a secluded spot; if it is too much disturbed, milk won't turn into curd. Next, you must put aside all other duties, sit in a quiet spot, and churn the curd. Only then do you get butter.

"Further, by meditating on God in solitude the mind acquires knowledge, dispassion, and devotion. But the very same mind goes downward if it dwells in the world. In the world there is only one thought: 'woman and gold'.2

"The world is water and the mind milk. If you pour milk into water they become one; you cannot find the pure milk any more. But turn the milk into curd and churn it into butter. Then, when that butter is placed in water, it will float. So, practise spiritual discipline in solitude and obtain the butter of knowledge and love. Even if you keep that butter in the water of the world the two will not mix. The butter will float.

Practice of discrimination

"Together with this, you must practise discrimination. 'Woman and gold' is impermanent. God is the only Eternal Substance. What does a man get with money? Food, clothes, and a dwelling-place - nothing more. You cannot realize God with its help. Therefore money can never be the goal of life. That is the process of discrimination. Do you understand?"

M: "Yes, sir. I recently read a Sanskrit play called Prabodha Chandrodaya. It deals with discrimination."

MASTER: "Yes, discrimination about objects. Consider - what is there in money or in a beautiful body? Discriminate and you will find that even the body of a beautiful woman consists of bones, flesh, fat, and other disagreeable things. Why should a man give up God and direct his attention to such things? Why should a man forget God for their sake?"

How to see God

M: "Is it possible to see God?"

MASTER: "Yes, certainly. Living in solitude now and then, repeating God's name and singing His glories, and discriminating between the Real and the unreal - these are the means to employ to see Him."

Longing and yearning

M: "Under what conditions does one see God?"

MASTER: "Cry to the Lord with an intensely yearning heart and you will certainly see Him. People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. They swim in tears for money. But who weeps for God? Cry to Him with a real cry."

The Master sang:

Cry to your Mother Syama , with a real cry, O mind!
And how can She hold Herself from you?
How can Syama stay away?
How can your Mother Kali hold Herself away?

O mind, if you are in earnest, bring Her an offering
Of bel-leaves and hibiscus flowers;
Lay at Her feet your offering
And with it mingle the fragrant sandal-paste of Love.

Continuing, he said: "Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God.

"God reveals Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions: the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man, the child's attraction for its mother, and the husband's attraction for the chaste wife. If one feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions, then through it one can attain Him.

"The point is, to love God even as the mother loves her child, the chaste wife her husband, and the worldly man his wealth. Add together these three forces of love, these three powers of attraction, and give it all to God. Then you will certainly see Him.

"It is necessary to pray to Him with a longing heart. The kitten knows only how to call its mother, crying, 'Mew, mew!' It remains satisfied wherever its mother puts it. And the mother cat puts the kitten sometimes in the kitchen, sometimes on the floor, and sometimes on the bed. When it suffers it cries only, 'Mew, mew!' That's all it knows. But as soon as the mother hears this cry, wherever she may be; she comes to the kitten."

Third visit

It was Sunday afternoon when M. came on his third visit to the Master. He had been profoundly impressed by his first two visits to this wonderful man. He had been thinking of the Master constantly, and of the utterly simple way he explained the deep truths of the spiritual life. Never before had he met such a man.

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch. The room was filled with devotees,3 who had taken advantage of the holiday to come to see the Master. M. had not yet become acquainted with any of them; so he took his seat in a corner. The Master smiled as he talked with the devotees.

Narendra

He addressed his words particularly to a young man of nineteen, named Narendranath, who was a college student and frequented the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. His eyes were bright, his words were full of spirit, and he had the look of a lover of God.

How the spiritually minded should look upon the worldly

M. guessed that the conversation was about worldly men, who look down on those who aspire to spiritual things. The Master was talking about the great number of such people in the world, and about how to deal with them.

MASTER (to Narendra): "How do you feel about it? Worldly people say all kinds of things about the spiritually minded. But look here! When an elephant moves along the street, any number of curs and other small animals may bark and cry after it; but the elephant doesn't even look back at them. If people speak ill of you, what will you think of them?"

NARENDRA: "I shall think that dogs are barking at me."

God in every being

MASTER (Smiling): "Oh, no! You mustn't go that far, my child! (Laughter). God dwells in all beings. But you may be intimate only with good people; you must keep away from the evil-minded. God is even in the tiger; but you cannot embrace the tiger on that account. (Laughter). You may say, 'Why run away from a tiger, which is also a manifestation of God?' The answer to that is: 'Those who tell you to run away are also manifestations of God - and why shouldn't you listen to them?'

Parable of the "elephant God"

"Let me tell you a story. In a forest there lived a holy man who had many disciples. One day he taught them to see God in all beings and, knowing this, to bow low before them all. A disciple went to the forest to gather wood for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly he heard an outcry: 'Get out of the way! A mad elephant is coming!' All but the disciple of the holy man took to their heels. He reasoned that the elephant was also God in another form. Then why should he run away from it? He stood still, bowed before the animal, and began to sing its praises. The mahut of the elephant was shouting: 'Run away! Run away!' But the disciple didn't move. The animal seized him with its trunk, cast him to one side, and went on its way. Hurt and bruised, the disciple lay unconscious on the ground. Hearing what had happened, his teacher and his brother disciples came to him and carried him to the hermitage. With the help of some medicine he soon regained consciousness. Someone asked him, 'You knew the elephant was

coming - why didn't you leave the place?' 'But', he said, 'our teacher has told us that God Himself has taken all these forms, of animals as well as men. Therefore, thinking it was only the elephant God that was coming, I didn't run away.' At this the teacher said: 'Yes, my child, it is true that the elephant God was coming; but the mahut God forbade you to stay there. Since all are manifestations of God, why didn't you trust the mahut's words? You should have heeded the words of the mahut God.' (Laughter)

"It is said in the scriptures that water is a form of God. But some water is fit to be used for worship, some water for washing the face, and some only for washing plates or dirty linen. This last sort cannot be used for drinking or for a holy purpose. In like manner, God undoubtedly dwells in the hearts of all - holy and unholy, righteous and unrighteous; but a man should not have dealings with the unholy, the wicked, the impure. He must not be intimate with them. With some of them he may exchange words, but with others he shouldn't go even that far. He should keep aloof from such people."

How to deal with the wicked

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, if a wicked man is about to do harm, or actually does so, should we keep quiet then?"

MASTER: "A man living in society should make a show of tamas to protect himself from evil-minded people. But he should not harm anybody in anticipation of harm likely to be done him.

Parable of the snake

"Listen to a story. Some cowherd boys used to tend their cows in a meadow where a terrible poisonous snake lived. Everyone was on the alert for fear of it. One day a brahmachari was going along the meadow. The boys ran to him and said: 'Revered sir, please don't go that way. A venomous snake lives over there.' 'What of it, my good children?' said the brahmachari. 'I am not afraid of the snake. I know some mantras.' So saying, he continued on his way along the meadow. But the cowherd boys, being afraid, did not accompany him. In the mean time the snake moved swiftly toward him with upraised hood. As soon as it came near, he recited a mantra, and the snake lay at his feet like an earthworm. The brahmachari said: 'Look here. Why do you go about doing harm? Come, I will give you a holy word. By repeating it you will learn to love God. Ultimately you will realize Him and so get rid of your violent nature.' Saying this, he taught the snake a holy word and initiated him into spiritual life. The snake bowed before the teacher and said, 'Revered sir, how shall I practise spiritual discipline?' 'Repeat that sacred word', said the teacher, 'and do no harm to anybody'. As he was about to depart, the brahmachari said, 'I shall see you again.'

"Some days passed and the cowherd boys noticed that the snake would not bite. They threw stones at it. Still it showed no anger; it behaved as if it were an earthworm. One day one of the boys came close to it, caught it by the tail, and, whirling it round and round, dashed it again and again on the ground and threw it away. The snake vomited

blood and became unconscious. It was stunned. It could not move. So, thinking it dead, the boys went their way.

"Late at night the snake regained consciousness. Slowly and with great difficulty it dragged itself into its hole; its bones were broken and it could scarcely move. Many days passed. The snake became a mere skeleton covered with a skin. Now and then, at night, it would come out in search of food. For fear of the boys it would not leave its hole during the day-time. Since receiving the sacred word from the teacher, it had given up doing harm to others. It maintained its life on dirt, leaves, or the fruit that dropped from the trees.

"About a year later the brahmachari came that way again and asked after the snake. The cowherd boys told him that it was dead. But he couldn't believe them. He knew that the snake would not die before attaining the fruit of the holy word with which it had been initiated. He found his way to the place and, searching here and there, called it by the name he had given it. Hearing the teacher's voice, it came out of its hole and bowed before him with great reverence. 'How are you?' asked the brahmachari. 'I am well, sir', replied the snake. 'But', the teacher asked, 'why are you so thin?' The snake replied: 'Revered sir, you ordered me not to harm any body. So I have been living only on leaves and fruit. Perhaps that has made me thinner.'

"The snake had developed the quality of sattva; it could not be angry with anyone. It had totally forgotten that the cowherd boys had almost killed it.

"The brahmachari said: 'It can't be mere want of food that has reduced you to this state. There must be some other reason. Think a little.' Then the snake remembered that the boys had dashed it against the ground. It said: 'Yes, revered sir, now I remember. The boys one day dashed me violently against the ground. They are ignorant, after all. They didn't realize what a great change had come over my mind. How could they know I wouldn't bite or harm anyone?' The brahmachari exclaimed: 'What a shame! You are such a fool! You don't know how to protect yourself. I asked you not to bite, but I didn't forbid you to hiss. Why didn't you scare them by hissing?'

"So you must hiss at wicked people. You must frighten them lest they should do you harm. But never inject your venom into them. One must not injure others.

"In this creation of God there is a variety of things: men, animals, trees, plants. Among the animals some are good, some bad. There are ferocious animals like the tiger. Some trees bear fruit sweet as nectar, and others bear fruit that is poisonous. Likewise, among human beings, there are the good and the wicked, the holy and the unholy. There are some who are devoted to God, and others who are attached to the world.

Four classes of men

"Men may be divided into four classes: those bound by the fetters of the world, the seekers after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-free.

"Among the ever-free we may count sages like Narada. They live in the world for the good of others, to teach men spiritual truth.

"Those in bondage are sunk in worldliness and forgetful of God. Not even by mistake do they think of God.

"The seekers after liberation want to free themselves from attachment to the world. Some of them succeed and others do not.

"The liberated souls, such as the sadhus and mahatmas, are not entangled in the world, in 'woman and gold'. Their minds are free from worldliness. Besides, they always meditate on the Lotus Feet of God.

"Suppose a net has been cast into a lake to catch fish. Some fish are so clever that they are never caught in the net. They are like the ever-free. But most of the fish are entangled in the net. Some of them try to free themselves from it, and they are like those who seek liberation. But not all the fish that struggle succeed. A very few do jump out of the net, making a big splash in the water. Then the fishermen shout, 'Look! There goes a big one!' But most of the fish caught in the net cannot escape, nor do they make any effort to get out. On the contrary, they burrow into the mud with the net in their mouths and lie there quietly, thinking, 'We need not fear any more; we are quite safe here.' But the poor things do not know that the fishermen will drag them out with the net. These are like the men bound to the world.

"The bound souls are tied to the world by the fetters of 'woman and gold'. They are bound hand and foot. Thinking that 'woman and gold' will make them happy and give them security, they do not realize that it will lead them to annihilation. When a man thus bound to the world is about to die, his wife asks, 'You are about to go; but what have you done for me?' Again, such is his attachment to the things of the world that, when he sees the lamp burning brightly, he says: 'Dim the light. Too much oil is being used.' And he is on his death-bed!

"The bound souls never think of God. If they get any leisure they indulge in idle gossip and foolish talk, or they engage in fruitless work. If you ask one of them the reason, he answers, 'Oh, I cannot keep still; so I am making a hedge.' When time hangs heavy on their hands they perhaps start playing cards."

There was deep silence in the room.

Redeeming power of faith

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, is there no help, then, for such a worldly person?"

MASTER: "Certainly there is. From time to time he should live in the company of holy men, and from time to time go into solitude to meditate on God. Furthermore, he should practise discrimination and pray to God, 'Give me faith and devotion.' Once a person has faith he has achieved everything. There is nothing greater than faith.

(To Kedar) "You must have heard about the tremendous power of faith. It is said in the purana that Rāma, who was God Himself - the embodiment of Absolute Brahman - had to build a bridge to cross the sea to Ceylon. But Hanuman, trusting in Rama's name, cleared the sea in one jump and reached the other side. He had no need of a bridge. (All laugh)

"Once a man was about to cross the sea. Bibhishana wrote Rama's name on a leaf, tied it in a corner of the man's wearing-cloth, and said to him: 'Don't be afraid. Have faith and walk on the water. But look here - the moment you lose faith you will be drowned.' The man was walking easily on the water. Suddenly he had an intense desire to see what was tied in his cloth. He opened it and found only a leaf with the name of Rāma written on it. 'What is this?' he thought. 'Just the name of Rāma!' As soon as doubt entered his mind he sank under the water.

"If a man has faith in God, then even if he has committed the most heinous sins - such as killing a cow, a brahmin, or a woman - he will certainly be saved through his faith. Let him only say to God, 'O Lord, I Will not repeat such an action', and he need not be afraid of anything."

When he had said this, the Master sang:

If only I can pass away repeating Durga's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,
Withhold from me deliverance,
Wretched though I may be?
1 may have stolen a drink of wine, or killed a child unborn,
Or slain a woman or a cow,
Or even caused a brahmin's death;
But, though it all be true,
Nothing of this can make me feel the least uneasiness;
For through the power of Thy sweet name
My wretched soul may still aspire
Even to Brahmanhood.

Parable of the homa bird

Pointing to Narendra, the Master said: "You all see this boy. He behaves that way here. A naughty boy seems very gentle when with his father. But he is quite another person when he plays in the chandni. Narendra and people of his type belong to the class of the ever-free. They are never entangled in the world. When they grow a little older they feel the awakening of inner consciousness and go directly toward God. They come to the world only to teach others. They never care for anything of the world. They are never attached to 'woman and gold'.

"The Vedas speak of the homa bird. It lives high up in the sky and there it lays its egg. As soon as the egg is laid it begins to fall; but it is so high up that it continues to fall for many days. As it falls it hatches, and the chick falls. As the chick falls its eyes open; it grows wings. As soon as its eyes open, it realizes that it is falling and will be dashed to

pieces on touching the earth. Then it at once shoots up toward the mother bird high in the sky."

At this point Narendra left the room. Kedar, Prankrishna, M., and many others remained.

Master praises Narendra

MASTER: "You see, Narendra excels in singing, playing on instruments, study, and everything. The other day he had a discussion with Kedar and tore his arguments to shreds. (All laugh.)

(To M.) "Is there any book in English on reasoning?"

M: "Yes, sir, there is. It is called Logic."

MASTER: "Tell me what it says."

M. was a little embarrassed. He said: "One part of the book deals with deduction from the general to the particular. For example: All men are mortal. Scholars are men. Therefore scholars are mortal. Another part deals with the method of reasoning from the particular to the general. For example: This crow is black. That crow is black. The crows we see everywhere are black. Therefore all crows are black. But there may be a fallacy in a conclusion arrived at in this way; for on inquiry one may find a white crow in some country. There is another illustration: If there is rain, there is, or has been, a cloud. Therefore rain comes from a cloud. Still another example: This man has thirty-two teeth. That man has thirty-two teeth. All the men we see have thirty-two teeth. Therefore men have thirty-two teeth. English logic deals with such inductions and deductions."

Sri Ramakrishna barely heard these words. While listening he became absent-minded. So the conversation did not proceed far.

When the meeting broke up, the devotees sauntered in the temple garden. M. went in the direction of the Panchavati. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. After a while he returned to the Master's room. There, on the small north verandah, he witnessed an amazing sight.

Sri Ramakrishna was standing still, surrounded by a few devotees, and Narendra was singing. M. had never heard anyone except the Master sing so sweetly. When he looked at Sri Ramakrishna he was struck with wonder; for the Master stood motionless, with eyes transfixed. He seemed not even to breathe. A devotee told M. that the Master was in samadhi. M. had never before seen or heard of such a thing. Silent with wonder, he thought: "Is it possible for a man to be so oblivious of the outer world in the consciousness of God? How deep his faith and devotion must be to bring about such a state!"

Narendra was singing:

Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,
The Stainless One, Pure Spirit through and through.
How peerless is the Light that in Him shines!
How soul-bewitching is His wondrous form!
How dear is He to all His devotees!

Ever more beauteous in fresh-blossoming love
That shames the splendour of a million moons,
Like lightning gleams the glory of His form,
Raising erect the hair for very joy.

The Master shuddered when this last line was sung. His hair stood on end, and tears of joy streamed down his cheeks. Now and then his lips parted in a smile. Was he seeing the peerless beauty of God, "that shames the splendour of a million moons"? Was this the vision of God, the Essence of Spirit? How much austerity and discipline, how much faith and devotion, must be necessary for such a vision!

The song went on:

Worship His feet in the lotus of your heart;
With mind serene and eyes made radiant
With heavenly love, behold that matchless sight.

Again that bewitching smile. The body motionless as before, the eyes half Shut, as if beholding a strange inner vision.

The song drew to a close. Narendra sang the last lines:

Caught in the spell of His love's ecstasy,
Immerse yourself for evermore, O mind"
In Him who is Pure Knowledge and Pure Bliss.

The sight of the samadhi, and the divine bliss he had witnessed, left an indelible impression on M.'s mind. He returned home deeply moved. Now and then he could hear within himself the echo of those soul-intoxicating lines:

Immerse yourself for evermore, O mind,
In Him who is Pure Knowledge and Pure Bliss.

Fourth visit

The next day, too, was a holiday for M. He arrived at Dakshineswar at three o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was in his room; Narendra, Bhavanath, and a few other devotees were sitting on a mat spread on the floor. They were all young men of nineteen or twenty. Seated on the small couch, Sri Ramakrishna was talking with them and smiling.

No sooner had M. entered the room than the Master laughed aloud and said to the boys, "There! He has come again." They all joined in the laughter. M. bowed low before him and took a seat. Before this he had saluted the Master with folded hands, like one with an English education. But that day he learnt to fall down at his feet in orthodox Hindu fashion.

The peacock and the opium

Presently the Master explained the cause of his laughter to the devotees, He said: "A man once fed a peacock with a pill of opium at four o'clock in the afternoon. The next day, exactly at that time, the peacock came back. It had felt the intoxication of the drug and returned just in time to have another dose."(All laugh.)

M. thought this a very apt illustration. Even at home he had been unable to banish the thought of Sri Ramakrishna for a moment. His mind was constantly at Dakshineswar and he had counted the minutes until he should go again.

In the mean time the Master was having great fun with the boys, treating them as if they were his most intimate friends. Peals of side-splitting laughter filled the room, as if it were a mart of joy. The whole thing was a revelation to M. He thought: "Didn't I see him only yesterday intoxicated with God? Wasn't he swimming then in the Ocean of Divine Love - a sight I had never seen before? And today the same person is behaving like an ordinary man! Wasn't it he who scolded me on the first day of my coming here? Didn't he admonish me, saying, 'And you are a man of knowledge!'? Wasn't it he who said to me that God with form is as true as God without form? Didn't he tell me that God alone is real and all else illusory? Wasn't it he who advised me to live in the world unattached, like a maidservant in a rich man's house?"

Sri Ramakrishna was having great fun with the young devotees; now and then he glanced at M. He noticed that M. sat in silence. The Master said to Ramlal: "You see, he is a little advanced in years, and therefore somewhat serious. He sits quiet while the youngsters are making merry." M. was then about twenty-eight years old.

Hanuman's devotion to Rāma

The conversation drifted to Hanuman, whose picture hung on the wall in the Master's room.

Sri Ramakrishna said: "Just imagine Hanuman's state of mind. He didn't care for money, honour, creature comforts, or anything else. He longed only for God. When he was running away with the heavenly weapon that had been secreted in the crystal pillar, Mandodari began to tempt him with various fruits so that he might come down and drop the weapon.5 But he couldn't be tricked so easily. In reply to her persuasions he sang this song:

Am I in need of fruit?
I have the Fruit that makes this life
Fruitful indeed. Within my heart

The Tree of Rāma grows,
Bearing salvation for its fruit.

Under the Wish-fulfilling Tree
Of Rāma do I sit at ease,
Plucking whatever fruit I will.
But if you speak of fruit -
No beggar, I, for common fruit.
Behold, I go,
Leaving a bitter fruit for you."

As Sri Ramakrishna was singing the song he went into samadhi. Again the half-closed eyes and motionless body that one sees in his photograph. Just a minute before, the devotees had been making merry in his company. Now all eyes were riveted on him. Thus for the second time M. saw the Master in samadhi.

After a long time the Master came back to ordinary consciousness. His face lighted up with a smile, and his body relaxed; his senses began to function in a normal way. He shed tears of joy as he repeated the holy name of Rāma. M. wondered whether this very saint was the person who a few minutes earlier had been behaving like a child of five.

The Master said to Narendra and M., "I should like to hear you speak and argue in English." They both laughed. But they continued to talk in their mother tongue. It was impossible for M. to argue any more before the Master. Though Ramakrishna insisted, they did not talk in English.

At five o'clock in the afternoon all the devotees except Narendra and M. took leave of the Master. As M. was walking in the temple garden, he suddenly came upon the Master talking to Narendra on the bank of the goose-pond. Sri Ramakrishna said to Narendra: "Look here. Come a little more often. You are a new-comer. On first acquaintance people visit each other quite often, as is the case with a lover and his sweetheart. (Narendra and M. laugh.) So please come, won't you?"

Narendra, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, was very particular about his promises. He said with a smile, "Yes, sir, I shall try."

As they were returning to the Master's room, Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "When peasants go to market to buy bullocks for their ploughs, they can easily tell the good from the bad by touching their tails. On being touched there, some meekly lie down on the ground. The peasants recognize that these are without mettle and so reject them. They select only those bullocks that frisk about and show spirit when their tails are touched. Narendra is like a bullock of this latter class. He is full of spirit within."

The Master smiled as he said this, and continued: "There are some people who have no grit whatever. They are like flattened rice soaked in milk - soft and mushy. No inner strength!"

It was dusk. The Master was meditating on God. He said to M.: "Go and talk to Narendra. Then tell me what you think of him."

Evening worship was over in the temples. M. met Narendra on the bank of the Ganges and they began to converse. Narendra told M. about his studying in college, his being a member of the Brahmo Samaj, and so on.

It was now late in the evening and time for M.'s departure; but he felt reluctant to go and instead went in search of Sri Ramakrishna. He had been fascinated by the Master's singing and wanted to hear more. At last he found the Master pacing alone in the natmandir in front of the Kali temple. A lamp was burning in the temple on either side of the image of the Divine Mother. The single lamp in the spacious natmandir blended light and darkness into a kind of mystic twilight, in which the figure of the Master could be dimly seen.

M. had been enchanted by the Master's sweet music. With some hesitation he asked him whether there would be any more singing that evening. "No, not tonight", said Sri Ramakrishna after a little reflection. Then, as if remembering something, he added: "But I'm going soon to Balarām Bose's house in Calcutta. Come there and you'll hear me sing." M. agreed to go.

MASTER. "Do you know Balarām Bose?"

M: "No, sir. I don't."

MASTER: "He lives in Bosepara."

M: "Well, sir, I shall find him."

As Sri Ramakrishna walked up and down the hall with M., he said to him: "Let me ask you something. What do you think of me?"

M. remained silent. Again Sri Ramakrishna asked: "What do you think of me? How many annas of knowledge of God have I?"

M: "I don't understand what you mean by 'annas'. But of this I am sure: I have never before seen such knowledge, ecstatic love, faith in God, renunciation, and catholicity anywhere."

The Master laughed.

M. bowed low before him and took his leave. He had gone as far as the main gate of the temple garden when he suddenly remembered something and came back to Sri Ramakrishna, who was still in the natmandir. In the dim light the Master, all alone, was pacing the hall, rejoicing in the Self as the lion lives and roams alone in the forest.

In silent wonder M. surveyed that great soul.

MASTER (to M.): "What makes you come back?"

M: "Perhaps the house you asked me to go to belongs to a rich man. They may not let me in. I think I had better not go. I would rather meet you here."

MASTER: "Oh, no! Why should you think that? Just mention my name. Say that you want to see me; then someone will take you to me."

M. nodded his assent and, after saluting the Master, took his leave.

Chapter 2

IN THE COMPANY OF DEVOTEES

March 11, 1882

Master at Balaram's house

ABOUT EIGHT O'CLOCK in the morning Sri Ramakrishna went as planned to Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta. It was the day of the Dolayatra. Ram, Manomohan, Rakhal, Nityagopal, and other devotees were with him. M., too, came, as bidden by the Master.

Devotees in trance

The devotees and the Master sang and danced in a state of divine fervour. Several of them were in an ecstatic mood. Nityagopal's chest glowed with the upsurge of emotion, and Rakhal lay on the floor in ecstasy, completely unconscious of the world. The Master put his hand on Rakhal's chest and said: "Peace. Be quiet." This was Rakhal's first experience of ecstasy. He lived with his father in Calcutta and now and then visited the Master at Dakshineswar. About this time he had studied a short while in Vidyasagar's school at Syampukur.

When the music was over, the devotees sat down for their meal. Balaram stood there humbly, like a servant. Nobody would have taken him for the master of the house. M. was still a stranger to the devotees, having met only Narendra at Dakshineswar.

A few days later M. visited the Master at Dakshineswar. It was between four and five o'clock in the afternoon. The Master and he were sitting on the steps of the Śiva temples. Looking at the temple of Radhakanta, across the courtyard, the Master went into an ecstatic mood.

Since his nephew Hriday's dismissal from the temple, Sri Ramakrishna had been living without an attendant. On account of his frequent spiritual moods he could hardly take care of himself. The lack of an attendant caused him great inconvenience.

Bigotry condemned

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Kāli, the Divine Mother of the Universe. He said: "Mother, everyone says, 'My watch alone is right.' The Christians, the Brahmos, the Hindus, the Mussalmans, all say, 'My religion alone is true.' But, Mother, the fact is that nobody's watch is right. Who can truly understand Thee? But if a man prays to Thee with a yearning heart, he can reach Thee, through Thy grace, by any path. Mother, show me some time how the Christians pray to Thee in their churches. But Mother, what will people say if I go in? Suppose they make a fuss! Suppose they don't allow me to enter the Kāli temple again! Well then, show me the Christian worship from the door of the church."

The mind's inability to comprehend God

Another day the Master was seated on the small couch in his room, with his usual beaming countenance. M. arrived with Kalikrishna, who did not know where his friend M. was taking him. He had only been told: "If you want to see a grog-shop, then come with me. You will see a huge jar of wine there." M. related this to Sri Ramakrishna, who

laughed about it. The Master said: "The bliss of worship and communion with God is the true wine, the wine of ecstatic love. The goal of human life is to love God, Bhakti is the one essential thing. To know God through jnāna and reasoning is extremely difficult."

Then the Master sang:

Who is there that can understand what Mother Kāli is?
Even the six darsanas are powerless to reveal Her....

The Master said, again: "The one goal of life is to cultivate love for God, the love that the milkmaids, the milkmen, and the cowherd boys of Vrindāvan felt for Krishna. When Krishna went away to Mathura, the cowherds roamed about weeping bitterly because of their separation from Him."

Saying this the Master sang, with his eyes turned upward:

Just now I saw a youthful cowherd
With a young calf in his arms;
There he stood, by one hand holding
The branch of a young tree.
"Where are You, Brother Kanai?" he cried;
But "Kanai" scarcely could he utter;
"Ka" was as much as he could say.
He cried, "Where are You, Brother?"
And his eyes were filled with tears.

When M. heard this song of the Master's, laden with love, his eyes were moist with tears.

April 2, 1882

Master's visit to Keshab

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in the drawing-room of Keshab Chandra Sen's house in Calcutta; it was five o'clock in the afternoon. When Keshab was told of his arrival, he came to the drawing-room dressed to go out, for he was about to call on a sick friend. Now he cancelled his plan. The Master said to him: "You have so many things to attend to. Besides, you have to edit a newspaper. You have no time to come to Dakshineswar; so I have come to see you. When I heard of your illness I vowed green coconut and sugar to the Divine Mother for your recovery. I said to Her, 'Mother, if something happens to Keshab, with whom shall I talk in Calcutta?' "

Sri Ramakrishna spoke to Pratap and the other Brahmo devotees. M. was seated near by. Pointing to him, the Master said to Keshab: "Will you please ask him why he doesn't come to Dakshineswar any more? He repeatedly tells me he is not attached to his wife and children." M. had been paying visits to the Master for about a month; his absence for a time from Dakshineswar called forth this remark. Sri Ramakrishna had asked M. to write to him, if his coming were delayed.

Pundit Samadhyayi was present. The Brahmo devotees introduced him to Sri Ramakrishna as a scholar well versed in the Vedas and the other scriptures. The Master said, "Yes, I can see inside him through his eyes, as one can see the objects in a room through the glass door."

Trailokya sang. Suddenly the Master stood up and went into samādhi, repeating the Mother's name. Coming down a little to the plane of sense consciousness, he danced and sang:

I drink no ordinary wine, but Wine of Everlasting Bliss,
As I repeat my Mother Kāli's name;
It so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk!
First my guru gives molasses for the making of the Wine;
My longing is the ferment to transform it.
Knowledge, the maker of the Wine, prepares it for me then;
And when it is done, my mind imbibes it from the bottle of the mantra,
Taking the Mother's name to make it pure.
Drink of this Wine, says Ramprasad, and the four fruits of life are yours.

The Master looked at Keshab tenderly, as if Keshab were his very own. He seemed to fear that Keshab might belong to someone else, that is to say, that he might become a worldly person. Looking at him, the Master sang again:

We are afraid to speak, and yet we are afraid to keep still;
Our minds, O Radha, half believe that we are about to lose you!
We tell you the secret that we know -
The secret whereby we ourselves, and others, with our help,
Have passed through many a time of peril;
Now it all depends on you.

Quoting the last part of the song, he said to Keshab: "That is to say, renounce everything and call on God. He alone is real; all else is illusory. Without the realization of God everything is futile. This is the great secret."

The Master sat down again and began to converse with the devotees. For a while he listened to a piano recital, enjoying it like a child. Then he was taken to the inner apartments, where he was served with refreshments and the ladies saluted him.

As the Master was leaving Keshab's house, the Brahmo devotees accompanied him respectfully to his carriage.

Sunday, April 9, 1882

Sri Ramakrishna was seated with his devotees in the drawing-room of Prankrishna Mukherji's house in Calcutta; it was between one and two o'clock in the afternoon. Since

Colonel Viswanath4 lived in that neighbourhood, the Master intended to visit him before going to see Keshab at the Lily Cottage. A number of neighbours and other friends of Prankrishna had been invited to meet Sri Ramakrishna. They were all eager to hear his words.

God and His glory & Dangers of worldly life

MASTER: "God and His glory. This universe is His glory. People see His glory and forget everything. They do not seek God, whose glory is this world. All seek to enjoy 'woman and gold'. But there is too much misery and worry in that. This world is like the whirlpool of the Viśālākśi. Once a boat gets into it there is no hope of its rescue. Again, the world is like a thorny bush: you have hardly freed yourself from one set of thorns before you find yourself entangled in another. Once you enter a labyrinth you find it very difficult to get out. Living in the world, a man becomes seared, as it were."

A DEVOTEE: "Then what is the way, sir?"

Prayer and holy company & Earnest longing

MASTER: "Prayer and the company of holy men. You cannot get rid of an ailment without the help of a physician. But it is not enough to be in the company of religious people only for a day. You should constantly seek it, for the disease has become chronic. Again, you can't understand the pulse rightly unless you live with a physician. Moving with him constantly, you learn to distinguish between the pulse of phlegm and the pulse of bile."

DEVOTEE: "What is the good of holy company?"

MASTER: "It begets yearning for God. It begets love of God. Nothing whatsoever is achieved in spiritual life without yearning. By constant living in the company of holy men, the soul becomes restless for God. This yearning is like the state of mind of a man who has someone ill in the family. His mind is in a state of perpetual restlessness, thinking how the sick person may be cured. Or again, one should feel a yearning for God like the yearning of a man who has lost his job and is wandering from one office to another in search of work. If he is rejected at a certain place which has no vacancy, he goes there again the next day and inquires, 'Is there an vacancy today?'

"There is another way: earnestly praying to God. God is our very own. We should say to Him: 'O God, what is Thy nature? Reveal Thyself to me. Thou must show Thyself to me; for why else hast Thou created me?' Some Sikh devotees once said to me, 'God is full of compassion.' I said: 'But why should we call Him compassionate? He is our Creator. What is there to be wondered at if He is kind to us? Parents bring up their children. Do you call that an act of kindness? They must act that way.' Therefore we should force our demands on God. He is our Father and Mother, isn't He? If the son demands his patrimony and gives up food and drink in order to enforce his demand, then the parents hand his share over to him three years before the legal time. Or when the child demands some pice from his mother, and says over and over again: 'Mother, give me a couple of pice. I beg you on my knees!' - then the mother, seeing his earnestness, and unable to bear it any more, tosses the money to him.

"There is another benefit from holy company. It helps one cultivate discrimination between the Real and the unreal. God alone is the Real, that is to say, the Eternal Substance, and the world is unreal, that is to say, transitory. As soon as a man finds his mind wandering away to the unreal, he should apply discrimination. The moment an elephant stretches out its trunk to eat a plantain-tree in a neighbour's garden, it gets a blow from the iron goad of the driver."

Explanation of evil

A NEIGHBOUR: "Why does a man have sinful tendencies?"

MASTER: "In God's creation there are all sorts of things. He has created bad men as well as good men. It is He who gives us good tendencies, and it is He again who gives us evil tendencies."

NEIGHBOUR: "In that case we aren't responsible for our sinful actions, are we?"

MASTER: "Sin begets its own result. This is God's law. Won't you burn our tongue if you chew a chilli? In his youth Mathur6 led a rather fast life; so he suffered from various diseases before his death.

"One may not realize this in youth. I have looked into the hearth in the kitchen of the Kāli temple when logs are being burnt. At first the wet wood burns rather well. It doesn't seem then that it contains much moisture. But when the wood is sufficiently burnt, all the moisture runs back to one end. At last water squirts from the fuel and puts out the fire.

"So one should be careful about anger, passion, and greed. Take, for instance, the case of Hanuman. In a fit of anger he burnt Ceylon. At last he remembered that Sita was living in the aśoka grove. Then he began to tremble lest the fire should injure her."

NEIGHHBOUR: "Why has God created wicked people?"

MASTER: "That is His will, His play. In His maya there exists avidyā as well as vidyā. Darkness is needed too. It reveals all the more the glory of light. There is no doubt that anger, lust, and greed are evils. Why, then, has God created them? In order to create saints. A man becomes a saint by conquering the senses. Is there anything impossible for a man who has subdued his passions? He can even realize God, through His grace. Again, see how His whole play of creation is perpetuated through lust.

"Wicked people are needed too. At one time the tenants of an estate became unruly. The landlord had to send Golak Choudhury, who was a ruffian. He was such a harsh administrator that the tenants trembled at the very mention of his name.

"There is need of everything. Once Sita said to her Husband: 'Rama, it would be grand if every house in Ayhodhya were a mansion! I find many houses old and dilapidated.' 'But, my dear,' said Rama, 'if all the houses were beautiful ones, what would the masons do?' (Laughter.) God has created all kinds of things. He has created good trees, and

poisonous plants and weeds as well. Among the animals there are good, bad, and all kinds of creatures - tigers, lions, snakes, and so on."

Washing away the heart's impurities with tears

NEIGHTBOUR: "Sir, is it ever possible to realize God while leading the life of a householder?"

MASTER: "Certainly. But as I said just now, one must live in holy company and pray unceasingly. One should weep for God. When the impurities of the mind are thus washed away, one realizes God. The mind is like a needle covered with mud, and God is like a magnet. The needle cannot be united with the magnet unless it is free from mud. Tears wash away the mud, which is nothing but lust, anger, greed, and other evil tendencies, and the inclination to worldly enjoyments as well. As soon as the mud is washed away, the magnet attracts the needle, that is to say, man realizes God. Only the pure in heart see God. A fever patient has an excess of the watery element in his system. What can quinine do for him unless that is removed?

"Why shouldn't one realize God while living in the world? But, as I said, one must live in holy company, pray to God, weeping for His grace, and now and then go into solitude. Unless the plants on a foot-path are protected at first by fences, they are destroyed by cattle."

Need of a guru

NEIGHBOUR: "Then householders, too, will have the vision of God, won't they?"

MASTER: "Everybody will surely be liberated. But one should follow the instructions of the guru; if one follows a devious path, one will suffer in trying to retrace one's steps. It takes a long time to achieve liberation. A man may fail to obtain it in this life. Perhaps he will realize God only after many births. Sages like Janaka performed worldly duties. They performed them, bearing God in their minds, as a dancing-girl dances, keeping jars or trays on her head. Haven't you seen how the women in northwest India walk, talking and laughing while carrying water-pitchers on their beads?"

NEIGHBOUR: "You just referred to the instructions of the guru. How shall we find him?"

MASTER: "Anyone and everyone cannot be a guru. A huge timber floats on the water and can carry animals as well. But a piece of worthless wood sinks, if a man sits on it, and drowns him. Therefore in every age God incarnates Himself as the guru, to teach humanity. Satchidananda alone is the guru.

"What is knowledge? And what is the nature of this ego? 'God alone is the Doer, and none else' - that is knowledge. I am not the doer; I am a mere instrument in His hand. Therefore I say: 'O Mother, Thou art the Operator and I am the machine. Thou art the Indweller and I am the house. Thou art the Driver and I am the carriage. I move as Thou movest me. I do as Thou makest me do. I speak as Thou makest me speak. Not I, not I, but Thou, but Thou.' "

From Prankrishna's house the Master went to Colonel Viswanath's and from there to the Lily Cottage.

Chapter 3

VISIT TO VIDYASAGAR

August 5, 1882

PUNDIT ISWAR CHANDRA VIDYASAGAR was born in the village of Beersingh, not far from Kamarpukur, Sri Ramakrishna's birthplace. He was known as a great scholar, educator, writer, and philanthropist. One of the creators of modern Bengali, he was also well versed in Sanskrit grammar and poetry. His generosity made his name a household word with his countrymen, most of his income being given in charity to widows, orphans, indigent students, and other needy people. Nor was his compassion limited to human beings: he stopped drinking milk for years so that the calves should not be deprived of it, and he would not drive in a carriage for fear of causing discomfort to the horses. He was a man of indomitable spirit, which he showed when he gave up the lucrative position of principal of the Sanskrit College of Calcutta because of a disagreement with the authorities. His affection for his mother was especially deep. One day, in the absence of a ferryboat, he swam a raging river at the risk of his life to fulfil her wish that he should be present at his brother's wedding. His whole life was one of utter simplicity. The title Vidyasagar, meaning "Ocean of Learning", was given him in recognition of his vast erudition.

Master's visit to the scholar

Sri Ramakrishna had long wanted to visit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Learning from M. that he was a teacher at Vidyasagar's school, the Master asked: "Can you take me to Vidyasagar? I should like very much to see him." M. told Iswar Chandra of Sri Ramakrishna's wish, and the pundit gladly agreed that M. should bring the Master, some Saturday afternoon at four o'clock. He only asked M. what kind of paramahamsa the Master was, saying, "Does he wear an ochre cloth?" M. answered: "No, sir. He is an unusual person. He wears a red-bordered cloth and polished slippers. He lives in a room in Rani Rasmani's temple garden. In his room there is a couch with a mattress and mosquito net. He has no outer indication of holiness. But he doesn't know anything except God. Day and night he thinks of God alone."

On the afternoon of August 5 the Master left Dakshineswar in a hackney carriage, accompanied by Bhavanath, M., and Hazra. Vidyasagar lived in Badurbagan, in central Calcutta, about six miles from Dakshineswar. On the way Sri Ramakrishna talked with his companions; but as the carriage neared Vidyasagar's house his mood suddenly changed. He was overpowered with divine ecstasy. Not noticing this, M. pointed out the garden house where Raja Rammohan Roy had lived. The Master was annoyed and said, "I don't care about such things now." He was going into an ecstatic state.

The carriage stopped in front of. Vidyasagar's house. The Master alighted, supported by M., who then led the way. In the courtyard were many flowering plants. As the Master walked to the house he said to M., like a child, pointing to his shirt-button: "My shirt is unbuttoned. Will that offend Vidyasagar?" "Oh, no!" said M. "Don't be anxious about it.

Nothing about you will be offensive. You don't have to button your shirt." He accepted the assurance simply, like a child.

Vidyasagar was about sixty-two years old, sixteen or seventeen years older than the Master. He lived in a two-storey house built in the English fashion, with lawns on all sides and surrounded by a high wall. After climbing the stairs to the second floor, Sri Ramakrishna and his devotees entered a room at the far end of which Vidyasagar was seated facing them, with a table in front of him. To the right of the table was a bench. Some friends of their host occupied chairs on the other two sides.

Vidyasagar rose to receive the Master. Sri Ramakrishna stood in front of the bench, with one hand resting on the table. He gazed at Vidyasagar, as if they had known each other before, and smiled in an ecstatic mood. In that mood he remained standing a few minutes. Now and then, to bring his mind back to normal consciousness, he said, "I shall have a drink of water."

In the mean time the young members of the household and a few friends and relatives of Vidyasagar had gathered around. Sri Ramakrishna, still in an ecstatic mood, sat on the bench. A young man, seventeen or eighteen years old, who had come to Vidyasagar to seek financial help for his education, was seated there. The Master sat down at a little distance from the boy, saying in an abstracted mood: "Mother, this boy is very much attached to the world. He belongs to Thy realm of ignorance."

Vidyasagar told someone to bring water and asked M. whether the Master would like some sweetmeats also. Since M. did not object, Vidyasagar himself went eagerly to the inner apartments and brought the sweets. They were placed before the Master. Bhavanath and Hazra also received their share. When they were offered to M., Vidyasagar said: "Oh, he is like one of the family. We needn't worry about him." Referring to a young devotee, the Master said to Vidyasagar: "He is a nice young man and is sound at the core. He is like the river Phalgu. The surface is covered with sand; but if you dig a little you will find water flowing underneath."

After taking some of the sweets, the Master, with a smile, began to speak to Vidyasagar. Meanwhile the room had become filled with people; some were standing and others were seated.

MASTER: "Ah! Today, at last, I have come to the ocean. Up till now I have seen only canals, marshes, or a river at the most. But today I am face to face with the sagar, the ocean."(All laugh.)

VIDYASAGAR (smiling): "Then please take home some salt water." (Laughter.)

MASTER: "Oh, no! Why salt water? You aren't the ocean of ignorance. You are the ocean of vidyā, knowledge. You are the ocean of condensed milk." (All laugh.)

VIDYASAGAR: "Well, you may put it that way."

The pundit became silent. Sri Ramakrishna said: "Your activities are inspired by sattva. Though they are rajasic, they are influenced by sattva. Compassion springs from sattva. Though work for the good of others belongs to rajas, yet this rajas has sattva for its basis, and is not harmful. Suka and other sages cherished compassion in their minds to give people religious instruction, to teach them about God. You are distributing food and learning. That is good too. If these activities are done in a selfless spirit they lead to God. But most people work for fame or to acquire merit. Their activities are not selfless. Besides, you are already a siddha."

VIDYASAGAR: "How is that, sir?"

MASTER (laughing): "When potatoes and other vegetables are well cooked, they become soft and tender. And you possess such a tender nature! You are so compassionate!" (Laughter.)

VIDYASAGAR (laughing): "But when the paste of kalai pulse is boiled it becomes all the harder."

Uninspired scholarship condemned

MASTER: "But you don't belong to that class. Mere pundits are like diseased fruit that becomes hard and will not ripen at all. Such fruit has neither the freshness of green fruit nor the flavour of ripe. Vultures soar very high in the sky, but their eyes are fixed on rotten carrion on the ground. The book-learned are reputed to be wise, but they are attached to 'woman and gold'. Like the vultures, they are in search of carrion. They are attached to the world of ignorance. Compassion, love of God, and renunciation are the glories of true knowledge."

Vidyasagar listened to these words in silence. The others, too, gazed at the Master and were attentive to every word he said.

Vidyasagar was very reticent about giving religious instruction to others. He had studied Hindu philosophy. Once, when M. had asked him his opinion of it, Vidyasagar had said, "I think the philosophers have failed to explain what was in their minds." But in his daily life he followed all the rituals of Hindu religion and wore the sacred thread of a brahmin. About God he had once declared: "It is indeed impossible to know Him. What, then, should be our duty? It seems to me that we should live in such a way that, if others followed our example, this very earth would be heaven. Everyone should try to do good to the world."

The world of duality & Transcendental nature of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna's conversation now turned to the Knowledge of Brahman.

MASTER: "Brahman is beyond vidyā and avidyā, knowledge and ignorance. It is beyond maya, the illusion of duality.

"The world consists of the illusory duality of knowledge and ignorance. It contains knowledge and devotion, and also attachment to 'Woman and gold'; righteousness and unrighteousness; good and evil. But Brahman is unattached to these. Good and evil apply to the jiva, the individual soul, as do righteousness and unrighteousness; but Brahman is not at all affected by them.

"One man may read the Bhagavata by the light of a lamp, and another may commit a forgery by that very light; but the lamp is unaffected. The sun sheds its light on the wicked as well as on the virtuous.

"You may ask, 'How, then, can one explain misery and sin and unhappiness?' The answer is that these apply only to the jiva. Brahman is unaffected by them. There is poison in a snake; but though others may die if bitten by it, the snake itself is not affected by the poison.

Brahman cannot be expressed in words

"What Brahman is cannot he described. All things in the world - the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, the six systems of philosophy - have been defiled, like food that has been touched by the tongue, for they have been read or uttered by the tongue. Only one thing has not been defiled in this way, and that is Brahman. No one has ever been able to say what Brahman is."

VIDYASAGAR (to his friends): "Oh! That is a remarkable statement. I have learnt something new today."

MASTER: "A man had two sons. The father sent them to a preceptor to learn the Knowledge of Brahman. After a few years they returned from their preceptor's house and bowed low before their father. Wanting to measure the depth of their knowledge of Brahman, he first questioned the older of the two boys. 'My child,' he said, 'You have studied all the scriptures. Now tell me, what is the nature of Brahman?' The boy began to explain Brahman by reciting various texts from the Vedas. The father did not say anything. Then he asked the younger son the same question. But the boy remained silent and stood with eyes cast down. No word escaped his lips. The father was pleased and said to him: 'My child, you have understood a little of Brahman. What It is cannot be expressed in words.'

Parable of ant and sugar hill

"Men often think they have understood Brahman fully. Once an ant went to a hill of sugar. One grain filled its stomach. Taking another grain in its mouth it started homeward. On its way it thought, 'Next time I shall carry home the whole hill.' That is the way shallow minds think. They don't know that Brahman is beyond one's words and thought. However great a man may be, how much can he know of Brahman? Sukadeva and sages like him may have been big ants; but even they could carry at the utmost eight or ten grains of sugar!

"As for what has been said in the Vedas and the Puranas, do you know what it is like? Suppose a man has seen the ocean, and somebody asks him, 'Well, what is the ocean

like?' The first man opens his mouth as wide as he can and says: 'What a sight! What tremendous waves and sounds!' The description of Brahman in the sacred books is like that. It is said in the Vedas that Brahman is of the nature of Bliss - It is Satchidananda.

"Suka and other sages stood on the shore of this Ocean of Brahman and saw and touched the water. According to one school of thought they never plunged into it. Those who do, cannot come back to the world again.

Parable of salt doll

"In samādhi one attains the Knowledge of Brahman - one realizes Brahman. In that state reasoning stops altogether, and man becomes mute. He has no power to describe the nature of Brahman.

"Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. (All laugh.) It wanted to tell others how deep the water was. But this it could never do, for no sooner did it get into the water than it melted. Now who was there to report the ocean's depth?"

A DEVOTEE: "Suppose a man has obtained the Knowledge of Brahman in samādhi. Doesn't he speak any more?"

MASTER: "Sankaracharya retained the 'ego of Knowledge' in order to teach others. After the vision of Brahman a man becomes silent. He reasons about It as long as he has not realized It. If you heat butter in a pan on the stove, it makes a sizzling sound as long as the water it contains has not dried up. But when no trace of water is left the clarified butter makes no sound. If you put an uncooked cake of flour in that butter it sizzles again. But after the cake is cooked all sound stops. Just so, a man established in samādhi comes down to the relative plane of consciousness in order to teach others, and then he talks about God.

"The bee buzzes as long as it is not sitting on a flower. It becomes silent when it begins to sip the honey. But sometimes, intoxicated with the honey, it buzzes again.

"An empty pitcher makes a gurgling sound when it is dipped in water. When it fills up it becomes silent. (All laugh.) But if the water is poured from it into another pitcher, then you will hear the sound again. (Laughter.)

Rishis of ancient India

"The rishis of old attained the Knowledge of Brahman. One cannot have this so long as there is the slightest trace of worldliness. How hard the rishis laboured! Early in the morning they would go away from the hermitage, and would spend the whole day in solitude, meditating on Brahman. At night they would return to the hermitage and eat a little fruit or roots. They kept their minds aloof from the objects of sight, hearing, touch, and other things of a worldly nature. Only thus did they realize Brahman as their own inner consciousness.

"But in the Kaliyuga, man, being totally dependent on food for life, cannot altogether shake off the idea that he is the body. In this state of mind it is not proper for him to

say, 'I am He.' When a man does all sorts of worldly things, he should not say, 'I am Brahman.' Those who cannot give up attachment to worldly things, and who find no means to shake off the feeling of 'I', should rather cherish the idea 'I am God's servant; I am His devotee.' One can also realize God by following the path of devotion.

Jnani and Vijnāni

"The jnani gives up his identification with worldly things, discriminating, 'Not this, not this'. Only then can he realize Brahman. It is like reaching the roof of a house by leaving the steps behind, one by one. But the vijnāni, who is more intimately acquainted with Brahman, realizes something more. He realizes that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof: bricks, lime, and brick-dust. That which is realized intuitively as Brahman, through the eliminating process of 'Not this, not this', is then found to have become the universe and all its living beings. The vijnāni sees that the Reality which is nirguna, without attributes, is also saguna, with attributes.

"A man cannot live on the roof a long time. He comes down again. Those who realize Brahman in samādhi come down also and find that it is Brahman that has become the universe and its living beings. In the musical scale there are the notes sa, re ga, ma, pa, dha, and ni; but one cannot keep one's voice on 'ni' a long time. The ego does not vanish altogether. The man coming down from samādhi perceives that it is Brahman that has become the ego, the universe, and all living beings. This is known as vijnāna.

Path of love is easy

"The path of knowledge leads to Truth, as does the path that combines knowledge and love. The path of love, too, leads to this goal. The way of love is as true as the way of knowledge. All paths ultimately lead to the same Truth. But as long as God keeps the feeling of ego in us, it is easier to follow the path of love.

"The vijnāni sees that Brahman is immovable and actionless, like Mount Sumeru. This universe consists of the three gunas - sattva, rajas, and tamas. They are in Brahman. But Brahman is unattached.

God's supernatural powers

"The vijnāni further sees that what is Brahman is the Bhagavan, the Personal God. He who is beyond the three gunas is the Bhagavan, with His six supernatural powers. Living beings, the universe, mind, intelligence, love, renunciation, knowledge - all these are the manifestations of His power. (With a laugh) If an aristocrat has neither house nor property, or if he has been forced to sell them, one doesn't call him an aristocrat any more. (All laugh.) God is endowed with the six supernatural powers. If He were not who would obey Him? (All laugh.)

Different manifestations of God's power

"Just see how picturesque this universe is! How many things there are! The sun, moon, and stars; and how many varieties of living beings! - big and small, good and bad, strong and weak - some endowed with more power some with less."

VIDYASAGAR: "Has He endowed some with more power and others with less?"

MASTER: "As the All-pervading Spirit He exists in all beings, even in the ant. But the manifestations of His Power are different in different beings; otherwise, how can one person put ten to flight, while another can't face even one? And why do all people respect you? Have you grown a pair horns? (Laughter.) You have more compassion and learning. Therefore people honour you and come to pay you their respects. Don't you agree with me?"

Vidyasagar smiled.

The Master continued: "There is nothing in mere scholarship. The object of study is to find means of knowing God and realizing Him. A holy man had a book. When asked what it contained, he opened it and showed that on all the pages were written the words 'Om Rama', and nothing else.

"What is the significance of the Gita? It is what you find by repeating the word ten times. It is then reversed into 'tagi', which means a person who has renounced everything for God. And the lesson of. the Gita is: 'O man, renounce everything and seek God alone.' Whether a man is a monk or a householder, he has to shake off all attachment from his mind.

"Chaitanyadeva set out on a pilgrimage to southern India. One day he saw a man reading the Gita. Another man, seated at a distance, was listening and weeping. His eyes were swimming in tears. Chaitanyadeva asked him, 'Do you understand all this?' The man said, 'No, revered sir, I don't understand a word of the text.' 'Then why are you crying?' asked Chaitanya. The devotee said: 'I see Arjuna's chariot before me. I see Lord Krishna and Arjuna seated in front of it, talking. I see this and I weep.'

"Why does a vijnāni keep an attitude of love toward God? The answer is that 'I-consciousness' persists. It disappears in the state of samādhi, no doubt, but it comes back. In the case of ordinary people the 'I' never disappears. You may cut down the Aśwattha tree, but the next day sprouts shoot up. (All laugh.)

Ego causes our sufferings

"Even after the attainment of Knowledge this 'I-consciousness' comes up, nobody knows from where. You dream of a tiger. Then you awake; but your heart keeps on palpitating! All our suffering is due to this 'I'. The cow cries, 'Hamba!', which means 'I'. That is why it suffers so much. It is yoked to the plough and made to work in rain and sun. Then it may be killed by the butcher. From its hide shoes are made, and also drums, which are mercilessly, beaten. (Laughter.) Still it does not escape suffering. At last strings are made out of its entrails for the bows used in carding cotton. Then it no longer says, 'Hamba! Hamba!', 'I! I!' but 'Tuhu! Tuhu!', 'Thou! Thou!'. Only then are its troubles over. ☐O Lord, I am the servant; Thou art the Master. I am the child; Thou art the Mother.☐

"Once Rama asked Hanuman, 'How do you look on Me?' And Hanuman replied: 'O Rama, as long as I have the feeling of "I", I see that Thou art the whole and I am a part; Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant. But when, O Rama, I have the knowledge of Truth, then I realize that Thou art I and I am Thou.'

"The relationship of master and servant is the proper one. Since this 'I' must remain, let the rascal be God's servant.

Evil of "I" and "mine"

"'I' and 'mine' - these constitute ignorance. 'My house', 'my wealth', 'my learning', 'my possessions' - the attitude that prompts one to say such things comes of ignorance. On the contrary, the attitude born of Knowledge is: 'O God, Thou art the Master, and all these things belong to Thee. House, family, children, attendants, friends, are Thine.'

"One should constantly remember death. Nothing will survive death. We are born into this world to perform certain duties, like the people who come from the countryside to Calcutta on business. If a visitor goes to a rich man's garden, the superintendent says to him, 'This is our garden', 'This is our lake', and so forth. But if the Superintendent is dismissed for some misdeed, he can't carry away even his mango-wood chest. He sends it secretly by the gate-keeper. (Laughter.)

"God laughs on two occasions. He laughs when the physician says to the patient's mother, 'Don't be afraid, mother; I shall certainly cure your boy.' God laughs, saying to Himself, 'I am going to take his life, and this man says he will save it!' The physician thinks he is the master, forgetting that God is the Master. God laughs again when two brothers divide their land with a string, saying to each other, 'This side is mine and that side is your'. He laughs and says to Himself, 'The whole universe belongs to Me, but they say they own this portion or that portion.'

"Can one know God through reasoning? Be His servant, surrender yourself to Him, and then pray to Him.

(To Vidyasagar, with a smile) "Well, what is your attitude?"

VIDYASAGAR (smiling): "Some day I shall confide it to you."(All laugh)

MASTER (laughing): "God cannot be realized through mere scholarly reasoning."

Intoxicated with divine love, the Master sang:

Who is there that can understand what Mother Kāli is?
Even the six darsanas are powerless to reveal Her.
It is She, the scriptures say, that is the Inner Self
Of the yogi, who in Self discovers all his joy;
She that, of Her own sweet will, inhabits every living thing.

The macrocosm and microcosm rest in the Mother's womb;
Now do you see how vast it is? In the Muladhara
The yogi meditates on Her, and in the Sahasrara:
Who but Śiva has beheld Her as She really is?
Within the lotus wilderness She sports beside Her Mate, the Swan.

When man aspires to understand Her, Ramprasad must smile;
To think of knowing Her, he says, is quite as laughable
As to imagine one can swim across the boundless sea.
But while my mind has understood, alas! my heart has not;
Though but a dwarf, it still would strive to make a captive of the moon.

Continuing, the Master said: "Did you notice?

The macrocosm and microcosm rest in the Mother's womb;
Now do you see how vast it is?

Again, the poet says:

Even the six darsanas are powerless to reveal Her.

She cannot be realized by means of mere scholarship.

Power of faith

"One must have faith and love. Let me tell you how powerful faith is. A man was about to cross the sea from Ceylon to India. Bibhishana said to him: 'Tie this thing in a corner of your wearing-cloth, and you will cross the sea safely. You will be able to walk on the water. But be sure not to examine it, or you will sink.' The man was walking easily on the water of the sea - such is the strength of faith - when, having gone part of the way, he thought, 'What is this wonderful thing Bibhishana has given me, that I can walk even on the water?' He untied the knot and found only a leaf with the name of Rama written on it. 'Oh, just this!' he thought, and instantly he sank.

"There is a popular saying that Hanuman jumped over the sea through his faith in Rama's name, but Rama himself had to build a bridge.

"If a man has faith in God, then He need not be afraid though he may have committed sin - nay, the vilest sin."

Then Sri Ramakrishna sang a song glorifying the Power of faith:

If only I can pass away repeating Durga's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,

Withhold from me deliverance,
Wretched though I may be?

The Master continued: "Faith and devotion. One realizes God easily through devotion. He is grasped through ecstasy of love."

With these words the Master sang again:

How are you trying, O my mind, to know the nature of God?
You are groping like a madman locked in a dark room.
He is grasped through ecstatic love; how can you fathom Him without it?
Only through affirmation, never negation, can you know Him;
Neither through Veda nor through Tantra nor the six darsanas.

It is in love's elixir only that He delights, O mind;
He dwells in the body's inmost depths, in Everlasting Joy.
And, for that love, the mighty yogis practise yoga from age to age;
When love awakes, the Lord, like a magnet, draws to Him the soul.

He it is, says Ramprasad, that I approach as Mother;
But must I give away the secret, here in the marketplace?
From the hints I have given, O mind, guess what that Being is!

While singing, the Master went into samādhi. He was seated on the bench, facing west, the palms of his hands joined together, his body erect and motionless. Everyone watched him expectantly. Vidyasagar, too, was speechless and could not take his eyes from the Master.

Brahman and Śakti are identical

After a time Sri Ramakrishna showed signs of regaining the normal state. He drew a deep breath and said with a smile: "The means of realizing God are ecstasy of love and devotion - that is, one must love God. He who is Brahman is addressed as the Mother.

He it is, says Ramprasad, that I approach as Mother;
But must I give away the secret, here in the market-place?
From the hints I have given, O mind, guess what that Being is!

"Ramprasad asks the mind only to guess the nature of God. He wishes it to understand that what is called Brahman in the Vedas is addressed by Him as the Mother. He who is attributeless also has attributes. He who is Brahman is also Śakti. When thought of as inactive, He is called Brahman, and when thought of as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer, He is called the Primordial Energy, Kāli.

"Brahman and Śakti are identical, like fire and its power to bum. When we talk of fire we automatically mean also its power to burn. Again, the fire's power to burn implies the fire itself. If you accept the one you must accept the other.

"Brahman alone is addressed as the Mother. This is because a mother is an object of great love. One is able to realize God just through love. Ecstasy of feeling, devotion, love, and faith - these are the means. Listen to a song:

As is a man's meditation, so is his feeling of love;
As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain;
And faith is the root of all.
If in the Nectar Lake of Mother Ka1i's feet
My mind remains immersed,
Of little use are worship, oblations, or sacrifice.

Growth of divine love lessens worldly duties

"What is needed is absorption in God - loving Him intensely. The 'Nectar Lake' is the Lake of Immortality. A man sinking in It does not die, but becomes immortal. Some people believe that by thinking of God too much the mind becomes deranged; but that is not true. God is the Lake of Nectar, the Ocean of Immortality. He is called the 'Immortal' in the Vedas. Sinking in It, one does not die, but verily transcends death. Of little use are worship, oblations, or sacrifice.

If a man comes to love God, he need not trouble himself much about these activities. One needs a fan only as long as there is no breeze. The fan may be laid aside if the southern breeze blows. Then what need is there of a fan?

(To Vidyasagar) "The activities that you are engaged in are good. It is very good if you can perform them in a selfless spirit, renouncing egotism, giving up the idea that you are the doer. Through such action one develops love and devotion to God, and ultimately realizes Him.

"The more you come to love God, the less you will be inclined to perform action. When the daughter-in-law is with child, her mother-in-law gives her less work to do. As time goes by she is given less and less work. When the time of delivery nears, she is not allowed to do any work at all, lest it should hurt the child or cause difficulty at the time of birth.

"By these philanthropic activities you are really doing good to yourself. If you can do them disinterestedly, your mind will become pure and you will develop love of God. As soon as you have that love you will realize Him.

"Man cannot really help the world. God alone does that - He who has created the sun and the moon, who has put love for their children in parents' hearts, endowed noble souls with compassion, and holy men and devotees with divine love. The man who works for others, without any selfish motive, really does good to himself.

"There is gold buried in your heart, but you are not yet aware of it. It is covered with a thin layer of clay. Once you are aware of it, all these activities of yours will lessen. After the birth of her child, the daughter-in-law in the family busies herself with it alone. Everything she does is only for the child. Her mother-in-law doesn't let her do any household duties.

Parable of the wood-cutter

"Go forward. A wood-cutter once entered a forest to gather wood. A brahmachari said to him, 'Go forward.' He obeyed the injunction and discovered some sandal-wood trees. After a few days he reflected, 'The holy man asked me to go forward. He didn't tell me to stop here.' So he went forward and found a silver-mine. After a few days he went still farther and discovered a gold-mine, and next, mines of diamonds and precious stones. With these he became immensely rich.

"Through selfless work, love of God grows in the heart. Then, through His grace one realizes Him in course of time. God can be seen. One can talk to him as I am talking to you."

In silent wonder they all sat listening to the Master's words. It seemed to them that the Goddess of Wisdom Herself, seated on Sri Ramakrishna's tongue was addressing these words not merely to Vidyasagar, but to all humanity for its good.

It was nearly nine o'clock in the evening. The Master was about to leave.

Master (to Vidyasagar, with a smile): "The words I have spoken are really superfluous. You know all this; you simply aren't conscious of it. There are countless gems in the coffers of Varuna. But he himself isn't aware of them."

VIDYASAGAR (with a smile): "You may say as you like."

MASTER (smiling): "Oh yes. There are many wealthy people who don't know the names of all their servants, and are even unaware of many of the precious things in their houses."(All laugh.)

Everybody was delighted with the Master's conversation. Again addressing Vidyasagar, he said with a smile: "Please visit the temple garden some time - I mean the garden of Rasmani. It's a charming place."

VIDYASAGAR: "Oh, of course I shall go. You have so kindly come here to see me, and shall I not return your visit?"

MASTER: "Visit me? Oh, never think of such a thing!"

VIDYASAGAR: "Why, sir? Why do you say that? May I ask you to explain?"

MASTER (smiling): "You see, we are like small fishing-boats. (All smile.) We can ply in small canals and shallow waters and also in big rivers. But you are a ship. You may run aground on the way!" (All laugh.)

Vidyasagar remained silent. Sri Ramakrishna said with a laugh, "But even a ship can go there at this season."

VIDYASAGR (smiling): "Yes, this is the monsoon season." (All laugh.)

M. said to himself: "This is indeed the monsoon season of newly awakened love. At such times one doesn't care for prestige or formalities."

Sri Ramakrishna then took leave of Vidyasagar, who with his friends escorted the Master to the main gate, leading the way with a lighted candle in his hand. Before leaving the room, the Master prayed for the family's welfare, going into an ecstatic mood as he did so.

As soon as the Master and the devotees reached the gate, they saw an unexpected sight and stood still. In front of them was a bearded gentleman of fair complexion, aged about thirty-six. He wore his clothes like a Bengali, but on his head was a white turban tied after the fashion of the Sikhs. No sooner did he see the Master than he fell prostrate before him, turban and all.

When he stood up the Master said: "Who is this? Balaram? Why so late in the evening?"

BALARAM: "I have been waiting here a long time, sir."

MASTER: "Why didn't you come in?"

BALARAM: "All were listening to you. I didn't like to disturb you." The Master got into the carriage with his companions.

VIDYASAGAR (to M., softly): "Shall I pay the carriage hire?"

M: "Oh, don't bother, please. It is taken care of."

Vidyasagar and his friends bowed to Sri Ramakrishna, and the carriage started for Dakshineswar. But the little group, with the venerable Vidyasagar at their head holding the lighted candle, stood at the gate and gazed after the Master until he was out of sight.

Chapter 4

ADVICE TO HOUSEHOLDERS

August 13, 1882

THE MASTER WAS CONVERSING with Kedār and some other devotees in his room in the temple garden. Kedār was a government official and had spent several years at Dāccā, in East Bengal, where he had become a friend of Vijay Goswami. The two would spend a great part of their time together, talking about Sri Ramakrishna and his spiritual experiences. Kedār had once been a member of the Brahmo Samaj. He followed the path of bhakti. Spiritual talk always brought tears to his eyes.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. Kedār was very happy that day, having arranged a religious festival for Sri Ramakrishna. A singer had been hired by Ram, and the whole day passed in joy.

Secret of divine communion

The Master explained to the devotees the secret of communion with God.

MASTER: "With the realization of Satchidananda one goes into samādhi. Then duties drop away. Suppose I have been talking about the ostad and he arrives. What need is there of talking about him then? How long does the bee buzz around? So long as it isn't sitting on a flower. But it will not do for the sadhaka to renounce duties. He should perform his duties, such as worship, japa, meditation, prayer, and pilgrimage.

"If you see someone engaged in reasoning even after he has realized God, you may liken him to a bee, which also buzzes a little even while sipping honey from a flower."

The Master was highly pleased with the ostad's music. He said to the musician, "There is a special manifestation of God's power in a man who has any outstanding gift, such as proficiency in music."

MUSICIAN: "Sir, what is the way to realize God?"

MASTER: "Bhakti is the one essential thing. To be sure, God exists in all beings. Who, then, is a devotee? He whose mind dwells on God. But this is not possible as long as one has egotism and vanity. The water of God's grace cannot collect on the high mound of egotism. It runs down. I am a mere machine.

Master's respect for other faiths

(To Kedār and the other devotees) "God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a rope. You can also climb up by a bamboo pole.

Many names of one God

"You may say that there are many errors and superstitions in another religion. I should reply: Suppose there are. Every religion has errors. Everyone thinks that his watch alone gives the correct time. It is enough to have yearning for God. It is enough to love Him and feel attracted to Him: Don't you know that God is the Inner Guide? He sees the longing of our heart and the yearning of our soul. Suppose a man has several sons. The older boys address him distinctly as 'Baba' or 'Papa', but the babies can at best call him 'Ba' or 'Pa'. Now, will the father be angry with those who address him in this indistinct way? The father knows that they too are calling him, only they cannot pronounce his name well. All children are the same to the father. Likewise, the devotees call on God alone, though by different names. They call on one Person only. God is one, but His names are many."

Thursday, August 24, 1882.

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Hazra on the long northeast verandah of his room, when M. arrived. He saluted the Master reverently.

Spiritual disciplines necessary at the beginning

MASTER: "I should like to visit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar a few times more. The painter first draws the general outlines and then puts in the details and colours at his leisure. The moulder first makes the image out of clay, then plasters it, then gives it a coat of whitewash, and last of all paints it with a brush. All these steps must be taken successively. Vidyasagar is fully ready, but his inner stuff is covered with a thin layer. He is now engaged in doing good works; but he doesn't know what is within himself. Gold is hidden within him. God dwells within us. If one knows that, one feels like giving up all activities and praying to God with a yearning soul."

So the Master talked with M. - now standing, now pacing up and down the long verandah.

MASTER: "A little spiritual discipline is necessary in order to know what lies within."

M: "Is it necessary to practise discipline all through life?"

MASTER: "No. But one must be up and doing in the beginning. After that one need not work hard. The helmsman stands up and clutches the rudder firmly as long as the boat is passing through waves, storms, high wind, or around the curves of a river; but he relaxes after steering through them. As soon as the boat passes the curves and the helmsman feels a favourable wind, he sits comfortably and just touches the rudder. Next he prepares to unfurl the sail and gets ready for a smoke. Likewise, the aspirant enjoys peace and calm after passing the waves and storms of 'woman and gold'.

"Woman and gold" is the obstruction to yoga

"Some are born with the characteristics of the yogi; but they too should be careful. It is 'woman and gold' alone that is the obstacle; it makes them deviate from the path of yoga and drags them into worldliness. Perhaps they have some desire for enjoyment.

After fulfilling their desire, they again direct their minds to God and thus recover their former state of mind, fit for the practise of yoga.

"Have you ever seen the spring trap for fish, called the 'satka-kal'?"

M: "No, sir, I haven't seen it."

MASTER: "They use it in our part of the country. One end of a bamboo pole is fastened in the ground, and the other is bent over with a catch. From this end a line with a hook hangs over the water, with bait tied to the hook. When the fish swallows the bait, suddenly the bamboo jumps up and regains its upright position.

"Again, take a pair of scales for example. If a weight is placed on one side, the lower needle moves away from the upper one. The lower needle is the mind, and the upper one, God. The meeting of the two is yoga.

"Unless the mind becomes steady there cannot be yoga. It is the wind of worldliness that always disturbs the mind, which may be likened to a candle flame. If that flame doesn't move at all, then one is said to have attained yoga.

"'Woman and gold' alone is the obstacle to yoga. Always analyse what you see. What is there in the body of a woman? Only such things as blood, flesh, fat, entrails, and the like. Why should one love such a body?

"Sometimes I used to assume a rajasic mood in order to practise renunciation. Once I had the desire to put on a gold-embroidered robe, wear a ring on my finger, and smoke a hubble-bubble with a long pipe. Mathur Babu procured all these things for me. I wore the gold-embroidered robe and said to myself after a while, 'Mind! This is what is called a gold-embroidered robe.' Then I took it off and threw it away. I couldn't stand the robe any more. Again I said to myself, 'Mind! This is called a shawl, and this a ring, and this, smoking a hubble-bubble with a long pipe.' I threw those things away once for all, and the desire to enjoy them never arose in my mind again."

It was almost dusk. The Master and M. stood talking alone near the door on the southeast verandah.

MASTER (to M.): "The mind of the yogi is always fixed on God, always absorbed in the Self. You can recognize such a man by merely looking at him. His eyes are wide open, with an aimless look, like the eyes of the mother bird hatching her eggs. Her entire mind is fixed on the eggs, and there is a vacant look in her eyes. Can you show me such a picture?"

M: "I shall try to get one."

As evening came on, the temples were lighted up. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on his small couch, meditating on the Divine Mother. Then he chanted the names of God. Incense was burnt in the room, where an oil lamp had been lighted. Sounds of conch-

shells and gongs came floating on the air as the evening worship began in the temple of Kāli. The light of the moon flooded all the quarters. The Master again spoke to M.

God and worldly duties

MASTER: "Perform your duties in an unselfish spirit. The work that Vidyasagar is engaged in is very good. Always try to perform your duties without desiring any result."

M: "Yes, sir. But may I know if one can realize God while performing one's duties? Can 'Rama' and 'desire' coexist? The other day I read in a Hindi couplet: 'Where Rama is, there desire cannot be; where desire is, there Rama cannot be.' "

MASTER: "All, without exception, perform work. Even to chant the name and glories of God is work, as is the meditation of the non-dualist on 'I am He'. Breathing is also an activity. There is no way of renouncing work altogether. So do your work, but surrender the result to God."

God and worldly duties

M: "Sir, may I make an effort to earn more money?"

MASTER: "It is permissible to do so to maintain a religious family. You may try to increase your income, but in an honest way. The goal of life is not the earning of money, but the service of God. Money is not harmful if it is devoted to the service of God."

M: "How long should a man feel obliged to do his duty toward his wife and children?"

MASTER: "As long as they feel pinched for food and clothing. But one need not take the responsibility of a son when he is able to support himself. When the young fledgling learns to pick its own food, its mother pecks it if it comes to her for food."

M: "How long must one do one's duty?"

MASTER: "The blossom drops off when the fruit appears. One doesn't have to do one's duty after the attainment of God, nor does one feel like doing it then.

"If a drunkard takes too much liquor he cannot retain consciousness. If he takes only two or three glasses, he can go on with his work. As you advance nearer and nearer to God, He will reduce your activities little by little. Have no fear.

"Finish the few duties you have at hand, and then you will have peace. When the mistress of the house goes to bathe after finishing her cooking and other household duties, she won't come back, however you may shout after her."

Different groups of devotees

M: "Sir, what is the meaning of the realization of God? What do you mean by God-vision? How does one attain it?"

MASTER: "According to the Vaishnavas the aspirants and the seers of God may be divided into different groups. These are the pravartaka, the sadhaka, the siddha, and

the siddha of the siddha. He who has just set foot on the path may be called a pravartaka. He may be called a sadhaka who has for some time been practising spiritual disciplines, such as worship, japa, meditation, and the chanting of God's name and glories. He may be called a siddha who has known from his inner experience that God exists. An analogy is given in the Vedanta to explain this. The master of the house is asleep in a dark room. Someone is groping in the darkness to find him. He touches the couch and says, 'No, it is not he.' He touches the window and says, 'No, it is not he.' He touches the door and says, 'No, it is not he.' This is known in the Vedanta as the process of 'Neti, neti', 'Not this, not this'. At last his hand touches the master's body and he exclaims, 'Here he is!' In other words, he is now conscious of the 'existence' of the master. He has found him, but he doesn't yet know him intimately.

"There is another type, known as the siddha of the siddha, the 'supremely perfect'. It is quite a different thing when one talks to the master intimately, when one knows God very intimately through love and devotion. A siddha has undoubtedly attained God, but the 'supremely perfect' has known God very intimately.

Different moods of aspirants

"But in order to realize God, one must assume one of these attitudes: Śānta, Dāsya, sakhya, Vātsalya, or Madhur.

"Śānta, the serene attitude. The rishis of olden times had this attitude toward God. They did not desire any worldly enjoyment. It is like the single-minded devotion of a wife to her husband. She knows that her husband is the embodiment of beauty and love, a veritable Madan.

"Dāsya, the attitude of a servant toward his master. Hanuman had this attitude toward Rama. He felt the strength of a lion when he worked for Rama. A wife feels this mood also. She serves her husband with all her heart and soul. A mother also has a little of this attitude, as Yaśoda had toward Krishna.

"Sakhya, the attitude of friendship. Friends say to one another, 'Come here and sit near me.' Sridāmā and other friends sometimes fed Krishna with fruit, part of which they had already eaten, and sometimes climbed on His shoulders.

"Vātsalya, the attitude of a mother toward her child. This was Yaśoda's attitude toward Krishna. The wife, too, has a little of this. She feeds her husband with her very life-blood, as it were. The mother feels happy only when the child has eaten to his heart's content. Yaśoda would roam about with butter in her hand, in order to feed Krishna.

"Madhur, the attitude of a woman toward her paramour. Radha had this attitude toward Krishna. The wife also feels it for her husband. This attitude includes all the other four."

M: "When one sees God does one see Him with these eyes?"

MASTER: "God cannot be seen with these physical eyes. In the course of spiritual discipline one gets a 'love body', endowed with 'love eyes', 'love ears', and so on. One

sees God with those 'love eyes'. One hears the voice of God with those 'love ears'. One even gets a sexual organ made of love."

At these words M. burst out laughing. The Master continued, unannoyed, "With this 'love body' the soul communes with God."

M. again became serious.

Seeing God everywhere

MASTER: "But this is not possible without intense love of God. One sees nothing but God everywhere when one loves Him with great intensity. It is like a person with jaundice, who sees everything yellow. Then one feels, 'I am verily He'.

"A drunkard, deeply intoxicated, says, 'Verily I am Kāli!' The gopis, intoxicated with love, exclaimed, 'Verily I am Krishna!'

"One who thinks of God, day and night, beholds Him everywhere. It is like a man's seeing flames on all sides after he has gazed fixedly at one flame for some time."

"But that isn't the real flame", flashed through M.'s mind.

Sri Ramakrishna, who could read a man's inmost thought, said: "One doesn't lose consciousness by thinking of Him who is all Spirit, all Consciousness. Shivanath once remarked that too much thinking about God confounds the brain. Thereupon I said to him, 'How can one become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness?' "

M: "Yes, sir, I realize that. It isn't like thinking of an unreal object. How can a man lose his intelligence if he always fixes his mind on Him whose very nature is eternal Intelligence?"

MASTER (with pleasure): "It is through God's grace that you understand that. The doubts of the mind will not disappear without His grace. Doubts do not disappear without Self-realization.

"But one need not fear anything if one has received the grace of God. It is rather easy for a child to stumble if he holds his father's hand; but there can be no such fear if the father holds the child's hand. A man does not have to suffer any more if God, in His grace, removes his doubts and reveals Himself to him. But this grace descends upon him only after he has prayed to God with intense yearning of heart and practised spiritual discipline. The mother feels compassion for her child when she sees him running about breathlessly. She has been hiding herself; now she appears before the child."

"But why should God make us run about?" thought M

Immediately Sri Ramakrishna said: "It is His will that we should run about a little. Then it is great fun. God has created the world in play, as it were. This is called Mahamaya,

the Great Illusion. Therefore one must take refuge in the Divine Mother, the Cosmic Power Itself. It is She who has bound us with the shackles of illusion. The realization of God is possible only when those shackles are severed."

Worship of the Divine Mother

The Master continued: "One must propitiate the Divine Mother, the Primal Energy, in order to obtain God's grace. God Himself is Mahamaya, who deludes the world with Her illusion and conjures up the magic of creation, preservation, and destruction. She has spread this veil of ignorance before our eyes. We can go into the inner chamber only when She lets us pass through the door. Living outside, we see only outer objects, but not that Eternal Being, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Therefore it is stated in the purna that deities like Brahma praised Mahamaya for the destruction of the demons Madhu and Kaitabha.

"Śakti alone is the root of the universe. That Primal Energy has two aspects: vidyā and avidyā. Avidyā deludes. Avidyā conjures up 'woman and gold', which casts the spell. Vidyā begets devotion, kindness, wisdom, and love, which lead one to God. This avidyā must be propitiated, and that is the purpose of the rites of Śakti worship.

"The devotee assumes various attitudes toward Śakti in order to propitiate Her: the attitude of a handmaid, a 'hero', or a child. A hero's attitude is to please Her even as a man pleases a woman through intercourse.

"The worship of Śakti is extremely difficult. It is no joke. I passed two years as the handmaid and companion of the Divine Mother. But my natural attitude has always been that of a child toward its mother. I regard the breasts of any woman as those of my own mother.

Master's attitude toward women

"Women are, all of them, the veritable images of Śakti. In northwest India the bride holds a knife in her hand at the time of marriage; in Bengal, a nut-cutter. The meaning is that the bridegroom, with the help of the bride, who is the embodiment of the Divine Power, will sever the bondage of illusion. This is the 'heroic' attitude. I never worshipped the Divine Mother that way. My attitude toward Her is that of a child toward its mother.

"The bride is the very embodiment of Śakti. Haven't you noticed, at the marriage ceremony, how the groom sits behind like an idiot? But the bride - she is so bold!

His love for Narendra

"After attaining God one forgets His external splendour; the glories of His creation. One doesn't think of God's glories after one has seen Him. The devotee, once immersed in God's Bliss, doesn't calculate any more about outer things. When I see Narendra, I don't need to ask him: 'What's your name? Where do you live?' Where is the time for such questions? Once a man asked Hanuman which day of the fortnight it was. 'Brother,' said Hanuman, 'I don't know anything of the day of the week, or the fortnight, or the position of the stars. I think of Rama alone.' "

October 16, 1882

It was Monday, a few days before the Durga Puja, the festival of the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna was in a very happy state of mind, for Narendra was with him. Narendra had brought two or three young members of the Brahmo Samaj to the temple garden. Besides these, Rakhal, Ramlal, Hazra, and M. were with the Master.

Narendra had his midday meal with Sri Ramakrishna. Afterwards a temporary bed was made on the floor of the Master's room so that the disciples might rest awhile. A mat was spread, over which was placed a quilt covered with a white sheet. A few cushions and pillows completed the simple bed. Like a child, the Master sat near Narendranath on the bed. He talked with the devotees in great delight. With a radiant smile lighting his face, and his eyes fixed on Narendra, he was giving them various spiritual teachings, interspersing these with incidents from his own life.

MASTER: "After I had experienced samādhi, my mind craved intensely to hear only about God. I would always search for places where they were reciting or explaining the sacred books, such as the Bhagavata, the Mahabharata, and the Adhyātma Rāmāyana. I used to go to Krishnakishore to hear him read the Adhyātma Rāmāyana.

Krishnakishore's faith

"What tremendous faith Krishnakishore had! Once, while at Vrindāvan, he felt thirsty and went to a well. Near it he saw a man standing. On being asked to draw a little water for him, the man said: 'I belong to a low caste, sir. You are a brahmin. How can I draw water for you?' Krishnakishore said: 'Take the name of Śiva. By repeating His holy name you will make yourself pure.' The low-caste man did as he was told, and Krishnakishore, orthodox brahmin that he was, drank that water. What tremendous faith!

"Once a holy man came to the bank of the Ganges and lived near the bathing-ghat at Ariadaha, not far from Dakshineswar. We thought of paying him a visit. I said to Haladhāri: 'Krishnakishore and I are going to see a holy man. Will you come with us?' Haladhāri replied, 'What is the use of seeing a mere human body, which is no better than a cage of clay?' Haladhāri was a student of the Gita and Vedanta philosophy, and therefore referred to the holy man as a mere 'cage of clay'. I repeated this to Krishnakishore. With great anger he said: 'How impudent of Haladhāri to make such a remark! How can he ridicule as a "cage of clay" the body of a man who constantly thinks of God, who meditates on Rama, and has renounced all for the sake of the Lord? Doesn't he know that such a man is the embodiment of Spirit?' He was so upset by Haladhāri's remarks that he would turn his face away from him whenever he met him in the temple garden, and stopped speaking to him.

"Once Krishnakishore asked me, 'Why have you cast off the sacred thread?' In those days of God-vision I felt as if I were passing through the great storm of Āświn, and everything had blown away from me. No trace of my old self was left. I lost all consciousness of the world. I could hardly keep my cloth on my body, not to speak of

the sacred thread! I said to Krishnakishore, 'Ah, you will understand if you ever happen to be as intoxicated with God as I was.'

"And it actually came to pass. He too passed through a God-intoxicated state, when he would repeat only the word 'Om' and shut himself up alone in his room. His relatives thought he was actually mad, and called in a physician. Ram Kaviraj of Natagore came to see him. Krishnakishore said to the physician, 'Cure me, sir, of my malady, if you please, but not of my Om.' (All laugh.)

"One day I went to see him and found him in a pensive mood. When I asked him about it, he said: 'The tax-collector was here. He threatened to dispose of my brass pots, my cups, and my few utensils, if I didn't pay the tax; so I am worried.' I said: 'But why should you worry about it? Let him take away your pots and pans. Let him arrest your body even. How will that affect you? For your nature is that of Kha!' (Narendra and the others laugh.) He used to say to me that he was the Spirit, all-pervading as the sky. He had got that idea from the Adhyātma Rāmāyana. I used to tease him now and then, addressing him as 'Kha'. Therefore I said to him that day, with a smile: 'You are Kha. Taxes cannot move you!'

Master's outspokenness

"In that state of God-intoxication I used to speak out my mind to all. I was no respecter of persons. Even to men of position I was not afraid to speak the truth.

"One day Jatindra came to the garden of Jadu Mallick. I was there too. I asked him: 'What is the duty of man? Isn't it our duty to think of God?' Jatindra replied: 'We are worldly people. How is it possible for us to achieve liberation? Even King Yudhisthira had to have a vision of hell.' This made me very angry. I said to him: 'What sort of man are you? Of all the incidents of Yudhisthira's life, you remember only his seeing hell. You don't remember his truthfulness, his forbearance, his patience, his discrimination, his dispassion, his devotion to God.' I was about to say many more things, when Hriday stopped my mouth. After a little while Jatindra left the place, saying he had some other business to attend to.

"Many days later I went with Captain to see Rājā Sourindra Tagore. As soon as I met him, I said, 'I can't address you as "Rājā", or by any such title, for I should be telling a lie.' He talked to me a few minutes, but even so our conversation was interrupted by the frequent visits of Europeans and others. A man of rajasic temperament, Sourindra was naturally busy with many things. Jatindra his eldest brother, had been told of my coming, but he sent word that he had a pain in his throat and couldn't go out.

"One day, in that state of divine intoxication, I went to the bathing-ghat on the Ganges at Baranagore. There I saw Jaya Mukherji repeating the name of God; but his mind was on something else. I went up and slapped him twice on the cheeks.

"At one time Rani Rasmani was staying in the temple garden. She came to the shrine of the Divine Mother, as she frequently did when I worshipped Kāli, and asked me to sing a song or two. On this occasion, while I was singing, I noticed she was sorting the flowers

for worship absent-mindedly. At once I slapped her on the cheeks. She became quite embarrassed and sat there with folded hands.

"Alarmed at this state of mind myself, I said to my cousin Haladhāri: 'Just see my nature! How can I get rid of it?' After praying to the Divine Mother for some time with great yearning, I was able to shake off this habit.

His anguish at worldly talk

"When one gets into such a state of mind, one doesn't enjoy any conversation but that about God. I used to weep when I heard people talk about worldly matters. When I accompanied Mathur Babu on a pilgrimage, we spent a few days in Benares at Raja Babu's house. One day I was seated in the drawing-room with Mathur Babu, Raja Babu, and others. Hearing them talk about various worldly things, such as their business losses and so forth, I wept bitterly and said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, where have You brought me? I was much better off in the temple garden at Dakshineswar. Here I am in a place where I must bear about "woman and gold". But at Dakshineswar I could avoid it.' "

The Master asked the devotees, especially Narendra, to rest awhile, and he himself lay down on the smaller couch.

His ecstasy in Kirtan

Late in the afternoon Narendra sang. Rakhal, Lātu, M., Hazra, and Priya, Narendra's Brahmo friend, were present. The singing was accompanied by the drum:

Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,
The Stainless One, Pure Spirit through and through.
How peerless is the light that in Him shines!
How soul-bewitching is His wondrous form!
How dear is He to all His devotees!

After this song Narendra sang:

Oh, when will dawn for me that day of blessedness
When He who is all Good, all Beauty, and all Truth,
Will light the inmost shrine of my heart?
When shall I sink at last, ever beholding Him,
Into that Ocean of Delight?
Lord, as Infinite Wisdom Thou shalt enter my soul,
And my unquiet mind, made speechless by Thy sight,
Will find a haven at Thy feet.
In my heart's firmament, O Lord, Thou wilt arise
As Blissful Immortality;
And as, when the chakora beholds the rising moon,
It sports about for very joy,
So, too, shall I be filled with heavenly happiness
When Thou appearest unto me.

Thou One without a Second, all Peace, the King of Kings!
At Thy beloved feet I shall renounce my life
And so at last shall gain life's goal;
1 shall enjoy the bliss of heaven while yet on earth!
Where else is a boon so rare bestowed?
Then shall I see Thy glory, pure and untouched by stain;
As darkness flees from 1ight, so will my darkest sins
Desert me at Thy dawn's approach.
Kindle in me, O Lord, the blazing fire of faith
To be the pole-star of my life;
O Succour of the weak, fulfil my one desire!
Then shall I bathe both day and night
In the boundless bliss of Thy Love, and utterly forget
Myself, O Lord, attaining Thee.

Narendra sang again:

With beaming face chant the sweet name of God
Till in your heart the nectar overflows.
Drink of it ceaselessly and share it with all!
If ever your heart runs dry, parched by the flames
Of worldly desire, chant the sweet name of God,
And heavenly love will moisten your arid soul.

Be sure, O mind, you never forget to chant
His holy name: when danger stares in your face,
Call on Him, your Father Compassionate;
With His name's thunder, snap the fetters of sin!
Come, let us fulfil our hearts' desires
By drinking deep of Everlasting Joy,
Made one with Him in Love's pure ecstasy.

Now Narendra and the devotees began to sing kirtan, accompanied by the drum and cymbals. They moved round and round the Master as they sang:

Immerse yourself for evermore, O mind,
In Him who is Pure Knowledge and Pure Bliss.

Next they sang:

Oh, when will dawn for me that day of blessedness
When He who is all Good, all Beauty, and all Truth
Will light the inmost shrine of my heart?

At last Narendra himself was playing on the drums, and he sang with the Master, full of joy:

With beaming face chant the sweet name of God

When the music was over, Sri Ramakrishna held Narendra in his arms a long time and said, "You have made us so happy today!" The flood-gate of the Master's heart was open so wide, that night, that he could hardly contain himself for joy. It was eight o'clock in the evening. Intoxicated with divine love, he paced the long verandah north of his room. Now and then he could be heard talking to the Divine Mother. Suddenly he said in an excited voice, "What can you do to me?" Was the Master hinting that maya was helpless before him, since he had the Divine Mother for his support?

Narendra, M., and Priya were going to spend the night at the temple garden. This pleased the Master highly, especially since Narendra would be with him. The Holy Mother, who was living in the nahabat, had prepared the supper. Surendra bore the greater part of the Master's expenses. The meal was ready, and the plates were set out on the southeast verandah of the Masters room.

Near the east door of his room Narendra and the other devotees were gossiping.

NARENDRA: "How do you find the young men nowadays?"

M: "They are not bad; but they don't receive any religious instructions".

NARENDRA: "But from my experience I feel they are going to the dogs. They smoke cigarettes, indulge in frivolous talk, enjoy foppishness, play truant, and do everything of that sort. I have even seen them visiting questionable places."

M: "I didn't notice such things during our student days."

NARENDRA: "Perhaps you didn't mix with the students intimately. I have even seen them talking with people of immoral character. Perhaps they are on terms of intimacy with them."

M: "It is strange indeed."

NARENDRA: "I know that many of them form bad habits. It would be proper if the guardians of the boys, and the authorities, kept their eyes on these matters."

They Were talking thus when Sri Ramakrishna came to them and asked with a smile, "Well, what are you talking about?"

NARENDRA: "I have been asking M. about the boys in the schools. The conduct of students nowadays isn't all that it should be."

The Master became grave and said to M. rather seriously: "This kind of conversation is not good. It isn't desirable to indulge in any talk but talk of God. You are their senior, and you are intelligent. You should not have encouraged them to talk about such matters."

Narendra was then about nineteen years old, and M. about twenty-eight. Thus admonished, M. felt embarrassed, and the others also fell silent.

While the devotees were enjoying their meal, Sri Ramakrishna stood by and watched them with intense delight. That night the Master's joy was very great.

After supper the devotees rested on the mat spread on the floor of the Master's room. They began to talk with him. It was indeed a mart of joy. The Master asked Narendra to sing the song beginning with the line: "In Wisdom's firmament the moon of Love is rising full."

Narendra sang, and other devotees played the drums and cymbals:

In Wisdom's firmament the moon of Love is rising full,
And Love's flood-tide, in surging waves, is flowing everywhere.
O Lord, how full of bliss Thou art! Victory unto Thee!

On every side shine devotees, like stars around the moon;
Their Friend, the Lord All-merciful, joyously plays with them.
Behold! the gates of paradise today are open wide.

The soft spring wind of the New Day raises fresh waves of joy;
Gently it carries to the earth the fragrance of God's Love,
Till all the yogis, drunk with bliss, are lost in ecstasy.

Upon the sea of the world unfolds the lotus of the New Day,
And there the Mother sits enshrined in blissful majesty.
See how the bees are mad with joy, sipping the nectar there!

Behold the Mother's radiant face, which so enchants the heart
And captivates the universe! About Her Lotus Feet
Bands of ecstatic holy men are dancing in delight.

What matchless loveliness is Hers! What infinite content
Pervades the heart when She appears! O brothers, says Premdas,
I humbly beg you, one and all, to sing the Mother's praise!

Sri Ramakrishna sang and danced, and the devotees danced around him.

A devotee's dream

When the song was over, the Master walked up and down the northeast verandah, where Hazra was seated with M. The Master sat down there. He asked a devotee, "Do you ever have dreams?"

DEVOTEE: "Yes, sir. The other day I dreamt a strange dream. I saw the whole world enveloped in water. There was water on all sides. A few boats were visible, but suddenly huge waves appeared and sank them. I was about to board a ship with a few others, when we saw a brahmin walking over that expanse of water. I asked him, 'How can you walk over the deep?' The brahmin said with a smile: 'Oh, there is no difficulty about that. There is a bridge under the water.' I said to him, 'Where are you going?' 'To Bhawanipur, the city of the Divine Mother', he replied. 'Wait a little', I cried. 'I shall accompany you.' "

MASTER: "Oh. I am thrilled to hear the story!"

DEVOTEE: "The brahmin said: 'I am in a hurry. It will take you some time to get out of the boat. Good-bye. Remember this path and come after me.

MASTER: "Oh, my hair is standing on end! Please be initiated by a guru as soon as possible."

Shortly before midnight Narendra and the other devotees lay down on a bed made on the floor of the Master's room.

At dawn some of the devotees were up. They saw the Master, naked as a child, pacing up and down the room, repeating the names of the various gods and goddesses. His voice was sweet as nectar. Now he would look at the Ganges, now stop in front of the pictures hanging on the wall and bow down before them, chanting all the while the holy names in his sweet voice. He chanted: "Veda, Purana, Tantra; Gita, Gayatri; Bhagavata, Bhakta, Bhagavan." Referring to the Gita, he repeated many times, "Tagi, tagi, tagi." Now and then he would say: "O Mother, Thou art verily Brahman, and Thou art verily Śakti. Thou art Purusha and Thou art Prakriti. Thou art Virat. Thou art the Absolute, and Thou dost manifest Thyself as the Relative. Thou art verily the twenty-four cosmic principles."

In the mean time the morning service had begun in the temples of Kāli and Radhakanta. Sounds of conch-shells and cymbals were carried on the air. The devotees came outside the room and saw the priests and servants gathering flowers in the garden for the divine service in the temples. From the nahabat floated the sweet melody of musical instruments, befitting the morning hours.

Narendra and the other devotees finished their morning duties and came to the Master. With a sweet smile on his lips Sri Ramakrishna was standing on the northeast verandah, close to his own room.

NARENDRA: "We noticed several sannyasis belonging to the sect of Nanak in the Panchavati."

MASTER: "Yes, they arrived here yesterday. (To Narendra) I'd like to see you all sitting together on the mat."

As they sat there the Master looked at them with evident delight. He then began to talk with them. Narendra asked about spiritual discipline.

MASTER: "Bhakti, love of God, is the essence of all spiritual discipline. Through love one acquires renunciation and discrimination naturally."

Disciplines of Tantra

NARENDRA: "Isn't it true that the Tantra prescribes spiritual discipline in the company of woman?"

MASTER: "That is not desirable. It is a very difficult path and often causes the aspirant's downfall. There are three such kinds of discipline. One may regard woman as one's mistress or look on oneself as her handmaid or as her child. I look on woman as my mother. To look on oneself as her handmaid is also good; but it is extremely difficult to practise spiritual discipline looking on woman as one's mistress. To regard oneself as her child is a very pure attitude."

The sannyasis belonging to the sect of Nanak entered the room and greeted the Master, saying, "Namo Narayanaya." Sri Ramakrishna asked them to sit down.

All is possible with God

MASTFR: "Nothing is impossible for God. Nobody can describe His nature in words. Everything is possible for Him. There lived at a certain place two yogis who were practising spiritual discipline. The sage Narada was passing that way one day. Realizing who he was, one of the yogis said: 'You have just come from God Himself. What is He doing now?' Narada replied, 'Why, I saw Him making camels and elephants pass and repass through the eye of a needle.' At this the yogi said: 'Is that anything to wonder at? Everything is possible for God.' But the other yogi said: 'What? Making elephants pass through the eye of a needle - is that ever possible? You have never been to the Lord's dwelling-place.' "

At nine o'clock in the morning, while the Master was still sitting in his room, Manomohan arrived from Konnagar with some members of his family. In answer to Sri Ramakrishna's kind inquiries, Manomohan explained that he was taking them to Calcutta. The Master said: "Today is the first day of the Bengali month, an inauspicious day for undertaking a journey. I hope everything will be well with you." With a smile he began to talk of other matters.

When Narendra and his friends had finished bathing in the Ganges, the Master said to them earnestly: "Go to the Panchavati and meditate there under the banyan-tree. Shall I give you something to sit on?"

Discrimination and dispassion

About half past ten Narendra and his Brahmo friends were meditating in the Panchavati. After a while Sri Ramakrishna came to them. M., too, was present.

The Master said to the Brahmo devotees: "In meditation one must be absorbed in God. By merely floating on the surface of the water, can you reach the gems lying at the bottom of the sea?"

Then he sang:

Taking the name of Kāli, dive deep down,
O mind, Into the heart's fathomless depths,
Where many a precious gem lies hid.
But never believe the bed of the ocean bare of gems
If in the first few dives you fail;
With firm resolve and self-control
Dive deep and make your way to Mother Kāli's realm.

Down in the ocean depths of heavenly Wisdom lie
The wondrous pearls of Peace, O mind;
And you yourself can gather them,
If you but have pure love and follow the scriptures' rule.
Within those ocean depths, as well,
Six alligators, lurk - lust, anger, and the rest -
Swimming about in search of prey.
Smear yourself with the turmeric of discrimination;
The very smell of it will shield you from their jaws.
Upon the ocean bed lie strewn
Unnumbered pearls and precious gems;
Plunge in, says Ramprasad, and gather up handfuls there!

Narendra and his friends came down from their seats on the raised platform of the Panchavati and stood near the Master. He returned to his room with them. The Master continued: "When you plunge in the water of the ocean, you may be attacked by alligators. But they won't touch you if your body is smeared with turmeric. There are no doubt six alligators - lust, anger, avarice, and so on - within you, in the 'heart's fathomless depths'. But protect yourself with the turmeric of discrimination and renunciation, and they won't touch you.

Futility of mere lecturing

"What can you achieve by mere lecturing and scholarship without discrimination and dispassion? God alone is real, and all else is unreal. God alone is substance, and all else is nonentity. That is discrimination.

"First of all set up God in the shrine of your heart, and then deliver lectures as much as you like. How will the mere repetition of 'Brahma' profit you if you are not imbued with discrimination and dispassion? It is the empty sound of a conch-shell.

"There lived in a village a young man named Padmalochan. People used to call him 'Podo', for short. In this village there was a temple in a very dilapidated condition. It contained no image of God. Aśwattha and other plants sprang up on the ruins of its

walls. Bats lived inside, and the floor was covered with dust and the droppings of the bats. The people of the village had stopped visiting the temple. One day after dusk the villagers heard the sound of a conch-shell from the direction of the temple. They thought perhaps someone had installed an image in the shrine and was performing the evening worship. One of them softly opened the door and saw Padmalochan standing in a corner, blowing the conch. No image had been set up. The temple hadn't been swept or washed. And filth and dirt lay everywhere. Then he shouted to Podo:

You have set up no image here,
Within the shrine, O fool!
Blowing the conch, you simply make
Confusion worse confounded.
Day and night eleven bats
Scream there incessantly.

Purification of mind

"There is no use in merely making a noise if you want to establish the Deity in the shrine of your heart, if you want to realize God. First of all purify the mind. In the pure heart God takes His seat. One cannot bring the holy image into the temple if the droppings of bats are all around. The eleven bats are our eleven organs: five of action, five of perception, and the mind.

"First of all invoke the Deity, and then give lectures to your heart's content. First of all dive deep. Plunge to the bottom and gather up the gems. Then you may do other things. But nobody wants to plunge. People are without spiritual discipline and prayer, without renunciation and dispassion. They learn a few words and immediately start to deliver lectures. It is difficult to teach others. Only if a man gets a command from God, after realizing Him, is he entitled to teach."

Thus conversing, the Master came to the west end of the verandah. M stood by his side. Sri Ramakrishna had repeated again and again that God cannot be realized without discrimination and renunciation. This made M. extremely worried. He had married and was then a young man of twenty-eight, educated in college in the Western way. Having a sense of duty, he asked himself, "Do discrimination and dispassion mean giving up 'woman and gold'?" He was really at a loss to know what to do.

M. (to the Master): "What should one do if one's wife says: 'You are neglecting me. I shall commit suicide?' "

MASTER (in a serious tone): "Give up such a wife if she proves an obstacle in the way of spiritual life. Let her commit suicide or anything else she likes. The wife that hampers her husband's spiritual life is an ungodly wife."

Immersed in deep thought, M. stood leaning against the wall. Narendra and the other devotees remained silent a few minutes. The Master exchanged several words with them; then, suddenly going to M., he whispered in his ear: "But if a man has sincere love for God, then all come under his control - the king, wicked persons, and his wife.

Sincere love of God on the husband's part may eventually help the wife to lead a spiritual life. If the husband is good, then through the grace of God the wife may also follow his example."

This had a most soothing effect on M.'s worried mind. All the while he had been thinking: "Let her commit suicide. What can I do?"

M. (to the Master): "This world is a terrible place indeed."

MASTER (to the devotees): "That is the reason Chaitanya said to his companion Nityananda, 'Listen, brother, there is no hope of salvation for the worldly-minded.' "

On another occasion the Master had said to M. privately: "Yes, there is no hope for a worldly man if he is not sincerely devoted to God. But he has nothing to fear if he remains in the world after realizing God. Nor need a man have any fear whatever of the world if he attains sincere devotion by practising spiritual discipline now and then in solitude. Chaitanya had several householders among his devotees, but they were householders in name only, for they lived unattached to the world."

It was noon. The worship was over, and food offerings had been made in the temple. The doors of the temple were shut. Sri Ramakrishna sat down for his meal, and Narendra and the other devotees partook of the food offerings from the temple.

Sunday, October 22, 1882

It was the day of Vijaya, the last day of the celebration of the worship of Durga, when the clay image is immersed in the water of a lake or river.

About nine o'clock in the morning M. was seated on the floor of the Master's room at Dakshineswar, near Sri Ramakrishna, who was reclining on the small couch. Rakhal was then living with the Master, and Narendra and Bhavanath visited him frequently. Baburam had seen him only once or twice.

MASTER: "Did you have any holiday during the Durga Puja?"

M: "Yes, sir. I went to Keshab's house every day for the first three days of the worship."

MASTER: "Is that so?"

M: "I heard there a very interesting interpretation of the Durga Puja."

MASTER: "Please tell me all about it."

M: "Keshab Sen held daily morning prayers in his house, lasting till ten or eleven. During these prayers he gave the inner meaning of the Durga Puja. He said that if anyone could realize the Divine Mother, that is to say, could install Mother Durga in the shrine of his heart, then Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Kartika, and Ganesa would come there of themselves. Lakshmi means wealth, Sarasvati knowledge, Kartika strength, and Ganesa

success. By realizing the Divine Mother within one's heart, one gets all these without any effort whatever."

Sri Ramakrishna listened to the description, questioning M. now and then about the prayers conducted by Keshab. At last he said to M.: "Don't go hither and thither. Come here alone. Those who belong to the inner circle of my devotees will come only here. Boys like Narendra, Bhavanath, and Rakhal are my very intimate disciples. They are not to be thought lightly of. Feed them one day. What do you think of Narendra?"

M: "I think very highly of him, sir."

Narendra's many virtues

MASTER: "Haven't you observed his many virtues? He is not only well versed in music, vocal and instrumental, but he is also very learned. Besides, he has controlled his passions and declares he will lead a celibate life. He has been devoted to God since his very boyhood.

Meditation on God with form

"How are you getting along with your meditation nowadays? What aspect of God appeals to your mind - with form or without form?"

M: "Sir, now I can't fix my mind on God with form. On the other hand, I can't concentrate steadily on God without form."

MASTER: "Now you see that the mind cannot be fixed, all of a sudden, on the formless aspect of God. It is wise to think of God with form during the primary stages."

M: "Do you mean to suggest that one should meditate on clay images?"

MASTER: "Why clay? These images are the embodiments of Consciousness."

M: "Even so, one must think of hands, feet, and the other parts of body. But again, I realize that the mind cannot be concentrated unless one meditates, in the beginning, on God with form. You have told me so. Well, God can easily assume different forms. May one meditate on the form of one's own mother?"

MASTER: "Yes, the mother should be adored. She is indeed an embodiment of Brahman."

M. sat in silence. After a few minutes he asked the Master: "What does one feel while thinking of God without form? Isn't it possible to describe it?" After some reflection, the Master said, "Do you know what it is like?" He remained silent a moment and then said a few words to M. about one's experiences at the time of the vision of God with and without form.

MASTER: "You see, one must practise spiritual discipline to understand this correctly. Suppose, there are treasures in a room. If you want to see them and lay hold of them, you must take the trouble to get the key and unlock the door. After that you must take the treasures out. But suppose the room is locked, and standing outside the door you say to yourself: 'Here I have opened the door. Now I have broken the lock of the chest. Now I have taken out the treasure.' Such brooding near the door will not enable you to achieve anything. You must practise discipline.

Brahman and Divine Incarnations

"The jnanis think of God without form. They don't accept the Divine Incarnation. Praising Sri Krishna, Arjuna said, 'Thou art Brahman Absolute.' Sri Krishna replied, 'Follow Me, and you will know whether or not I am Brahman Absolute.' So saying, Sri Krishna led Arjuna to a certain place and asked him what he saw there. 'I see a huge tree,' said Arjuna, 'and on it I notice fruits hanging like clusters of blackberries.' Then Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Come nearer and you will find that these are not clusters of blackberries, but clusters of innumerable Krishnas like Me, hanging from the tree.' In other words, Divine Incarnations without number appear and disappear on the tree of the Absolute Brahman.

"Kavirdas was strongly inclined to the formless God. At the mention of Krishna's name he would say: 'Why should I worship Him? The gopis would clap their hands while He performed a monkey dance.' (With a smile) But I accept God with form when I am in the company of people who believe in that ideal, and I also agree with those who believe in the formless God."

M. (smiling): "You are as infinite as He of whom we have been talking. Truly, no one can fathom your depth."

MASTER (smiling): "Ah! I see you have found it out. Let me tell you one thing. One should follow various paths. One should practise each creed for a time. In a game of satrancha a piece can't reach the centre square until it completes the circle; but once in the square it can't be overtaken by any other piece."

M: "That is true, sir."

MASTER: "There are two classes of. yogis: the bahudakas and the kutichakas. The bahudakas roam about visiting various holy places and have not yet found peace of mind. But the kutichakas, having visited all the sacred places, have quieted their minds. Feeling serene and peaceful, they settle down in one place and no longer move about. In that one place they are happy; they don't feel the need of going to any sacred place. If one of them ever visits a place of pilgrimage, it is only for the purpose of new inspiration.

"I had to practise each religion for a time - Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the paths of the Saktas, Vaishnavas, and Vedantists. I realized that there is only one God toward whom all are travelling; but the paths are different.

"While visiting the holy places, I would sometimes suffer great agony. Once I went with Mathur to Raja Babu's drawing-room in Benares. I found that they talked there only of worldly matters - money, real estate, and the like. At this I burst into tears. I said to the Divine Mother, weeping: 'Mother! Where hast Thou brought me? I was much better off at Dakshineswar.' In Allahabad I noticed the same things that I saw elsewhere - the same ponds, the same grass, the same trees, the same tamarind-leaves.

Master's ecstasy at Vrindāvan

"But one undoubtedly finds inspiration in a holy place. I accompanied Mathur Babu to Vrindāvan. Hriday and the ladies of Mathur's family were in our party. No sooner did I see the Kaliyadaman Ghat than a divine emotion surged up within me. I was completely overwhelmed. Hriday used to bathe me there as if I were a small child.

"In the dusk I would walk on the bank of the Jamuna when the cattle returned along the sandy banks from their pastures. At the very sight of those cows the thought of Krishna would flash in my mind. I would run along like a madman, crying: 'Oh, where is Krishna? Where is my Krishna?'

"I went to Syamakunda and Radhakunda in a palanquin and got out to visit the holy Mount Govardhan. At the very sight of the mount I was overpowered with divine emotion and ran to the top. I lost all consciousness of the world around me. The residents of the place helped me to come down. On my way to the sacred pools of Syamakunda and Radhakunda, when I saw the meadows, the trees, the shrubs, the birds, and the deer, I was overcome with ecstasy. My clothes became wet with tears. I said: 'O Krishna! Everything here is as it was in the olden days. You alone are absent.' Seated inside the palanquin I lost all power of speech. Hriday followed the palanquin. He had warned the bearers to be careful about me.

"Gangamayi became very fond of me in Vrindāvan. She was an old woman who lived all alone in a hut near the Nidhuvan. Referring to my spiritual condition and ecstasy, she said, 'He is the very embodiment of Radha.' She addressed me as 'Dulali'. When with her, I used to forget my food and drink, my bath, and all thought of going home. On some days Hriday used to bring food from home and feed me. Gangamayi also would serve me with food prepared by her own hands.

"Gangamayi used to experience trances. At such times a great crowd would come to see her. One day, in a state of ecstasy, she climbed on Hriday's shoulders.

"I didn't want to leave her and return to Calcutta. Everything was arranged for me to stay with her. I was to eat double-boiled rice, and we were to have our beds on either side of the cottage. All the arrangements had been made, when Hriday said: 'You have such a weak stomach. Who will look after you?' 'Why,' said Gangamayi, 'I shall look after him. I'll nurse him.' As Hriday dragged me by one hand and she by the other, I remembered my mother, who was then living alone here in the nahabat of temple garden. I found it impossible to stay away from her, and said to Gangamayi, 'No, I must go.' I loved the atmosphere of Vrindāvan."

About eleven o'clock the Master took his meal, the offerings from temple of Kāli. After taking his noonday rest he resumed his conversation with the devotees. Every now and then he uttered the holy word "Om" or repeated the sacred names of the deities.

After sunset the evening worship was performed in the temples. Since it was the day of Vijaya, the devotees first saluted the Divine Mother and then took the dust of the Master's feet.

Tuesday, October 24,1882

It was three or four o'clock in the afternoon. The Master was standing near the shelf where the food was kept, when Balaram and M. arrived from Calcutta and saluted him. Sri Ramakrishna said to them with a smile: "I was going to take some sweets from the shelf, but no sooner did I put my hand on them than a lizard dropped on my body. At once I removed my hand. (All laugh.)

"Oh, yes! One should observe all these things. You see, Rakhal is ill, and my limbs ache too. Do you know what's the matter? This morning as I was leaving my bed I saw a certain person, whom I took for Rakhal. (All laugh.) Oh, yes! Physical features should be studied. The other day Narendra brought one of his friends, a man with only one good eye, though the other eye was not totally blind. I said to myself, 'What is this trouble that Narendra has brought with him?'

"A certain person comes here, but I can't eat any food that he brings. He works in an office at a salary of twenty rupees and earns another twenty by writing false bills. I can't utter a word in his presence, because he tells lies. Sometimes he stays here two or three days without going to his office. Can you guess his purpose? It is that I should recommend him to someone for a job somewhere else.

"Balaram comes from a family of devout Vaishnavas. His father, now an old man, is a pious devotee. He has a tuft of hair on his head, a rosary of tulsi beads round his neck, and a string of beads in his hand. He devotes his time to the repetition of God's name. He owns much property in Orissa and has built temples to Radha-Krishna in Kothar, Vrindāvan, and other places, establishing free guest-houses as well.

(To Balaram) "A certain person came here the other day. I understand he is the slave of that black hag of a wife. Why is it that people do not see God? It is because of the barrier of 'woman and gold'. How impudent he was to say to you the other day, 'A paramahamsa came to my father, who fed him with chicken curry!'

"In my present of my mind I can eat a little fish soup if it has been offered to the Divine Mother beforehand. I can't eat any meat, even if it is offered to the Divine Mother; but I taste it with the end of my finger lest She should be angry. (Laughter.)

"Well, can you explain this state of my mind? Once I was going from Burdwan to Kamarpukur in a bullock-cart, when a great storm arose. Some people gathered near the cart. My companions said they were robbers. So I began to repeat the names of

God, calling sometimes on Kāli, sometimes on Rama, sometimes on Hanuman. What do you think of that?"

Was the Master hinting that God is one but is addressed differently by different sects?

MASTER (to Balaram): "Maya is nothing but 'woman and gold'. A man living in its midst gradually loses his spiritual alertness. He thinks all is well with him. The scavenger carries a tub of night-soil on his head, and in course of time loses his repulsion to it. One gradually acquires love of God through the practice of chanting God's name and glories. (To M.) One should not be ashamed of chanting God's holy name. As the saying goes, 'One does not succeed so long as one has these three: shame, hatred, and fear.'

"At Kamarpukur they sing kirtan very well. The devotional music is sung to the accompaniment of drums.

(To Balaram) "Have you installed any image at Vrindāvan?"

BALARAM: "Yes, sir. We have a grove where Krishna is worshipped."

Chapter 5

THE MASTER AND KESHAB

October 27, 1882

Master's boat trip with Keshab

IT WAS FRIDAY, the day of the Lakshmi Puja. Keshab Chandra Sen had arranged a boat trip on the Ganges for Sri Ramakrishna.

About four o'clock in the afternoon the steamboat with Keshab and his Brahmo followers cast anchor in the Ganges alongside the Kāli temple at Dakshineswar. The passengers saw in front of them the bathing-ghat and the chandni. To their left, in the temple compound, stood six temples of Śiva, and to their right another group of six Śiva temples. The white steeple of the Kāli temple, the tree-tops of the Panchavati, and the silhouette of pine-trees stood high against the blue autumn sky. The gardens between the two nahabats were filled with fragrant flowers, and along the bank of the Ganges were rows of flowering plants. The blue sky was reflected in the brown water of the river, the sacred Ganges, associated with the most ancient traditions of Aryan civilization. The outer world appeared soft and serene, and the hearts of the Brahmo devotees were filled with peace.

Master in samādhi

Sri Ramakrishna was in his room talking with Vijay and Haralal. Some disciples of Keshab entered. Bowing before the Master, they said to him: "Sir, the steamer has arrived. Keshab Babu has asked us to take you there." A small boat was to carry the Master to the steamer. No sooner did he get into the boat than he lost outer consciousness in samādhi. Vijay was with him.

M. was among the passengers. As the boat came alongside the steamer, all rushed to the railing to have a view of Sri Ramakrishna. Keshab became anxious to get him safely on board. With great difficulty the Master was brought back to consciousness of the world and taken to a cabin in the steamer. Still in an abstracted mood, he walked mechanically, leaning on a devotee for support. Keshab and the others bowed before him, but he was not aware of them. Inside the cabin there were a few chairs and a table. He was made to sit on one of the chairs, Keshab and Vijay occupying two others. Some devotees were also seated, most of them on the floor, while many others had to stand outside. They peered eagerly through the door and windows. Sri Ramakrishna again went into deep samādhi and became totally unconscious of the outer world.

As the air in the room was stuffy because of the crowd of people, Keshab opened the windows. He was embarrassed to meet Vijay, since they had differed in certain principles of the Brāhrno Samaj and Vijay had separated himself from Keshab's organization, joining another society.

The Brahmo devotees looked wistfully at the Master. Gradually he came back to sense consciousness; but the divine intoxication still lingered. He said to himself in a whisper: "Mother, why have You brought me here? They are hedged around and not free. Can I free them?" Did the Master find that the people assembled there were locked within the prison walls of the world? Did their helplessness make the Master address these words to the Divine Mother?

God dwells in devotee's heart

Sri Ramakrishna was gradually becoming conscious of the outside world. Nilmadhav of Ghazipur and a Brahmo devotee were talking about Pavhari Baba. Another Brahmo devotee said to the Master: "Sir, these gentlemen visited Pavhari Baba. He lives in Ghazipur. He is a holy man like yourself." The Master could hardly talk; he only smiled. The devotee continued, "Sir, Pavhari Baba keeps your photograph in his room." Pointing to his body the Master said with a smile, "Just a pillow-case."

The Master continued: "But you should remember that the heart of the devotee is the abode of God. He dwells, no doubt, in all beings, but He especially manifests Himself in the heart of the devotee. A landlord may at one time or another visit all parts of his estate, but people say he is generally to be found in a particular drawing-room. The heart of the devotee is the drawing-room of God.

Attitude of jnānis and bhaktās

"He who is called Brahman by the jnanis is known as Ātman by the yogis and as Bhagavan by the bhaktas. The same brahmin is called priest, when worshipping in the temple, and cook, when preparing a meal in the kitchen. The jnani sticking to the path of knowledge, always reasons about the Reality, saying, 'Not this, not this'. Brahman is neither 'this' nor 'that'; It is neither the universe nor its living beings. Reasoning in this way, the mind becomes steady. Then it disappears and the aspirant goes into samādhi. This is the knowledge of Brahman. It is the unwavering conviction of the jnani that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. All these names and forms are illusory, like a dream. What Brahman is cannot be described. One cannot even say that Brahman is a Person. This is the opinion of the jnanis, the followers of Vedanta philosophy.

"But the bhaktas accept all the states of consciousness. They take the waking state to be real also. They don't think the world to be illusory, like a dream. They say that the universe is a manifestation of God's power and glory. God has created all these - sky, stars, moon, sun, mountains, ocean, men, animals. They constitute His glory. He is within us, in our hearts. Again, He is outside. The most advanced devotees say that He Himself has become all this - the twenty-four cosmic principles, the universe, and all living beings. The devotee of God wants to eat sugar, not to become sugar. (All laugh.)

"Do you know how a lover of God feels? His attitude is: 'O God, Thou are the Master, and I am Thy servant. Thou art the Mother, and I am Thy child.' Or again: 'Thou art my Father and Mother. Thou art the Whole, and I am a part.' He doesn't like to say, 'I am Brahman.'

Attitude of yogis

"The yogi seeks to realize the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul. His ideal is the union of the embodied soul and the Supreme Soul. He withdraws his mind from sense-objects and tries to concentrate it on the Paramatman. Therefore, during the first stage of his spiritual discipline, he retires into solitude and with undivided attention practises meditation in a fixed posture.

"But the Reality is one and the same. The difference is only in name. He who is Brahman is verily Ātman, and again, He is the Bhagavan. He is Brahman to the followers of the path of knowledge, Paramatman to the yogis, and Bhagavan to the lovers of God."

The steamer had been going toward Calcutta; but the passengers, with their eyes fixed on the Master and their ears given to his nectar-like words, were oblivious of its motion. Dakshineswar, with its temples and gardens, was left behind. The paddles of the boat churned the waters of the Ganges with a murmuring sound. But the devotees were indifferent to all this. Spellbound, they looked on a great yogi, his face lighted with a divine smile, his countenance radiating love, his eyes sparkling with joy-a man who had renounced all for God and who knew nothing but God. Unceasing words of wisdom flowed from his lips.

Reasoning of jnanis

MASTIER: "The jnanis, who adhere to the non-dualistic philosophy of Vedanta, say that the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, the universe itself and all its living beings, are the manifestations of Śakti, the Divine Power. If you reason it out, you will realize that all these are as illusory as a dream. Brahman alone is the Reality, and all else is unreal. Even this very Śakti is unsubstantial, like a dream.

"But though you reason all your life, unless you are established in samādhi, you cannot go beyond the jurisdiction of Śakti. Even when you say, 'I am meditating', or 'I am contemplating', still you are moving in the realm of Śakti, within Its power.

Identity of Brahman and Śakti

"Thus Brahman and Śakti are identical. If you accept the one, you must accept the other. It is like fire and its power to burn. If you see the fire, you must recognize its power to burn also. You cannot think of fire without its power to burn, nor can you think of the power to burn without fire. You cannot conceive of the sun's rays without the sun, nor can you conceive of the sun without its rays.

"What is milk like? Oh, you say, it is something white. You cannot think of the milk without the whiteness, and again, you cannot think of the whiteness without the milk.

"Thus one cannot think of Brahman without Śakti, or of Śakti without Brahman. One cannot think of the Absolute without the Relative, or of the Relative without the Absolute.

"The Primordial Power is ever at play. She is creating, preserving, and destroying in play, as it were. This Power is called Kāli. Kāli is verily Brahman, and Brahman is verily Kāli. It is one and the same Reality. When we think of It as inactive, that is to say, not engaged in the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, then we call It Brahman. But when It engages in these activities, then we call It Kāli or Śakti. The Reality is one and the same; the difference is in name and form.

"It is like water, called in different languages by different names, such as 'jal', 'pani', and so forth. There are three or four ghats on a lake. The Hindus, who drink water at one place, call it 'jal'. The Mussalmans at another place call it 'pani'. And the English at a third place call it 'water'. All three denote one and the same thing, the difference being in the name only. In the same way, some address the Reality as 'Allah', some as 'God', some as 'Brahman', some as 'Kāli', and others by such names as 'Rama', 'Jesus', 'Durga', 'Hari.' "

Different manifestations of Kāli

KESHAB (with a smile): "Describe to us, sir, in how many ways Kāli, the Divine Mother, sports in this world."

MASTER (with a smile): "Oh, She plays in different ways. It is She alone who is known as Maha-Kāli, Nitya-Kāli, Smasana-Kāli, Raksha-Kāli, and Syama-Kāli. Maha-Kāli and Nitya-Kāli are mentioned in the Tantra philosophy. When there were neither the creation, nor the sun, the moon, the planets, and the earth and when darkness was enveloped in darkness, then the Mother, the Formless One, Maha-Kāli, the Great Power, was one with Maha-Kala, the Absolute.

"Syama-Kāli has a somewhat tender aspect and is worshipped in the Hindu households. She is the Dispenser of boons and the Dispeller of fear. People worship Raksha-Kāli, the Protectress, in times of epidemic, famine, earthquake, drought, and flood. Smasana-Kāli is the embodiment of the power of destruction. She resides in the cremation ground, surrounded by corpses, jackals, and terrible female spirits. From Her mouth flows a stream of blood, from Her neck hangs a garland of human heads, and around Her waist is a girdle made of human hands.

Beginning of a cycle

"After the destruction of the universe, at the end of a great cycle, the Divine Mother garners the seeds for the next creation. She is like the elderly mistress of the house, who has a hotchpotch-pot in which she keeps different articles for household use. (All laugh.)

"Oh, yes! Housewives have pots like that, where they keep 'sea-foam', blue pills, small bundles of seeds of cucumber, pumpkin, and gourd, and so on. They take them out when they want them. In the same way, after the destruction of the universe, my Divine Mother, the Embodiment of Brahman, gathers together the seeds for the next creation. After the creation the Primal Power dwells in the universe itself. She brings forth this phenomenal world and then pervades it. In the Vedas creation is likened to

the spider and its web. The spider brings the web out of itself and then remains in it. God is the container of the universe and also what is contained in it.

"Is Kāli, my Divine Mother, of a black complexion? She appears black because She is viewed from a distance; but when intimately known She is no longer so. The sky appears blue at a distance; but look at it close by and you will find that it has no colour. The water of the ocean looks blue at a distance, but when you go near and take it in your hand, you find that it is colourless."

The Master became intoxicated with divine love and sang:

Is Kāli, my Mother, really black?
The Naked One, of blackest hue,
Lights the Lotus of the Heart. . . .

The Master continued: "Bondage and liberation are both of Her making. By Her Maya worldly people become entangled in 'woman and gold', and again, through Her grace they attain their liberation. She is called Saviour, and the remover of the bondage that binds one to the world."

Divine Mother's sport

Then the Master sang the following song in his melodious voice:

In the world's busy market-place, O Syama, Thou art flying kites;
High up they soar on the wind of hope, held fast by maya's string.
Their frames are human skeletons, their sails of the three gunas made;
But all their curious workmanship is merely for ornament.
Upon the kite-strings Thou hast rubbed the manja-paste of worldliness,
So as to make each straining strand all the more sharp and strong.
Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best but one or two break free;
And Thou dost laugh and clap Thy hands, O Mother, watching them!
On favouring winds, says Ramprasad, the kites set loose will speedily
Be borne away to the Infinite, across the sea of the world.

The Master said: "The Divine Mother is always playful and sportive. This universe is Her play. She is self-willed and must always have Her own way. She is full of bliss. She gives freedom to one out of a hundred thousand."

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "But, sir, if She likes, She can give freedom to all. Why, then, has She kept us bound to the world?"

MASTER: "That is Her will. She wants to continue playing with Her created beings. In a game of hide-and-seek the running about soon stops if in the beginning all the players touch the 'granny'. If all touch her, then how can the game go on? That displeases her. Her pleasure is in continuing the game. Therefore the poet said:

Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best but one or two break free;
And Thou dost laugh and clap Thy hands, O Mother, watching them!

Reassurance to householders

"It is as if the Divine Mother said to the human mind in confidence, with a sign from Her eye, 'Go and enjoy the world.' How can one blame the mind? The mind can disentangle itself from worldliness if, through Her grace, She makes it turn toward Herself. Only then does it become devoted to the Lotus Feet of the Divine Mother."

Whereupon Sri Ramakrishna, taking upon himself, as it were, the agonies of all householders, sang a song complaining to the Divine Mother:

Mother, this is the grief that sorely grieves my heart,
That even with Thee for Mother, and though I am wide awake,
There should be robbery in my house.
Many and many a time I vow to call on Thee,
Yet when the time for prayer comes round, I have forgotten.
Now I see it is all Thy trick.

As Thou hast never given, so Thou receivest naught;
Am I to blame for this, O Mother? Hadst Thou but given,
Surely then Thou hadst received;
Out of Thine own gifts I should have given to Thee.
Glory and shame, bitter and sweet, are Thine alone;
This world is nothing but Thy play.
Then why, O Blissful One, dost Thou cause a rift in it?

Says Ramprasad: Thou hast bestowed on me this mind,
And with a knowing wink of Thine eye
Bidden it, at the same time, to go and enjoy the world.
And so I wander here forlorn through Thy creation,
Blasted, as it were, by someone's evil glance,
Taking the bitter for the sweet,
Taking the unreal for the Real.

The Master continued: "Men are deluded through Her maya and have become attached to the world.

Says Ramprasad: Thou hast bestowed on me this mind,
And with a knowing wink of Thine eye
Bidden it, at the same time, to go and enjoy the world."

BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "Sir, can't we realize God without complete renunciation?"

MASTFR (with a laugh): "Of course you can! Why should you renounce everything? You are all right as you are, following the middle path-like molasses partly solid and partly liquid. Do you know the game of nax? Having scored the maximum number of points, I am out of the game. I can't enjoy it. But you are very clever. Some of you have scored ten points, some six, and some five. You have scored just the right number; so you are not out of the game like me. The game can go on. Why, that's fine! (All laugh.)

"I tell you the truth: there is nothing wrong in your being in the world. But you must direct your mind toward God; otherwise you will not succeed. Do your duty with one hand and with the other hold to God. After the duty is over, you will hold to God with both hands.

Bondage and liberation are of the mind

"It is all a question of the mind. Bondage and liberation are of the mind alone. The mind will take the colour you dye it with. It is like white clothes just returned from the laundry. If you dip them in red dye, they will be red. If you dip them in blue or green, they will be blue or green. They will take only the colour you dip them in, whatever it may be. Haven't you noticed that, if you read a little English, you at once begin to utter English words: Foot fut it mit? Then you put on boots and whistle a tune, and so on. It all goes together. Or, if a scholar studies Sanskrit, he will at once rattle off Sanskrit verses. If you are in bad company, then you will talk and think like your companions. On the other hand, when you are in the company of devotees, you will think and talk only of God.

"The mind is everything. A man has his wife on one side and his daughter on the other. He shows his affection to them in different ways. But his mind is one and the same.

"Bondage is of the mind, and freedom is also of the mind. A man is free if he constantly thinks: 'I am a free soul. How can I be bound, whether I live in the world or in the forest? I am a child of God, the King of Kings. Who can bind me?' If bitten by a snake, a man may get rid of its venom by saying emphatically, 'There is no poison in me.' In the same way, by repeating with grit and determination, 'I am not bound, I am free', one really becomes so-one really becomes free.

"Once someone gave me a book of the Christians. I asked him to read it to me. It talked about nothing but sin. (To Keshab) Sin is the only thing one hears of at your Brahmo Samaj, too. The wretch who constantly says, 'I am bound, I am bound' only succeeds in being bound. He who says day and night, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner' verily becomes a sinner.

Redeeming power of faith

"One should have such burning faith in God that one can say: 'What? I have repeated the name of God, and can sin still cling to me? How can I be a sinner any more? How can I be in bondage any more?'

"If a man repeats the name of God, his body, mind, and everything become pure. Why should one talk only about sin and hell, and such things? Say but once, 'O Lord, I have undoubtedly done wicked things, but I won't repeat them.' And have faith in His name."

Sri Ramakrishna became intoxicated with divine love and sang:

If only I can pass away repeating Durga's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,
Withhold from me deliverance,
Wretched though I may be? . . .

Master's prayer

Then he said: "To my Divine Mother I prayed only for pure love. I offered flowers at Her Lotus Feet and prayed to Her: 'Mother, here is Thy virtue, here is Thy vice. Take them both and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy knowledge, here is Thy ignorance. Take them both and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy purity, here is Thy impurity. Take them both, Mother, and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy dharma, here is Thy adharma. Take them both, Mother, and grant me only pure love for Thee.'

(To the Brahmo devotees) "Now listen to a song by Ramprasad:

Come, let us go for a walk, O mind, to Kāli, the Wish-fulfilling Tree,
And there beneath It gather the four fruits of life.
Of your two wives, Dispassion and Worldliness,
Bring alone Dispassion only, on your way to the Tree,
And ask her son Discrimination about the Truth.

When will you learn to lie, O mind, in the abode of Blessedness,
With Cleanliness and Defilement on either side of you?
Only when you have found the way
To keep these wives contentedly under a single roof,
Will you behold the matchless form of Mother Syama.

Ego and Ignorance, your parents, instantly banish from your sight;
And should Delusion seek to drag you to its hole,
Manfully cling to the pillar of Patience.
Tie to the post of Unconcern the goats of Vice and Virtue,
Killing them with the sword of Knowledge if they rebel.
With the children of Worldliness, your first wife, plead from a

goodly distance,
And, if they will not listen, drown them in Wisdom's sea.
Says Ramprasad: If you do as I say,
You can submit a good account, O mind, to the King of Death,
And I shall be well pleased with you and call you my darling.

"Why shouldn't one be able to realize God in this world? King Janaka had such realization. Ramprasad described the world as a mere 'framework of illusion'. But if one loves God's hallowed feet, then-

This very world is a mansion of mirth;
Here I can eat, here drink and make merry.
Janaka's might was unsurpassed;
What did he lack of the world or the Spirit?
Holding to one as well as the other,
He drank his milk from a brimming cup! (All laugh.)

"But one cannot be a King Janaka all of a sudden. Janaka at first practised much austerity in solitude.

Solitude for householders

"Even if one lives in the world, one must go into solitude now and then. It will be of great help to a man if he goes away from his family, lives alone, and weeps for God even for three days. Even if he thinks of God for one day in solitude, when he has the leisure, that too will do him good. People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. But who cries for the Lord? Now and then one must go into solitude and practise spiritual discipline to realize God. Living in the world and entangled in many of its duties, the aspirant, during the first stage of spiritual life, finds many obstacles in the path of concentration. While the trees on the foot-path are young, they must he fenced around; otherwise they will be destroyed by cattle. The fence is necessary when the tree is young, but it can be taken away when the trunk is thick and strong. Then the tree won't be hurt even if an elephant is tied to it.

Malady of worldly people and its cure

"The disease of worldliness is like typhoid. And there are a huge jug of water and a jar of savoury pickles in the typhoid patient's room. If you want to cure him of his illness, you must remove him from that room. The worldly man is like the typhoid patient. The various objects of enjoyment are the huge jug of water, and the craving for their enjoyment is his thirst. The very thought of pickles makes the mouth water; you don't have to bring them near. And he is surrounded with them. The companionship of woman is the pickles. Hence treatment in solitude is necessary.

"One may enter the world after attaining discrimination and dispassion. In the ocean of the world there are six alligators: lust, anger, and so forth. But you need not fear the alligators if you smear your body with turmeric before you go into the water.

Discrimination and dispassion are the turmeric. Discrimination is the knowledge of what is real and what is unreal. It is the realization that God alone is the real and eternal Substance and that all else is unreal, transitory, impermanent. And you must cultivate intense zeal for God. You must feel love for Him and be attracted to Him. The gopis of Vrindāvan felt the attraction of Krishna. Let me sing you a song:

Listen! The flute has sounded in yonder wood.
There I must fly, for Krishna waits on the path.
Tell me, friends, will you come along or no?
To you my Krishna is merely an empty name;
To me He is the anguish of my heart.
You hear His flute-notes onlv with your ears,
But, oh, I hear them in my deepest soul.
I hear His flute calling: 'Radha come out!
Without you the grove is shorn of its loveliness.' "

The Master sang the song with tears in his eyes, and said to Keshab and the other Brahmo devotees: "Whether you accept Radha and Krishna, or not, please do accept their attraction for each other. Try to create that same yearning in your heart for God. Yearning is all you need in order to realize Him."

Gradually the ebb-tide set in. The steamboat was speeding toward Calcutta. It passed under the Howrah Bridge and came within sight of the Botanical Garden. The captain was asked to go a little farther down the river. The passengers were enchanted with the Master's words, and most of them had no idea of time or of how far they had come.

Keshab began to serve some puffed rice and grated coconut. The guests held these in the folds of their wearing-cloths and presently started to eat. Everyone was joyful. The Master noticed, however, that Keshab and Vijay rather shrank from each other, and he was anxious to reconcile them.

Disagreements necessary for enriching life

MASTEIR (to Keshab): "Look here. There is Vijay. Your quarrel seems like the fight between Śiva and Rama. Śiva was Rama's s guru. Though they fought with each other, yet they soon came to terms. But the grimaces of the ghosts, the followers of Śiva, and the gibberish of the monkeys, the followers of Rama, would not come to an end! (Loud laughter.) Such quarrels take place even among one's own kith and kin. Didn't Rama fight with His own sons, Lava and Kusa? Again, you must have noticed how a mother and daughter, living together and having the same spiritual end in view, observe their religious fast separately on Tuesdays, each on her own account-as if the welfare of the mother were different from the welfare of the daughter. But what benefits the one benefits the other. In like manner, you have a religious society, and Vijay thinks he must have one too. (Laughter.) But I think all these are necessary. While Sri Krishna, Himself God Incarnate, played with the gopis at Vrindāvan, trouble-makers like Jatila and Kutila appeared on the scene. You may ask why. The answer is that the play does

not develop without trouble-makers. (All laugh.) There is no fun without Jatila and Kutila. (Loud laughter.)

"Ramanuja upheld the doctrine of Qualified Non-dualism. But his guru was a pure non-dualist. They disagreed with each other and refuted each other's arguments. That always happens. Still, to the teacher the disciple is his own."

All rejoiced in the Mastcr's company and his words.

MASTER (to Keshab): "You don't look into people's natures, before you make them your disciples, and so they break away from you.

"All men look alike, to be sure, but they have different natures. Some have an excess of sattva, others an excess of rajas, and still others an excess of tamas. You must have noticed that the cakes known as puli all look alike. But their contents are very different. Some contain condensed milk, some coconut kernel, and others mere boiled kalai pulse. (All laugh)

Master's humility

"Do you know my attitude? As for myself, I eat, drink, and live happily. The rest the Divine Mother knows. Indeed, there are three words that prick my flesh: 'guru', 'master', and 'father'.

"There is only one Guru, and that is Satchidananda. He alone is the Teacher. My attitude toward God is that of a child toward its mother. One can get human gurus by the million. All want to be teachers. But who cares to be a disciple?

Difficulty of preaching

"It is extremely difficult to teach others. A man can teach only if God reveals Himself to him and gives the command. Narada, Sukadeva, and sages like them had such a command from God, and Sankara had it too. Unless you have a command from God, who will listen to your words?

"Don't you know how easily the people of Calcutta get excited? The milk in the kettle puffs up and boils as long as the fire burns underneath. Take away the fuel and all becomes quiet. The people of Calcutta love sensations. You may see them digging a well at a certain place. They say they want water. But if they strike a stone they give up that place; they begin at another place. And there, perchance, they find sand; they give up the second place too. Next they begin at a third. And so it goes. But it won't do if a man only imagines that he has God's command.

"God does reveal Himself to man and speak. Only then may one receive His command. How forceful are the words of such a teacher! They can move mountains. But mere lectures? People will listen to them for a few days and then forget them. They will never act upon mere words.

"At Kamarpukur there is a small lake called the Haldarpukur. Certain people used to befoul its banks every day. Others who came there in the morning to bathe would abuse the offenders loudly. But next morning they would find the same thing. The nuisance didn't stop. (All laugh.) The villagers finally informed the authorities about it. A constable was sent, who put up a notice on the bank which read: 'Commit no nuisance.' This stopped the miscreants at once. (All laugh.)

"To teach others, one must have a badge of authority; otherwise teaching becomes a mockery. A man who is himself ignorant starts out to teach others-like the blind leading the blind! Instead of doing good, such teaching does harm. After the realization of God one obtains an inner vision. Only then can one diagnose a person's spiritual malady and give instruction.

"Without the commission from God, a man becomes vain. He says to himself, 'I am teaching people.' This vanity comes from ignorance, for only an ignorant person feels that he is the doer. A man verily becomes liberated in life if he feels: 'God is the Doer. He alone is doing everything. I am doing nothing.' Man's sufferings and worries spring only from his persistent thought that he is the doer.

Doing good to others

"You people speak of doing good to the world. Is the world such a small thing? And who are you, pray, to do good to the world? First realize God, see Him by means of spiritual discipline. If He imparts power, then you can do good to others; otherwise not."

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "Then, sir, we must give up our activities until we realize God?"

MASTER: "No. Why should you? You must engage in such activities as contemplation, singing His praises, and other daily devotions."

BRAHMO: "But what about our worldly duties-duties associated with our earning money, and so on?"

MASTER: "Yes, you can perform them too, but only as much as you need for your livelihood. At the same time, you must pray to God in solitude, with tears in your eyes, that you may be able to perform those duties in an unselfish manner. You should say to Him: 'O God, make my worldly duties fewer and fewer; otherwise, O Lord, I find that I forget Thee when I am involved in too many activities. I may think I am doing unselfish work, but it turns out to be selfish.' People who carry to excess the giving of alms, or the distributing of food among the poor, fall victims to the desire of acquiring name and fame.

"Sambhu Mallick once talked about establishing hospitals, dispensaries, and schools, making roads, digging public reservoirs, and so forth. I said to him: 'Don't go out of your way to look for such works. Undertake only those works that present themselves to you and are of pressing necessity-and those also in a spirit of detachment.' It is not good to become involved in many activities. That makes one forget God. Coming to the Kalighat temple, some, perhaps, spend their whole time in giving alms to the poor. They

have no time to see the Mother in the inner shrine! (Laughter.) First of all manage somehow to see the image of the Divine Mother, oven by pushing through the crowd. Then you may or may not give alms, as you wish. You may give to the poor to your heart's content, if you feel that way. Work is only a means to the realization of God. Therefore I said to Sambhu, 'Suppose God appears before you; then will you ask Him to build hospitals and dispensaries for you?' (Laughter.) A lover of God never says that. He will rather say: 'O Lord, give me a place at Thy Lotus Feet. Keep me always in Thy company. Give me sincere and pure love for Thee.'

Path of devotion most elective for Kaliyuga

"Karmayoga is very hard indeed. In the Kaliyuga it is extremely difficult to perform the rites enjoined in the scriptures. Nowadays man's life is centred on food alone. He cannot perform many scriptural rites. Suppose a man is laid up with fever. If you attempt a slow cure with the old-fashioned indigenous remedies, before long his life may be snuffed out. He can't stand much delay. Nowadays the drastic 'D Gupta' mixture is appropriate. In the Kaliyuga the best way is bhaktiyoga, the path of devotion-singing the praises of the Lord, and prayer. The path of devotion alone is the religion for this age. (To the Brahmo devotees) Yours also is the path of devotion. Blessed you are indeed that you chant the name of Hari and sing the Divine Mother's glories. I like your attitude. You don't call the world a dream like the non-dualists. You are not Brahmajnanis like them; you are bhaktas, lovers of God. That you speak of Him as a Person is also good. You are devotees. You will certainly realize Him if you call on Him with sincerity and earnestness."

The boat cast anchor at Kayalaghat and the passengers prepared to disembark. On coming outside they noticed that the full moon was up. The trees, the buildings, and the boats on the Ganges were bathed in its mellow light. A carriage was hailed for the Master, and M. and a few devotees got in with him. The Master asked for Keshab. Presently the latter arrived and inquired about the arrangements made for the Master's return to Dakshineswar. Then he bowed low and took leave of Sri Ramakrishna.

The carriage drove through the European quarter of the city. The Master enjoyed the sight of the beautiful mansions on both sides of the well lighted streets. Suddenly he said: "I am thirsty. What's to be done?" Nandalal, Keshab's nephew, stopped the carriage before the India Club and went upstairs to get some water. The Master inquired whether the glass had been well washed. On being assured that it had been, he drank the water.

As the carriage went along, the Master put his head out of the window and looked with childlike enjoyment, at the people, the vehicles, the horses, and the streets, all flooded with moonlight. Now and then he heard European ladies singing at the piano. He was in a very happy mood.

The carriage arrived at the house of Suresh Mitra, who was a great devotee of the Master and whom he addressed affectionately as Surendra. He was not at home.

The members of the household opened a room on the ground floor for the Master and his party. The cab fare was to be paid. Surendra would have taken care of it had he been there. The Master said to a devotee: "Why don't you ask the ladies to pay the fare? They certainly know that their master visits us at Dakshineswar. I am not a stranger to them."(All laugh.)

Narendra, who lived in that quarter of the city, was sent for. In the mean time Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees were invited to the drawing-room upstairs. The floor of the room was covered with a carpet and a white sheet. A few cushions were lying about. On the wall hung an oil painting especially painted for Surendra, in which Sri Ramakrishna was pointing out to Keshab the harmony of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other religions. On seeing the picture Keshab had once said, "Blessed is the man who conceived the idea."

Sri Ramakrishna was talking joyously with the devotees, when Narendra arrived. This made the Master doubly happy. He said to his young disciple, "We had a boat trip with Keshab today. Vijay and many other Brahmo devotees were there. (Pointing to M.) Ask him what I said to Keshab and Vijay about the mother and daughter observing their religious fast on Tuesdays, each on her own account, though the welfare of the one meant the welfare of the other. I also said to Keshab that trouble-makers like jatila and Kutila were necessary to lend zest to the play. (To M.) Isn't that so?"

M: "Yes, sir. Quite so."

It was late. Surendra had not yet returned. The Master had to leave for the temple garden, and a cab was brought for him. M. and Narendra saluted him and took their leave. Sri Ramakrishna's carriage started for Dakshineswar through the moonlit streets.

Chapter 6

THE MASTER WITH THE BRAHMO DEVOTEES (I)

October 28, 1882

IT WAS SATURDAY. The semi-annual Brahmo festival, celebrated each autumn and spring, was being held in Benimadhav Pal's beautiful garden house at Sinthi, about three miles north of Calcutta. The house stood in a secluded place suited for contemplation. Trees laden with flowers, artificial lakes with grassy banks, and green arbours enhanced the beauty of the grounds. Just as the fleecy clouds were turning gold in the light of the setting sun, the Master arrived.

Many devotees had attended the morning devotions, and in the afternoon people from Calcutta and the neighbouring villages joined them. Shivanath, the great Brahmo devotee whom the Master loved dearly, was one of the large gathering of members of the Brahmo Samaj who had been eagerly awaiting Sri Ramakrishna's arrival.

When the carriage bringing the Master and a few devotees reached the garden house, the assembly stood up respectfully to receive him. There was a sudden silence, like that which comes when the curtain in a theatre is about to be rung up. People who had been conversing with one another now fixed their attention on the Master's serene face, eager not to lose one word that might fall from his lips.

Master's joy on seeing Shivanāth

At the sight of Shivanath the Master cried out joyously: "Ah! Here is Shivanath! You see, you are a devotee of God. The very sight of you gladdens my heart. One hemp-smoker feels very happy to meet another. Very often they embrace each other in an exuberance of joy."

The devotees burst out laughing.

Worldly people's indifference to spiritual life

MASTER: "Many people visit the temple garden at Dakshineswar. If I see some among the visitors indifferent to God, I say to them, 'You had better sit over there.' Or sometimes I say, 'Go and see the beautiful buildings.' (Laughter.)

"Sometimes I find that the devotees of God are accompanied by worthless people. Their companions are immersed in gross worldliness and don't enjoy spiritual talk at all. Since the devotees keep on, for a long time, talking with me about God, the others become restless. Finding it impossible to sit there any longer, they whisper to their devotee friends: 'When shall we be going? How long will you stay here?' The devotees say: 'Wait a bit. We shall go after a little while.' Then the worldly people say in a disgusted tone: 'Well, then, you can talk. We shall wait for you in the boat.' (All laugh.)

Power of God's name

"Worldly people will never listen to you if you ask them to renounce everything and devote themselves whole-heartedly to God. Therefore Chaitanya and Nitai, after some deliberation, made an arrangement to attract the worldly. They would say to such persons, 'Come, repeat the name of Hari, and you shall have a delicious soup of magur fish and the embrace of a young woman.' Many people, attracted by the fish and the woman, would chant the name of God. After tasting a little of the nectar of God's hallowed name, they would soon realize that the 'fish soup' really meant the tears they shed for love of God, while the 'young woman' signified the earth. The embrace of the woman meant rolling on the ground in the rapture of divine love.

"Nitai would employ any means to make people repeat Hari's name. Chaitanya said: 'The name of God has very great sanctity. It may not produce an immediate result, but one day it must bear fruit. It is like a seed that has been left on the cornice of a building. After many days the house crumbles, and the seed falls on the earth, germinates, and at last bears fruit.'

Three classes of devotees

"As worldly people are endowed with sattva, rajas, and tamas, so also is bakti characterized by the three gunas.

"Do you know what a worldly person endowed with sattva is like? Perhaps his house is in a dilapidated condition here and there. He doesn't care to repair it. The worship hall may be strewn with pigeon droppings and the courtyard covered with moss, but he pays no attention to these things. The furniture of the house may be old; he doesn't think of polishing it and making it look neat. He doesn't care for dress at all; anything is good enough for him. But the man himself is very gentle, quiet, kind, and humble; he doesn't injure anyone.

"Again, among the worldly there are people with the traits of rajas. Such a man has a watch and chain, and two or three rings on his fingers. The furniture of his house is all spick and span. On the walls hang portraits of the Queen, the Prince of Wales, and other prominent people; the building is whitewashed and spotlessly clean. His wardrobe is filled with a large assortment of clothes; even the servants have their livery, and all that.

"The traits of a worldly man endowed with tamas are sleep, lust, anger, egotism, and the like.

Three kinds of bhakti

"Similarly, bhakti, devotion, has its sattva. A devotee who possesses it meditates on God in absolute secret, perhaps inside his mosquito net. Others think he is asleep. Since he is late in getting up, they think perhaps he has not slept well during the night. His love for the body goes only as far as appeasing his hunger, and that only by means of rice and simple greens. There is no elaborate arrangement about his meals, no luxury

in clothes, and no display of furniture. Besides, such a devotee never flatters anybody for money.

"An aspirant possessed of rajasic bhakti puts a tilak on his forehead and a necklace of holy rudraksha beads, interspersed with gold ones, around his neck. (All laugh.) At worship he wears a silk cloth.

"A man endowed with tamasic bhakti has burning faith. Such a devotee literally extorts boons from God, even as a robber falls upon a man and plunders his money. 'Bind! Beat! Kill!'-that is his way, the way of the dacoits."

Utilizing *Tamas* for spiritual welfare

Saying this, the Master began to sing in a voice sweet with rapturous love, his eyes turned upward:

Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,
So long as I can breathe my last with Kāli's name upon my lips?
What need of rituals has a man, what need of devotions any more,
If he repeats the Mother's name at the three holy hours?
Rituals may pursue him close, but never can they overtake him.
Charity, vows, and giving of gifts do not appeal to Madan's mind;
The Blissful Mother's Lotus Feet are his whole prayer and sacrifice.
Who could ever have conceived the power Her name possesses?
Śiva Himself, the God of Gods, sings Her praise with His five mouths!

The Master was beside himself with love for the Divine Mother. He sang with fiery enthusiasm:

If only I can pass away repeating Durga's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,
Withhold from me deliverance,
Wretched though I may be? . . .

Then he said, "One must take the firm attitude: 'What? I have chanted the Mother's name. How can I be a sinner any more? I am Her child, heir to Her powers and glories.'

"If you can give a spiritual turn to your tamas, you can realize God with its help. Force your demands on God. He is by no means a stranger to you. He is indeed your very own.

Illustration of physicians

"Again, you see, the quality of tamas can be used for the welfare of others. There are three classes of physicians: superior, mediocre, and inferior. The physician who feels the patient's pulse and just says to him, 'Take the medicine regularly' belongs to the inferior class. He doesn't care to inquire whether or not the patient has actually taken the medicine. The mediocre physician is he who in various ways persuades the patient to take the medicine, and says to him sweetly: 'My good man, how will you be cured unless you use the medicine? Take this medicine. I have made it for you myself.' But he who, finding the patient stubbornly refusing to take the medicine, forces it down his throat, going so far as to put his knee on the patient's chest, is the best physician. This is the manifestation of the tamas of the physician. It doesn't injure the patient; on the contrary, it does him good.

Three types of gurus

"Like the physicians, there are three types of religious teachers. The inferior teacher only gives instruction to the disciples but makes no inquiries about their progress. The mediocre teacher, for the good of the student, makes repeated efforts to bring the instruction home to him, begs him to assimilate it, and shows him love in many other ways. But there is a type of teacher who goes to the length of using force when he finds the student persistently unyielding; I call him the best teacher."

No finality about God's nature

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "Sir, has God forms or has He none?"

MASTER: "No one can say with finality that God is only 'this' and nothing else. He is formless, and again He has forms. For the bhakta He assumes forms. But He is formless for the jnani, that is, for him who looks on the world as a mere dream. The bhakta feels that he is one entity and the world another. Therefore God reveals Himself to him as a Person. But the jnani-the Vedantist, for instance-always reasons, applying the process of 'Not this, not this'. Through this discrimination he realizes, by his inner perception, that the ego and the universe are both illusory, like a dream. Then the jnani realizes Brahman in his own consciousness. He cannot describe what Brahman is.

"Do you know what I mean? Think of Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, as a shoreless ocean. Through the cooling influence, as it were, of the bhakta's love, the water has frozen at places into blocks of ice. In other words, God now and then assumes various forms for His lovers and reveals Himself to them as a Person. But with the rising of the sun of Knowledge, the blocks of ice melt. Then one doesn't feel any more that God is a Person, nor does one see God's forms. What He is cannot be described. Who will describe Him? He who would do so disappears. He cannot find his 'I' any more.

Illusoriness of "I"

"If one analyses oneself, one doesn't find any such thing as 'I'. Take an onion, for instance. First of all you peel off the red outer skin; then you find thick white skins. Peel these off one after the other, and you won't find anything inside.

"In that state a man no longer finds the existence of his ego. And who is there left to seek it? Who can describe how he feels in that state-in his own Pure Consciousness-about the real nature of Brahman? Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. No sooner was it in the water than it melted. Now who was to tell the depth?

Sign of Perfect Knowledge

"There is a sign of Perfect Knowledge. Man becomes silent when It is attained. Then the 'I', which may be likened to the salt doll, melts in the Ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute and becomes one with It. Not the slightest trace of distinction is left.

"As long as his self-analysis is not complete, man argues with much ado. But he becomes silent when he completes it. When the empty pitcher has been filled with water, when the water inside the pitcher becomes one with the water of the lake outside, no more sound is heard. Sound comes from the pitcher as long as the pitcher is not filled with water.

"People used to say in olden days that no boat returns after having once entered the 'black waters' of the ocean.

"All trouble and botheration come to an end when the 'I' dies. You may indulge in thousands of reasoning, but still the 'I' doesn't disappear. For people like you and me, it is good to have the feeling, 'I am a lover of God.'

Personal God for devotees

"The Saguna Brahman is meant for the bhaktas. In other words, a bhakta believes that God has attributes and reveals Himself to men as a Person, assuming forms. It is He who listens to our prayers. The prayers that you utter are directed to Him alone. You are bhaktas, not jnanis or Vedantists. It doesn't matter whether you accept God with form or not. It is enough to feel that God is a Person who listens to our prayers, who creates, preserves, and destroys the universe, and who is endowed with infinite power.

"It is easier to attain God by following the path of devotion."

BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "Sir, is it possible for one to see God? If so, why can't we see Him?"

MASTER: "Yes, He can surely be seen. One can see His forms, and His formless aspect as well. How can I explain that to you?"

Intense longing enables one to see God

BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "What are the means by which one can see God?"

MASTER: "Can you weep for Him with intense longing of heart? Men shed a jugful of tears for the sake of their children, for their wives, or for money. But who weeps for God? So long as the child remains engrossed with its toys, the mother looks after her cooking and other household duties. But when the child no longer relishes the toys, it throws them aside and yells for its mother. Then the mother takes the rice-pot down from the hearth, runs in haste, and takes the child in her arms."

Why so much controversy about God?

BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "Sir, why are there so many different opinions about the nature of God? Some say that God has form, while others say that He is formless. Again, those who speak of God with form tell us about His different forms. Why all this controversy?"

MASTER: "A devotee thinks of God as he sees Him. In reality there is no confusion about God. God explains all this to the devotee if the devotee only realizes Him somehow. You haven't set your foot in that direction. How can you expect to know all about God?

Parable of the chameleon

"Listen to a story. Once a man entered a wood and saw a small animal on a tree. He came back and told another man that he had seen a creature of a beautiful red colour on a certain tree. The second man replied: 'When I went into the wood, I also saw that animal. But why do you call it red? It is green.' Another man who was present contradicted them both and insisted that it was yellow. Presently others arrived and contended that it was grey, violet, blue, and so forth and so on. At last they started quarrelling among themselves. To settle the dispute they all went to the tree. They saw a man sitting under it. On being asked, he replied: 'Yes, I live under this tree and I know the animal very well. All your descriptions are true. Sometimes it appears red, sometimes yellow, and at other times blue, violet, grey, and so forth. It is a chameleon. And sometimes it has no colour at all. Now it has a colour, and now it has none.'

"In like manner, one who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature; he alone knows that God reveals Himself to seekers in various forms and aspects. God has attributes; then again He has none. Only the man who lives under the tree knows that the chameleon can appear in various colours, and he knows, further, that the animal at times has no colour at all. It is the others who suffer from the agony of futile argument.

"Kabir used to say, 'The formless Absolute is my Father, and God with form is my Mother.'

"God reveals Himself in the form which His devotee loves most. His love for the devotee knows no bounds. It is written in the Purana that God assumed the form of Rama for His heroic devotee, Hanuman.

Vedantic Non-dualism

"The forms and aspects of God disappear when one discriminates in accordance with the Vedanta philosophy. The ultimate conclusion of such discrimination is that Brahman alone is real and this world of names and forms illusory. It is possible for a man to see the forms of God, or to think of Him as a Person, only so long as he is conscious that he is a devotee. From the standpoint of discrimination this 'ego of a devotee' keeps him a little away from God.

"Do you know why images of Krishna or Kāli are three and a half cubits high? Because of distance. Again, on account of distance the sun appears to be small. But if you go near

it you will find the sun so big that you won't be able to comprehend it. Why have images of Krishna and Kāli a dark-blue colour? That too is on account of distance, like the water of a lake, which appears green, blue, or black from a distance. Go near, take the water in the palm of your hand, and you will find that it has no colour. The sky also appears blue from a distance. Go near and you will see that it has no colour at all.

"Therefore I say that in the light of Vedantic reasoning Brahman has no attributes. The real nature of Brahman cannot be described. But so long as your individuality is real, the world also is real, and equally real are the different forms of God and the feeling that God is a Person.

"Yours is the path of bhakti. That is very good; it is an easy path. Who can fully know the infinite God? and what need is there of knowing the Infinite? Having attained this rare human birth, my supreme need is to develop love for the Lotus Feet of God.

"If a jug of water is enough to remove my thirst, why should I measure the quantity of water in a lake? I become drunk on even half a bottle of wine-what is the use of my calculating the quantity of liquor in the tavern? What need is there of knowing the Infinite?

"The various states of mind of the Brahmajnani are described in the Vedas. The path of knowledge is extremely difficult. One cannot obtain jnāna if one has the least trace of worldliness and the slightest attachment to 'woman and gold'. This is not the path for the Kaliyuga.

Seven planes of the mind

"The Vedas speak of seven planes where the mind dwells. When the mind is immersed in worldliness it dwells in the three lower planes- at the naval, the organ of generation, and the organ of evacuation. In that state the mind loses all its higher visions-it broods only on 'woman and gold'. The fourth plane of the mind is at the heart. When the mind dwells there, one has the first glimpse of spiritual consciousness. One sees light all around. Such a man, perceiving the divine light, becomes speechless with wonder and says: 'Ah! What is this? What is this?' His mind does not go downward to the objects of the world.

"The fifth plane of the mind is at the throat. When the mind reaches this, the aspirant becomes free from all ignorance and illusion. He does not enjoy talking or hearing about anything but God. If people talk about worldly things, he leaves the place at once.

"The sixth plane is at the forehead. When the mind reaches it, the aspirant sees the form of God day and night. But even then a little trace of ego remains. At the sight of that incomparable beauty of God's form, one becomes intoxicated and rushes forth to touch and embrace it. But one doesn't succeed. It is like the light inside a lantern. One feels as if one could touch the light, but one cannot on account of the pane of glass.

"In the top of the head is the seventh plane. When the mind rises there, one goes into samādhi. Then the Brahmajnani directly perceives Brahman. But in that state his body

does not last many days. He remains unconscious of the outer world. If milk is poured into his mouth, it runs out. Dwelling on this plane of consciousness, he gives up his body in twenty-one days. That is the condition of the Brahmajnani. But yours is the path of devotion. That is a very good and easy path.

"Once a man said to me, 'Sir, can you teach me quickly the thing you call samādhi?' (All laugh.)

Duties drop away with deepening of spiritual mood

"After a man has attained samādhi all his actions drop away. All devotional activities, such as worship, japa, and the like, as well as all worldly duties, cease to exist for such a person. At the beginning there is much ado about work. As a man makes progress toward God, the outer display of his work becomes less and less-so much so that he cannot even sing the name and glories of God. (To Shivanath) As long as you were not here at the meeting, people talked a great deal about you and discussed your virtues. But no sooner did you arrive here than all that stopped. Now the very sight of you makes everyone happy. People now simply say, 'Ah! Here is Shivanath Babu.' All other talk about you has stopped.

What happens after samādhi

"After attaining samādhi, I once went to the Ganges to perform tarpan. But as I took water in the palm of my hand, it trickled down through my fingers. Weeping, I said to Haladhāri, 'Cousin, what is this?' Haladhāri replied, 'It is called galitahasta in the holy books.' After the vision of God, such duties as the performance of tarpan drop away.

"In the kirtan the devotee first sings, 'Nitai amar mata hati.' As the devotional mood deepens, he simply sings, 'Hati! Hati!' Next, all he can sing is 'Hati'. And last of all he simply sings, 'Ha!' and goes into samādhi. The man who has been singing all the while then becomes speechless.

"Again, at a feast given to the brahmins one at first hears much noise of talking. When the guests sit on the floor with leaf-plates in front of them, much of the noise ceases. Then one hears only the cry, 'Bring some luchi!' As they partake of the luchi and other dishes, three quarters of the noise subsides. When the curd, the last course, appears, one hears only the sound 'soop, soop' as the guests eat the curd with their fingers. Then there is practically no noise. Afterwards all retire to sleep, and absolute silence reigns.

"Therefore I say, at the beginning of religious life a man makes much ado about work, but as his mind dives deeper into God, he becomes less active. Last of all comes the renunciation of work, followed by samādhi.

"Generally the body does not remain alive after the attainment of samādhi. The only exceptions are such sages as Narada, who keep their bodies alive in order to bring spiritual light to others. It is also true of Divine Incarnations, like Chaitanya. After the well is dug, one generally throws away the spade and the basket. But some keep them

in order to help their neighbours. The great souls who retain their bodies after samādhi feel compassion for the suffering of others. They are not so selfish as to be satisfied with their own illumination. You are well aware of the nature of selfish people. If you ask them to spit at a particular place, they won't, lest it should do you good. If you ask them to bring a sweetmeat worth a cent from the store, they will perhaps lick it on the way back. (All laugh.)

"But the manifestations of Divine Power are different in different beings. Ordinary souls are afraid to teach others. A piece of worthless timber may itself somehow float across the water, but it sinks even under the weight of a bird. Sages like Narada are like a heavy log of wood, which not only floats on the water but also can carry men, cows, and even elephants.

(To Shivanath and the other Brahmo devotees) "Can you tell me why you dwell so much on the powers and glories of God? I asked the same thing of Keshab Sen. One day Keshab and his party came to the temple garden at Dakshineswar. I told them I wanted to hear how they lectured. A meeting was arranged in the paved courtyard above the bathing-ghat on the Ganges, where Keshab gave a talk. He spoke very well. I went into a trance. After the lecture I said to Keshab, 'Why do you so often say such things as: "O God, what beautiful flowers Thou hast made! O God, Thou hast created the heavens, the stars, and the ocean!" and so on?' Those who love splendour themselves are fond of dwelling on God's splendour.

"Once a thief stole the jewels from the images in the temple of Radhakanta. Mathur Babu entered the temple and said to the Deity: 'What a shame, O God! You couldn't save Your own ornaments.' 'The idea!' I said to Mathur. 'Does He who has Lakshmi for His handmaid and attendant ever lack any splendour? Those jewels may be precious to you, but to God they are no better than lumps of clay. Shame on you! You shouldn't have spoken so meanly. 'What riches can you give to God to magnify His glory?'

"Therefore I say, a man seeks the person in whom he finds joy. What need has he to ask where that person lives, the number of his houses, gardens, relatives, and servants, or the amount of his wealth? I forget everything when I see Narendra. Never, even unwittingly, have I asked him where he lived, what his father's profession was, or the number of his brothers.

"Dive deep in the sweetness of God's Bliss. What need have we of His infinite creation and unlimited glory?"

The Master sang:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God's Beauty;
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love.

Go seek, O mind, go seek Vrindāvan in your heart,
Where with His loving devotees
Sri Krishna sports eternally.

Light up, O mind, light up true wisdom's shining lamp,
And let it burn with steady flame
Unceasingly within your heart.

Who is it that steers your boat across the solid earth?
It is your guru, says Kubir;
Meditate on his holy feet.

Sri Ramakrishna continued: "It is also true that after the vision of God the devotee desires to witness His lila. After the destruction of Ravana at Rama's hands, Nikasha, Ravana's mother, began to run away for fear of her life. Lakshmana said to Rama: 'Revered Brother, please explain this strange thing to me. This Nikasha is an old woman who has suffered a great deal from the loss of her many sons, and yet she is so afraid of losing her own life that she is taking to her heels!' Rama bade her come near, gave her assurance of safety, and asked her why she was running away. Nikasha answered: 'O Rama, I am able to witness all this lila of Yours because I am still alive. I want to live longer so that I may see the many more things You will do on this earth.' (All laugh.)

(To Shivanath) "I like to see you. How can I live unless I see pure-souled devotees? I feel as if they had been my friends in a former incarnation."

Reincarnation of soul & Inscrutability of God's ways

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "Sir, do you believe in the reincarnation of the soul?"

MASTER: "Yes, they say there is something like that. How can we understand the ways of God through our small intellects? Many people have spoken about reincarnation; therefore I cannot disbelieve it. As Bhishma lay dying on his bed of arrows, the Pandava brothers and Krishna stood around him. They saw tears flowing from the eyes of the great hero. Arjuna said to Krishna: 'Friend, how surprising it is! Even such a man as our grandsire Bhishma-truthful, self-restrained, supremely wise, and one of the eight Vasus-weeps, through maya, at the hour of death.' Sri Krishna asked Bhishma about it. Bhishma replied: 'O Krishna, You know very well that this is not the cause of my grief. I am thinking that there is no end to the Pandavas' sufferings, though God Himself is their charioteer.7 A thought like this makes me feel that I have understood nothing of the ways of God, and so I weep.' "

It was about half past eight when the evening worship began in the prayer hall. Soon the moon rose in the autumn sky and flooded the trees and creepers of the garden with its light. After prayer the devotees began to sing. Sri Ramakrishna was dancing, intoxicated with love of God. The Brahmo devotees danced around him to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. All appeared to be in a very joyous mood. The place echoed and re-echoed with God's holy name. When the music had stopped, Sri Ramakrishna prostrated himself on the ground and, making salutations to the Divine Mother again and again, said: "Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan! My salutations at the feet of the jnanis! My salutations at the feet of the bhaktas! I salute the bhaktas who believe in God with form, and I salute the bhaktas who believe in God without form. I salute the

knowers of Brahman of olden times. And my salutations at the feet of the modern knowers of Brahman of the Brahmo Samaj!"

Then the Master and the devotees enjoyed a supper of delicious dishes, which Benimadhav, their host, had provided.

Wednesday, November 15, 1882

Master at the circus

Sri Ramakrishna, accompanied by Rakhal and several other devotees, came to Calcutta in a carriage and called for M. at the school where he was teaching. Then they all set out for the Maidan. Sri Ramakrishna wanted to see the Wilson Circus. As the carriage rolled along the crowded Chitpore Road, his joy was very great. Like a little child he leaned first out of one side of the carriage and then out of the other, talking to himself as if addressing the passers-by. To M. he said: "I find the attention of the people fixed on earthly things. They are all rushing about for the sake of their stomachs. No one is thinking of God."

They arrived at the circus. Tickets for the cheapest seats were purchased. The devotees took the Master to a high gallery, and they all sat on a bench. He said joyfully: "Ha! This is a good place. I can see the show well from here." There were exhibitions of various feats. A horse raced around a circular track over which large iron rings were hung at intervals. The circus rider, an Englishwoman, stood on one foot on the horse's back, and as the horse passed under the rings, she jumped through them, always alighting on one foot on the horse's back. The horse raced around the entire circle, and the woman never missed the horse or lost her balance.

When the circus was over, the Master and the devotees stood outside in the field, near the carriage. Since it was a cold night he covered his body with his green shawl.

Necessity of spiritual discipline

Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "Did you see how that Englishwoman stood on one foot on her horse, while it ran like lightning? How difficult a feat that must be! She must have practised a long time. The slightest carelessness and she would break her arms or legs; she might even be killed. One faces the same difficulty leading the life of a householder. A few succeed in it through the grace of God and as a result of their spiritual practice. But most people fail. Entering the world, they become more and more involved in it; they drown in worldliness and suffer the agonies of death. A few only, like Janaka, have succeeded, through the power of their austerity, in leading the spiritual life as householders. Therefore spiritual practice is extremely necessary; otherwise one cannot rightly live in the world."

The Master got into the carriage with the devotees and went to Balaram Bose's house. He was taken with his companions to the second floor. It was evening and the lamps were lighted. The Master described the feats he had seen at the circus. Gradually other devotees gathered, and soon he was engaged in spiritual talk with them.

Master on caste-system

The conversation turned to the caste-system. Sri Ramakrishna said: "The caste-system can be removed by one means only, and that is the love of God. Lovers of God do not belong to any caste. The mind, body, and soul of a man become purified through divine love. Chaitanya and Nityananda scattered the name of Hari to everyone, including the pariah, and embraced them all. A brahmin without this love is no longer a brahmin. And a pariah with the love of God is no longer a pariah. Through bhakti an untouchable becomes pure and elevated."

Entanglement of householders

Speaking of householders entangled in worldliness, the Master said: "They are like the silk-worm. They can come out of the cocoon of their worldly life if they wish. But they can't bear to; for they themselves have built the cocoon with great love and care. So they die there. Or they are like the fish in a trap. They can come out of it by the way they entered, but they sport inside the trap with other fish and hear the sweet sound of the murmuring water and forget everything else. They don't even make an effort to free themselves from the trap. The lisping of children is the murmur of the water; and the other fish are relatives and friends. Only one or two make good their escape by running away. They are the liberated souls."

The Master then sang:

When such delusion veils the world, through Mahamaya's spell,
That Brahma is bereft of sense,
And Vishnu loses consciousness,
What hope is left for men?

The narrow channel first is made, and there the trap is set;
But open though the passage lies,
The fish, once safely through the gate,
Do not come out again.

The silk-worm patiently prepares its closely spun cocoon;
Yet even though a way leads forth,
Encased within its own cocoon,
The worm remains to die.

The Master continued: "Man may be likened to grain. He has fallen between the millstones and is about to be crushed. Only the few grains that stay near the peg escape. Therefore men should take refuge at the peg, that is to say, in God. Call on Him. Sing His name. Then you will be free. Otherwise you will be crushed by the King of Death."

The Master sang again:

Mother! Mother! My boat is sinking, here in the ocean of this world;
Fiercely the hurricane of delusion rages on every side!

Clumsy is my helmsman, the mind; stubborn my six oarsmen, the passions;
Into a pitiless wind
I sailed my boat, and now it is sinking!
Split is the rudder of devotion; tattered is the sail of faith;
Into my boat the waters are pouring! Tell me, what shall I do?
For with my failing eyes, alas! nothing but darkness do I see.
Here in the waves I will swim,
O Mother, and cling to the raft of Thy name!

Mr. Viswas had been sitting in the room a long time; he now left. He had once been wealthy but had squandered everything in an immoral life. Finally he had become indifferent to his wife and children. Referring to Mr. Viswas, the Master said: "He is an unfortunate wretch. A householder has his duties to discharge, his debts to pay: his debt to the gods, his debt to his ancestors, his debt to the rishis, and his debt to wife and children. If a wife is chaste, then her husband should support her; he should also bring up their children until they are of age. Only a monk must not save; the bird and the monk do not provide for the morrow. But even a bird provides when it has young. It brings food in its bill for its chicks."

BALARAM: "Mr. Viswas now wants to cultivate the company of holy people."

MASTER (with a smile): "A monk's kamandalu goes to the four principal holy places with him, but it still tastes bitter. Likewise, it is said that the Malaya breeze turns all trees into sandal-wood. But there are a few exceptions, such as the cotton-tree, the Aśwattha, and the hog plum.

"Some frequent the company of holy men in order to smoke hemp. Many monks smoke it, and these householders stay with them, prepare the hemp, and partake of the prasad."

Thursday, November 16, 1882

The Master had come to Calcutta. In the evening he went to the house of Rajmohan, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, where Narendra and some of his young friends used to meet and worship according to the Brahmo ceremonies. Sri Ramakrishna wanted to see their worship. He was accompanied by M. and a few other devotees.

The Master was very happy to see Narendra and expressed a desire to watch the young men at their worship. Narendra sang and then the worship began. One of the young men conducted it. He prayed, "O Lord, may we give up everything and be absorbed in Thee!" Possibly the youth was inspired by the Master's presence and so talked of utter renunciation. Sri Ramakrishna remarked in a whisper, "Much likelihood there is of that!" Rajmohan served the Master with refreshments.

Sunday, November 19, 1882

It was the auspicious occasion of the Jagaddhatri Puja, the festival of the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna was invited to Surendra's house in Calcutta; but first he went to the house of Manomohan in the neighbourhood.

The Master was seated in Manomohan's parlour. He said: "God very much relishes the bhakti of the poor and the lowly, just as the cow relishes fodder mixed with oil-cake. King Duryodhana showed Krishna the splendour of his wealth and riches, but Krishna accepted the hospitality of the poor Vidura. God is fond of His devotees. He runs after the devotee as the cow after the calf."

The Master sang:

And, for that love, the mighty yogis practise yoga from age to age;
When love awakes, the Lord, like a magnet, draws to Him the soul.

Then he said: "Chaitanya used to shed tears of joy at the very mention of Krishna's name. God alone is the real Substance; all else is illusory. Man can realize God if he wants to, but he madly craves the enjoyment of 'woman and gold'. The snake has a precious stone in its head, but it is perfectly satisfied to eat a mere frog.

"Bhakti is the one essential thing. Who can ever know God through reasoning? I want love of God. What do I care about knowing His infinite glories? One bottle of wine makes me drunk. What do I care about knowing how many gallons there are in the grog-shop? One jar of water is enough to quench my thirst. I don't need to know the amount of water there is on earth."

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at Surendra's house. Many devotees had assembled there, including Surendra's elder brother, who was a judge.

Futility of reasoning

MASTER (To Surendra's brother): "You are a judge. That is very good. But remember, everything happens through God's power. It is He who has given you your high position; that is how you became a judge. People think it is they who are great. The water from the roof flows through a spout that is shaped like a lion's head. It looks as if the lion were bringing the water out through its mouth. But look at the source of the water! A cloud gathers in the sky and rain falls on the roof; then the water flows through the pipe and at last comes out through the spout."

SURENDRA'S BROTHER: "The Brahmo Samaj preaches the freedom of women and the abolition of the caste-system. What do you think about these matters?"

MASTER: "Men feel that way when they are just beginning to develop spiritual yearning. A storm raises clouds of dust, and one cannot distinguish between the different trees-the mango, the hog plum, and the tamarind. But after the storm blows over, one sees clearly. After the first storm of divine passion is quelled, one gradually understands that

God alone is the Highest Good, the Eternal Substance, and that all else is transitory. One cannot grasp this without tapasya and the company of holy men. What is the use of merely reciting the written parts for the drum? It is very difficult to put them into practice on the instrument. What can be accomplished by a mere lecture? It is austerity that is necessary. By that alone can one comprehend.

"You asked about caste distinctions. There is only one way to remove them, and that is by love of God. Lovers of God have no caste. Through this divine love the untouchable becomes pure, the pariah no longer remains a pariah. Chaitanya embraced all, including the pariahs.

"The members of the Brahmo Samaj sing the name of Hari. That is very good. Through earnest prayer one receives the grace of God and realizes Him. God can be realized by means of all paths. The same God is invoked by different names."

Master on Theosophy

SURENDRA'S BROTHER: "Sir, what do you think of Theosophy?"

MASTER: "I have heard that man can acquire superhuman powers through it and perform miracles. I saw a man who had brought a ghost under control. The ghost used to procure various things for his master. What shall I do with superhuman powers? Can one realize God through them? If God is not realized then everything becomes false."

November 1882

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Sri Ramakrishna arrived in Calcutta to attend the annual festival of the Brahmo Samaj, which was to be celebrated at Manilal Mallick's house. Besides M. and other devotees of the Master, Vijay Goswami and a number of Brahmos were present. Elaborate arrangements had been made to make the occasion a success. Vijay was to conduct the worship.

The kathak recited the life of Prahlada from the Purana. Its substance was as follows: Hiranyakasipu, Prahlada's father, was king of the demons. He bore great malice toward God and put his own son through endless tortures for leading a religious life. Afflicted by his father, Prahlada prayed to God, "O God, please give my father holy inclinations."

At these words the Master wept. He went into an ecstatic mood. Afterwards he began to talk to the devotees.

MASTER: "Bhakti is the only essential thing. One obtains love of God by constantly chanting His name and singing His glories. Ah! What a devotee Shivanath is! He is soaked in the love of God, like a cheese-cake in syrup.

"One should not think, 'My religion alone is the right path and other religions are false.' God can be realized by means of all paths. It is enough to have sincere yearning for God. Infinite are the paths and infinite the opinions.

The pure in heart see God

"Let me tell you one thing. God can be seen. The Vedas say that God is beyond mind and speech. The meaning of this is that God is unknown to the mind attached to worldly objects. Vaishnavcharan used to say, 'God is known by the mind and intellect that are pure.' Therefore it is necessary to seek the company of holy men, practise prayer, and listen to the instruction of the guru. These purify the mind. Then one sees God. Dirt can be removed from water by a purifying agent. Then one sees one's reflection in it. One cannot see one's face in a mirror if the mirror is covered with dirt.

"After the purification of the heart one obtains divine love. Then one sees God, through His grace. One can teach others if one receives that command from God after seeing Him. Before that one should not 'lecture'. There is a song that says:

You have set up no image here,
Within the shrine, O fool!
Blowing the conch, you simply make
Confusion worse confounded.

"You should first cleanse the shrine of your heart. Then you should install the Deity and arrange worship. As yet nothing has been done. What can you achieve by blowing the conch-shell and simply making a loud noise?"

Vijay sat on a raised stool and conducted the worship according to the rules of the Brahmo Samaj. Afterwards he sat by the Master.

MASTER (to Vijay): "Will you tell me one thing? Why did you harp so much on sin? By repeating a hundred times, 'I am a sinner', one verily becomes a sinner. One should have such faith as to be able to say, 'What? I have taken the name of God; how can I be a sinner?' God is our Father and Mother. Tell Him, 'O Lord, I have committed sins, but I won't repeat them.' Chant His name and purify your body and mind. Purify your tongue by singing God's holy name."

December 1882

In the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the west porch of his room in the temple garden at Dakshineswar. Among others, Baburam, Ramdayal, and M. were present. These three were going to spend the night with the Master. M. intended to stay the following day also, for he was having his Christmas holidays. Baburam had only recently begun to visit the Master.

MASTER (to the devotees): "A man becomes liberated even in this life when he knows that God is the Doer of all things. Once Keshab came here with Sambhu Mallick. I said to him, 'Not even a leaf moves except by the will of God.' Where is man's free will? All are under the will of God. Nangta was a man of great knowledge, yet even he was about to drown himself in the Ganges. He stayed here eleven months. At one time he suffered from stomach trouble. The excruciating pain made him lose control over himself, and he wanted to drown himself in the river. There was a long shoal near the bathing-ghat. However far he went into the river, he couldn't find water above his

knees. Then he understood everything and came back. At one time I was very ill and was about to cut my throat with a knife. Therefore I say: 'O Mother, I am the machine and Thou art the Operator; I am the chariot and Thou art the Driver. I move as Thou movest me; I do as Thou makest me do.' "

The devotees sing kirtan in the Master's room:

Dwell, O Lord, O Lover of bhakti,
In the Vrindāvan of my heart,
And my devotion unto Thee
Will be Thy Radha, dearly loved;
My body will be Nanda's home,
My tenderness will be Yaśoda,
My longing for deliverance
Will be Thy gentle gopi maids.
Lift the Govardhan of my sin
And slay my six unyielding passions,
Fierce as the demons sent by Kamsa!
Sweetly play the flute of Thy grace,
Charming the milch cow of my mind;
Abide in the pasture of my soul.
Dwell by the Jamuna of my yearning,
Under the banyan of my hope,
For ever gracious to Thy servant;
And, if naught but the cowherds' love
Can hold Thee in Vrindāvan's vale,
Then, Lord, let Dasarathi, too,
Become Thy cowherd and Thy slave.

Again they sang:

Sing, O bird that nestles deep within my heart!
Sing, O bird that sits on the Kalpa-Tree of Brahman!
Sing God's everlasting praise.
Taste, O bird, of the four fruits of the Kalpa-Tree,
Dharma, artha, kama, moksha.
Sing, O bird, "He alone is the Comfort of my soul!"
Sing, O bird, "He alone is my life's enduring Joy!"
O thou wondrous bird of my life,
Sing aloud in my heart! Unceasingly sing, O bird!
Sing for evermore, even as the thirsty chatak
Sings for the raindrop from the cloud.

A devotee from Nandanbagan entered the room with his friends. The Master looked at him and said, "Everything inside him can be seen through his eyes, as one sees the objects in a room through a glass door." This devotee and his brothers always celebrated

the anniversary of the Brahmo Samaj at their house in Nandanbagan. Sri Ramakrishna had taken part in these festivals.

The evening worship began in the temples. The Master was seated on the small couch in his room, absorbed in meditation. He went into an ecstatic mood and said a little later: "Mother, please draw him to Thee. He is so modest and humble! He has been visiting Thee." Was the Master referring to Baburam, who later became one of his foremost disciples?

Why so much suffering in God's creation?

The Master explained the different kinds of samādhi to the devotees. The conversation then turned to the joy and suffering of life. Why did God create so much suffering?

M: "Once Vidyasagar said in a mood of pique: 'What is the use of calling on God? Just think of this incident: At one time Chenghiz Khan plundered a country and imprisoned many people. The number of prisoners rose to about a hundred thousand. The commander of his army said to him: "Your Majesty, who will feed them? It is risky to keep them with us. It will be equally dangerous to release them. What shall I do?" Chenghiz Khan said: "That's true. What can be done? Well, have them killed." The order was accordingly given to cut them to pieces. Now, God saw this slaughter, didn't He? But He didn't stop it in any way. Therefore I don't need God, whether He exists or not. I don't derive any good from Him.'"

MASTER: "Is it possible to understand God's action and His motive? He creates, He preserves, and He destroys. Can we ever understand why He destroys? I say to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother, I do not need to understand. Please give me love for Thy Lotus Feet.' The aim of human life is to attain bhakti. As for other things, the Mother knows best. I have come to the garden to eat mangoes. What is the use of my calculating the number of trees, branches, and leaves? I only eat the mangoes; I don't need to know the number of trees and leaves."

Baburam, M., and Ramdayal slept that night on the floor of the Master's room.

It was an early hour of the morning, about two or three o'clock. The room was dark. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on his bed and now and then conversed with the devotees.

Compassion and attachment

MASTER: "Remember that daya, compassion, and maya, attachment, are two different things. Attachment means the feeling of 'my-ness' toward one's relatives. It is the love one feels for one's parents, one's brother, one's sister, one's wife and children. Compassion is the love one feels for all beings of the world. It is an attitude of equality. If you see anywhere an instance of compassion, as in Vidyasagar, know that it is due to the grace of God. Through compassion one serves all beings. Maya also comes from God. Through maya God makes one serve one's relatives. But one thing should be remembered: maya keeps us in ignorance and entangles us in the world, whereas daya makes our hearts pure and gradually unties our bonds.

"God cannot be realized without purity of heart. One receives the grace of God by subduing the passions-lust, anger, and greed. Then one sees God. I tried many things in order to conquer lust.

"When I was ten or eleven years old and lived at Kamarpukur, I first experienced samādhi. As I was passing through a paddy-field, I saw something and was overwhelmed. There are certain characteristics of God-vision. One sees light, feels joy, and experiences the upsurge of a great current in one's chest, like the bursting of a rocket."

The next day Baburam and Ramdayal returned to Calcutta. M. spent the day and the night with the Master.

December 1882

It was afternoon. The Master was sitting in his room at Dakshineswar with M. and one or two other devotees. Several Marwari devotees arrived and saluted the Master. They requested Sri Ramakrishna to give them spiritual instruction. He smiled.

MASTER (to the Marwari devotees): "You see, the feeling of 'I' and 'mine' is the result of ignorance. But to say, 'O God, Thou art the Doer; all these belong to Thee' is the sign of Knowledge. How can you say such a thing as 'mine'? The superintendent of the garden says, 'This is my garden.' But if he is dismissed because of some misconduct, then he does not have the courage to take away even such a worthless thing as his mango-wood box. Anger and lust cannot be destroyed. Turn them toward God. If you must feel desire and temptation, then desire to realize God, feel tempted by Him. Discriminate and turn the passions away from worldly objects. When the elephant is about to devour a plaintain-tree in someone's garden, the mahut strikes it with his iron-tipped goad.

"You are merchants. You know how to improve your business gradually. Some of you start with a castor-oil factory. After making some money at that, you open a cloth shop. In the same way, one makes progress toward God. It may be that you go into solitude, now and then, and devote more time to prayer.

"But you must remember that nothing can be achieved except in its proper time. Some persons must pass through many experiences and perform many worldly duties before they can turn their attention to God; so they have to wait a long time. If an abscess is lanced before it is soft, the result is not good; the surgeon makes the opening when it is soft and has come to a head. Once a child said to its mother: 'Mother, I am going to sleep now. Please wake me up when I feel the call of nature.' 'My child,' said the mother, 'when it is time for that, you will wake up yourself. I shan't have to wake you.' "

The Marwari devotees generally brought offerings of fruit, candy, and other sweets for the Master. But Sri Ramakrishna could hardly eat them. He would say: "They earn their money by falsehood. I can't eat their offerings." He said to the Marwaris: "You see, one can't strictly adhere to truth in business. There are ups and downs in business. Nanak once said, 'I was about to eat the food of unholy people, when I found it stained with

blood.' A man should offer only pure things to holy men. He shouldn't give them food earned by dishonest means. God is realized by following the path of truth. One should always chant His name. Even while one is performing one's duties, the mind should be left with God. Suppose I have a carbuncle on my back. I perform my duties, but the mind is drawn to the carbuncle. It is good to repeat the name of Rama. 'The same Rama who was the son of King Dasaratha has created this world. Again, as Spirit, He pervades all beings. He is very near us; He is both within and without.' "

Chapter 7

THE MASTER AND VIJAY GOSWAMI

Thursday, December 14, 1882

IT WAS AFTERNOON. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on his bed after a short noonday rest. Vijay, Balaram, M., and a few other devotees were sitting on the floor with their faces toward the Master. They could see the sacred river Ganges through the door. Since it was winter all were wrapped up in warm clothes. Vijay had been suffering from colic and had brought some medicine with him.

Vijay, the Brahmo preacher

Vijay was a paid preacher in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, but there were many things about which he could not agree with the Samaj authorities. He came from a very noble family of Bengal noted for its piety and other spiritual qualities. Advaita Goswami, one of his remote ancestors, had been an intimate companion of Sri Chaitanya. Thus the blood of a great lover of God flowed in Vijay's veins. As an adherent of the Brahmo Samaj, Vijay no doubt meditated on the formless Brahman; but his innate love of God, inherited from his distinguished ancestors, had merely been waiting for the proper time to manifest itself in all its sweetness. Thus Vijay was irresistibly attracted by the God-intoxicated state of Sri Ramakrishna and often sought his company. He would listen to the Master's words with great respect, and they would dance together in an ecstasy of divine love.

It was a week-day. Generally devotees came to the Master in large numbers on Sundays; hence those who wanted to have intimate talks with him visited him on week-days.

Tendencies from previous births

A boy named Vishnu, living in Ariadaha, had recently committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor. The talk turned to him.

MASTER: "I felt very badly when I heard of the boy's passing away. He was a pupil in a school and he used to come here. He would often say to me that he couldn't enjoy worldly life. He had lived with some relatives in the western provinces and at that time used to meditate in solitude, in the meadows, hills, and forests. He told me he had visions of many divine forms.

"Perhaps this was his last birth. He must have finished most of his duties in his previous birth. The little that had been left undone was perhaps finished in this one.

"One must admit the existence of tendencies inherited from previous births. There is a story about a man who practised the sava-sadhana.l He worshipped the Divine Mother in

a deep forest. First he saw many terrible visions. Finally a tiger attacked and killed him. Another man, happening to pass and seeing the approach of the tiger, had climbed a tree. Afterwards he got down and found all the arrangements for worship at hand. He performed some purifying ceremonies and seated himself on the corpse. No sooner had he done a little japa than the Divine Mother appeared before him and said: 'My child, I am very much pleased with you. Accept a boon from Me.' He bowed low at the Lotus Feet of the Goddess and said: 'May I ask You one question, Mother? I am speechless with amazement at Your action. The other man worked so hard to get the ingredients for Your worship and tried to propitiate You for such a long time, but You didn't condescend to show him Your favour. And I, who don't know anything of worship, who have done nothing, who have neither devotion nor knowledge nor love, and who haven't practised any austerities, am receiving so much of Your grace.' The Divine Mother said with a laugh: 'My child, you don't remember your previous births. For many births you tried to propitiate Me through austerities. As a result of those austerities all these things have come to hand, and you have been blessed with My Vision. Now ask Me your boon.' "

Suicide after the vision of God

A DEVOTEE: "I am frightened to hear of the suicide."

MASTER: "Suicide is a heinous sin, undoubtedly. A man who kills himself must return again and again to this world and suffer its agony.

"But I don't call it suicide if a person leaves his body after having the vision of God. There is no harm in giving up one's body that way. After attaining Knowledge some people give up their bodies. After the gold image has been cast in the clay mould, you may either preserve the mould or break it.

"Many years ago a young man of about twenty used to come to the temple garden from Baranagore; his name was Gopal Sen. In my presence he used to experience such intense ecstasy that Hriday had to support him for fear he might fall to the ground and break his limbs. That young man touched my feet one day and said: 'Sir, I shall not be able to see you any more. Let me bid you good-bye.' A few days later I learnt that he had given up his body.

Four classes of men

"It is said that there are four classes of human beings: the bound, those aspiring after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-perfect.

Parable of the fish and the net

"This world is like a fishing-net. Men are the fish, and God, whose maya has created this world, is the fisherman. When the fish are entangled in the net, some of them try to tear through its meshes in order to get their liberation. They are like the men striving after liberation. But by no means all of them escape. Only a few jump out of the net with a loud splash, and then people say, 'Ah! There goes a big one!' In like manner, three or four men attain liberation. Again, some fish are so careful by nature that they are never caught in the net; some beings of the ever-perfect class, like Narada, are

never entangled in the meshes of worldliness. Most of the fish are trapped; but they are not conscious of the net and of their imminent death. No sooner are they entangled than they run headlong, net and all, trying to hide themselves in the mud. They don't make the least effort to get free. On the contrary, they go deeper and deeper into the mud. These fish are like the bound men. They are still inside the net, but they think they are quite safe there. A bound creature is immersed in worldliness, in 'woman and gold', having gone deep into the mire of degradation. But still he believes he is quite happy and secure. The liberated, and the seekers after liberation, look on the world as a deep well. They do not enjoy it. Therefore, after the attainment of Knowledge, the realization of God, some give up their bodies. But such a thing is rare indeed.

Worldly-minded forget their lessons

"The bound creatures, entangled in worldliness, will not come to their senses at all. They suffer so much misery and agony, they face so many dangers, and yet they will not wake up.

"The camel loves to eat thorny bushes. The more it eats the thorns, the more the blood gushes from its mouth. Still it must eat thorny plants and will never give them up. The man of worldly nature suffers so much sorrow and affliction, but he forgets it all in a few days and begins his old life over again. Suppose a man has lost his wife or she has turned unfaithful. Lo! He marries again.

"Or take the instance of a mother: her son dies and she suffers bitter grief; but after a few days she forgets all about it. The mother, so overwhelmed with sorrow a few days before, now attends to her toilet and puts on her jewelry. A father becomes bankrupt through the marriage of his daughters, yet he goes on having children year after year. People are ruined by litigation, yet they go to court all the same. There are men who cannot feed the children they have, who cannot clothe them or provide decent shelter for them; yet they have more children every year.

"Again, the worldly man is like a snake trying to swallow a mole. The snake can neither swallow the mole nor give it up. The bound soul may have realized that there is no substance to the world-that the world is like a hog plum, only stone and skin-but still he cannot give it up and turn his mind to God.

"I once met a relative of Keshab Sen, fifty years old. He was playing cards. As if the time had not yet come for him to think of God!

"There is another characteristic of the bound soul. If you remove him from his worldly surroundings to a spiritual environment, he will pine away. The worm that grows in filth feels very happy there. It thrives in filth. It will die if you put it in a pot of rice."

All remained silent.

Bondage removed by strong renunciation

VIJAY: "What must the bound soul's condition of mind be in order to achieve liberation?"

MASTER: "He can free himself from attachment to 'woman and gold' if, by the grace of God, he cultivates a spirit of strong renunciation. What is this strong renunciation? One who has only a mild spirit of renunciation says, 'Well, all will happen in the course of time; let me now simply repeat the name of God.' But a man possessed of a strong spirit of renunciation feels restless for God, as the mother feels for her own child. A man of strong renunciation seeks nothing but God. He regards the world as a deep well and feels as if he were going to be drowned in it. He looks on his relatives as venomous snakes; he wants to fly away from them. And he does go away. He never thinks, 'Let me first make some arrangement for my family and then I shall think of God.' He has great inward resolution.

Parable of the two farmers

"Let me tell you a story about strong renunciation. At one time there was a drought in a certain part of the country. The farmers began to cut long channels to bring water to their fields. One farmer was stubbornly determined. He took a vow that he would not stop digging until the channel connected his field with the river. He set to work. The time came for his bath, and his wife sent their daughter to him with oil. 'Father,' said the girl, 'it is already late. Rub your body with oil and take your bath.' 'Go away!' thundered the farmer. 'I have too much to do now.' It was past midday, and the farmer was still at work in his field. He didn't even think of his bath. Then his wife came and said: 'Why haven't you taken your bath? The food is getting cold. You overdo everything. You can finish the rest tomorrow or even today after dinner.' The farmer scolded her furiously and ran at her, spade in hand, crying: 'What? Have you no sense? There's no rain. The crops are dying. What will the children eat? You'll all starve to death. I have taken a vow not to think of bath and food today before I bring water to my field.' The wife saw his state of mind and ran away in fear. Through a whole day's back-breaking labour the farmer managed by evening to connect his field with the river. Then he sat down and watched the water flowing into his field with a murmuring sound. His mind was filled with peace and joy. He went home, called his wife, and said to her, 'Now give me some oil and prepare me a smoke.' With serene mind he finished his bath and meal, and retired to bed, where he snored to his heart's content. The determination he showed is an example of strong renunciation.

"Now, there was another farmer who was also digging a channel to bring water to his field. His wife, too, came to the field and said to him: 'It's very late. Come home. It isn't necessary to overdo things.' The farmer didn't protest much, but put aside his spade and said to his wife, 'Well, I'll go home since you ask me to.' (All laugh) That man never succeeded in irrigating his field. This is a case of mild renunciation.

"As without strong determination the farmer cannot bring water to his field, so also without intense yearning a man cannot realize God. (To Vijay) Why don't you come here now as frequently as before?"

VIJAY: "Sir, I wish to very much, but I am not free. I have accepted work in the Brahmo Samaj."

Attachment to "woman" creates bondage

MASTER: "It is 'woman and gold' that binds man and robs him of his freedom. It is woman that creates the need for gold. For woman one man becomes the slave of another, and so loses his freedom. Then he cannot act as he likes.

Story of Govindaji's priests

"The priests in the temple of Govindaji at Jaipur were celibates at first, and at that time they had fiery natures. Once the King of Jaipur sent for them, but they didn't obey him. They said to the messenger, 'Ask the king to come to see us.' After consultation, the king and his ministers arranged marriages for them. From then on the king didn't have to send for them. They would come to him of themselves and say: 'Your Majesty, we have come with our blessings. Here are the sacred flowers of the temple. Deign to accept them.' They came to the palace, for now they always wanted money for one thing or another: the building of a house, the rice-taking ceremony of their babies, or the rituals connected with the beginning of their children's education.

Story of twelve hundred nedas

"There is the story of the twelve hundred nedas and thirteen hundred nedis. Virabhadra, the son of Nityananda Goswami, had thirteen hundred 'shaven-headed' disciples. They attained great spiritual powers. That alarmed their teacher. 'My disciples have acquired great spiritual powers', thought Virabhadra. 'Whatever they say to people will come to pass. Wherever they go they may create alarming situations; for people offending them unwittingly will come to grief.' Thinking thus, Virabhadra one day called them to him and said, 'See me after performing your daily devotions on the bank of the Ganges.' These disciples had such a high spiritual nature that, while meditating, they would go into samādhi and be unaware of the river water flowing over their heads during the flood-tide. Then the ebb-tide would come and still they would remain absorbed in meditation.

"Now, one hundred of these disciples had anticipated what their teacher would ask of them. Lest they should have to disobey his injunctions, they had quickly disappeared from the place before he summoned them. So they did not go to Virabhadra with the others. The remaining twelve hundred disciples went to the teacher after finishing their meditation. Virabhadra said to them: 'These thirteen hundred nuns will serve you. I ask you to marry them.' 'As you please, revered sir', they said. 'But one hundred of us have gone away.' Thenceforth each of these twelve hundred disciples had a wife. Consequently they all lost their spiritual power. Their austerities did not have their original fire. The company of woman robbed them of their spirituality because it destroyed their freedom.

Degrading effect of serving others

(To Vijay) "You yourself perceive how far you have gone down by being a servant of others. Again, one finds that people with many university degrees, scholars with their vast English education, accept service under their English masters and are daily trampled under their boots. The one cause of all this is woman. They have married and set up a 'gay fair' with their wives and children. Now they cannot go back, much as they would like to. Hence all these insults and humiliations, all this suffering from slavery.

"Once a man realizes God through intense dispassion, he is no longer attached to woman. Even if he must lead the life of a householder, he is free from fear of and attachment to woman. Suppose there are two magnets, one big and the other small. Which one will attract the iron? The big one, of course. God is the big magnet. Compared to Him, woman is a small one. What can 'woman' do?"

Worshipping woman as Divine Mother

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, shall we hate women then?"

MASTER: "He who has realized God does not look upon a woman with the eye of lust; so he is not afraid of her. He perceives clearly that women are but so many aspects of the Divine Mother. He worships them all as the Mother Herself.

(To Vijay) "Come here now and then. I like to see you very much."

VIJAY: "I have to do my various duties in the Brahmo Samaj; that is why I can't always come here. But I shall visit you whenever I find it possible."

Difficulties of preaching

MASTER (to Vijay): "The task of a religious teacher is indeed difficult. One cannot teach men without a direct command from God. People won't listen to you if you teach without such authority. Such teaching has no force behind it. One must first of all attain God through spiritual discipline or some other means. Thus armed with authority from God, one can deliver lectures.

"After receiving the command from God, one can be a teacher and give lectures anywhere. He who receives authority from God also receives power from Him. Only then can he perform the difficult task of a teacher.

"An insignificant tenant was once engaged in a lawsuit with a big landlord. People realized that there was a powerful man behind the tenant. Perhaps another big landlord was directing the case from behind. Man is an insignificant creature. He cannot fulfil the difficult task of a teacher without receiving power direct from God."

VIJAY: "Don't the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj bring men salvation?"

MASTER: "How is it ever possible for one man to liberate another from the bondage of the world? God alone, the Creator of this world-bewitching maya, can save men from maya. There is no other refuge but that great Teacher, Satchidananda. How is it ever possible for men who have not realized God or received His command, and who are not strengthened with divine strength, to save others from the prison-house of the world?

"One day as I was passing the Panchavati on my way to the pine-grove, I heard a bullfrog croaking. I thought it must have been seized by a snake. After some time, as I was coming back, I could still hear its terrified croaking. I looked to see what was the matter, and found that a water-snake had seized it. The snake could neither swallow it nor give it up. So there was no end to the frog's suffering. I thought that had it been

seized by a cobra it would have been silenced after three croaks at the most. As it was only a water-snake, both of them had to go through this agony. A man's ego is destroyed after three croaks, as it were, if he gets into the clutches of a real teacher. But if the teacher is an 'unripe' one, then both the teacher and the disciple undergo endless suffering. The disciple cannot get rid either of his ego or of the shackles of the world. If a disciple falls into the clutches of an incompetent teacher, he doesn't attain liberation."

Ego alone the cause of bondage

VIJAY: "Sir, why are we bound like this? Why don't we see God?"

MASTER: "Maya is nothing but the egotism of the embodied soul. This egotism has covered everything like a veil. 'All troubles come to an end when the ego dies.' If by the grace of God a man but once realizes that he is not the doer, then he at once becomes a Jivanmukta. Though living in the body, he is liberated. He has nothing else to fear.

"This maya, that is to say, the ego, is like a cloud. The sun cannot be seen on account of a thin patch of cloud; when that disappears one sees the sun. If by the grace of the guru one's ego vanishes, then one sees God.

"Rama, who is God Himself, was only two and a half cubits ahead of Lakshmana. But Lakshmana couldn't see Him because Sita stood between them. Lakshmana may be compared to the jiva, and Sita to maya. Man cannot see God on account of the barrier of maya. Just look: I am creating a barrier in front of my face with this towel. Now you can't see me, even though I am so near. Likewise, God is the nearest of all, but we cannot see Him on account of this covering of maya.

Maya creates upadhis

"The jiva is nothing but the embodiment of Satchidananda. But since maya, or ego, has created various upadhis, he has forgotten his real Self.

"Each upadhi changes man's nature. If he wears a fine black-bordered cloth, you will at once find him humming Nidhu Babu's love-songs. Then playing-cards and a walking-stick follow. If even a sickly man puts on high boots, he begins to whistle and climbs the stairs like an Englishman, jumping from one step to another. If a man but holds a pen in his hand, he scribbles on any paper he can get hold of-such is the power of the pen!

"Money is also a great upadhi. The possession of money makes such a difference in a man! He is no longer the same person. A brahmin used to frequent the temple garden. Outwardly he was very modest. One day I went to Konnagar with Hriday. No sooner did we get off the boat than we noticed the brahmin seated on the bank of the Ganges. We thought he had been enjoying the fresh air. Looking at us, he said: 'Hello there, priest! How do you do?' I marked his tone and said to Hriday: 'The man must have got some money. That's why he talks that way.' Hriday laughed.

"A frog had a rupee, which he kept in his hole. One day an elephant was going over the hole, and the frog, coming out in a fit of anger, raised his foot, as if to kick the elephant, and said, 'How dare you walk over my head?' Such is the pride that money begets!

"One can get rid of the ego after the attainment of Knowledge. On attaining Knowledge one goes into samādhi, and the ego disappears. But it is very difficult to obtain such Knowledge.

Seven planes of the mind

"It is said in the Vedas that a man experiences samādhi when his mind ascends to the seventh plane. The ego can disappear only when one goes into samādhi. Where does the mind of a man ordinarily dwell? In the first three planes. These are at the organs of evacuation and generation, and at the navel. Then the mind is immersed only in worldliness, attached to 'woman and gold'. A man sees the light of God when his mind dwells in the plane of the heart. He sees the light and exclaims: 'Ah! What is this? What is this?' The next plane is at the throat. When the mind dwells there he likes to hear and talk only of God. When the mind ascends to the next plane, in the forehead, between the eyebrows, he sees the form of Satchidānanda and desires to touch and embrace It. But he is unable to do so. It is like the light in a lantern, which you can see but cannot touch. You feel as if you were touching the light, but in reality you are not. When the mind reaches the seventh plane, then the ego vanishes completely and the man goes into samādhi."

Indescribability of highest plane

VIJAY: "What does a man see when he attains the Knowledge of Brahman after reaching the seventh plane?"

MASTER: "What happens when the mind reaches the seventh plane cannot be described.

"Once a boat enters the 'black waters' of the ocean, it does not return. Nobody knows what happens to the boat after that. Therefore the boat cannot give us any information about the ocean.

"Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. No sooner did it enter the water than it melted. Now who could tell how deep the ocean was? That which could have told about its depth had melted. Reaching the seventh plane, the mind is annihilated; man goes into samādhi. What he feels then cannot be described in words.

The "wicked I"

"The 'I' that makes one a worldly person and attaches one to 'woman and gold' is the 'wicked I'. The intervention of this ego creates the difference between jiva and Ātman. Water appears to be divided into two parts if one puts a stick across it. But in reality there is only one water. It appears as two on account of the stick. This 'I' is the stick. Remove the stick and there remains only one water as before.

"Now, what is this 'wicked I'? It is the ego that says: 'What? Don't they know me? I have so much money! Who is wealthier than I?' If a thief robs such a man of only ten rupees,

first of all he wrings the money out of the thief, then he gives him a good beating. But the matter doesn't end there: the thief is handed over to the police and is eventually sent to jail. The 'wicked I' says: 'What? Doesn't the rogue know whom he has robbed? To steal my ten rupees! How dare he?' "

VIJAY: "If without destroying the 'I' a man cannot get rid of attachment to the world and consequently cannot experience samādhi, then it would be wise for him to follow the path of Brahmajnāna to attain samādhi. If the 'I' persists in the path of devotion, then one should rather choose the path of knowledge."

The "servant I"

MASTER: "It is true that one or two can get rid of the 'I' through samādhi; but these cases are very rare. You may indulge in thousands of reasonings, but still the 'I' comes back. You may cut the peepal-tree to the very root today, but you will notice a sprout springing up tomorrow. Therefore if the 'I' must remain, let the rascal remain as the 'servant I'. As long as you live, you should say, 'O God, Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant.' The 'I' that feels, 'I am the servant of God, I am His devotee' does not injure one. Sweet things cause acidity of the stomach, no doubt, but sugar candy is an exception.

"The path of knowledge is very difficult. One cannot obtain Knowledge unless one gets rid of the feeling that one is the body. In the Kaliyuga the life of man is centred on food. He cannot get rid of the feeling that he is the body and the ego. Therefore the path of devotion is prescribed for this cycle.

This is an easy path. You will attain God if you sing His name and glories and pray to Him with a longing heart. There is not the least doubt about it.

"Suppose you draw a line on the surface of water with a bamboo stick. The water appears to be divided into two parts; but the line doesn't remain for any length of time. The 'servant I'or the 'devotee I' or the 'child I' is only a line drawn with the ego and is not real".

The "ego of a devotee"

VIJAY (to the Master): "Sir, you ask us to renounce the 'wicked I'. Is there any harm in the 'servant I'?"

MASTER: "The 'servant I'-that is, the feeling, 'I am the servant of God, I am the devotee of God'-does not injure one. On the contrary, it helps one to realize God."

VIJAY: "Well, sir, what becomes of the lust, anger, and other passions of one who keeps the 'servant I'?"

MASTER: "If a man truly feels like that, then he has only the semblance of lust, anger, and the like. If, after attaining God, he looks on himself as the servant or the devotee of God, then he cannot injure anyone. By touching the philosopher's stone a sword is turned into gold. It keeps the appearance of a sword but cannot injure.

"When the dry branch of a coconut palm drops to the ground, it leaves only a mark on the trunk indicating that once there was a branch at that place. In like manner, he who has attained God keeps only an appearance of ego; there remains in him only a semblance of anger and lust. He becomes like a child. A child has no attachment to the three gunas-sattva, rajas, and tamas. He becomes as quickly detached from a thing as he becomes attached to it. You can cajole him out of a cloth worth five rupees with a doll worth an *ānnā*, though at first he may say with great determination: 'No, I won't give it to you. My daddy bought it for me.' Again, all persons are the same to a child. He has no feeling of high and low in regard to persons. So he doesn't discriminate about caste. If his mother tells him that a particular man should be regarded as an elder brother, the child will eat from the same plate with him, though the man may belong to the low caste of a blacksmith. The child doesn't know hate, or what is holy or unholy.

"Even after attaining samādhi, some retain the 'servant ego' or the 'devotee ego'. The bhakta keeps this 'I-consciousness'. He says, 'O God, Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant; Thou art the Lord and I am Thy devotee.' He feels that way even after the realization of God. His 'I' is not completely effaced. Again, by constantly practising this kind of 'I-consciousness', one ultimately attains God. This is called bhaktiyoga.

"One can attain the Knowledge of Brahman, too, by following the path of bhakti. God is all-powerful. He may give His devotee Brahmajnāna also, if He so wills. But the devotee generally doesn't seek the Knowledge of the Absolute. He would rather have the consciousness that God is the Master and he the servant, or that God is the Divine Mother and he the child."

VIJAY: "But those who discriminate according to the Vedanta philosophy also realize Him in the end, don't they?"

Path of bhakti is easy

MASTER: "Yes, one may reach Him by following the path of discrimination too: that is called Jnanayoga. But it is an extremely difficult path. I have told you already of the seven planes of consciousness. On reaching the seventh plane the mind goes into samādhi. If a man acquires the firm knowledge that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory, then his mind merges in samādhi. But in the Kaliyuga the life of a man depends entirely on food. How can he have the consciousness that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory? In the Kaliyuga it is difficult to have the feeling, 'I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am not the twenty-four cosmic principles; I am beyond pleasure and pain, I am above disease and grief, old age and death.' However you may reason and argue, the feeling that the body is identical with the soul will somehow crop up from an unexpected quarter. You may cut a peepal-tree to the ground and think it is dead to its very root, but the next morning you will find a new sprout shooting up from the dead stump. One cannot get rid of this identification with the body; therefore the path of bhakti is best for the people of the Kaliyuga. It is an easy path.

"And, 'I don't want to become sugar; I want to eat it.' I never feel like saying, 'I am Brahman.' I say, 'Thou art my Lord and I am Thy servant.' It is better to make the mind

go up and down between the fifth and sixth planes, like a boat racing between two points. I don't want to go beyond the sixth plane and keep my mind a long time in the seventh. My desire is to sing the name and glories of God. It is very good to look on God as the Master and oneself as His servant. Further, you see, people speak of the waves as belonging to the Ganges; but no one says that the Ganges belongs to the waves. The feeling, 'I am He', is not wholesome. A man who entertains such an idea, while looking on his body as the Self, causes himself great harm. He cannot go forward in spiritual life; he drags himself down. He deceives himself as well as others. He cannot understand his own state of mind.

Prema-bhakti

"But it isn't any and every kind of bhakti that enables one to realize God. One cannot realize God without prema-bhakti. Another name for prema-bhakti is raga-bhakti. God cannot be realized without love and longing. Unless one has learnt to love God, one cannot realize Him.

"There is another kind of bhakti, known as vaidhi-bhakti, according to which one must repeat the name of God a fixed number of times, fast, make pilgrimages, worship God with prescribed offerings, make so many sacrifices, and so forth and so on. By continuing such practices a long time one gradually acquires raga-bhakti. God cannot be realized until one has raga-bhakti. One must love God. In order to realize God one must be completely free from worldliness and direct all of one's mind to Him.

"But some acquire raga-bhakti directly. It is innate in them. They have it from their very childhood. Even at an early age they weep for God. An instance of such bhakti is to be found in Prahlada. Vaidhi-bhakti is like moving a fan to make a breeze. One needs the fan to make the breeze. Similarly, one practises japa, austerity, and fasting, in order to acquire love of God. But the fan is set aside when the southern breeze blows of itself.
Such actions as japa and austerity drop away when one spontaneously feels love and attachment for God. Who, indeed, will perform the ceremonies enjoined in the scriptures, when mad with love of God?

"Devotion to God may be said to be 'green' so long as it doesn't grow into love of God; but it becomes 'ripe' when it has grown into such love.

"A man with 'green' bhakti cannot assimilate spiritual talk and instruction; but one with 'ripe' bhakti can. The image that falls on a photographic plate covered with black film5 is retained. On the other hand, thousands of images may be reflected on a bare piece of glass, but not one of them is retained. As the object moves away, the glass becomes the same as it was before. One cannot assimilate spiritual instruction unless one has already developed love of God."

VIJAY: "Is bhakti alone sufficient for the attainment of God, for His vision?"

MASTER: "Yes, one can see God through bhakti alone. But it must be 'ripe' bhakti, prema-bhakti and raga-bhakti. When one has that bhakti, one loves God even as the mother loves the child, the child the mother, or the wife the husband.

"When one has such love and attachment for God, one doesn't feel the attraction of maya to wife, children, relatives, and friends. One retains only compassion for them. To such a man the world appears a strange land, a place where he has merely to perform his duties. It is like a man's having his real home in the country, but coming to Calcutta for work; he has to rent a house in Calcutta for the sake of his duties. When one develops love of God, one completely gets rid of one's attachment to the world and worldly wisdom.

"One cannot see God if one has even the slightest trace of worldliness. Match-sticks, if damp, won't strike fire though you rub a thousand of them against the match-box. You only waste a heap of sticks. The mind soaked in worldliness is such a damp match-stick. Once Sri Radha said to her friends that she saw Krishna everywhere-both within and without. The friends answered: 'Why, we don't see Him at all. Are you delirious?' Radha said, 'Friends, paint your eyes with the collyrium of divine love, and then you will see Him.'

(To Vijay) "It is said in a song of your Brahmo Samaj:

O Lord, is it ever possible to know Thee without love,
However much one may perform worship and sacrifice?

"If the devotee but once feels this attachment and ecstatic love for God, this mature devotion and longing, then he sees God in both His aspects, with form and without form."

Purity of heart

VIJAY: "How can one see God?"

MASTER: "One cannot see God without purity of heart. Through attachment to 'woman and gold' the mind has become stained-covered with dirt, as it were. A magnet cannot attract a needle if the needle is covered with mud. Wash away the mud and the magnet will draw it. Likewise, the dirt of the mind can be washed away with the tears of our eyes. This stain is removed if one sheds tears of repentance and says, 'O God, I shall never again do such a thing.' Thereupon God, who is like the magnet, draws to Himself the mind, which is like the needle. Then the devotee goes into samādhi and obtains the vision of God.

God's grace is the ultimate help

"You may try thousands of times, but nothing can be achieved without God's grace. One cannot see God without His grace. Is it an easy thing to receive the grace of God? One must altogether renounce egotism; one cannot see God as long as one feels, 'I am the doer.' Suppose, in a family, a man has taken charge of the store-room; then if someone asks the master, 'Sir, will you yourself kindly give me something from the store-room?',

the master says to him: 'There is already someone in the store-room. What can I do there?'

"God doesn't easily appear in the heart of a man who feels himself to be his own master. But God can be seen the moment His grace descends. He is the Sun of Knowledge. One single ray of His has illumined the world with the light of knowledge. That is how we are able to see one another and acquire varied knowledge. One can see God only if He turns His light toward His own face.

"The police sergeant goes his rounds in the dark of night with a lantern6 in his hand. No one sees his face; but with the help of that light the sergeant sees everybody's face, and others, too, can see one another. If you want to see the sergeant, however, you must pray to him: 'Sir, please turn the light on your own face. Let me see you.' In the same way one must pray to God: 'O Lord, be gracious and turn the light of knowledge on Thyself, that I may see Thy face.'

"A house without light indicates poverty. So one must light the lamp of Knowledge in one's heart. As it is said in a song:

Lighting the lamp of Knowledge in the chamber of your heart,
Behold the face of the Mother, Brahman's Embodiment."

As Vijay had brought medicine with him, the Master asked a devotee to give him some water. He was indeed a fountain of infinite compassion. He had arranged for Vijay's boat fare, since the latter was too poor to pay it. Vijay, Balaram, M., and the other devotees left for Calcutta in a country boat.

Monday, January 1, 1883

At eight o'clock in the morning Sri Ramakrishna was seated on a mat spread on the floor of his room at Dakshineswar. Since it was a cold day, he had wrapped his body in his moleskin shawl. Prankrishna and M. were seated in front of him. Rakhal, too, was in the room. Prankrishna was a high government official and lived in Calcutta. Since he had had no offspring by his first wife, with her permission he had married a second time. By the second wife he had a son. Because he was rather stout, the Master addressed him now and then as "the fat brahmin". He had great respect for Sri Ramakrishna. Though a householder, Prankrishna studied the Vedanta and had been heard to say: "Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. I am He." The Master used to say to him: "In the Kaliyuga the life of a man depends on food. The path of devotion prescribed by Narada is best for this age."

A devotee had brought a basket of jilipi for the Master, which the latter kept by his side. Eating a bit of the sweets, he said to Prankrishna with a smile: "You see, I chant the name of the Divine Mother; so I get all these good things to eat. (Laughter.) But She doesn't give such fruits as gourd or pumpkin. She bestows the fruit of Amrita, Immortality-knowledge, love, discrimination, renunciation, and so forth."

A boy six or seven years old entered the room. The Master himself became like a child. He covered the contents of the basket with the palm or his hand, as a child does to conceal sweets from another child lest the latter should snatch them. Then he put the basket aside.

Suddenly the Master went into samādhi and sat thus a long time. His body was transfixed, his eyes wide open and unwinking, his breathing hardly perceptible. After a long time he drew a deep breath, indicating his return to the world of sense.

Vision of Divine Mother

MASTER (to Prankrishna): "My Divine Mother is not only formless, She has forms as well. One can see Her forms. One can behold Her incomparable beauty through feeling and love. The Mother reveals Herself to Her devotees in different forms.

"I saw Her yesterday. She was clad in a seamless ochre-coloured garment, and She talked with me.

"She came to me another day as a Mussalman girl six or seven years old. She had a tilak on her forehead and was naked. She walked with me, joking and frisking like a child.

"At Hriday's house I had a vision of Gauranga. He wore a black-bordered cloth.

"Haladhāri used to say that God is beyond both Being and Non-being. I told the Mother about it and asked Her, 'Then is the divine form an illusion?' The Divine Mother appeared to me in the form of Rati's mother and said, 'Do thou remain in ***Bhāva***' I repeated this to Haladhāri. Now and then I forget Her command and suffer. Once I broke my teeth because I didn't remain in bhava. So I shall remain in bhava unless I receive a revelation from heaven or have a direct experience to the contrary. I shall follow the path of love. What do you say?"

PRANKRISHNA: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "But why should I ask you about it? There is Someone within me who does all these things through me. At times I used to remain in a mood of Godhood and would enjoy no peace of mind unless I was being worshipped.

"I am the machine and God is the Operator. I act as He makes me act. I speak as He makes me speak. Keep your raft, says Ramprasad, afloat on the sea of life, Drifting up with the flood-tide, drifting down with the ebb.

"It is like the cast-off leaf before a gale; sometimes it is blown to a good place and sometimes into the gutter, according to the direction of the wind.

"As the weaver said in the story: 'The robbery was committed by the will of Rama, I was arrested by the police by the will of Rama, and again, by the will of Rama, I was set free.'

"Hanuman once said to Rama: 'O Rama, I have taken refuge in Thee. Bless me that I may have pure devotion to Thy Lotus Feet and that I may not be caught in the spell of Thy world-bewitching maya.'

"Once a dying bullfrog said to Rama: 'O Rama, when caught by a snake I cry for Your protection. But now I am about to die, struck by Your arrow. Hence I am silent.'

God's nature like that of a child

"I used to see God directly with these very eyes, just as I see you. Now I see divine visions in trance.

"After realizing God a man becomes like a child. One acquires the nature of the object one meditates upon. The nature of God is like that of a child. As a child builds up his toy house and then breaks it down, so God acts while creating, preserving, and destroying the universe. Further, as the child is not under the control of any guna, so God is beyond the three gunas-sattva, rajas, and tamas. That is why paramahamsas keep five or ten children with them, that they may assume their nature."

Sitting on the floor in the room was a young man from Agarpara about twenty-two years old. Whenever he came to the temple garden, he would take the Master aside, by a sign, and whisper his thoughts to him. He was a new-comer. That day he was sitting on the floor near the Master.

MASTER (to the young man): "A man can change his nature by imitating another's character. He can get rid of a passion like lust by assuming the feminine mood. He gradually comes to act exactly like a woman. I have noticed that men who take female parts in the theatre speak like women or brush their teeth like women while bathing. Come again on a Tuesday or Saturday.

(To Prankrishna) "Brahman and Śakti are inseparable. Unless you accept Śakti, you will find the whole universe unreal-'I', 'you', house, buildings, and family. The world stands solid because the Primordial Energy stands behind it. If there is no supporting pole, no framework can be made, and without the framework there can be no beautiful image of Durga.

"Without giving up worldliness a man cannot awaken his spiritual consciousness, nor can he realize God. He cannot but be a hypocrite as long as he has even a trace of worldly desire. God cannot be realized without guilelessness.

Cherish love within your heart; abandon cunning and deceit:
Through service, worship, selflessness, does Rama's blessed vision come.

Even those engaged in worldly activities, such as office work or business, should hold to the truth. Truthfulness alone is the spiritual discipline in the Kaliyuga."

PRANKRISHNA: "Yes, sir. It is said in the Mahanirvana Tantra: 'O Goddess, this religion enjoins it upon one to be truthful, self-controlled, devoted to the welfare of others, unagitated, and compassionate.'"

MASTER: "Yes. But these ideas must be assimilated."

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch. He was in an ecstatic mood and looked at Rakhal. Suddenly he was filled with the tender feeling of parental love toward his young disciple and spiritual child. Presently he went into samādhi. The devotees sat speechless, looking at the Master with wondering eyes.

Regaining partial consciousness, the Master said: "Why is my spiritual feeling kindled at the sight of Rakhal? The more you advance toward God, the less you will see of His glories and grandeur. The aspirant at first has a vision of the Goddess with ten arms;8 there is a great display of power in that image. The next vision is that of the Deity with two arms; there are no longer ten arms holding various weapons and missiles. Then the aspirant has a vision of Gopala, in which there is no trace of power. It is the form of a tender child. Beyond that there are other visions also. The aspirant then sees only Light.

"Reasoning and discrimination vanish after the attainment of God and communion with Him in samādhi. How long does a man reason and discriminate? As long as he is conscious of the manifold, as long as he is aware of the universe, of embodied beings, of 'I' and 'you'. He becomes silent when he is truly aware of Unity. This was the case with Trailanga Swami.

"Have you watched a feast given to the brahmins? At first there is a great uproar. But the noise lessens as their stomachs become more and more filled with food. When the last course of curd and sweets is served, one hears only the sound 'soop, soop' as they scoop up the curd in their hands. There is no other sound. Next is the stage of sleep-samādhi. There is no more uproar.

(To M. and Prankrishna) "Many people talk of Brahmajnāna, but their minds are always preoccupied with lower things: house, buildings, money, name, and sense pleasures. As long as you stand at the foot of the Monument,10 so long do you see horses, carriages, Englishmen, and Englishwomen. But when you climb to its top, you behold the sky and the ocean stretching to infinity. Then you do not enjoy buildings, carriages, horses, or men. They look like ants.

"All such things as attachment to the world and enthusiasm for 'woman and gold' disappear after the attainment of the Knowledge of Brahman. Then comes the cessation of all passions. When the log burns, it makes a crackling noise and one sees the flame. But when the burning is over and only ash remains, then no more noise is heard. Thirst disappears with the destruction of attachment. Finally comes peace.

"The nearer you come to God, the more you feel peace. Peace, peace, peace-supreme peace! The nearer you come to the Ganges, the more you feel its coolness. You will feel completely soothed when you plunge into the river.

"But the universe and its created beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles, all exist because God exists. Nothing remains if God is eliminated. The number increases if you put many zeros after the figure one; but the zeros don't have any value if the one is not there."

The Master continued: "There are some who come down, as it were, after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman-after samādhi-and retain the 'ego of Knowledge' or the 'ego of Devotion', just as there are people who, of their own sweet will, stay in the market-place after the market breaks up. This was the case with sages like Narada. They kept the 'ego of Devotion' for the purpose of teaching men. Sankaracharya kept the 'ego of Knowledge' for the same purpose.

"God cannot be realized if there is the slightest attachment to the things of the world. A thread cannot pass through the eye of a needle if the tiniest fibre sticks out.

"The anger and lust of a man who has realized God are only appearances. They are like a burnt string. It looks like a string, but a mere puff blows it away.

"God is realized as soon as the mind becomes free from attachment. Whatever appears in the Pure Mind is the voice of God. That which is Pure Mind is also Pure Buddhi; that, again, is Pure Ātman, because there is nothing pure but God. But in order to realize God one must go beyond dharma and adharma."

The Master sang in his melodious voice:

Come, let us go for a walk, O mind, to Kāli, the Wish-fulfilling Tree,
And there beneath It gather the four fruits of life. . . .

Sri Ramakrishna went out on the southeast verandah of his room and sat down. Prankrishna and the other devotees accompanied him. Hazra, too, was sitting there. The Master said to Prankrishna with a smile: "Hazra is not a man to be trifled with. If one finds the big dargah here, then Hazra is the smaller dargah." All laughed at the Master's words. A certain gentleman, Navakumar by name, came to the door and stood there. At sight of the devotees he immediately left. "Oh! Egotism incarnate!" Sri Ramakrishna remarked.

About half past nine in the morning Prankrishna took leave of the Master. Soon afterwards a minstrel sang some devotional songs to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. The Master was listening to the songs when Kedār Chatterji, a householder devotee, entered the room clad in his office clothes. He was a man of devotional temperament and cherished the attitude of the gopis of Vrindāvan. Words about God would make him weep.

The sight of Kedār awakened in the Master's mind the episode of Vrindāvan in Sri Krishna's life. Intoxicated with divine love, the Master stood up and sang, addressing Kedār:

Tell me, friend, how far is the grove
Where Krishna, my Beloved, dwells?
His fragrance reaches me even here;
But I am tired and can walk no farther. . . .

Sri Ramakrishna assumed the attitude of Sri Radha to Krishna and went into deep samādhi while singing the song. He stood there, still as a picture on canvas, with tears of divine joy running down his cheeks.

Kedār knelt before the Master. Touching his feet, he chanted a hymn:

We worship the Brahman-Consciousness in the Lotus of the Heart,
The Undifferentiated, who is adored by Hari, Hara, and Brahma;
Who is attained by yogis in the depths of their meditation;
The Scatterer of the fear of birth and death,
The Essence of Knowledge and Truth, the Primal Seed of the world.

After a time the Master regained consciousness of the relative world. Soon Kedār took his leave and returned to his office in Calcutta.

At midday Ramlal brought the Master a plate of food that had been offered in the Kāli temple. Like a child he ate a little of everything.

Later in the afternoon several Marwari devotees entered the Master's room, where Rakhal and M. also were seated.

A MARWARI DEVOTEE: "Sir, what is the way?"

Two ways of God-realization

MASTER: "There are two ways. One is the path of discrimination, the other is that of love. Discrimination means to know the distinction between the Real and the unreal. God alone is the real and permanent Substance; all else is illusory and impermanent. The magician alone is real; his magic is illusory. This is discrimination.

"Discrimination and renunciation. Discrimination means to know the distinction between the Real and the unreal. Renunciation means to have dispassion for the things of the world. One cannot acquire them all of a sudden. They must be practised every day. One should renounce 'woman and gold' mentally at first. Then, by the will of God, one can renounce it both mentally and outwardly. It is impossible to ask the people of Calcutta to renounce all for the sake of God. One has to tell them to renounce mentally.

Constant practice urged

"Through the discipline of constant practice one is able to give up attachment to 'woman and gold'. That is what the Gita says. By practice one acquires uncommon power of mind. Then one doesn't find it difficult to subdue the sense-organs and to bring anger, lust, and the like under control. Such a man behaves like a tortoise, which, once it has tucked in its limbs, never puts them out. You cannot make the tortoise put its limbs out again, though you chop it to pieces with an axe."

MARWARI DEVOTEE: "Revered sir, you just mentioned two paths. What is the other path?"

MASTER: "The path of bhakti, or zealous love of God. Weep for God in solitude, with a restless soul, and ask Him to reveal Himself to you. Cry to your Mother Syama with a real cry, O mind! And how can She hold Herself from you? "

MARWARI DEVOTEE: "Sir, what is the meaning of the worship of the Personal God? And what is the meaning of God without form or attribute?"

MASTER: "As you recall your father by his photograph, so likewise the worship of the image reveals in a flash the nature of Reality.

"Do you know what God with form is like? Like bubbles rising on an expanse of water, various divine forms are seen to rise out of the Great Ākāśa of Consciousness. The Incarnation of God is one of these forms. The Primal Energy sports, as it were, through the activities of a Divine Incarnation.

"What is there in mere scholarship? God can be attained by crying to Him with a longing heart. There is no need to know many things.

"He who is an Āchārya has to know different things. One needs a sword and shield to kill others; but to kill oneself, a needle or a nail-knife suffices.

"One ultimately discovers God by trying to know who this 'I' is. Is this 'I' the flesh, the bones, the blood, or the marrow? Is it the mind or the buddhi? Analysing thus, you realize at last that you are none of these. This is called the process of 'Neti, neti', 'Not this, not this'. One can neither comprehend nor touch the Ātman. It is without qualities or attributes.

"But, according to the path of devotion, God has attributes. To a devotee Krishna is Spirit, His Abode is Spirit, and everything about Him is Spirit."

The Marwari devotees saluted the Master and took their leave.

At the approach of evening Sri Ramakrishna went out to look at the sacred river. The lamp was lighted in his room. The Master chanted the hallowed name of the Divine Mother and meditated on Her. Then the evening worship began in the various temples.

The sound of gongs, floating on the air, mingled with the murmuring voice of the river. Peace and blessedness reigned everywhere.

Chapter 8

THE MASTER'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION AT DAKSHINESWAR

Sunday, February 18, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA arrived at Govinda Mukherji's house at Belgharia, near Calcutta. Besides Narendra, Ram, and other devotees, some of Govinda's neighbours were present. The Master first sang and danced with the devotees. After the kirtan they sat down. Many saluted the Master. Now and then he would say, "Bow before God."

Master's attitude toward the wicked

"It is God alone", he said, "who has become all this. But in certain places- for instance, in a holy man-there is a greater manifestation than in others. You may say, there are wicked men also. That is true, even as there are tigers and lions; but one need not hug the 'tiger God'. One should keep away from him and salute him from a distance. Take water, for instance. Some water may be drunk, some may be used for worship, some for bathing, and some only for washing dishes."

Paths of knowledge and devotion

A NEIGHBOUR: "Revered sir, what are the doctrines of Vedanta?"
MASTER: "The Vedantist says, 'I am He.' Brahman is real and the world illusory. Even the 'I' is illusory. Only the Supreme Brahman exists.

"But the 'I' cannot be got rid of. Therefore it is good to have the feeling, 'I am the servant of God, His son, His devotee.'

"For the Kāli Yuga the path of bhakti is especially good. One can realize God through bhakti too. As long as one is conscious of the body, one is also conscious of objects. Form, taste, smell, sound, and touch-these are the objects. It is extremely difficult to get rid of the consciousness of objects. And one cannot realize 'I am He' as long as one is aware of objects.

"The sannyasi is very little conscious of worldly objects. But the householder is always engrossed in them. Therefore it is good for him to feel, 'I am the servant of God.'"

God's name destroys sin

NEIGHBOUR: "Sir, we are sinners. What will happen to us?"
MASTER: "All the sins of the body flyaway if one chants the name of God and sings His glories. The birds of sin dwell in the tree of the body. Singing the name of God is like clapping your hands. As, at a clap of the hands, the birds in the tree flyaway, so do our sins disappear at the chanting of God's name and glories.

"Again, you find that the water of a reservoir dug in a meadow is evaporated by the heat of the sun. Likewise, the water of the reservoir of sin is dried up by the singing of the name and glories of God.

"You must practise it every day. The other day, at the circus, I saw a horse running at top speed, with an Englishwoman standing on one foot on its back. How much she must have practised to acquire that skill!

"Weep at least once to see God.

"These, then, are the two means: practice and passionate attachment to God, that is to say, restlessness of the soul to see Him."

Sri Ramakrishna began his midday meal with the devotees. It was about one o'clock. A devotee sang in the courtyard below:

Awake, Mother! Awake! How long Thou hast been asleep
In the lotus of the Muladhara!
Fulfil Thy secret function, Mother:
Rise to the thousand-petalled lotus within the head,
Where mighty Śiva has His dwelling;
Swiftly pierce the six lotuses
And take away my grief, O Essence of Consciousness!

Hearing the song, Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi; his whole body became still, and his hand remained touching the plate of food. He could eat no more. After a long time his mind came down partially to the plane of the sense world, and he said, "I want to go downstairs." A devotee led him down very carefully. Still in an abstracted mood, he sat near the singer. The song had ended. The Master said to him very humbly, "Sir, I want to hear the chanting of the Mother's name again."

The musician sang:

Awake, Mother! Awake! How long Thou hast been asleep
In the lotus of the Muladhara! . . .
The Master again went into ecstasy.

February 25, 1883

After his noon meal the Master conversed with the devotees. Ram, Kedār, Nityagopal, M., and others had arrived from Calcutta. Rakhal, Harish, Lātu, and Hazra were living with the Master. Mr.Choudhury, who had three or four university degrees and was a government officer, was also present. He had recently lost his wife and had visited the Master several times for peace of mind.

MASTER (to Ram and the other devotees): "Devotees like Rakhal, Narendra, and Bhavanath may be called *Nityasiddha*. Their spiritual consciousness has been awake since their very birth. They assume human bodies only to impart spiritual illumination to others.

"There is another class of devotees, known as K*ripasiddha*, that is to say, those on whom the grace of God descends all of a sudden and who at once attain His vision and Knowledge. Such people may be likened to a room that has been dark a thousand years, which, when a lamp is brought into it, becomes light immediately, not little by little.

Mystery of God's ways

"Those who lead a householder's life should practise spiritual discipline; they should pray eagerly to God in solitude. (To Mr. Choudhury) God cannot be realized through scholarship. Who, indeed, can understand the things of the Spirit through reason? No, all should strive for devotion to the Lotus Feet of God.

"Infinite are the glories of God! How little can you fathom them! Can you ever find out the meaning of God's ways?

"Bhishma was none other than one of the eight Vasus, but even he shed tears on his bed of arrows. He said: 'How astonishing! God Himself is the companion of the Pandava brothers, and still there is no end to their troubles and sorrows!' Who can ever understand the ways of God?

"A man thinks, 'I have practised a little prayer and austerity; so I have gained a victory over others.' But victory and defeat lie with God. I have seen a prostitute dying in the Ganges and retaining consciousness to the end."

God-vision through pure love

MR. CHOUDHURY: "How can one see God?"

MASTER: "Not with these eyes. God gives one divine eyes; and only then can one behold Him. God gave Arjuna divine eyes so that he might see His Universal Form.

"Your philosophy is mere speculation. It only reasons. God cannot be realized that way.

"God cannot remain unmoved if you have raga-bhakti, that is, love of God with passionate attachment to Him. Do you know how fond God is of His devotees' love? It is like the cow's fondness for fodder mixed with oil-cake. The cow gobbles it down greedily.

"Raga-bhakti is pure love of God, a love that seeks God alone and not any worldly end. Prahlada had it. Suppose you go to a wealthy man every day, but you seek no favour of him; you simply love to see him. If he wants to show you favour, you say: 'No, sir. I don't need anything. I came just to see you.' Such is love of God for its own sake. You simply love God and don't want anything from Him, in return."

Saying this, the Master sang:

Though I am never loath to grant salvation,
I hesitate indeed to grant pure love.
Whoever wins pure love surpasses all;

He is adored by men;
He triumphs over the three worlds. . . .

He continued, "The gist of the whole thing is that one must develop passionate yearning for God and practise discrimination and renunciation."

Guru and Ishta

MR. CHOUDHURY: "Sir, is it not possible to have the vision of God without the help of a guru?"

MASTER: "Satchidananda Himself is the Guru. At the end of the *Shavasadhana*, just when the vision of the Ishta is about to take place, the guru appears before the aspirant and says to him, 'Behold! There is your Ishta.' Saying this, the guru merges in the Ishta. He who is the guru is also the Ishta. The guru is the thread that leads to God. Women perform a ritualistic worship known as the 'Ananta-vrata', the object of worship being the Infinite. But actually the Deity worshipped is Vishnu. In Him are the 'infinite' forms of God.

(To Ram and the other devotees) "If you asked me which form of God you should meditate upon, I should say: Fix your attention on that form which appeals to you most; but know for certain that all forms are the forms of one God alone.

"Never harbour malice toward anyone. Śiva, Kāli, and Hari are but different forms of that One. He is blessed indeed who has known all as one. Outwardly he appears as Śiva's devotee, But in his heart he worships Kāli, the Blissful Mother, And with his tongue he chants aloud Lord Hari's name.

"The body does not endure without a trace of lust, anger, and the like. You should try to reduce them to a minimum."

Looking at Kedār, the Master said: "He is very nice. He accepts both the Absolute and the Relative. He believes in Brahman, but he also accepts the gods and Divine Incarnations in human form."

In Kedār's opinion Sri Ramakrishna was such an Incarnation.

Looking at Nityagopal, the Master said to the devotees, "He is in a lofty mood.

(To Nityagopal) "Don't go there too often. You may go once in a while. She may be a devotee, but she is a woman too. Therefore I warn you.

"The sannyasi must observe very strict discipline. He must not look even at the picture of a woman. But this rule doesn't apply to householders. An aspirant should not associate with a woman, even though she is very much devoted to God. A sannyasi, even though he may have subdued his passions, should follow this discipline to set an example to householders.

"Worldly people learn renunciation by seeing the complete renunciation of a monk; otherwise they sink more and more. A sannyasi is a world teacher."

Friday, March 9, 1883

Life of worldliness

About nine o'clock in the morning the Master was seated in his room with Rakhal, M., and a few other devotees. It was the day of the new moon. As usual with him on such days, Sri Ramakrishna entered again and again into communion with the Divine Mother. He said to the devotees: "God alone exists, and all else is unreal. The Divine Mother has kept all deluded by Her maya. Look at men. Most of them are entangled in worldliness. They suffer so much, but still they have the same attachment to 'woman and gold'. The camel eats thorny shrubs, and blood gushes from its mouth; still it will eat thorns. While suffering pain at the time of delivery, a woman says, 'Ah! I shall never go to my husband again.' But afterwards she forgets.

"The truth is that no one seeks God. There are people who eat the prickly leaves of the pineapple and not the fruit."

DEVOTEE: "Sir, why has God put us in the world?"

MASTER: "The world is the field of action. Through action one acquires knowledge. The guru instructs the disciple to perform certain works and refrain from others. Again, he advises the pupil to perform action without desiring the result. The impurity of the mind is destroyed through the performance of duty. It is like getting rid of a disease by means of medicine, under the instruction of a competent physician.

"Why doesn't God free us from the world? Ah, He will free us when the disease is cured. He will liberate us from the world when we are through with the enjoyment of 'woman and gold'. Once a man registers his name in the hospital, he cannot run away. The doctor will not let him go away unless his illness is completely cured."

Master's love for Rakhal

During these days Sri Ramakrishna's heart overflowed with motherly love like the love Yaśoda felt for Krishna. So he kept Rakhal with him. Rakhal felt toward the Master as a child feels toward its mother. He would sit leaning on the Master's lap as a young child leans on its mother while sucking her breast.

Rakhal was thus seated by the Master when a man entered the room and said that a high tide was coming in the Ganges. The Master and the devotees ran to the Panchavati to see it. At the sight of a boat being tossed by the tide, Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed: "Look! Look! I hope nothing happens to it."

They all sat in the Panchavati. The Master asked M. to explain the cause of the tide. M. drew on the ground the figures of the sun, moon, and earth and tried to explain gravitation, ebb-tide, flood-tide, new moon, full moon, eclipse, and so forth.

MASTER (to M.): "Stop it! I can't follow you. It makes me dizzy. My head is aching. Well, how can they know of things so far off?

"You see, during my childhood I could paint well; but arithmetic would make my head spin. I couldn't learn simple arithmetic."

Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room with the devotees. Looking at a picture of Yaśoda, on the wall, he said: "It is not well done. She looks like a garland-seller."

Adhar's first visit

The Master enjoyed a nap after his noon meal. Adhar and other devotees gradually gathered. This was Adhar's first visit. He was a deputy magistrate and about thirty years old.

Much reasoning condemned

ADHAR (to the Master): "Sir, I have a question to ask. Is it good to sacrifice animals before the Deity? It certainly involves killing."

MASTER: "The sastra prescribes sacrifice on special occasions. Such sacrifice is not harmful. Take, for instance, the sacrifice of a goat on the eighth day of the full or new moon.

"I am now in such a state of mind that I cannot watch a sacrifice. Also I cannot eat meat offered to the Divine Mother. Therefore I first touch my finger to it, then to my head, lest She should be angry with me.

"Again, in a certain state of mind I see God in all beings, even in an ant. At that time, if I see a living being die, I find consolation in the thought that it is the death of the body, the soul being beyond life and death.

"One should not reason too much; it is enough if one loves the Lotus Feet of the Mother. Too much reasoning throws the mind into confusion. You get clear water if you drink from the surface of a pool. Put your hand deeper and stir the water, and it becomes muddy. Therefore pray to God for devotion.

"Behind Dhruva's devotion there was desire. He practised austerities to gain his father's kingdom. But Prahlada's love for God was motiveless-a love that sought no return."

A DEVOTEE: "How can one realize God?"

MASTER: "Through that kind of love. But one must force one's demand on God. One should be able to say: 'O God, wilt Thou not reveal Thyself to me? I will cut my throat with a knife.' This is the tamas of bhakti."

DEVOTEE: "Can one see God?"

MASTER: "Yes, surely. One can see both aspects of God-God with form and without form. One can see God with form, the Embodiment of Spirit. Again, God can be directly perceived in a man with a tangible form. Seeing an Incarnation of God is the same as seeing God Himself. God is born on earth as man in every age."

March 11, 1883
Master's birthday celebration

It was Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. Many of his disciples and devotees wanted to celebrate the happy occasion at the Dakśineśwar temple garden.

From early morning the devotees streamed in, alone or in parties. After the morning worship in the temples sweet music was played in the nahabat. It was springtime. The trees, creepers, and plants were covered with new leaves and blossoms. The very air seemed laden with joy. And the hearts of the devotees were glad on this auspicious day.

M. arrived early in the morning and found the Master talking smilingly to Bhavanath, Rakhal, and Kalikrishna. M. prostrated himself before him.

MASTER (to M.): "I am glad you have come.

(To the devotees) "One cannot be spiritual as long as one has shame, hatred, or fear. Great will be the joy today. But those fools who will not sing or dance, mad with God's name, will never attain God. How can one feel any shame or fear when the names of God are sung? Now sing, all of you."

Bhavanath and his friend Kalikrishna sang:

Thrice blessed is this day of joy!
May all of us unite, O Lord,
To preach Thy true religion here
In India's holy land!
Thou dwellest in each human heart;
Thy name, resounding everywhere,
Fills the four corners of the sky.
Today Thy devotees proclaim
Thy boundless majesty.
We seek not wealth or friends or fame,
O Lord! No other hope is ours.
For Thee alone Thy devotees
Long with unflagging love.
Safe at Thy feet, what fear have we
Of death or danger? We have found
The Fount of Immortality.
To Thee the victory, O Lord!
To Thee the victory!

As Sri Ramakrishna listened to the song with folded hands, his mind soared to a far-off realm. He remained absorbed in meditation a long time. After a while Kalikrishna

whispered something to Bhavanath. Then he bowed before the Master and rose. Sri Ramakrishna was surprised. He asked, "Where are you going?"

BHAVANATH: "He is going away on a little business."

MASTER: "What is it about?"

BHAVANATH: "He is going to the Baranagore Workingmen's Institute."

MASTER: "It's his bad luck. A stream of bliss will flow here today. He could have enjoyed it. But how unlucky!"

Sri Ramakrishna did not feel well; so he decided not to bathe in the Ganges. About nine o'clock a few jars of water were taken from the river, and with the help of the devotees he finished his bath on the verandah east of his room.

After bathing, the Master put on a new wearing-cloth, all the while chanting the name of God. Accompanied by one or two disciples he walked across the courtyard to the temple of Kāli, still chanting Her hallowed name. His eyes had an indrawn look, like that of a bird hatching her eggs.

On entering the temple, he prostrated himself before the image and worshipped the Divine Mother. But he did not observe any ritual of worship. Now he would offer flowers and sandal-paste at the feet of the image, and now he would put them on his own head. After finishing the worship in his own way, he asked Bhavanath to carry the green coconut that had been offered to the Mother. He also visited the images of Radha and Krishna in the Vishnu temple.

When the Master returned to his room, he found that other devotees had arrived, among them Ram, Nityagopal, and Kedār. They all saluted the Master, who greeted them cordially.

He asked Nityagopal, "Will you eat something now?" "Yes", the devotee answered. Nityagopal, who was twenty-three or twenty-four years old and unmarried, was like a child. His mind was always soaring in the spiritual realm. He visited the Master sometimes alone and sometimes in Ram's company. The Master had observed the spiritual state of his mind and had become very fond of him. He remarked now and then that Nityagopal was in the state of a paramahamsa.

Warning to monks

After Nityagopal had finished eating, the Master took him aside and gave him various instructions.

A certain woman, about thirty-one years old and a great devotee, often visited Sri Ramakrishna and held him in high respect. She had been much impressed by Nityagopal's spiritual state and, looking upon him as her own son, often invited him to her house.

MASTER (to Nityagopal): "Do you go there?"

NITYAGOPAL (like a child): "Yes, I do. She takes me".

MASTER: "Beware, holy man! Go there once in a great while, but not frequently; otherwise you will slip from the ideal. Maya is nothing but 'woman and gold'. A holy man must live away from woman. All sink there. 'Even Brahma and Vishnu struggle for life in that whirlpool.' "

Nityagopal listened to these words attentively.

M. (to himself): "How strange! This young man has developed the state of a paramahamsa. That is what the Master says now and then. Is there still a possibility of his falling into danger in spite of his high spiritual state? What an austere rule is laid down for a sādhu! He may slip from his ideal by associating intimately with women. How can an ordinary man expect to attain liberation unless such a high ideal is set by holy men? The woman in question is very devout; but still there is danger. Now I understand why Chaitanya punished his disciple, the younger Haridas, so severely. In spite of his teacher's prohibition, Haridas conversed with a widow devotee. But he was a sannyasi. Therefore Chaitanya banished him. What a severe punishment! How hard is the rule for one who has accepted the life of renunciation! Again, what love the Master cherishes for this devotee! He is warning him even now, lest he should run into danger in the future."

"Beware, holy man!" These words of the Master echoed in the hearts of the devotees, like the distant rumbling of thunder.

The Master went with the devotees to the northeast verandah of his room. Among them was a householder from the village of Dakśineśwar, who studied Vedanta philosophy at home. He had been discussing Om with Kedār before the Master. He said, "This Eternal Word, the Anāhata Śabda, is ever present both within and without."

MASTER: "But the Word is not enough. There must be something indicated by the Word. Can your name alone make me happy? Complete happiness is not possible for me unless I see you."

DEVOTEE: "That Eternal Word itself is Brahman."

MASTER (to Kedār): "Oh, don't you understand? He upholds the doctrine of the rishis of olden times. They once said to Rama: 'O Rama, we know You only as the son of Dasaratha. Let sages like Bharadvaja worship You as God Incarnate. We want to realize Brahman, the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.' At these words Rama smiled and went away."

KEDĀR: "Those rishis could not recognize Rama as an Incarnation of God. They must have been fools,"

MASTER (seriously): "Please don't say such a thing. People worship God according to their tastes and temperaments. The mother cooks the same fish differently for her children, that each one may have what suits his stomach. For some she cooks the rich dish of *pilau*. But not all the children can digest it. For those with weak stomachs she prepares soup. Some, again, like fried fish or pickled fish. It depends on one's taste.

Incarnation of God

"The rishis followed the path of jnāna. Therefore they sought to realize Brahman, the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. But those who follow the path of devotion seek an Incarnation of God, to enjoy the sweetness of bhakti. The darkness of the mind disappears when God is realized. In the Purana it is said that it was as if a hundred suns were shining when Rama entered the court. Why, then, weren't the courtiers burnt up? It was because the brilliance of Rama was not like that of a material object. As the lotus blooms when the sun rises, so the lotus of the heart of the people assembled in the court burst into blossom."

As the Master uttered these words, standing before the devotees, he suddenly fell into an ecstatic mood. His mind was withdrawn from external objects. No sooner did he say, "the lotus of the heart burst into blossom", than he went into deep samādhi. He stood motionless, his countenance beaming and his lips parted in a smile.

After a long time he returned to the normal consciousness of the world. He drew a long breath and repeatedly chanted the name of Rama, every word showering nectar into the hearts of the devotees. The Master sat down, the others seating themselves around him.

MASTER (to the devotees): "Ordinary people do not recognize the advent of an Incarnation of God. He comes in secret. Only a few of His intimate disciples can recognize Him. That Rama was both Brahman Absolute and a perfect Incarnation of God in human form was known only to twelve rishis. The other sages said to Him, 'Rama, we know You only as Dasaratha's son.'

"Can everyone comprehend Brahman, the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute? He alone has attained perfect love of God who, having reached the Absolute, keeps himself in the realm of the Relative in order to enjoy the divine *lila*. A man can describe the ways and activities of the Queen if he has previously visited her in England. Only then will his description of the Queen be correct. Sages like Bharadvaja adored Rama and said: 'O Rama, You are nothing but the Indivisible Satchidananda. You have appeared before us as a human being, but You look like a man because You have shrouded Yourself with Your own maya.' These rishis were great devotees of Rama: and had supreme love for God."

Master's different spiritual moods

Presently some devotees from Konnagar arrived, singing kirtan to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. As they reached the northeast verandah of Sri Ramakrishna's room, the Master joined in the music, dancing with them intoxicated with divine joy.

Now and then he went into samādhi, standing still as a statue. While he was in one of these states of divine unconsciousness, the devotees put thick garlands of jasmine around his neck. The enchanting form of the Master reminded the devotees of Chaitanya, another Incarnation of God. The Master passed alternately through three moods of divine consciousness: the inmost, when he completely lost all knowledge of the outer world; the semi-conscious, when he danced with the devotees in an ecstasy of love; and the conscious, when he joined them in loud singing. It was indeed a sight for the gods, to see the Master standing motionless in samādhi, with fragrant garlands hanging from his neck, his countenance beaming with love, and the devotees singing and dancing around him.

When it was time for his noon meal, Sri Ramakrishna put on a new yellow cloth and sat on the small couch. His golden complexion, blending with his yellow cloth, enchanted the eyes of the devotees.

After his meal Sri Ramakrishna rested a little on the small couch. Inside and outside his room crowded the devotees, among them Kedār, Suresh, Ram, Manomohan, Girindra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, and M. Rakhal's father was also present.

Efficacy of earnest japa

A Vaishnava goswami was seated in the room. The Master said to him: "Well, what do you say? What is the way?"

GOSWAMI: "Sir, the chanting of God's name is enough. The scriptures emphasize the sanctity of God's name for the Kaliyuga."

MASTER: "Yes, there is no doubt about the sanctity of God's name. But can a mere name achieve anything, without the yearning love of the devotee behind it? One should feel great restlessness of soul for the vision of God. Suppose a man repeats the name of God mechanically, while his mind is absorbed in 'woman and gold'. Can he achieve anything? Mere muttering of magic words doesn't cure one of the pain of a spider or scorpion sting. One must also apply the smoke of burning cow-dung."

GOSWAMI: "But what about Ajamila then? He was a great sinner; there was no sin he had not indulged in. But he uttered the name of Narayana on his death-bed, calling his son, who also had that name. And thus he was liberated."

MASTER: "Perhaps Ajamila had done many spiritual things in his past births. It is also said that he once practised austerity; besides, those were the last moments of his life. What is the use of giving an elephant a bath? It will cover itself with dirt and dust again and become its former self. But if someone removes the dust from its body and gives it a bath just before it enters the stable, then the elephant remains clean. .

"Suppose a man becomes pure by chanting the holy name of God, but immediately afterwards commits many sins. He has no strength of mind. He doesn't take a vow not to repeat his sins. A bath in the Ganges undoubtedly absolves one of all sins; but what does that avail? They say that the sins perch on the trees along the bank of the Ganges.

No sooner does the man come back from the holy waters than the old sins jump on his shoulders from the trees. (All laugh.) The same old sins take possession of him again. He is hardly out of the water before they fall upon him.

"Therefore I say, chant the name of God, and with it pray to Him that you may have love for Him. Pray to God that your attachment to such transitory things as wealth, name, and creature comforts may become less and less every day.

Dogmatism condemned

(To the goswami) "With sincerity and earnestness one can realize God through all religions. The Vaishnavas will realize God, and so will the Saktas, the Vedantists, and the Brahmos. The Mussalmans and Christians will realize Him too. All will certainly realize God if they are earnest and sincere.

"Some people indulge in quarrels, saying, 'One cannot attain anything unless one worships our Krishna', or, 'Nothing can be gained without the worship of Kāli, our Divine Mother', or, 'One cannot be saved without accepting the Christian religion.' This is pure dogmatism. The dogmatist says, 'My religion alone is true, and the religions of others are false.' This is a bad attitude. God can be reached by different paths.

"Further, some say that God has form and is not formless. Thus they start quarrelling. A Vaishnava quarrels with a Vedantist.

"One can rightly speak of God only after one has seen Him. He who has seen God knows really and truly that God has form and that He is formless as well. He has many other aspects that cannot be described.

Parable of the elephant and the blind men

"Once some blind men chanced to come near an animal that someone told them was an elephant. They were asked what the elephant was like. The blind men began to feel its body. One of them said the elephant was like a pillar; he had touched only its leg. Another said it was like a winnowing-fan; he had touched only its ear. In this way the others, having touched its tail or belly, gave their different versions of the elephant. Just so, a man who has seen only one aspect of God limits God to that alone. It is his conviction that God cannot be anything else.

Illustration of the ocean and the ice

(To the goswami) "How can you say that the only truth about God is that He has form? It is undoubtedly true that God comes down to earth in a human form, as in the case of Krishna. And it is true as well that God reveals Himself to His devotees in various forms. But it is also true that God is formless; He is the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. He has been described in the Vedas both as formless and as endowed with form. He is also described there both as attributeless and as endowed with attributes.

"Do you know what I mean? Satchidananda is like an infinite ocean. Intense cold freezes the water into ice, which floats on the ocean in blocks of various forms.

Likewise, through the cooling influence of bhakti, one sees forms of God in the Ocean of the Absolute. These forms are meant for the bhaktas, the lovers of God. But when the Sun of Knowledge rises, the ice melts; it becomes the same water it was before. Water above and water below, everywhere nothing but water. Therefore a prayer in the Bhagavata says: 'O Lord, Thou hast form, and Thou art also formless. Thou walkest before us, O Lord, in the shape of a man; again, Thou hast been described in the Vedas as beyond words and thought.'

"But you may say that for certain devotees God assumes eternal forms. There are places in the ocean where the ice doesn't melt at all. It assumes the form of quartz."

KEDĀR: "It is said in the Bhagavata that Vyāsa asked God's forgiveness for his three transgressions. He said: 'O Lord, Thou art formless, but I have thought of Thee in my meditation as endowed with form; Thou art beyond speech, but I have sung Thee hymns; Thou art the All-pervading Spirit, but I have made pilgrimages to sacred places. Be gracious, O Lord, and forgive these three transgressions of mine.'"

MASTER: "Yes, God has form and He is formless too. Further, He is beyond both form and formlessness. No one can limit Him."

Rakhal's father was sitting in the room. At that time Rakhal was staying with the Master. After his mother's death his father had married a second time. Now and then he came to Dakśineśwar because of Rakhal's being there. He did not raise much objection to his son's living with the Master. Being a wealthy man of the world, he was always involved in litigation. There were lawyers and deputy magistrates among Sri Ramakrishna's visitors. Rakhal's father found it profitable to cultivate their acquaintance, since he expected to be benefited by their counsels in worldly matters.

Now and then the Master cast a glance at Rakhal's father. It was his cherished desire that Rakhal should live with him permanently at Dakśineśwar.

Rakhal's inborn spiritual nature

MASTER (to Rakhal's father and the devotees): "Ah, what a nice character Rakhal has developed! Look at his face and every now and then you will notice his lips moving. Inwardly he repeats the name of God, and so his lips move.

Parable of the Homa bird

"Youngsters like him belong to the class of the ever-perfect. They are born with God-Consciousness. No sooner do they grow a little older than they realize the danger of coming in contact with the world. There is the parable of the Homa bird in the Vedas. The bird lives high up in the sky and never descends to earth. It lays its egg in the sky, and the egg begins to fall. But the bird lives in such a high region that the egg hatches while falling. The fledgling comes out and continues to fall. But it is still so high that while falling it grows wings and its eyes open. Then the young bird perceives that it is dashing down toward the earth and will be instantly killed. The moment it sees the

ground, it turns and shoots up toward its mother in the sky. Then its one goal is to reach its mother.

"Youngsters like Rakhal are like that bird. From their very childhood they are afraid of the world, and their one thought is how to reach the Mother, how to realize God.

"You may ask, 'How is it possible for these boys, born of worldly parents and living among the worldly-minded, to develop such knowledge and devotion?' It can be explained. If a pea falls into a heap of dung, it germinates into a pea-plant none the less. The peas that grow on that plant serve many useful purposes. Because it was sown in dung, will it produce another kind of plant?

"Ah, what a sweet nature Rakhal has nowadays! And why shouldn't it be so? If the yam is a good one, its shoots also become good. (All laugh.) Like father like son."

M. (aside to Girindra): "How well he has explained God with and without form! Do the Vaishnavas believe only in God with form?"

GIRINDRA: "Perhaps so. They are one-sided."

M: "Did you understand what he meant by the 'eternal form' of God? That 'quartz'? I couldn't grasp it well."

MASTER (to M.): "Well, what are you talking about?"

M. and Girindra smiled and remained silent.

Later in the afternoon the devotees were singing in the Panchavati, where the Master joined them. They sang together in praise of the Divine Mother:

High in the heaven of the Mother's feet, my mind was soaring like a kite,
When came a blast of sin's rough wind that drove it swiftly toward the earth.
Maya disturbed its even flight by bearing down upon one side,
And I could make it rise no more.
Entangled in the twisting string of love for children and for wife,
Alas! my kite was rent in twain.

It lost its crest of wisdom soon and downward plunged as I let it go;
How could it hope to fly again, when all its top was torn away?
Though fastened with devotion's cord, it came to grief in playing here;
Its six opponents worsted it.
Now Nareschandra rues this game of smiles and tears, and

thinks it better
Never to have played at all.

The singing continued. Sri Ramakrishna danced with the devotees. They sang:

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight
To the blue lotus flower of Mother Syama's feet,
The blue flower of the feet of Kāli, Śiva's Consort;
Tasteless, to the bee, are the blossoms of desire.
My Mother's feet are black, and black, too, is the bee;
Black is made one with black! This much of the mystery
My mortal eyes behold, then hastily retreat.
But Kamalakanta's hopes are answered in the end;
He swims in the Sea of Bliss, unmoved by joy or pain.

The kirtan went on:

O Mother, what a machine is this that Thou hast made!
What pranks Thou playest with this toy
Three and a half cubits high!
Hiding Thyself within, Thou holdest the guiding string;
But the machine, not knowing it,
Still believes it moves by itself.
Whoever finds the Mother remains a machine no more;
Yet some machines have even bound
The Mother Herself with the string of Love.

It was a very happy day for all.

The Master, accompanied by M., was coming back to his room, when he met Trailokya, a Brahmo devotee, on the way. Trailokya bowed before the Master.

MASTER: "They are singing in the Panchavati. Won't you go there?"

TRAILOKYA: "What shall I do there?"

MASTER: "Why, you will enjoy the music."

TRAILOKYA: "I have been there already."

MASTER: "Well, well! That's good."

It was about six o'clock in the evening. The Master was sitting with the devotees on the southeast verandah of his room.

MASTER: "A holy man who has renounced the world will of course chant the name of God. That is only natural. He has no other duties to perform. If he meditates on God it

shouldn't surprise anybody. On the other hand, if he fails to think of God or chant His holy name, then people will think ill of him.

"But it is a great deal to his credit if a householder utters the name of the Lord. Think of King Janaka. What courage he had, indeed! He fenced with two swords, the one of Knowledge and the other of work. He possessed the perfect Knowledge of Brahman and also was devoted to the duties of the world. An unchaste woman attends to the minutest duties of the world, but her mind always dwells on her paramour.

"The constant company of holy men is necessary. The holy man introduces one to God."

KEDĀR: "Yes, sir. The great soul is born in the world for the redemption of humanity. He leads others to God, just as a locomotive engine takes along with it a long train of carriages. Or again, he is like a river or lake that quenches the thirst of many people."

The devotees were ready to return home. One by one they saluted the Master. At the sight of Bhavanath Sri Ramakrishna said: "Don't go away today. The very sight of you inspires me." Bhavanath had not yet entered into worldly life. A youth of twenty, he had a fair complexion and handsome features. He shed tears of joy on hearing the name of God. The Master looked on him as the embodiment of Narayana.

Thursday, March 29, 1883

The Master had taken a little rest after his noon meal, when a few devotees arrived from Calcutta, among them Amrita and the well-known singer of the Brahmo Samaj, Trailokya.

Rakhal was not feeling well. The Master was greatly worried about him and said to the devotees: "You see, Rakhal is not well. Will soda-water help him? What am I to do now? Rakhal, please take the prasad from the Jagannath temple."

Even as he spoke these words the Master underwent a strange transformation. He looked at Rakhal with the infinite tenderness of a mother and affectionately uttered the name of Govinda. Did he see in Rakhal the manifestation of God Himself? The disciple was a young boy of pure heart who had renounced all attraction to lust and greed. And Sri Ramakrishna was intoxicated day and night with love of God. At the sight of Rakhal his eyes expressed the tender feelings of a mother, a love like that which had filled the heart of Mother Yaśoda at the sight of the Baby Krishna. The devotees gazed at the Master in wonder as he went into deep samādhi. As his soul soared into the realm of Divine Consciousness, his body became motionless, his eyes were fixed on the tip of his nose, and his breathing almost ceased.

Renunciation, false and true

An unknown Bengali, dressed in the ochre cloth of a monk, entered the room and sat on the floor. The Master's mind was coming down to the ordinary plane of consciousness. Presently he began to talk, though the spell of samādhi still lingered.

MASTER (at the sight of the ochre cloth): "Why this gerrua? Should one put on such a thing for a mere fancy? A man once said, 'I have exchanged the Chandi for a drum.' At first he used to sing the holy songs of the Chandi; now he beats the drum. (All laugh.)

"There are three or four varieties of renunciation. Afflicted with miseries at home, one may put on the ochre cloth of a monk; but that renunciation doesn't last long. Again, a man out of work puts on an ochre wearing-cloth and goes off to Benares. After three months he writes home: 'I have a job here. I shall come home in a few days. Don't worry about me.' Again, a man may have everything he wants. He lacks nothing, yet he does not enjoy his possessions. He weeps for God alone. That is real renunciation.

"No lie of any sort is good. A false garb, even though a holy one, is not good. If the outer garb does not correspond to the inner thought, it gradually brings ruin. Uttering false words or doing false deeds, one gradually loses all fear. Far better is the white cloth of a householder. Attachment to worldliness, occasional lapses from the ideal, and an outer garb of gerrua- how dreadful!

"It is not proper for a righteous person to tell a lie or do something false even in a dramatic performance. Once I went to Keshab's house to see the performance of a play called *Nava-Vrindāvan.* They brought something on the stage which they called the 'Cross'. Another actor sprinkled water, which they said was the 'Water of Peace'. I saw a third actor staggering and reeling in the role of a drunkard."

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "It was K-."

MASTER: "It is not good for a devotee to play such parts. It is bad for the mind to dwell on such subjects for a long while. The mind is like white linen fresh from the laundry; it takes the colour in which you dip it. If it is associated with falsehood for a long time, it will be stained with falsehood.

"Another day I went to Keshab's house to see the play called *Nimai Sannyas*. Some flattering disciples of Keshab spoiled the whole performance. One of them said to Keshab, 'You are the Chaitanya of the Kaliyuga.' Keshab pointed to me and asked with a smile, 'Then who is he?' I replied: 'Why, I am the servant of your servant. I am a speck of the dust of your feet.' Keshab had a desire for name and fame.

(To Amrita and Trailokya) "Youngsters like Narendra and Rakhal are ever-perfect. Every time they are born they are devoted to God. An ordinary man acquires a little devotion after austerities and a hard struggle. But these boys have love of God from the very moment of their birth. They are like the natural image of Śiva, which springs forth from the earth and is not set up by human hands.

Nature of the ever-perfect

"The ever-perfect form a class by themselves. Not all birds have crooked beaks. The ever-perfect are never attached to the world. There is the instance of Prahlada.

"Ordinary people practise spiritual discipline and cultivate devotion to God; but they also become attached to the world and are caught in the glamour of 'woman and gold'. They are like flies, which sit on a flower or a sweetmeat and light on filth as well.

"But the ever-perfect are like bees, which light only on flowers and sip the honey. The ever-perfect drink only the Nectar of Divine Bliss. They are never inclined to worldly pleasures.

"The devotion of the ever-perfect is not like the ordinary devotion that one acquires as a result of strenuous spiritual discipline. Ritualistic devotion consists in repeating the name of God and performing worship in a prescribed manner. It is like crossing a rice-field in a roundabout way along the balk. Again, it is like reaching a near-by village by boat in a roundabout way along a winding river.

"One does not follow the injunctions of ceremonial worship when one develops raga-bhakti, when one loves God as one's own. Then it is like crossing a rice-field after the harvest. You don't have to walk along the balk. You can go straight across the field in any direction.

"When the country is flooded deep with water, one doesn't have to follow the winding river. Then the fields are deep under water. You can row your boat straight to the village.

"Without this intense attachment, this passionate love, one cannot realize God."

Master's experiences in samādhi

AMRITA: "Sir, how do you feel in samādhi?"

MASTER: "You may have heard that the cockroach, by intently meditating on the Bhramara, is transformed into a Bhramara. Do you know how I feel then? I feel like a fish released from a pot into the water of the Ganges."

AMRITA: "Don't you feel at that time even a trace of ego?"

MASTER: "Yes, generally a little of it remains. However hard you may rub a grain of gold against a grindstone, still a bit of it always remains. Or again, take the case of a big fire; the ego is like one of its sparks. In samādhi I lose outer consciousness completely; but God generally keeps a little trace of ego in me for the enjoyment of divine communion. Enjoyment is possible only when 'I' and 'you' remain.

"Again, sometimes God effaces even that trace of 'I'. Then one experiences jada samādhi or nirvikalpa samādhi. That experience cannot be described. A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean, but before it had gone far into the water it melted away. It became entirely one with the water of the ocean. Then who was to come back and tell the ocean's depth?"

Chapter 9

ADVICE TO THE BRAHMOS

Saturday, April 7, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was visiting Balarām in Calcutta, with Narendra, Bhavanath, Rākhāl , M., and others. Balarām, at the Master's bidding, had invited some of the young devotees to lunch. Sri Ramakrishna often said to him, "Feed them now and then; that will confer on you the merit of feeding holy men." The Master looked on his young disciples, yet untouched by "woman and gold", as veritable embodiments of God.

A few days earlier Sri Ramakrishna had been to Keshab's house with Narendra and Rākhāl to see a performance of the play entitled Nava-Vrindāvan. Narendra had taken part in the performance, in which Keshab had played the role of Pavhari Baba.

MASTER: "Keshab came on the stage in the role of a holy man and sprinkled the 'Water of Peace'. But I didn't like it. The idea of sprinkling such water on a theatrical stage after a performance!

"Another gentleman played the part of Sin. That is not good either. One should not commit sin; one should not even feign it."

Narendra's music

The Master wanted to hear Narendra sing. The young disciple was not feeling well, but at the Master's earnest request he sang to the accompaniment of the Tānpura:

Sing, O bird that nestles deep within my heart!
Sing, O bird that sits on the Kalpa-Tree of Brahman!
Sing God's everlasting praise. . . .

Then he sang:

Brahman, Joy of the whole universe, Supreme Effulgence;
God beginningless, Lord of the world, the very Life of life! . . .

And again:

O King of Kings, reveal Thyself to me!
I crave Thy mercy. Cast on me Thy glance!
At Thy dear feet I dedicate my life,
Seared in the fiery furnace of this world.
My heart, alas, is deeply stained with sin;
Ensnared in maya, I am all but dead.
Compassionate Lord! Revive my fainting soul
With the life-giving nectar of Thy grace.

Narendra continued:

Upon the tray of the sky blaze bright
The lamps of Sun and moon;
Like diamonds shine the glittering stars
To deck Thy wondrous form.
The sweet Malaya breeze blows soft,
For fragrant incense smoke;
The moving air sways to and fro
The fan before Thy holy face:
Like gleaming votive lights
The fresh and flowery groves appear.
How wonderful Thy worship is,
O Slayer of birth and death!
The sacred Om, from space arisen,
Is the resounding drum.
My mind craves nectar day and night
At Hari's Lotus Feet;
Oh, shower the waters of Thy grace
On thirsty Nanak, blessed Lord;
And may Thy hallowed name
Become his everlasting home!

He sang again:

In Wisdom's firmament the moon of Love is rising full,
And Love's flood-tide, in surging waves, is flowing everywhere.
O Lord, how full of bliss Thou art! Victory unto Thee! . . .

Then at the Master's bidding Bhavanath sang:

Where is a friend like Thee, O Essence of Mercy?
Where is another friend like Thee
To stand by me through pain and pleasure?
Who, among all my friends, forgives my failings,
Bringing me comfort for my grief,
Soothing my spirit in its terror?
Thou art the Helmsman who dost steer life's craft
Across the world's perilous sea;
Thy grace it is alone, O Lord,
That silences my raging passions' storm.
Thou pourest out the waters of peace
Upon my burning, penitent soul:
And Thine is the bosom that will shelter me
When every other friend I own
Deserts me in my dying hour.

True renunciation

Narendra said to the Master with a smile, referring to Bhavanath, "He has given up fish and betel-leaf."

MASTER: "Why so? What is the matter with fish and betel-leaf? They aren't harmful. The renunciation of 'woman and gold' is the true renunciation.

"Where is Rākhāl?"

A DEVOTEE: "He is asleep, sir."

MASTER (with a smile): "Once a man went to a certain place to see a theatrical performance, carrying a mat under his arm. Hearing that it would be some time before the performance began, he spread the mat on the floor and fell asleep. When he woke up it was all over. (All laugh.) Then he returned home with the mat under his arm."

Ramdayal was very ill and lay in bed in another room. The Master went there to inquire about him.

About four o'clock in the afternoon some members of the Brahmo Samaj arrived. The Master began to converse with them.

Study of scriptures for the beginner

A BRAHMO: "Sir, have you read the Panchadasi?"

MASTER: "At first one should hear books like that and indulge in reasoning. But later on-

Cherish my precious Mother Syama
Tenderly within, O mind;
May you and I alone behold Her,
Letting no one else intrude.

"One should hear the scriptures during the early stages of spiritual discipline. After attaining God there is no lack of knowledge. Then the Divine Mother supplies it without fail.

"A child spells out every word as he writes, but later on he writes fluently.

"The goldsmith is up and doing while melting gold. As long as the gold hasn't melted, he works the bellows with one hand, moves the fan with the other, and blows through a pipe with his mouth. But the moment the gold melts and is poured into the mould, he is relieved of all anxiety.

"Mere reading of the scriptures is not enough. A person cannot understand the true significance of the scriptures if he is attached to the world. Though with intense delight I learnt many poems and dramas, I have forgotten them all, entrapped in Krishna's love.

"Keshab enjoys the world and practises yoga as well. Living in the world, he directs his mind to God."

A devotee described the Convocation of Calcutta University, saying that the meeting looked like a forest of human heads.

MASTER: "The feeling of the Divine is awakened in me when I see a great crowd of people. Had I seen that meeting, I should have been overwhelmed with spiritual fervour."

Sunday, April 8, 1883

It was Sunday morning. The Master, looking like a boy, was seated in his room, and near him was another boy, his beloved disciple Rākhāl. M. entered and saluted the Master. Ramlal also was in the room, and Kishori, Manilal Mallick, and several other devotees gathered by and by.

Manilal Mallick, a business man, had recently been to Benares, where he owned a bungalow.

Trailanga Swami and Bhāskarānanda

MASTER: "So you have been to Benares. Did you see any holy men there?"

MANILAL: "Yes, sir. I paid my respects to Trailanga Swami, Bhaskarananda, and others."

MASTER: "Tell us something about them."

MANILAL: "Trailanga Swami is living in the same temple where he lived before-on the Manikarnika Ghat; near the Benimadhav Minaret. People say he was formerly in a more exalted spiritual state. He could perform many miracles. Now he has lost much of that power."

MASTER: "That is the criticism of worldly people."

MANILAL: "Trailanga Swami keeps a strict vow of silence. Unlike him, Bhaskarananda is friendly with all."

MASTER: "Did you have any conversation with Bhaskarananda?"

MANILAL: "Yes, sir. We had a long talk. Among other things we discussed the problem of good and evil. He said to me: 'Don't follow the path of evil. Give up sinful thoughts. That is how God wants us to act. Perform only those duties that are virtuous.' "

The seer of God transcends good and evil

MASTER: "Yes, that is also a path, meant for worldly-minded people. But those whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened, who have realized that God alone is real and all else illusory, cherish a different ideal. They are aware that God alone is the Doer and others are His instruments.

"Those whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened never make a false step. They do not have to reason in order to shun evil. They are so full of love of God that whatever action they undertake is a good action. They are fully conscious that they are not the doers of their actions, but mere servants of God. They always feel: 'I am the machine and He is the Operator. I do as He does through me. I speak as He speaks through me. I move as He moves me.'

"Fully awakened souls are beyond virtue and vice. They realize that it is God who does everything.

Seeing God in everything

"There was a monastery in a certain place. The monks residing there went out daily to beg their food. One day a monk, while out for his alms, saw a landlord beating a man mercilessly. The compassionate monk stepped in and asked the landlord to stop. But the landlord was filled with anger and turned his wrath against the innocent monk. He beat the monk till he fell unconscious on the ground. Someone reported the matter to the monastery. The monks ran to the spot and found their brother lying there. Four or five of them carried him back and laid him on a bed. He was still unconscious. The other monks sat around him sad at heart; some were fanning him. Finally someone suggested that he should be given a little milk to drink. When it was poured into his mouth he regained consciousness. He opened his eyes and looked around. One of the monks said, 'Let us see whether he is fully conscious and can recognize us.' Shouting into his ear, he said, 'Revered sir, who is giving you milk?' 'Brother,' replied the holy man in a low voice, 'He who beat me is now giving me milk.'

"But one does not attain such a state of mind without the realization of God."

MANILAL: "Sir, what you have just said applies to a man of a very lofty spiritual state. I talked on such topics in a general way with Bhaskarananda."

MASTER: "Does he live in a house?"

MANILAL: "Yes, sir. He lives with a devotee."

MASTER: "How old is he now?"

MANILAL: "About fifty-five."

MASTER: "Did you talk about anything else?"

MANILAL: "I asked him how to cultivate bhakti. He said: 'Chant the name of God. Repeat the name of Rāma.' "

MASTER: "That is very good."

The worship was over in the temples and the bells rang for the food offerings in the shrines. As it was a summer noon the sun was very hot. The flood-tide began in the

Ganges and a breeze came up from the south. Sri Ramakrishna was resting in his room after his meal.

The people of Basirhat, Rākhāl 's birth-place, had been suffering from a severe drought during the summer months.

MASTER (to Manilal): "Rākhāl says that the people in his native village have been suffering seriously from a scarcity of water. Why don't you build a reservoir there? That will do the people good. (Smiling) You have so much money; what will you do with all your wealth? But they say that telis are very calculating." (All laugh.)

Manilal was truly a calculating man, though he suffered no lack of money. In later years he set up an endowment of twenty-five thousand rupees for the maintenance of poor students.

Manilal made no answer to these words of the Master about his caste characteristics. Later on, in the course of the conversation, he remarked casually: "Sir, you referred to a reservoir. You might as well have confined yourself to that suggestion. Why allude to the 'oil-man caste' and all that?"

Some of the devotees smiled to themselves. The Master laughed.

Presently a few elderly members of the Brahmo Samaj arrived. The room was full of devotees. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on his bed, facing the north. He kept smiling, and talked to the Brahmo devotees in a joyous mood.

Characteristics of divine love

MASTER: "You talk glibly about prema. But is it such a commonplace thing? There are two characteristics of prema. First, it makes one forget the world. So intense is one's love of God that one becomes unconscious of outer things. Chaitanya had this ecstatic love; he 'took a wood for the sacred grove of Vrindāvan and the ocean for the dark waters of the Jamuna'. Second, one has no feeling of 'my-ness' toward the body, which is so dear to man. One wholly gets rid of the feeling that the body is the soul.

Indications of God-realization

"There are certain signs of God-realization. The man in whom longing for God manifests its glories is not far from attaining Him. What are the glories of that longing? They are discrimination, dispassion, compassion for living beings, serving holy men, loving their company, chanting the name and glories of God, telling the truth, and the like. When you see those signs of longing in an aspirant, you can rightly say that for him the vision of God is not far to seek.

"The state of a servant's house will tell you unmistakably whether his master has decided to visit it. First, the rubbish and jungle around the house are cleared up. Second, the soot and dirt are removed from the rooms. Third, the courtyard, floors, and other places are swept clean. Finally the master himself sends various things to the

house such as a carpet, a hubble-bubble for smoking, and the like. When you see these things arriving, you conclude that the master will very soon come"

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, should one first practise discrimination to attain self-control?"

MASTER: "That is also a path. It is called the path of vichara, reasoning. But the inner organs3 are brought under control naturally through the path of devotion as well. It is rather easily accomplished that way. Sense pleasures appear more and more tasteless as love for God grows. Can carnal pleasure attract a grief-stricken man and woman the day their child has died?"

Efficacy of japa and prayer

DEVOTEE: "How can I develop love for God?"

MASTER: "Repeat His name, and sins will disappear. Thus you will destroy lust, anger, the desire for creature comforts, and so on."

DEVOTEE: "How can I take delight in God's name?"

MASTER: "Pray to God with a yearning heart that you may take delight in His name. He will certainly fulfil your heart's desire."

So saying, the Master sang a song in his sweet voice, pleading with the Divine Mother to show Her grace to suffering men:

O Mother, I have no one else to blame:
Alas! I sink in the well these very hands have dug.
With the six passions for my spade,
I dug a pit in the sacred land of earth;
And now the dark water of death gushes forth!
How can I save myself, O my Redeemer?

Surely I have been my own enemy;
How can I now ward off this dark water of death?
Behold, the waters rise to my chest!
How can I save myself? O Mother, save me!
Thou art my only Refuge; with Thy protecting glance
Take me across to the other shore of the world.

The Master sang again:

What a delirious fever is this that I suffer from!
O Mother, Thy grace is my only cure.
False pride is the fever that racks my wasted form;
"I" and "mine" are my cry. Oh, what a wicked delusion!
My quenchless thirst for wealth and friends is never-ceasing;
How, then, shall I sustain my life?

Talk about things unreal, this is my wretched delirium,
And I indulge in it always, O Giver of all good fortune!
My eyes in seeming sleep are closed, my stomach is filled
With the vile worms of cruelty.
Alas! I wander about absorbed in unmeaning deeds;
Even for Thy holy name I have no taste, O Mother!
I doubt that I shall ever be cured of this malady.

Then the Master said: " 'Even for Thy holy name I have no taste.' A typhoid patient has very little chance of recovery if he loses all taste for food; but his life need not be despaired of if he enjoys food even a little. That is why one should cultivate a taste for God's name. Any name will do-Durga, Krishna, or Śiva. Then if, through the chanting of the name, one's attachment to God grows day by day, and joy fills the soul, one has nothing to fear. The delirium will certainly disappear; the grace of God will certainly descend.

Parable of the two friends

" 'As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain.' Once two friends were going along the street, when they saw some people listening to a reading of the Bhagavata. 'Come, friend', said the one to the other. 'Let us hear the sacred book.' So saying he went in and sat down. The second man peeped in and went away. He entered a house of ill fame. But very soon he felt disgusted with the place. 'Shame on me!' he said to himself. 'My friend has been listening to the sacred word of Hari; and see where I am!' But the friend who had been listening to the Bhagavata also became disgusted. 'What a fool I am!' he said. 'I have been listening to this fellow's blah-blah, and my friend is having a grand time.' In course of time they both died. The messenger of Death came for the soul of the one who had listened to the Bhagavata and dragged it off to hell. The messenger of God came for the soul of the one who had been to the house of prostitution and led it up to heaven.

"Verily, the Lord looks into a man's heart and does not judge him by what he does or where he lives. 'Krishna accepts a devotee's inner feeling of love.'

"In the Kartabhaja sect, the teacher, while giving initiation, says to the disciple, 'Now everything depends on your mind.' According to this sect, 'He who has the right mind find the right way and also achieves the right end.' It was through the power of his mind that Hanuman leapt over the sea. 'I am the servant of Rāma; I have repeated the holy name of Rāma. Is there anything impossible for me?'-that was Hanuman's faith.

"Ignorance lasts as long as one has ego. There can be no liberation so long as the ego remains. 'O God, Thou art the Doer and not I'-that is knowledge.

"By being lowly one can rise high. The chatak bird makes its nest on low ground, but it soars very high in the sky. Cultivation is not possible on high land; in low land water accumulates and makes cultivation possible.

"One must take the trouble to seek the company of holy persons. In his own home a man hears only worldly talk; the disease of worldliness has become chronic with him. The caged parrot sitting on its perch repeats, 'Rāma! Rāma!' But let it fly to the forest and it will squawk in its usual way.

"Mere possession of money doesn't make a nobleman. One sign of the mansion of a nobleman is that all the rooms are lighted. The poor cannot afford much oil, and consequently cannot have so many lights. This shrine of the body should not be left dark; one should illumine it with the lamp of Wisdom. Lighting the lamp of knowledge in the chamber of your heart, Behold the face of the Mother, Brahman's Embodiment.

"Everyone can attain Knowledge. There are two entities: Jivatma, the individual soul, and Paramatma, the Supreme Soul. Through prayer all individual souls can be united to the Supreme Soul. Every house has a connection for gas, and gas can be obtained from the main storage-tank of the Gas Company. Apply to the Company, and it will arrange for your supply of gas. Then your house will be lighted.

"In some people spiritual consciousness has already been awakened; but they have special marks. They do not enjoy hearing or talking about anything but God. They are like the chatak, which prays for rain-water though the seven oceans, the Ganges, the Jamuna, and the rivers near it are all filled with water. It won't drink anything but rain-water, even though its throat is burning with thirst."

The Master wanted to hear a few songs. Ramlal and a brahmin official of the temple garden sang:

Dwell, O Lord, O Lover of bhakti,
In the Vrindāvan of my heart,
And my devotion unto Thee
Will be Thy Radha, dearly loved. . . .

And again:

The dark cloud of the summer storm fades into nothingness,
When, flute in hand and a smile on His lips,
Lighting the world with His loveliness,
Krishna, the Dark One, appears.

His dazzling yellow robe outgleams even the lightning's glare;
A wreath of wild-flowers interwoven
Gently swings from His youthful breast
And softly kisses His feet.

See, there He stands, the Lord of life, the Moon of Nanda's line,
Outshining all the moons in heaven
And with the splendour of His rays
Flooding the Jamuna's bank!

He stands there, stealing the maidens' hearts;
He lures them from hearth and home.
Krishna enters my own heart's shrine,
And with His flute-note steals away
My wisdom, life, and soul.
To whom shall Ganga Narayana pour out his tale of woe?
Ah, friend, you might have understood
Had you but gone to the Jamuna's bank
To fill your water-jar!

Again they sang:

High in the heaven of the Mother's feet, my mind was soaring like a kite,
When came a blast of sin's rough wind that drove it swiftly toward the earth. . . .

Zeal for the Lord destroys sin

MASTER (to the devotees): "As the tiger devours other animals, so does the 'tiger of zeal for the Lord' eat up lust, anger, and the other passions. Once this zeal grows in the heart, lust and the other passions disappear. The gopis of Vrindāvan had that state of mind because of their zeal for Krishna.

"Again, this zeal for God is compared to collyrium. Radha said to her friends, 'I see Krishna everywhere.' They replied, 'Friend, you have painted your eyes with the collyrium of love; that is why you see Krishna everywhere.'

"They say that when your eyes are painted with collyrium made from the ashes of a frog's head you see snakes everywhere.

Traits of bound souls

"They are indeed bound souls who constantly dwell with 'woman and gold' and do not think of God even for a moment. How can you expect noble deeds of them? They are like mangoes pecked by a crow, which may not be offered to the Deity in the temple, and which even men hesitate to eat.

"Bound souls, worldly people, are like silk-worms. The worms can cut through their cocoons if they want, but having woven the cocoons themselves, they are too much attached to them to leave them. And so they die there.

"Free souls are not under the control of 'woman and gold'. There are some silk-worms that cut through the cocoon they have made with such great care. But they are few and far between.

"It is maya that deludes. Only a few become spiritually awakened and are not deluded by the spell of maya. They do not come under the control of 'woman and gold'.

Two classes of perfect souls

"There are two classes of perfect souls: those who attain perfection through spiritual practice, and those who attain it through the grace of God. Some farmers irrigate their fields with great labour. Only then can they grow crops. But there are some who do not have to irrigate at all; their fields are flooded by rain. They don't have to go to the trouble of drawing water. One must practise spiritual discipline laboriously, in order to avoid the clutches of maya. Those who attain liberation through the grace of God do not have to labour. But they are few indeed.

The ever-perfect

"Then there is the class of the ever-perfect. They are born in each life with their spiritual consciousness already awakened. Think of a spring whose outlet is obstructed. While looking after various things in the garden, the plumber accidentally clears it and the water gushes out. Yet people are amazed to see the first manifestations of an ever-perfect soul's zeal for God. They say, 'Where was all this devotion and renunciation and love?'"

The conversation turned to the spiritual zeal of devotees, as illustrated in the earnestness of the gopis of Vrindāvan. Ramlal sang:

Thou art my All in All, O Lord!-the Life of my life, the Essence of essence;
In the three worlds I have none else but Thee to call my own.
Thou art my peace, my joy, my hope; Thou my support, my wealth, my glory;
Thou my wisdom and my strength.
Thou art my home, my place of rest; my dearest friend, my next of kin;
My present and my future, Thou; my heaven and my salvation.
Thou art my scriptures, my commandments; Thou art my ever gracious Guru;
Thou the Spring of my boundless bliss.
Thou art the Way, and Thou the Goal; Thou the Adorable One, O Lord!
Thou art the Mother tender-hearted; Thou the chastising Father;
Thou the Creator and Protector; Thou the Helmsman who dost steer
My craft across the sea of life.

MASTER (to the devotees): "Ah! What a beautiful song!-'Thou art my All in All.' "

Ramlal sang again, this time describing the pangs of the gopis on being separated from their beloved Krishna:

Hold not, hold not the chariot's wheels!
Is it the wheels that make it move?
The Mover of its wheels is Krishna,
By whose will the worlds are moved. . . .

The Master went into deep samādhi. His body was motionless; he sat with folded hands as in his photograph. Tears of joy flowed from the corners of his eyes. After a long time his mind came down to the ordinary plane of consciousness. He mumbled something, of which only a word now and then could be heard by the devotees in the room. He was saying: "Thou art I, and I am Thou-Thou eatest-Thou-I eat! . . . What is this confusion Thou hast created?"

Continuing, the Master said: "I see everything like a man with jaundiced eyes! I see Thee alone everywhere. O Krishna, Friend of the lowly! O Eternal Consort of my soul! O Govinda!"

As he uttered the words "Eternal Consort of my soul" and "Govinda", the Master again went into samādhi. There was complete silence in the room. The eager and unsatiated eyes of the devotees were fixed on the Master, a God-man of infinite moods.

Adhar Sen arrived with several of his friends. He was a deputy magistrate, about thirty years old. This was his second visit to the Master. He was accompanied by his friend Saradacharan, who was extremely unhappy because of the death of his eldest son. A retired deputy inspector of schools, Saradacharan devoted himself to meditation and prayer. Adhar had brought his friend to the Master for consolation in his afflicted state of mind.

Coming down from samādhi, the Master found the eyes of the devotees fixed on him. He muttered to himself, still in an abstracted mood.

Worldly people's lack perseverance

Then, addressing the devotees, Sri Ramakrishna said: "The spiritual wisdom of worldly people is seen only on rare occasions. It is like the flame of a candle. No, it is rather like a single ray of the sun passing through a chink in a wall. Worldly people chant the name of God, but there is no zeal behind it. It is like children's swearing by God, having learnt the word from the quarrels of their aunts.

"Worldly people have no grit. If they succeed in an undertaking, it is all right, but if they don't succeed, it scarcely bothers them at all. When they need water, they begin to dig a well. But as soon as they strike a stone, they give up digging there and begin at another place. Perhaps they come to a bed of sand. Finding nothing but sand, they give that place up too. How can they succeed in getting water unless they continue to dig persistently where they started?

"Man reaps the harvest of his own past actions. Hence you read in the song:

O Mother, I have no one else to blame:
Alas! I sink in the well these very hands have dug.

"'I' and 'mine'-that is ignorance. By discriminating you will realize that what you call 'I' is really nothing but Ātman. Reason it out. Are you the body or the flesh or something else? At the end you will know that you are none of these. You are free from attributes. Then you will realize that you have never been the doer of any action, that you have been free from virtue and faults alike, that you are beyond righteousness and unrighteousness.

"From ignorance a man says, 'This is gold and this is brass.' But a man of Knowledge says, 'It is all gold.'

"Reasoning stops when one sees God. But there are instances of people who have realized God and who still continue to reason. Again, there are people who, even after having seen God, chant His name with devotion and sing His glories.

"How long does a child cry? So long as it is not sucking at its mother's breast. As soon as it is nursed it stops crying. Then the child feels only joy. Joyously it drinks the milk from its mother's breast. But it is also true that, while drinking, the child sometimes plays and laughs.

"It is God alone who has become everything. But in man He manifests Himself the most. God is directly present in the man who has the pure heart of a child and who laughs and cries and dances and sings in divine ecstasy."

By this time Sri Ramakrishna had become better acquainted with Adhar, who related the cause of his friend's grief. The Master sang, as if to himself:

To arms! To arms, O man! Death storms your house in battle array!
Bearing the quiver of knowledge, mount the chariot of devotion;
Bend the bow of your tongue with the bow-string of love,
And aim at him the shaft of Mother Kāli's holy name.
Here is a ruse for the fray: You need no chariot or charioteer;
Fight your foe from the Ganges' bank, and he is easily slain.

Master consoles a bereaved father

Then he said: "What can you do? Be ready for Death. Death has entered the house. You must fight him with the weapon of God's holy name. God alone is the Doer. I say: 'O Lord, I do as Thou doest through me. I speak as Thou speakest through me. I am the machine and Thou art the Operator. I am the house and Thou art the Indweller. I am the engine and Thou art the Engineer.' Give your power of attorney to God. One doesn't come to grief through letting a good man assume one's responsibilities. Let His will be done.

"But isn't your grief for your son only natural? The son is one's own self reborn. Lakshmana ran to Ravana when the latter fell dead on the battlefield. Looking at Ravana's body, he found that everyone of his bones was full of holes. Thereupon he said to Rāma: 'O Rāma, glory be to Your arrows! There is no spot in Ravana's body that they have not pierced.' 'Brother,' replied Rāma, 'the holes you see in his bones are not from My arrows. Grief for his sons has pierced them through and through. These holes are the marks of his grief. It has penetrated his very bones.'

"But house, wife, and children are all transitory; they have only a momentary existence. The palm-tree alone is real. One or two fruits have dropped off. Why lament?

"God is engaged in three kinds of activity: creation, preservation, and destruction. Death is inevitable. All will be destroyed at the time of dissolution. Nothing will remain. At that time the Divine Mother will gather up the seeds for the future creation, even as the elderly mistress of the house keeps in her hotchpotch-pot little bags of cucumber seeds, 'sea-foam', blue pills, and other miscellaneous things. The Divine Mother will take Her seeds out again at the time of the new creation."

Sri Ramakrishna began to talk with Adhar on the verandah north of his room.

MASTER (to Adhar): "You are a deputy magistrate. Remember that you have obtained your position through the grace of God. Do not forget Him, but remember that all men must one day walk down the same path. We stay in the world only a couple of days.

"This world is our field of activity. We are born here to perform certain duties. People have their homes in the country but come to Calcutta to work.

"It is necessary to do a certain amount of work. This is a kind of discipline. But one must finish it speedily. While melting gold, the goldsmith uses everything-the bellows, the fan, and the pipe-so that he may have the hot fire he needs to melt the metal. After the melting is over, he relaxes and asks his attendant to prepare a smoke for him. All this time his face has been hot and perspiring; but now he can smoke.

"One must have stern determination; then alone is spiritual practice possible. One must make a firm resolve.

"There is great power in the seed of God's name. It destroys ignorance. A seed is tender, and the sprout soft; still it pierces the hard ground. The ground breaks and makes way for the sprout.

"The mind becomes very much distracted if one lives long in the midst of 'woman and gold'. Therefore one must be very careful. But monks do not have much to fear. The real sannyasi lives away from 'woman and gold'. Therefore through the practice of spiritual discipline he can always fix his mind on God.

"True sannyasis, those who are able to devote their minds constantly to God, are like bees, which light only on flowers and sip their honey. Those who live in the world, in the

midst of 'woman and gold', may direct their attention to God; but sometimes their minds dwell also on 'woman and gold'. They are like common flies, which light on a piece of candy, then on a sore or filth.

"Always keep your mind fixed on God. In the beginning you must struggle a little; later on you will enjoy your pension."

Sunday, April 15, 1883

Surendra, a beloved lay disciple of the Master, had invited him to his house on the auspicious occasion of the Annapurna Puja. It was about six o'clock when Sri Ramakrishna arrived there with some of his devotees. The image of the Divine Mother had been installed in the worship hall. At Her feet lay Hibiscus flowers and vilwa-leaves; from Her neck hung a garland of flowers. Sri Ramakrishna entered the hall and bowed down before the image. Then he went to the open courtyard, where he sat on a carpet, surrounded by his devotees and disciples. A few bolsters lay on the carpet, which was covered with a white linen sheet. He was asked to lean against one of these, but he pushed it aside.

Difficulty of overcoming vanity

MASTER (to the devotees): "To lean against a bolster! You see, it is very difficult to give up vanity. You may discriminate, saying that the ego is nothing at all; but still it comes, nobody knows from where. A goat's legs jerk for a few moments even after its head has been cut off. Or perhaps you are frightened in a dream; you shake off sleep and are wide awake, but still you feel your heart palpitating. Egotism is exactly like that. You may drive it away, but still it appears from somewhere. Then you look sullen and say: 'What! I have not been shown proper respect!'"

KEDĀR: "One should be lowlier than a straw and patient as a tree."

MASTER: "As for me, I consider myself as a speck of the dust of the devotee's feet."

Vaidyanath arrived. He was a well-educated man, a lawyer of the High Court of Calcutta. With folded hands he saluted the Master and took his seat at one side.

SURENDRA (to the Master): "He is one of my relatives."

MASTER: "Yes, I see he has a nice nature."

SURENDRA: "He has come here because he wants to ask you a question or two."

Different manifestations of divine power

MASTER (to Vaidyanath): "All that you see is the manifestation of God's Power. No one can do anything without this Power. But you must remember that there is not an equal manifestation of God's Power in all things. Vidyasagar once asked me whether God endowed some with greater power than others. I said to him: 'If there are no greater and lesser manifestations of His Power, then why have we taken the trouble to visit you? Have you grown two horns?' So it stands to reason that God exists in all beings as the

All-pervasive Power; but the manifestations of His Power are different in different beings."

Free will and God's will

VAIDYANATH: "Sir, I have a doubt. People speak of free will. They say that a man can do either good or evil according to his will. Is it true? Are we really free to do whatever we like?"

MASTER: "Everything depends on the will of God. The world is His play. He has created all these different things-great and small, strong and weak, good and bad, virtuous and vicious. This is all His maya, His sport. You must have observed that all the trees in a garden are not of the same kind.

"As long as a man has not realized God, he thinks he is free. It is God Himself who keeps this error in man. Otherwise sin would have multiplied. Man would not have been afraid of sin, and there would have been no punishment for it.

"But do you know the attitude of one who has realized God? He feels: 'I am the machine, and Thou, O Lord, art the Operator. I am the house and Thou art the Indweller. I am the chariot and Thou art the Driver. I move as Thou movest me; I speak as Thou makest me speak.'

(To Vaidyanath): "It is not good to argue. Isn't that so?"

VAIDYANATH: "Yes, sir. The desire to argue disappears when a man attains wisdom."

The Master, out of his stock of a dozen English words, said, "Thank you!" in the most charming way, and all laughed.

MASTER (to Vaidyanath): "You will make spiritual progress. People don't trust a man when he speaks about God. Even if a great soul affirms that he has seen God, still the average person will not accept his words. He says to himself, 'If this man has really seen God, then let him show Him to me.' But can a man learn to feel a person's pulse in one day? He must go about with a physician for many days; only then can he distinguish the different pulses. He must be in the company of those with whom the examination of the pulse has become a regular profession.

"Can anyone and everyone pick out a yarn of a particular count? If you are in that trade, you can distinguish in a moment a forty-count thread from a forty-one."

The kirtan was about to begin. Some Vaishnavas were seated on one side with their mridangas and cymbals. A drummer began to play on his instrument preparatory to the singing. The sweet and melodious sound of the mridanga filled the courtyard, calling to mind the ecstatic kirtan of Sri Gaurānga. The Master passed into a deep spiritual state. Now and then he looked at the drummer and said, "Ah! Ah! My hair is all standing on end."

The singers asked what kind of song they should sing. The Master said humbly, "Something about Gaurānga, if you please."

The kirtan began. They sang about the celestial beauty of Sri Gaurānga:

The beauty of Gaurānga's face
Glows brighter than the brightest gold;
His smile illumines all the world.
Who cares for even a million moons
Shining in the blue autumn sky?

The chief musician added improvised lines as they sang: "O friend, his face shines like the full moon!" "But it does not wane nor has it any stain." "It illumines the devotee's heart." Again he improvised: "His face is bathed with the essence of a million moons."

At these words the Master went into deep samādhi. After a short while he regained consciousness of the sense world. Then he suddenly stood up, overpowered by his spiritual mood, and sang improvised lines with the professionals, thinking himself to be a milkmaid of Vrindāvan gone mad with the beauty of Sri Krishna's form: "Whose fault is it-my mind's or His beauty's?" "In the three worlds I see nothing but my beloved Krishna."

The Master danced and sang. All remained spellbound as they watched. The chief musician sang the words of a gopi: "O flute, pray stop. Can you not go to sleep?" One of the musicians added a new line: "How can it sleep? It rests on Krishna's lips."

The Master sat down. The music went on. They sang, assuming the mood of Radha: "My eyes are blinded. My ears are deaf. I have lost the power of smell. All my senses are paralysed. But, alas, why am I left alone?"

Finally the musicians sang of the union of Radha and Krishna:

Radha and Krishna are joined at last in the Nidhu Grove of Vrindāvan;
Incomparable their beauty, and limitless their love!
The one half shines like yellow gold, the other like bluest sapphire;
Round the neck, on one side, a wild-flower garland hangs,
And, on the other, there swings a necklace of precious gems.
A ring of gold adorns one ear, a ring of shell the other;
Half of the brow is bright as the blazing midday sun,
The other softly gleams with the glow of the rising moon.
Upon one half of the head a graceful peacock feather stands,
And, from the other half, there hangs a braid of hair.

As the music came to a close the Master said, "Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan", and bowed low to the devotees seated on all sides. He touched with his forehead the ground made holy by the singing of the sacred music.

It was now about half past nine in the evening. Surendra entertained the Master and the devotees with a sumptuous feast. When it was time to take leave of their host, the Master, the devotees, and Surendra entered the worship hall and stood before the image.

SURENDRA (to the Master): "No one has sung anything about the Divine Mother today."

MASTER (pointing to the image): "Ah! Look at the beauty of the hall. The light of the Divine Mother seems to have lighted the whole place. Such a sight fills the heart with joy. Grief and desire for pleasure disappear.

"But can one not see God as formless Reality? Of course one can But not if one has the slightest trace of worldliness. The. rishis of olden times renounced everything and then contemplated Satchidananda, the Indivisible Brahman.

"The Brahmajnanis of modern times sing of God as 'immutable, homogeneous'. It sounds very dry to me. It seems as if the singers themselves don't enjoy the sweetness of God's Bliss. One doesn't want a refreshing drink made with sugar candy if one is satisfied with mere coarse treacle.

"Just see how happy you are, looking at this image of the Deity. But those who always cry after the formless Reality do not get anything. They realize nothing either inside or outside."

The Master sang a song to the Divine Mother:

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,
Do not deprive Thy worthless child of bliss!
My mind knows nothing but Thy Lotus Feet.
The King of Death scowls at me terribly;
Tell me, Mother, what shall I say to him?

It was my heart's desire to sail my boat
Across the ocean of this mortal life,
O Durga, with Thy name upon my lips.
I never dreamt that Thou wouldst drown me here
In the dark waters of this shoreless sea.

Both day and night I swim among its waves,
Chanting Thy saving name; yet even so
There is no end, O Mother, to my grief.
If I am drowned this time, in such a plight,
No one will ever chant Thy name again.

Again he sang:

Repeat, O mind, my Mother Durga's hallowed name!
Whoever treads the path, repeating "Durga! Durga!",
Śiva Himself protects with His almighty trident.
Thou art the day, O Mother! Thou art the dusk and the night.
Sometimes Thou art man, and sometimes woman art Thou.
Thou mayest even say to me: "Step aside! Go away!"
Yet I shall cling to Thee, O Durga! Unto Thy feet
As Thine anklets I shall cling, making their tinkling sound.
Mother, when as the Kite Thou soarest in the sky,
There, in the water beneath, as a minnow I shall be swimming;
Upon me Thou wilt pounce, and pierce me through with Thy claws.
Thus, when the breath of life forsakes me in Thy grip,
Do not deny me the shelter of Thy Lotus Feet!

The Master saluted the divine image. As he came down the steps, he called softly to Rākhāl: "Where are my shoes? Are they missing?"

As the Master got into the carriage, Surendra and the other devotees bowed down before him. Then the carriage started for Dakshineswar. The moon still lighted the streets.

Chapter 10

THE MASTER WITH THE BRAHMO DEVOTEES (II)

April 22, 1883

Master's visit to Brahmo festival

SRI RAMAKRISHNA paid a visit to Benimadhav Pal's garden house at Sinthi, near Calcutta, on the occasion of the semi-annual festival of the Brahmo Samaj. Many devotees of the Samaj were present and sat around the Master. Now and then some of them asked him questions.

Love and prayer

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "Sir, what is the way?"

MASTER: "Attachment to God, or, in other words, love for Him. And secondly, prayer."

BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "Which one is the way-love or prayer?"

MASTER: "First love, and then prayer."

The Master sang:

Cry to your Mother Syama with a real cry, O mind!
And how can She hold Herself from you?
How can Syama stay away? . . .

Continuing, the Master said: "And one must always chant the name and glories of God and pray to Him. An old metal pot must be scrubbed every day. What is the use of cleaning it only once? Further, one must practise discrimination and renunciation; one must be conscious of the unreality of the world."

BRAHMO: "Is it good to renounce the world?"

MASTER: "Not for all. Those who have not yet come to the end of their enjoyments should not renounce the world. Can one get drunk on two *ānnās*' worth of wine?"

How to lead a householder's life

BRAHMO: "Then should they lead a worldly life?"

MASTER: "Yes, they should try to perform their duties in a detached way. Before you break the jack-fruit open, rub your hands with oil, so that the sticky milk will not smear them. The maidservant in a rich man's house performs all her duties, but her mind dwells on her home in the country. This is an example of doing duty in a detached way. You should renounce the world only in mind. But a sannyasi should renounce the world both inwardly and outwardly."

BRAHMO: "What is the meaning of the 'end of enjoyments'?"

MASTER: "I mean the enjoyment of 'woman and gold'. It is risky to put a typhoid patient in a room where pitchers of water and jugs of pickled tamarind are kept. Most

people don't feel any longing for God unless they have once passed through the experience of wealth, name, fame, creature comforts, and the like, that is to say, unless they have seen through these enjoyments."

BRAHMO: "Who is really bad, man or woman?"

MASTER: "As there are women endowed with vidyaŚakti, so also there are women with avidyaŚakti. A woman endowed with spiritual attributes leads a man to God, but a woman who is the embodiment of delusion makes him forget God and drowns him in the ocean of worldliness.

"This universe is created by the Mahamaya of God. Mahamaya contains both Vidyā-māyā, the illusion of knowledge, and Avidyā-māyā, the illusion of ignorance. Through the help of Vidyā-māyā one cultivates such virtues as the taste for holy company, knowledge, devotion, love, and renunciation. Avidyā-māyā consists of the five elements and the objects of the five senses- form, flavour, smell, touch, and sound. These make one forget God."

Why there is evil in the world

BRAHMO: "If the power of avidyā is the cause of ignorance, then why has God created it?"

MASTER: "That is His play. The glory of light cannot be appreciated without darkness. Happiness cannot be understood without misery. Knowledge of good is possible because of knowledge of evil.

"Further, the mango grows and ripens on account of the covering skin. You throwaway the skin when the mango is fully ripe and ready to be eaten. It is possible for a man to attain gradually to the Knowledge of Brahman because of the covering skin of maya. Maya in its aspects of vidyā and avidyā may be likened to the skin of the mango. Both are necessary."

BRAHMO: "Sir, is it good to worship God with form, an image of the Deity made of clay?"

MASTER: "You do not accept God with form. That is all right. The image is not meant for you. For you it is good to deepen your feeling toward your own Ideal. From the worshippers of the Personal God you should learn their yearning-for instance, Sri Krishna's attraction for Radha. You should learn from the worshippers of the Personal God their love for their Chosen Ideal. When the believers in the Personal God worship the images of Kāli and Durga, with what feeling they cry from the depths of their souls, 'Mother! O Mother!' How much they love the Deity! You should accept that feeling. You don't have to accept the image."

BRAHMO: "How does one cultivate the spirit of dispassion? Why don't all attain it?"

MASTER: "Dispassion is not possible unless there is satiety through enjoyment. You can easily cajole a small child with candies or toys. But after eating the candies and finishing

its play, it cries, 'I want to go to my mother.' Unless you take the child to its mother, it will throw away the toy and scream at the top of its voice."

The members of the Brahmo Samaj are opposed to the traditional guru system of orthodox Hinduism. Therefore the Brahmo devotee asked the Master about it.

The need of a guru

BRAHMO: "Is spiritual knowledge impossible without a guru?"

MASTER: "Satchidananda alone is the Guru. If a man in the form of a guru awakens spiritual consciousness in you, then know for certain that it is God the Absolute who has assumed that human form for your sake. The guru is like a companion who leads you by the hand. After the realization of God, one loses the distinction between the guru and the disciple. 'That creates a very difficult situation; there the guru and the disciple do not see each other.' It was for this reason that Janaka said to Sukadeva, 'Give me first my teacher's fee if you want me to initiate you into the Knowledge of Brahman.' For the distinction between the teacher and the disciple ceases to exist after the disciple attains to Brahman. The relationship between them remains as long as the disciple does not see God."

It was dusk. Some of the Brahmo devotees said to the Master, "Perhaps it is time for your evening devotions."

MASTER: "No, it isn't exactly that. One should pass through these disciplines in the beginning. Later one doesn't need the rituals of formal worship or to follow the injunctions."

After dusk the preacher of the Brahmo Samaj conducted the service from the pulpit. The service was interspersed with recitations from the Upanishads and the singing of Brahmo songs.

After the service the Master and the preacher conversed.

Personal God and formless Deity

MASTER: "Well, it seems to me that both the formless Deity and God with form are real. What do you say?"

PREACHER: "Sir, I compare the formless God to the electric current, which is not seen with the eyes but can be felt."

MASTER: "Yes, both are true. God with form is as real as God without form. Do you know what describing God as being formless only is like? It is like a man's playing only a monotone on his flute, though it has seven holes. But on the same instrument another man plays different melodies. Likewise, in how many ways the believers in a Personal God enjoy Him! They enjoy Him through many different attitudes: the serene attitude, the attitude of a servant, a friend, a mother, a husband, or a lover.

"You see, the thing is somehow or other to get into the Lake of the Nectar of Immortality. Suppose one person gets into It by propitiating the Deity with hymns and

worship, and you are pushed into It. The result will be the same. Both of you will certainly become immortal.

"I give the Brahmos the illustration of water and ice. Satchidananda is like an endless expanse of water. The water of the great ocean in cold regions freezes into blocks of ice. Similarly, through the cooling influence of divine love, Satchidananda assumes forms for the sake of the bhaktas. The rishis had the vision of the supersensuous Spirit-form and talked with It. But devotees acquire a 'love body', and with its help they see the Spirit-form of the Absolute.

"It is also said in the Vedas that Brahman is beyond mind and words. The heat of the sun of Knowledge melts the ice-like form of the Personal God. On attaining the Knowledge of Brahman and communing with It in nirvikalpa samādhi, one realizes Brahman, the Infinite, without form or shape and beyond mind and words.

God's true nature cannot be described

"The nature of Brahman cannot be described. About It one remains silent. Who can explain the Infinite in words? However high a bird may soar, there are regions higher still. What do you say?"

PREACHER: "Yes, sir, it is so stated in the Vedanta philosophy."

MASTER: "Once a salt doll went to the ocean to measure its depth. But it could not come back to give a report. According to one school of thought, sages like Sukadeva saw and touched the Ocean of Brahman, but did not plunge into It.

"Once I said to Vidyasagar, 'Everything else but Brahman has been polluted, as it were, like food touched by the tongue.' In other words, no one has been able to describe what Brahman is. A thing once uttered by the tongue becomes polluted. Vidyasagar, great pundit though he was, was highly pleased with my remarks.

"It is said that there are places near Kedār that are covered with eternal snow; he who climbs too high cannot come back. Those who have tried to find out what there is in the higher regions, or what one feels there, have not come back to tell us about it.

"After having the vision of God man is overpowered with bliss. He becomes silent. Who will speak? Who will explain?

"The king lives beyond seven gates. At each gate sits a man endowed with great power and glory. At each gate the visitor asks, 'Is this the king?' The gate-keeper answers, 'No. Not this, not this.' The visitor passes through the seventh gate and. becomes overpowered with joy. He is speechless. This time he doesn't have to ask, 'Is this the king?' The mere sight of him removes all doubts."

PREACHER: "Yes, sir, it is so described in Vedanta."

MASTER: "When the Godhead is thought of as creating, preserving, and destroying, It is known as the Personal God, Saguna Brahman, or the Primal Energy, *Ādyāśakti*. Again, when It is thought of as beyond the three gunas, then It is called the Attributeless Reality, Nirguna Brahman, beyond speech and thought; this is the Supreme Brahman, Parabrahman.

The three gunas

"Under the spell of God's maya man forgets his true nature. He forgets that he is heir to the infinite glories of his Father. This divine maya is made up of three gunas. And all three are robbers; for they rob man of all his treasures and make him forget his true nature. The three gunas are sattva, rajas, and tamas. Of these, sattva alone points the way to God. But even sattva cannot take a man to God.

Parable of the three robbers

"Let me tell you a story. Once a rich man was passing through a forest, when three robbers surrounded him and robbed him of all his wealth. After snatching all his possessions from him, one of the robbers said: 'What's the good of keeping the man alive? Kill him.' Saying this, he was about to strike their victim with his sword, when the second robber interrupted and said: 'There's no use in killing him. Let us bind him fast and leave him here. Then he won't be able to tell the police.' Accordingly the robbers tied him with a rope, left him, and went away.

"After a while the third robber returned to the rich man and said: 'Ah! You're badly hurt, aren't you? Come, I'm going to release you.' The third robber set the man free and led him out of the forest. When .they came near the highway, the robber said, 'Follow this road and you will reach home easily.' 'But you must come with me too', said the man. 'You have done so much for me. We shall all be happy to see you at our home.' 'No,' said the robber, 'it is not possible for me to go there. The police will arrest me.' So saying, he left the rich man after pointing out his way.

"Now, the first robber, who said: 'What's the good of keeping the man alive? Kill him', is tamas. It destroys. The second robber is rajas, which binds a man to the world and entangles him in a variety of activities. Rajas makes him forget God. Sattva alone shows the way to God. It produces virtues like compassion, righteousness, and devotion. Again, sattva is like the last step of the stairs. Next to it is the roof. The Supreme Brahman is man's own abode. One cannot attain the Knowledge of Brahman unless one transcends the three gunas."

PREACHER: "You have given us a fine talk, sir."

MASTER (with a smile): "Do you know the nature of devotees? When one devotee meets another, he says, 'Let me speak and you listen; and when you speak I shall listen.' You are a preacher and teach so many people! You are a steamship, and I am a mere fishing-boat.' (All laugh.)

Wednesday, May 2, 1883

About five o'clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the temple of the Brahmo Samaj in Nandanbagan, accompanied by M., Rakhal, and a few other devotees. At first the Master sat in the drawing-room on the ground floor, where the Brahmo devotees gradually assembled. Rabindranath Tagore and a few other members of the Tagore family were present on this occasion.

Sri Ramakrishna was asked to go to the worship hall on the second floor. A dais had been built on the eastern side of the room. There were a few chairs and a piano in the hall. The Brahmo worship was to begin at dusk.

Why temples are holy

As soon as the Master entered the worship hall he bowed low before the dais. Having taken his seat, he said to M. and the other devotees, "Narendra once asked me, 'What good is there in bowing before the Brahmo Samaj temple?' The sight of the temple recalls to my mind God alone; then God-Consciousness is kindled in my mind. God is present where people talk about Him. One feels there the presence of all the holy places. Places of worship recall God alone to my mind.

"Once a devotee was overwhelmed with ecstasy at the sight of a babla-tree. The idea flashed in his mind that the handle of the axe used in the garden of the temple of Radhakanta was made from the wood of the babla. Another devotee had such devotion for his guru that he would be overwhelmed with divine feeling at the sight of his guru's neighbours. Krishna-consciousness would be kindled in Radha's mind at the sight of a cloud, a blue dress, or a painting of Krishna. She would become restless and cry like a mad person, 'Krishna, where art Thou?' "

GHOSAL: "But madness is not desirable."

MASTER: "What do you mean? Was Radha's madness the madness that comes from brooding over worldly objects and makes one unconscious? One attains that madness by meditating on God. Haven't you heard of love-madness and knowledge-madness?"

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "How can one realize God?"

MASTER: "By directing your love to Him and constantly reasoning that God alone is real and the world illusory. The Aśwattha tree alone is permanent; its fruit is transitory."

How to spiritualize the passions

BRAHMO: "We have passions like anger and lust. What shall we do with these?"
MASTER: "Direct the six passions to God. The impulse of lust should be turned into the desire to have intercourse with Ātman. Feel angry at those who stand in your way to God. Feel greedy for Him. If you must have the feeling of I and Mine, then associate it with God. Say, for instance, 'My Rama, my Krishna.' If you must have pride, then feel like Bibhishana, who said, 'I have touched the feet of Rama with my head; I will not bow this head before anyone else.'"

Responsibility for sins

BRAHMO: "If it is God that makes me do everything, then I am not responsible for my sins."

MASTER (with a smile): "Yes, Duryodhana also said that. 'O Krishna, I do what Thou, seated in my heart, makest me do.' If a man has the firm conviction that God alone is the Doer and he is His instrument, then he cannot do anything sinful. He who has learnt to dance correctly never makes a false step. One cannot even believe in the existence of God until one's heart becomes pure."

Sri Ramakrishna looked at the devotees assembled in the worship hall and said: "It is very good to gather in this way, now and then, and think of God and sing His name and glories. But the worldly man's yearning for God is momentary. It lasts as long as a drop of water on a red-hot frying-pan."

Brahmo worship

The worship was about to begin, and the big hall was filled with Brahmo devotees. Some of the Brahmo ladies sat on chairs, with music books in their hands. The songs of the Brahmo Samaj were sung to the accompaniment of harmonium and piano. Sri Ramakrishna's joy was unbounded. The invocation was followed by a prayer, and then the worship began. The acharyas, seated on the platform, recited from the Vedas:

Om. Thou art our Father. Give us right knowledge; do not destroy us! We bow to Thee.

The Brahmo devotees chanted in chorus with the acharyas:
Om. Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, Infinity.
It shines as Bliss and Immortality.
Brahman is Peace, Blessedness, and the One without a Second;
It is pure and unstained by sin.

The acharyas chanted in praise of God:

Om. O Reality, Cause of the Universe, we bow to Thee!

Then the acharyas chanted their prayer together:

From the unreal lead us to the Real;
From darkness lead us to Light;
From death lead us to Immortality.
Reach us through and through,
O Rudra, and protect us evermore with Thy Compassionate Face.

As Sri Ramakrishna heard these hymns, he went into a spiritual mood. After this an Āchārya read a paper.

The worship was over. Most of the devotees went downstairs or to the courtyard for fresh air while the refreshments were being made ready. It was about nine o'clock in the evening. The hosts were so engrossed with the other invited guests that they forgot to pay any attention to Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER (to Rakhal and the other devotees): "What's the matter? Nobody is paying any attention to us!"

RAKHAL (angrily): "Sir, Let us leave here and go to Dakshineswar."

MASTER (with a smile): "Keep quiet! The carriage hire is three rupees and two *ānnās*. Who will pay that? Stubbornness won't get us anywhere. You haven't a penny, and you are making these empty threats! Besides, where shall we find food at this late hour of the night?"

After a long time dinner was announced. The devotees were asked to take their seats. The Master, with Rakhal and the others, followed the crowd to the second floor. No room could be found for him inside the hall. Finally, with great difficulty, a place was found for him in a dusty corner. A brahmin woman served some curry, but Sri Ramakrishna could not eat it. He ate luchi with salt and took some sweets.

There was no limit to the Master's kindness. The hosts were mere youngsters; how could he be displeased with them, even though they did not show him proper respect? Further, it would have been inauspicious for the household if a holy man had left the place without taking food. Finally the feast had been prepared in the name of God.

Sri Ramakrishna got into a carriage: but who was to pay the hire? The hosts could not be found. Referring to this incident afterwards, the Master said to the devotees, jokingly: "The boys went to our hosts for the carriage hire. First they were put out, but at last they managed to get together three rupees. Our hosts refused to pay the extra two *ānnās* and said, 'No, that will do.' "

Sunday, May 13, 1883

The Master paid a visit to the Hari-Bhakti-Pradayini-Sabha of Kansharipara, in Calcutta, on the anniversary day of that religious society. Kirtan and other forms of devotional music had been arranged for the occasion. The songs centred round the Vrindāvan episode of Sri Krishna's life. The theme was Radha's pique because of Sri Krishna's having visited Chandravali, another of the gopis of Vrindāvan. Radha's friends tried to console her and said to her: "Why are you piqued? It seems you are not thinking of Krishna's happiness, but only of your own." Radha said to them: "I am not angry at His going to Chandravali's grove. But why should He go there? She doesn't know how to take care of Him."

May 20,1883

The following Sunday a kirtan was arranged at the house of Ram, one of the Master's householder devotees. Sri Ramakrishna graced the occasion with his presence. The musicians sang about Radha's pangs at her separation from Krishna:

Radha said to her friends: "I have loved to see Krishna from my childhood. My finger-nails are worn off from counting the days on them till I shall see Him. Once He gave me a garland. Look, it has withered, but I have not yet thrown it away. Alas! Where has the Moon of Krishna risen now? Has that Moon gone away from my firmament, afraid of

the Rahu of my pique? Alas! Shall I ever see Krishna again? O my beloved Krishna, I have never been able to look at You to my heart's complete satisfaction. I have only one pair of eyes; they blink and so hinder my vision. And further, on account of streams of tears I could not see enough of my Beloved. The peacock feather on the crown of His head shines like arrested lightning. The peacocks, seeing Krishna's dark-cloud complexion, would dance in joy, spreading their tails. O friends, I shall not be able to keep my life-breath. After my death, place my body on a branch of the dark tamala tree and inscribe on my body Krishna's sweet name."

The Master said: "God and His name are identical; that is the reason Radha said that. There is no difference between Rama and His holy name."

May 27, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was in his room at Dakshineswar, conversing with the devotees. It was about nine o'clock in the morning.

Religious quarrels condemned

MASTER (to M. and the other devotees): "It is not good to harbour malice. The Saktas, the Vaishnavas, and the Vedantists quarrel among themselves. That is not wise. Padmalochan was court pundit of the Maharaja of Burdwan. Once at a meeting the pundits were discussing whether Śiva was superior to Brahma, or Brahma to Śiva. Padmalochan gave an appropriate reply. 'I don't know anything about it', said he. 'I haven't talked either to Śiva or to Brahma.'

Single-minded devotion

"If people feel sincere longing, they will find that all paths lead to God. But one should have nishtha, single-minded devotion. It is also described as chaste and unswerving devotion to God. It is like a tree with only one trunk shooting straight up. Promiscuous devotion is like a tree with five branches.

Such was the single-minded devotion of the gopis to Krishna that they didn't care to look at anyone but the Krishna they had seen at Vrindāvan-the Shepherd Krishna, bedecked with a garland of yellow wild-flowers and wearing a peacock feather on His crest. At the sight of Krishna at Mathura with a turban on His head and dressed in royal robes, the gopis pulled down their veils. They would not look at His face. 'Who is this man?' they said. 'Should we violate our chaste love for Krishna by talking to him?'

"The devotion of the wife to her husband is also an instance of unswerving love. She feeds her brothers-in-law as well, and looks after their comforts, but she has a special relationship with her husband. Likewise, one may have that single-minded devotion to one's own religion; but one should not on that account hate other faiths. On the contrary, one should have a friendly attitude, toward them."

The Master bathed in the Ganges and then went to the Kāli temple with M. He sat before the image and offered flowers at the feet of the Divine Mother. Now and then he put flowers on his own head and meditated.

After a long time he stood up. He was in a spiritual mood and danced before the image, chanting the name of Kāli. Now and again he said: "O Mother! O Destroyer of suffering! O Remover of grief and agony!" Was he teaching people thus to pray to the Mother of the Universe with a yearning heart, in order to get rid of the suffering inevitable in physical life?

Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room and sat on the west porch. Rakhal, M., Nakur Vaishnav, and other devotees were with him. Nakur had been known to the Master for about twenty-five years. He was a devotee of Gauranga and had a small shop which Sri Ramakrishna had often visited when he first came to Calcutta from Kamarpukur.

Still overpowered with divine ecstasy, the Master sang:

O Kāli, my Mother full of Bliss! Enchantress of the almighty Śiva!
In Thy delirious joy Thou dancest, clapping Thy hands together!
Eternal One! Thou great First Cause, clothed in the form of the Void
Thou wearest the moon upon Thy brow,
Where didst Thou find Thy garland of heads before the universe was made?
Thou art the Mover of all that move, and we are but Thy helpless toys;
We move alone as Thou movest us and speak as through us Thou speakest.
But worthless Kamalakanta says, fondly berating Thee:
Confoundress! With Thy flashing sword
Thoughtlessly Thou hast put to death my virtue and my sin alike!

He sang again:

Mother, Thou art our sole Redeemer,
Thou the Support of the three gunas,
Higher than the most high.
Thou art compassionate, I know,
Who takest away our bitter grief.
Sandhya art Thou, and Gayatri;
Thou dost sustain this universe.
Mother, the Help art Thou
Of those that have no help but Thee,
O Eternal Beloved of Śiva!

Thou art in earth, in water Thou;
Thou liest at the root of all.
In me, in every creature,

Thou hast Thy home; though clothed with form,
Yet art Thou formless Reality.

The Master sang a few more songs in praise of the Divine Mother. Then he said to the devotees: "It is not always best to tell householders about the sorrows of life. They want bliss. Those who suffer from chronic poverty can go without food for a day or two. But it is not wise to talk about the sorrows and miseries of life to those who suffer if their food is delayed a few minutes. Vaishnavcharan used to say: 'Why should one constantly dwell on sin? Be merry!' "

While the Master was resting after his midday meal, Manohor Goswami, a singer of kirtan, arrived. He sang about the ecstatic love of Gauranga and the divine episode of Vrindāvan. The Master was absorbed in a deep spiritual mood. He tore off his shirt and said, to the melody of the kirtan, assuming the attitude of Radha: "O Krishna, my Beloved! O friends, bring Krishna to me. Then you will be real friends. Or take me to Him, and I will be your slave for ever."

The musician sat spellbound at Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy; then he said with folded hands, "Won't you please rid me of my worldliness?"

MASTER: "You are like the holy man who went about the city after first finding a lodging. You are a sweet person and express many sweet ideas."

MUSICIAN: "Sir, I am like the bullock that only carries the bag of sugar but cannot taste it. Alas, I myself do not enjoy the sweetness of divine bliss."

The melodious music went on, and all were filled with joy.

Saturday, June 2, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna had been invited to visit the homes of his devotees Balaram, Adhar, and Ram in Calcutta. Devotional music had been arranged by Adhar and Ram. The Master was accompanied in the carriage by Rakhal, M., and others.

As they drove along, Sri Ramakrishna said to the devotees: "You see, sin flies away when love of God grows in a man's heart, even as the water of the reservoir dug in a meadow dries up under the heat of the sun. But one cannot love God if one feels attracted to worldly things, to 'woman and gold'. Merely taking the vow of monastic life will not help a man if he is attached to the world. It is like swallowing your own spittle after spitting it out on the ground."

After a few minutes the Master continued: 'The members of the Brahmo Samaj do not accept God with form. Narendra says that God with form is a mere idol. He says further: 'What? He still goes to the Kāli temple!'"

Sri Ramakrishna and his party arrived at Balaram's house. Yajnanath of Nandanbagan came to invite the Master to his house at four o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna agreed to go if he felt well. After Yajnanath's departure the Master went into an ecstatic

mood. He said to the Divine Mother: "Mother, what is all this? Stop! What are these things Thou art showing to me? What is it that Thou dost reveal to me through Rakhal and others? The form is disappearing. But, Mother, what people call 'man' is only a pillow-case, nothing but a pillow-case. Consciousness is Thine alone.

"The modern Brahmajnanis have not tasted Thy sweet bliss. Their eyes look dry and so do their faces. They won't achieve anything without ecstatic love of God.

"Mother, once I asked Thee to give me a companion just like myself. Is that why Thou hast given me Rakhal?"

The Master went to Adhar's house, where arrangements were being made for the kirtan. Many devotees and neighbours had gathered in Adhar's drawing-room, anxious to listen to the Master's words.

Spiritual inspiration comes from God

MASTER (to the devotees): "Both worldliness and liberation depend on God's will. It is God alone who has kept man in the world in a state of ignorance; and man will be free when God, of His own sweet will, calls him to Himself. It is like the mother calling the child at meal-time, when he is out playing. When the time comes for setting a man free, God makes him seek the company of holy men. Further, it is God who makes him restless for spiritual life."

A NEIGIHBOUR: "What kind of restlessness, sir?"

MASTER: "Like the restlessness of a clerk who has lost his job. He makes the round of the offices daily and asks whether there is any vacancy. When that restlessness comes, man longs for God. A fop, seated comfortably with one leg over the other, chewing betel-leaf and twirling his moustaches-a carefree dandy-, cannot attain God."

NEIGHBOUR: "Can one get this longing for God through frequenting the company of holy men?"

MASTER: "Yes, it is possible. But not for a confirmed scoundrel. A sannyasi's kamandalu, made of bitter gourd, travels with him to the four great places of pilgrimage but still does not lose its bitterness."

The kirtan began. The musician sang of Sri Krishna's life in Vrindāvan:

RADHA: "Friend, I am about to die. Give me back my Krishna."

FRIEND: "But, Radha; the cloud of Krishna was ready to burst into rain. It was yourself who blew it away with the strong wind of your pique. You are certainly not happy to see Krishna happy; or why were you piqued?"

RADHA: "But this pride was not mine. My pride has gone away with Him who made me proud."

After the music Sri Ramakrishna conversed with the devotees.

MASTER: "The gopis worshipped Katyayani in order to be united with Sri Krishna. Everyone is under the authority of the Divine Mother, Mahamaya, the Primal Energy. Even the Incarnations of God accept the help of maya to fulfil their mission on earth. Therefore they worship the Primal Energy. Don't you see how bitterly Rama wept for Sita? 'Brahman weeps, ensnared in the meshes of maya.'

"Vishnu incarnated Himself as a sow in order to kill the demon Hiranyaksha. After killing the demon, the sow remained quite happy with her young ones. Forgetting her real nature, she was suckling them very contentedly. The gods in heaven could not persuade Vishnu to relinquish His sow's body and return to the celestial regions. He was absorbed in the happiness of His beast form. After consulting among themselves, the gods sent Śiva to the sow. Śiva asked the sow, 'Why have you forgotten yourself?' Vishnu replied through the sow's body, 'Why, I am quite happy here.' Thereupon with a stroke of his trident Śiva destroyed the sow's body, and Vishnu went back to heaven."

Ramchandra Dutta

From Adhar's house Sri Ramakrishna went to Ram's house. Ramchandra Dutta, one of the chief householder disciples of the Master, lived in Calcutta. He had been one of the first to announce the Master as an Incarnation of God. The Master had visited his house a number of times and unstintingly praised the devotion and generosity of this beloved disciple. A few of the Master's disciples made Ram's house virtually their own dwelling-place.

Ram had arranged a special festival to celebrate the Master's visit. The small courtyard was nicely decorated. A kathak, seated on a raised platform, was reciting from the Bhagavata when the Master arrived. Ram greeted him respectfully and seated him near the reader. The disciple was extremely happy. The kathak was in the midst of the story of King Harischandra.

Story of Harishchandra

The great King Harischandra of the Purana was the embodiment of generosity. No one ever went away from him empty-handed. Now, the sage Viswamitra, wanting to test the extent of the king's charity, extracted from him a promise to grant any boon that he might ask. Then the sage asked for the gift of the sea-girt world, of which Harischandra was king. Without the slightest hesitation the king gave away his kingdom. Then Viswamitra demanded the auxiliary fee, which alone makes charity valid and meritorious. The kathak continued his recitation:

Viswamitra said to the king: "O King, you have given away the entire world, which was your kingdom. It now belongs to me; you cannot claim any place here. But you may live in Benares, which belongs to Śiva. I shall lead you there with your wife Saibya, and Rohitasva, your son. There you can procure the auxiliary fee that you owe me." The royal family, accompanied by the sage, reached Benares and visited the temple of Śiva.

At the very mention of Śiva, the Master went into spiritual mood and repeated the holy name several times indistinctly.

The kathak continued:

The king could not procure the fee and was compelled to sell Saibya, his royal consort, to a brahmin. With her went Prince Rohitasva. But since even that was not enough to redeem his pledge to the sage, Harischandra sold himself to an untouchable who kept a cremation ground. He was ordered to supervise the cremations. One day, while plucking flowers for his brahmin master, Prince Rohitasva was bitten by a venomous snake and that very night died. The cruel brahmin would not leave his bed to help the poor mother cremate the body. The night was dark and stormy. Lightning rent the black clouds. Saibya started for the cremation ground alone, carrying the body of her son in her arms. Smitten with fear and overpowered with grief, the queen filled heaven and earth with her wailing. Arriving at the cremation ground, she did not recognize her husband, who demanded the usual fee for the cremation. Saibya was penniless and wept bitterly at her unending misfortunes. The impenetrable darkness was illumined only by the terrible flames of the cremation pyres. Above her the thunder roared, and before her the uncouth guardian of the cremation ground demanded his fee. She who had once been queen of the world sat there with her only child dead and cold on her lap.

The devotees burst into tears and loudly lamented this tragic episode of a royal life. And what was the Master doing? He was listening to the recital with rapt attention. Tear-drops appeared in his eyes and he wiped them away.

The kathak continued:

When the queen, wailing bitterly, uttered the name of her husband, Harischandra at once recognized his wife and son. Then the two wept for the dead prince. Yet in all these misfortunes the king never once uttered a word of regret for his charity. Finally the sage Viswamitra appeared and told them that he had only wanted to put the king's charitable impulses to a crucial test. Then, through his spiritual power, the sage brought the prince back to life and returned to the king his lost kingdom.

Story of Uddhava

Sri Ramakrishna asked the kathak to recite the episode of Uddhava, the friend and devotee of Krishna.

At the request of Krishna, Uddhava had gone to Vrindāvan to console the cowherds and the gopis, who were sore at heart because of their separation from their beloved Krishna.

The Kathak said:

When Uddhava arrived at Vrindāvan, the gopis and cowherd boys ran to him eagerly and asked him: "How is our Krishna? Has He forgotten us altogether? Doesn't He even speak our names?" So saying, some of them wept. Others accompanied him to various places in Vrindāvan still filled with Krishna's sweet memory. They said: "Here it was that

Krishna lifted up Mount Govardhan, and here He killed the demons sent by the evil-minded Kamśa. In this meadow He tended His cows; here on the bank of the Jamuna He sported with the gopis. Here

He played with the cowherd boys, and here in these groves He met the gopis secretly." Uddhava said to them: "Why are you so grief-stricken at Krishna's absence? He resides in all beings as their indwelling Spirit. He is God Himself, and nothing can exist without God." "But", said the gopis, "we do not understand all that. We can neither read nor write. We know only our Krishna of Vrindāvan, who played with us here in so many ways." Uddhava said: "Krishna is God Himself. By meditating on Him, man escapes from birth and death in the world and attains liberation." The gopis said: "We do not understand big words like 'liberation'. We want to see the Krishna of our hearts."

The Master listened to the story from the Bhagavata with great attention and said at last, "Yes, the gopis were right."

Then he sang:

Though I am never loath to grant salvation,
I hesitate indeed, to grant pure love.
Whoever wins pure love surpasses all;
He is adored by men;
He triumphs over the three worlds.

Listen, Chandravali! I shall tell you of love:
Mukti a man may gain, but rare is bhakti.
Solely for pure love's sake did I become
King Vali's door-keeper
Down in his realm in the nether world.

Alone in Vrindāvan can pure love be found;
Its secret none but the gopas and gopis know.
For pure love's sake I dwelt in Nanda's house;
Taking him as My father,
I carried his burdens on My head.

The Master said to the kathak: "The gopis had ecstatic love, unswerving and single-minded devotion to one ideal. Do you know the meaning of devotion that is not loyal to one ideal? It is devotion tinged with intellectual knowledge. It makes one feel: 'Krishna has become all these. He alone is the Supreme Brahman. He is Rama, Śiva, and Śakti.' But this element of knowledge is not present in ecstatic love of God. Once Hanuman came to Dwaraka and wanted to see Sita and Rama. Krishna said to Rukmini, His queen, 'You had better assume the form of Sita; otherwise there will be no escape from the hands of Hanuman.'

"Once the Pandava brothers performed the Rajasuya sacrifice. All the kings placed Yudhisthira on the royal throne and bowed low before him in homage. But Bibhishana, the King of Ceylon, said, 'I bow down to Narayana and to none else.' At these words the

Lord Krishna bowed down to Yudhisthira. Only then did Bibhishana prostrate himself, crown and all, before him.

"Do you know what devotion to one ideal is like? It is like the attitude of a daughter-in-law in the family. She serves all the members of the family-her brothers-in-law, father-in-law, husband, and so forth-, bringing them water to wash their feet, fetching their towels, arranging their seats, and the like; but with her husband she has a special relationship.

Characteristics of divine love

"There are two elements in this ecstatic love: 'I-ness' and 'my-ness'. Yaśoda used to think: 'Who would look after Gopala if I did not? He will fall ill if I do not serve Him.' She did not look on Krishna as God. The other element is 'my-ness'. It means to look on God as one's own-'my Gopala'. Uddhava said to Yaśoda: 'Mother, your Krishna is God Himself. He is the Lord of the Universe and not a common human being.' 'Oh!' exclaimed Yaśoda. 'I am not asking you about your Lord of the Universe. I want to know how my Gopala fares. Not the Lord of the Universe, but my Gopala.'

"How faithful to Krishna the gopis were! After many entreaties to the door-keeper, the gopis entered the royal court in Mathura, where Krishna was seated as king. The door-keeper took them to Him; but at the sight of King Krishna wearing the royal turban, the gopis bent down their heads and said among themselves: 'Who is this man with a turban on his head? Should we violate our chaste love for Krishna by talking to him? Where is our beloved Krishna with the yellow robe and the bewitching crest with the peacock feather?'

"Did you observe the single-minded love of the gopis for Krishna? The ideal of Vrindāvan is unique. I am told that the people of Dwaraka worship Krishna, the companion of Arjuna, but reject Radha."

A DEVOTEE: "Which is the better, ecstatic love or love mixed with knowledge?"

Parable of the three friends

MASTER: "It is not possible to develop ecstatic love of God unless you love Him very deeply and regard Him as your very own.

"Listen to a story. Once three friends were going through a forest, when a tiger suddenly appeared before them. 'Brothers,' one of them exclaimed, 'we are lost!' 'Why should you say that?' said the second friend. 'Why should we be lost? Come, let us pray to God.' The third friend said: 'No. Why should we trouble God about it? Come, let us climb this tree.'

"The friend who said, 'We are lost!' did not know that there is a God who is our Protector. The friend who asked the others to pray to God was a jnani. He was aware that God is the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the world. The third friend, who didn't want to trouble God with prayers and suggested climbing the tree, had ecstatic love of God. It is the very nature of such love that it makes a man think himself

stronger than his Beloved. He is always alert lest his Beloved should suffer. The one desire of his life is to keep his Beloved from even being pricked in the foot by a thorn."

Ram served the Master and the devotees with delicious sweets.

Chapter 11

WITH THE DEVOTEES AT DAKSHINESWAR (I)

Monday, June 4, 1883

ABOUT NINE O'CLOCK in the morning the devotees began to arrive at the temple garden. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the porch of his room facing the Ganges. M., who had spent the previous night with the Master, sat near him. Balarām and several other devotees were present. Rākhāl lay on the floor, resting his head on the Master's lap. For the past few days the Master had been regarding Rākhāl as the Baby Krishna.

Seeing Trailokya passing on his way to the Kali temple, Sri Ramakrishna asked Rākhāl to get up. Trailokya bowed to the Master.

MASTER (to Trailokya): "Was there no yatra performance last night?"

TRAILOKYA: "No, sir. We couldn't conveniently arrange it."

MASTER: "What is done is done. But please see that this doesn't happen again. The traditions of the temple should be properly observed."

Trailokya gave a suitable reply and went on his way. After a while Ram Chatterji, the priest of the Vishnu temple, came up to Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER: "Well, Ram, I told Trailokya that the yatra performance should not be omitted again. Was I right in saying that?".

RAM: "What of it, sir? Of course you were right. The traditions should be observed."

The Master asked Balarām to stay for his midday meal. Before the meal Sri Ramakrishna described to the devotees the days of his God-intoxication. Rākhāl, M., Ramlal, and a few others were present.

Master's attitude toward young disciples

MASTER: "Now and then Hazra comes forward to teach me. He says to me, 'Why do you think so much about the youngsters?' One day, as I was going to Balarām's house in a carriage, I felt greatly troubled about it. I said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, Hazra admonishes me for worrying about Narendra and the other young boys. He asks me why I forget God and think about these youngsters.' No sooner did this thought arise in my mind than the Divine Mother revealed to me in a flash that it is She Herself who has become man. But She manifests Herself most clearly through a. pure soul. At this vision I went into samadhi. Afterwards I felt angry with Hazra. I said to myself, 'That

rascal made me miserable.' Then I thought: 'But why should I blame the poor man? How is he to know?'

His yearning for Narendra

"I know these youngsters to be Narayana Himself. At my first meeting with Narendra I found him completely indifferent to his body. When I touched his chest with my hand, he lost consciousness of the outer world. Regaining consciousness, Narendra said: 'Oh, what have you done to me? I have my father and mother at home!' The same thing happened at Jadu Mallick's house. As the days passed I longed more and more to see him. My heart yearned for him. One day at that time I said to Bholanath: 'Can you tell me why I should feel this way? There is a boy called Narendra, of the kayastha caste. Why should I feel so restless for him?' Bholanath said: 'You will find the explanation in the Mahabharata. On coming down to the plane of ordinary consciousness, a man established in samadhi enjoys himself in the company of sattvic people. He feels peace of mind at the sight of such men.' When I heard this my mind was set at ease. Now and then I would sit alone and weep for the sight of Narendra.

Reminiscences of his God-intoxicated state

"Oh, what a state of mind I passed through! When I first had that experience, I could not perceive the coming and going of day or night. People said I was insane. What else could they say? They made me marry. I was then in a state of God-intoxication. At first I felt worried about my wife. Then I thought she too would eat and drink and live like me.

"I visited my father-in-law's house. They arranged a kirtan. It was a great religious festival, and there was much singing of God's holy name. Now and then I would wonder about my future. I would say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I shall take my spiritual experiences to be real if the landlords of the country show me respect.' They too came of their own accord and talked with me.

"Oh, what an ecstatic state it was! Even the slightest suggestion would awaken my spiritual consciousness. I worshipped the 'Beautiful' in a girl fourteen years old. I saw that she was the personification of the Divine Mother. At the end of the worship I bowed before her and offered a rupee at her feet. One day I witnessed a Ramlila performance. I saw the performers to be the actual Sita, Rāma, Lakshmana, Hanuman, and Bibhishana. Then I worshipped the actors and actresses who played those parts.

"At that time I used to invite maidens here and worship them. I found them to be embodiments of the Divine Mother Herself.

"One day I saw a woman in blue standing near the bakul-tree. She was a prostitute. But she instantly kindled in me the vision of Sita. I forgot the woman. I saw that it was Sita herself on her way to meet Rāma after her rescue from Ravana in Ceylon. For a long time I remained in samadhi, unconscious of the outer world.

"Another day I had gone to the Maidan in Calcutta for fresh air. A great crowd had assembled there to watch a balloon ascension. Suddenly I saw an English boy leaning against a tree. As he stood there his body was bent in three places. The vision of Krishna came before me in a flash. I went into samadhi.

"Once, at Sihore, I fed the cowherd boys. I put sweetmeats into their hands. I saw that these boys were actually the cowherd boys of Vrindavan, and I partook of the sweetmeats from their hands.

"At that time I was almost unconscious of thc outer world. Mathur Babu kept me at his Janbazar mansion a few days. While living there I regarded myself as the handmaid of the Divine Mother. The ladies of the house didn't feel at all bashful with me. They felt as free before me as women feel before a small boy or girl. I used to escort Mathur's daughter to her husband's chamber with the maidservant.

"Even now the slightest thing awakens God-Consciousness in me. Rākhāl used to repeat the name of God half aloud. At such times I couldn't control myself. It would rouse my spiritual consciousness and overwhelm me."

Sri Ramakrishna went on describing the different experiences he had had while worshipping the Divine Mother as Her handmaid. He said: "Once I imitated a professional woman, singer for a man singer. He said my acting was quite correct and asked me where I had learnt it." The Master repeated his imitation for the devotees, and they burst into laughter.

After his noon meal the Master took a short rest. Manilal Mallick, an old member of the Brahmo Samaj, entered the room and sat down after saluting the Master, who was still lying on his bed. Manilal asked him questions now and then, and the Master, still half asleep, answered with a word or two. Manilal said that Shivanath admired Nityagopal's spiritual state. The Master asked in a sleepy tone what they thought of Hazra.

Then Sri Ramakrishna sat up on his bed and told Manilal about Bhavanath's devotion to God.

MASTER: "Ah, what an exalted state he is in! He has hardly begun to sing about God before his eyes fill with tears. The very sight of Harish made him ecstatic. He said that Harish was very lucky. He made the remark because Harish was spending a few days here, now and then, away from his home."

Sri Ramakrishna asked M., "Well, what is the cause of bhakti? Why should the spiritual feeling of young boys like Bhavanath be awakened?" M. remained silent.

MASTER: "The fact is, all men may look alike from the outside, but some of them have fillings of 'condensed milk'. Cakes may have fillings of condensed milk or powdered black grams, but they all look alike from the outside. The desire to know God, ecstatic love of Him, and such other spiritual qualities are the 'condensed milk'."

Reassurance to the devotees & Parable of the tigress

Sri Ramakrishna spoke reassuringly to the devotees.

MASTER (to M.): "Some think: 'Oh, I am a bound soul. I shall never acquire knowledge and devotion.' But if one receives the guru's grace, one has nothing to fear. Once a tigress attacked a flock of goats. As she sprang on her prey, she gave birth to a cub and died. The cub grew up in the company of the goats. The goats ate grass and the cub followed their example. They bleated; the cub bleated too. Gradually it grew to be a big tiger. One day another tiger attacked the same flock. It was amazed to see the grass-eating tiger. Running after it, the wild tiger at last seized it, whereupon the grass-eating tiger began to bleat. The wild tiger dragged it to the water and said: 'Look at your face in the water. It is just like mine. Here is a little meat. Eat it.' Saying this, it thrust some meat into its mouth. But the grass-eating tiger would not swallow it and began to bleat again. Gradually, however, it got the taste for blood and came to relish the meat. Then the wild tiger said: 'Now you see there is no difference between you and me. Come along and follow me into the forest.'

"So there can be no fear if the guru's grace descends on one. He will let you know who you are and what your real nature is.

"If the devotee practises spiritual discipline a little, the guru explains everything to him. Then the disciple understands for himself what is real and what is unreal. God alone is real, and the world is illusory.

Parable of the false ascetic

"One night a fisherman went into a garden and cast his net into the lake in order to steal some fish. The owner heard him and surrounded him with his servants. They brought lighted torches and began to search for him. In the mean time the fisherman smeared his body with ashes and sat under a tree, pretending to be a holy man. The owner and his men searched a great deal but could not find the thief. All they saw was a holy man covered with ashes, meditating under a tree. The next day the news spread in the neighbourhood that a great sage was staying in the garden. People gathered there and saluted him with offerings of fruit, flowers, and sweets. Many also offered silver and copper coins. 'How strange!' thought the fisherman. 'I am not a genuine holy man, and still people show such devotion to me. I shall certainly realize God if I become a true sadhu. There is no doubt about it.'

"If a mere pretence of religious life can bring such spiritual awakening, you can imagine the effect of real sadhana. In that state you will surely realize what is real and what is unreal. God alone is real, and the world is illusory."

The world is a dream

One of the devotees said to himself: "Is the world unreal, then? The fisherman, to be sure, renounced worldly life. What, then, will happen to those who live in the world? Must they too renounce it?" Sri Ramakrishna, who could see into a man's innermost

thought, said very tenderly: "Suppose an office clerk has been sent to jail. He undoubtedly leads a prisoner's life there. But when he is released from jail, does he cut capers in the street? Not at all. He gets a job as a clerk again and goes on working as before. Even after attaining Knowledge through the guru's grace, one can very well live in the world as a Jivanmukta." Thus did Sri Ramakrishna reassure those who were living as householders.

MANILAL: "Sir, where shall I meditate on God when I perform my daily worship?"

MASTER: "Why, the heart is a splendid place. Meditate on God there."

Manilal, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, believed in a formless God. Addressing him, the Master said: "Kabir used to say: 'God with form is my Mother, the formless God my Father. Whom should I blame? Whom should I adore? The two sides of the scales are even.' During the day-time Haladhari used to meditate on God with form, and at night on the formless God. Whichever attitude you adopt, you will certainly realize God if you have firm faith. You may believe in God with form or in God without form, but your faith must be sincere and whole-hearted. Sambhu Mallick used to come on foot from Baghbazar to his garden house at Dakshineswar. One day a friend said to him: 'It is risky to walk such a long distance. Why don't you come in a carriage?' At that Sambhu's face turned red and he exclaimed: 'I set out repeating the name of God! What danger can befall me?' Through faith alone one attains everything. I used to say, 'I shall take all this to be true if I meet a certain person or if a certain officer of the temple garden talks to me.' What I would think of would invariably come to pass."

M. had studied English logic. In the chapters on fallacies he had read that only superstitious people believed in the coincidence of morning dreams with actual events. Therefore he asked the Master, "Was there never any exception?"

MASTER: "No. At that time everything happened that way. I would repeat the name of God and believe that a certain thing would happen, and it would invariably come to pass. (To Manilal) But you must remember, unless one is guileless and broad-minded, one cannot have such faith. Bony people, the hollow-eyed, the cross-eyed-people with physical traits like those cannot easily acquire faith. What can a man do if there are evil omens on all sides?"

It was dusk. The maidservant entered the room and burnt incense. Manilal and some other devotees left for Calcutta. M. and Rākhāl were in the room. The Master was seated on his small couch absorbed in meditation on the Divine Mother. There was complete silence.

After a time Bhagavati, an old maidservant of the temple proprietor, entered the room and saluted the Master from a distance. Sri Ramakrishna bade her sit down. The Master had known her for many years. In her younger days she had lived a rather immoral life; but the Master's compassion was great. Soon he began to converse with her.

MASTER: "Now you are pretty old. Have you been feeding the Vaishnavas and holy men, and thus spending your money in a noble way?"

BHAGAVATI (smiling): "How can I say that?"

MASTER: "Have you been to Vrindavan, Benares, and the other holy places?"

BHAGAVATI (shrinkingly): "How can I say that- I have built a bathing place, and my name is inscribed there on a slab."

MASTER: "Indeed!"

BHAGAVATI: "Yes, sir. My name, 'Srimati Bhagavati Dasi', is written there."

MASTER (with a smile): "How nice!"

Emboldened by the Master's words, Bhagavati approached and saluted him, touching his feet. Like a man stung by a scorpion, Sri Ramakrishna stood up and cried out, "Govinda! Govinda!" A big jar of Ganges water stood in a comer of the room. He hurried there, panting, and washed with the holy water the spot the maidservant had touched. The devotees in the room were amazed to see this incident. Bhagavati sat as if struck dead.

Sri Ramakrishna consoled her and said in a very kindly tone, "You should salute me from a distance." In order to relieve her mind of all embarrassment, the Master said tenderly, "Listen to a few songs."

The Master then sang about the Divine Mother:

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight
To the blue lotus flower of Mother Syama's feet. . . .

Then he sang:

High in the heaven of the Mother's feet, my mind was soaring like a kite,
When came a gust of sin's rough wind that drove it swiftly toward the earth. . . .

Again:

Dwell, O mind, within yourself;
Enter no other's home.
If you but seek there, you will find
All you are searching for.

God, the true Philosopher's Stone,
Who answers every prayer,

Lies hidden deep within your heart,
The richest gem of all.

How many pearls and precious stones
Are scattered all about
The outer court that lies before
The chamber of your heart!

Tuesday, June 5, 1883

Rākhāl and Hazra were staying with the Master in the temple garden at Dakshineswar. M., too, had been there since the previous Sunday. As it was a week-day there were only a few devotees in the room. Generally people gathered there in large numbers on Sundays or holidays.

It was afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was telling the devotees about his experiences during his God-intoxicated state.

MASTER (to M.): "Oh, what a state I passed through! At that time I didn't eat my meals here. I would enter the house of a brahmin in the village or at Baranagore or at Ariadaha. Generally it would be past meal-time. I would just sit down there without saying a word. If the members of the household asked me why I had come, I would simply say, 'I want something to eat.' Now and then I would go, uninvited of course, to Ram Chatterji's house at Alambazar or to the Choudhurys at Dakshineswar. But I didn't relish the food at the Choudhurys' house.

"One day I begged Mathur to take me to Devendra Tagore's house. I said: 'Devendra chants the name of God, I want to see him. Will you take me there?' Mathur Babu was a very proud man. How could one expect him to go to another man's house uninvited? At first he hesitated. But then he said: 'All right. Devendra and I were fellow students. I will take you to him.'

"Another day I learnt of a good man named Dina Mukherji, living at Baghbazar near the bridge. He was a devotee. I asked Mathur to take me there. Finding me insistent, he took me to Dina's house in a carriage. It was a small place. The arrival of a rich man in a big carriage embarrassed the inmates. We too were embarrassed. That day Dina's son was being invested with the sacred thread. The house was crowded, and there was hardly any place for Dina to receive us. We were about to enter a side room, when someone cried out: 'Please don't go into that room. There are ladies there.' It was really a distressing situation. Returning, Mathur Babu said, 'Father, I shall never listen to you again.' I laughed.

"Oh, what a state I passed through! Once Kumar Singh gave a feast to the sadhus and invited me too. I found a great many holy men assembled there. When I sat down for the meal, several sadhus asked me about myself. At once I felt like leaving them and sitting alone. I wondered why they should bother about all that. The sadhus took their seats. I began to eat before they had started. I heard several of them remark, 'Oh! What sort of man is this?' "

Parable of the farmer

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the steps of his verandah. Hazra, Rākhāl, and M. were near him. Hazra had the attitude of a Vedantist: "I am He."

MASTER (to Hazra): "Yes, all one's confusion comes to an end if one only realizes that it is God who manifests Himself as the atheist and the believer, the good and the bad, the real and the unreal; that it is He who is present in waking and in sleep; and that He is beyond all these.

"There was a farmer to whom an only son was born when he was rather advanced in age. As the child grew up, his parents became very fond of him. One day the farmer was out working in the fields, when a neighbour told him that his son was dangerously ill-indeed, at the point of death. Returning home he found the boy dead. His wife wept bitterly, but his own eyes remained dry. Sadly the wife said to her ncighbours, 'Such a son has passed away, and he hasn't even one tear to shed!' After a long while the farmer said to his wife: 'Do you know why I am not crying? Last night I dreamt I had become a king, and the father of seven princes. These princes were beautiful as well as virtuous. They grew in stature and acquired wisdom and knowledge in the various arts. Suddenly I woke up. Now I have been wondering whether I should weep for those seven children or this one boy.' To the jnanis the waking state is no more real than the dream state.

"God alone is the Doer. Everything happens by His will."

Law of karma

HAZRA: "But it is very difficult to understand that. Take the case of the sadhu of Bhukailas. How people tortured him and; in a way, killed him! They had found him in samadhi. First they buried him, then they put him under water, and then they branded him with a hot iron. Thus they brought him back to consciousness of the world. But in the end the sadhu died as a result of these tortures. He undoubtedly suffered at the hands of men, though, as you say, he died by the will of God."

MASTER: "Man must reap the fruit of his own karma. But as far as the death of that holy man is concerned, it was brought about by the will of God. The kavirajs prepare makaradhvaja in a bottle. The bottle is covered with clay and heated in the fire. The gold inside the bottle melts and combines with the other ingredients, and the medicine is made. Then the physicians break the bottle carefully and take out the medicine. When the medicine is made, what difference does it make whether the bottle is preserved or broken? So people think that the holy man was killed. But perhaps his inner stuff had been made. After the realization of God, what difference does it make whether the body lives or dies?

Different kinds of samadhi

"The sadhu of Bhukailas was in samadhi. There are many kinds of samadhi. My own spiritual experiences tally with the words I heard from a sadhu of Hrishikesh.

Sometimes I feel the rising of the spiritual current inside me, as though it were the creeping of an ant. Sometimes it feels like the movement of a monkey jumping from one branch to another. Again, sometimes it feels like a fish swimming in water. Only he who experiences it knows what it is like. In samadhi one forgets the world. When the mind comes down a little, I say to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, please cure me of this. I want to talk to people.'

"None but the Isvarakotis can return to the plane of relative consciousness after attaining samadhi. Some ordinary men attain samadhi through spiritual discipline; but they do not come back. But when God Himself is born as a man, as an Incarnation, holding in His hand the key to others' liberation, then for the welfare of humanity the Incarnation returns from samadhi to consciousness of the world."

M. (to himself): "Does the Master hold in his hand the key to man's liberation?"

HAZRA: "The one thing needful is to please God. What does it matter whether an Incarnation of God exists or not?"

It was the day of the new moon. Gradually night descended and dense darkness enveloped the trees and the temples. A few lights shone here and there in the temple garden. The black sky was reflected in the waters of the Ganges.

The Master went to the verandah south of his room. A spiritual mood was the natural state of his mind. The dark night of the new moon, associated with the black complexion of Kali, the Divine Mother, intensified his spiritual exaltation. Now and then he repeated "Om" and the name of Kali.

He lay down on a mat and whispered to M.

MASTER: "Yes, God can be seen. X- has had a vision of God. But don't tell anyone about it. Tell me, which do you like better, God with form, or the formless Realitv?"

M: "Sir, nowadays I like to think of God without form. But I am also beginning to understand that it is God alone who manifests Himself through different forms."

MASTER: "Will you take me in a carriage some day to Mati Seal's garden house at Belgharia? When you throw puffed rice into the lake there, the fish come to the surface and eat it. Ah! I feel so happy to see them sport in the water. That will awaken your spiritual consciousness too. You will feel as if the fish of the human soul were playing in the Ocean of Satchidananda. In the same manner, I go into an ecstatic mood when I stand in a big meadow. I feel like a fish released from a bowl into a lake.

"Spiritual discipline is necessary in order to see God. I had to pass through very severe discipline. How many austerities I practised under the bel-tree! I would lie down under it, crying to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, reveal Thyself to me.' The tears would flow in torrents and soak my body."

M: "You practised so many austerities, but people expect to realize God in a moment! Can a man build a wall simply by moving his finger around his home?"

MASTER (with a smile): "Amrita says that one man lights a fire and ten bask in its heat. I want to tell you something else. It is good to remain on the plane of the Lila after reaching the Nitya."

M: "You once said that one comes down to the plane of the Lila in order to enjoy the divine play."

MASTER; "No, not exactly that. The Lila is real too.

"Let me tell you something. Whenever you come here, bring a trifle with you. Perhaps I shouldn't say it; it may look like egotism. I also told Adhar Sen that he should bring a pennyworth of something with him. I asked Bhavanath to bring a pennyworth of betel-leaf. Have you noticed Bhavanath's devotion? Narendra and he seem like man and woman. He is devoted to Narendra. Bring Narendra here with you in a carriage, and also bring some sweets with you. It will do you good.

Paths of love and knowledge

"Knowledge and love-both are paths leading to God. Those who follow the path of love have to observe a little more outer purity. But the violation of this by a man following the path of knowledge cannot injure him. It is destroyed in the fire of knowledge. Even a banana tree is burnt up when it is thrown into a roaring fire.

"The jnanis follow the path of discrimination. Sometimes it happens that, discriminating between the Real and the unreal, a man loses his faith in the existence of God. But a devotee who sincerely yearns for God does not give up his meditation even though he is invaded by atheistic ideas. A man whose father and. grandfather have been farmers continues his farming even though he doesn't get any crop in a year of drought."

Lying on the mat and resting his head on a pillow, Sri Ramakrishna continued the conversation. He said to M: "My legs are aching. Please stroke them gently." Thus, out of his infinite compassion, the Master allowed his disciple to render him personal service.

June 8, 1883

It was a summer day. The evening service in the Kali temple was over. Sri Ramakrishna stood before the image of the Divine Mother and waved the fan a few minutes.

Ram, Kedar Chatterji, and Tarak arrived from Calcutta with flowers and sweets. Kedar was about fifty years old. At first he had frequented the Brahmo Samaj and joined other religious sects in his search for God, but later on he had accepted the Master as his spiritual guide. He was an accountant in a government office and lived in a suburb of Calcutta.

Tarak was a young man of twenty-four. His wife had died shortly after their marriage. He hailed from the village of Barasat not far from Calcutta. His father, a highly spiritual soul, had visited Sri Ramakrishna many times. Tarak often went to Ram's house and used to go to Dakshineswar in the company of Ram and Nityagopal. He worked in a business firm, but his attitude toward the world was one of utter indifference.

As Sri Ramakrishna came out of the temple, he saw Ram, Kedar, M., Tarak, and other devotees standing outside. He showed his affection for Tarak by touching his chin. He was very happy to see him.

Returning to his room, the Master sat on the floor in an ecstatic mood, with his legs stretched before him. Ram and Kedar decorated his feet with flowers and garlands. The Master was in samadhi.

Master's exhortation to a devotee to go forward

Kedar believed in certain queer practices of a religious sect to which he had once belonged. He held the Master's big toe in his hand, believing that in this way the Master's spiritual power would be transmitted to him. As Sri Ramakrishna regained partial consciousness, he said, "Mother, what can he do to me by holding my toe?" Kedar sat humbly with folded hands. Still in an ecstatic mood, the Master said to Kedar: "Your mind is still attracted by 'woman and gold'. What is the use of saying you don't care for it? Go forward. Beyond the forest of sandal-wood there are many more things: mines of silver, gold, diamonds, and other precious stones. Having a glimpse of spirituality, don't think you have attained everything." The Master was again in an ecstatic mood. He said to the Divine Mother, "Mother, take him away." At these words Kedar's throat dried up. In a frightened tone he said to Ram, "What is the Master saying?"

At the sight of Rākhāl, Sri Ramakrishna was again overpowered with a spiritual mood. He said to his beloved disciple: "I have been here many days; When did you come?"

Was the Master hinting that he was an Incarnation of God, and Rākhāl his divine companion, a member of the inner circle of devotees?

Sunday, June 10, 1883

The Master was sitting in his room with Rākhāl, M., Latu, Kishori, Ramlal, Hazra, and other devotees. It was about ten o'clock in the morning.

Reminiscences of boyhood

Describing his early life, Sri Ramakrishna said to them: "During my younger days the men and women of Kamarpukur were equally fond of me. They loved to hear me sing. I could imitate other people's gestures and conversation and I used to entertain them that way. The women would put aside things for me to eat. No one distrusted me. Everybody took me in as one of the family.

"But I was like a happy pigeon. I used to frequent only happy families. I would run away from a place where I saw misery and suffering.

"One or two young boys of the village were my close friends. I was very intimate with some of them; but now they are totally immersed in worldliness. A few of them visit me here now and then and say, 'Goodness! He seems to be just the same as he was in the village school!' While I was at school, arithmetic would throw me into confusion, but I could paint very well and could also model small images of the deities.

"I loved to visit the free eating-places maintained for holy men and the poor, and would watch them for hours.

"I loved to hear the reading of sacred books such as the Ramayana and Bhagavata. If the readers had any affectations, I could easily imitate them and would entertain others with my mimicry.

"I understood the behaviour of women very well and imitated their words and intonations. I could easily recognize immoral women. Immoral widows part their hair in the middle and perform their toilet with great care. They have very little modesty. The way they sit is so different! But let's not talk of worldly things any more."

The Master asked Ramlal to sing. Ramlal sang:

Who is this terrible Woman, dark as the sky at midnight?
Who is this Woman dancing over the field of battle.
Like a blue lotus that floats on a crimson sea of blood?
Who is She, clad alone in the Infinite for a garment,
Rolling Her three great eyes in frenzy and savage fury?
Under the weight of Her tread the earth itself is trembling!
Siva, Her mighty Husband, who wields the fearful trident,
Lies like a lifeless corpse beneath Her conquering feet.

The next song described the grief of Mandodari at the death of her husband Ravana. As he listened to it the Master shed tears of sorrow and said: "Once, when I entered the pine-grove over there, I heard the boatmen on the Ganges singing that song and wept bitterly for a long time. I had to be brought back to my room."

Ramlal sang about the love of the gopis for Sri Krishna. Akrura was about to drive Sri Krishna in a chariot from Vrindavan to Mathura. The gopis would not let Him go. Some held the wheels of the chariot; some lay down in front of it. They blamed Akrura, not knowing that Sri Krishna was leaving them of His own will. Akrura was explaining this to the gopis.

Ramlal sang:

Hold not, hold not the chariot's wheels!
Is it the wheels that make it move?
The Mover of its wheels is Krishna,
By whose will the worlds are moved. . . .

About the gopis, the Master said: "What deep love, what ecstatic devotion they had for Krishna! Radha painted the picture of Sri Krishna with her own hand, but did not paint His legs lest He should run away to Mathura! I used to sing these songs very often during my boyhood. I could reproduce the whole drama from memory."

After his meal Sri Ramakrishna sat on the couch. He had not yet found time to rest. The devotees began to assemble. One party arrived from Manirampur and another from Belgharia. Some of the devotees said, "We have disturbed your rest."

MASTER: "Oh, no! What you say applies only to a rajasic man. About him people say, 'Ah, now he will enjoy his sleep.'"

The devotees from Manirampur asked the Master how to realize God.

MASTER: "You must practise spiritual discipline a little. It will not do simply to say that milk contains butter. You must let the milk set into curd and then churn it. Only then can you get butter from it. Spiritual aspirants must go into solitude now and then. After acquiring love of God in solitude, they may live in the world. If one is wearing a pair of shoes, one can easily walk over thorns.

"The most important thing is faith.
As is a man's meditation, so is his feeling of love;
As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain;
And faith is the root of all.

If one has faith one has nothing to fear."

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, is it necessary to have a guru?"

MASTER: "Yes, many need a guru. But a man must have faith in the guru's words. He succeeds in spiritual life by looking on his guru as God Himself. Therefore the Vaishnavas speak of Guru, Krishna, and Vaishnava.

"One should constantly repeat the name of God. The name of God is highly effective in the Kaliyuga. The practice of yoga is not possible in this age, for the life of a man depends on food. Clap your hands while repeating God's name, and the birds of your sin will fly away.

"One should always seek the company of holy men. The nearer you approach the Ganges, the cooler the breeze will feel. Again, the nearer you go to a fire, the hotter the air will feel.

"But one cannot achieve anything through laziness and procrastination. People who desire worldly enjoyment say about spiritual progress: 'Well, it will all happen in time. We shall realize God some time or other.'

"I said to Keshab Sen: 'When a father sees that his son has become restless for his inheritance, he gives him his share of the property even three years before the legal time. A mother keeps on cooking while the baby is in bed sucking its toy. But when it throws the toy away and cries for her, she puts down the rice-pot and takes the baby in her arms and nurses it.' I said all this to Keshab.

"It is said that, in the Kaliyuga, if a man can weep for God one day and one night, he sees Him.

"Feel piqued at God and say to Him: 'You have created me. Now You must reveal Yourself to me.' Whether you live in the world or elsewhere, always fix your mind on God. The mind soaked in worldliness may be compared to a wet match-stick. You won't get a spark, however much you may rub it. Ekalavya placed the clay image of Drona, his teacher, in front of him and thus learnt archery.

Go forward. The wood-cutter, following the instructions of the holy man, went forward and found in the forest sandal-wood and mines of silver and gold; and going still farther, he found diamonds and other precious stones.

"The ignorant are like people living in a house with clay walls. There is very little light inside, and they cannot see outside at all. But those who enter the world after attaining the Knowledge of God are like people living in a house made of glass. For them both inside and outside are light. They can see things outside as well as inside.

"Nothing exists except the One. That One is the Supreme Brahman. So long as He keeps the 'I' in us, He reveals to us that it is He who, as the Primal Energy, creates, preserves, and destroys the universe.

"That which is Brahman is also the Primal Energy. Once a king asked a yogi to impart Knowledge to him in one word. The yogi said, 'All right; you will get Knowledge in one word.' After a while a magician came to the king. The king saw the magician moving two of his fingers rapidly and heard him exclaim, 'Behold, O King! Behold.' The king looked at him amazed when, after a few minutes, he saw the two fingers becoming one. The magician moved that one finger rapidly and said, 'Behold, O King! Behold.' The implication of the story is that Brahman and the Primal Energy at first appear to be two. But after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman one does not see the two. Then there is no differentiation; it is One, without a second -Advaita-non-duality."

The Master was very happy to see a musician who had come with the devotees from Belghariā. Some time before, Sri Ramakrishna had gone into an ecstatic mood on hearing his devotional music. At the Master's request the musician sang a few songs, one of which described the awakening of the Kundalini and the six centres:

Awake, Mother! Awake! How long Thou hast been asleep
In the lotus of the Muladhara!
Fulfil Thy secret function, Mother:
Rise to the thousand-petalled lotus within the head,

Where mighty Siva has His dwelling;
Swiftly pierce the six lotuses
And take away my grief, O Essence of Consciousness!

MASTER: "The song speaks of the Kundalini's passing through the six centres. God is both within and without. From within He creates the various states of mind. After passing through the six centres, the jiva goes beyond the realm of maya and becomes united with the Supreme Soul. This is the vision of God.

"One cannot see God unless maya steps aside from the door. Rāma, Lakshmana, and Sita were walking together. Rāma was in front, Sita walked in the middle, and Lakshmana followed them. But Lakshmana could not see Rāma because Sita was between them. In like manner, man cannot see God because maya is between them. (To Mani Mallick) But maya steps aside from the door when God shows His grace to the devotee. When the visitor stands before the door, the door-keeper says to the master, 'Sir, command us, and we shall let him pass.'

"There are two schools of thought: the Vedānta and the Purana. According to the Vedānta this world is a 'framework of illusion', that is to say, it is all illusory, like a dream. But according to the Purana, the books of devotion, God Himself has become the twenty-four cosmic principles. Worship God both within and without.

"As long as God keeps the awareness of 'I' in us, so long do sense-objects exist; and we cannot very well speak of the world as a dream. There is fire in the hearth; therefore the rice and pulse and potatoes and the other vegetables jump about in the pot. They jump about as if to say: 'We are here! We are jumping!' This body is the pot. The mind and intelligence are the water. The objects of the senses are the rice, potatoes, and other vegetables. The 'I-consciousness' identified with the senses says, 'I am jumping about.' And Satchidananda is the fire.

"Hence the Bhakti scriptures describe this very world as a 'mansion of mirth'. Ramprasad sang in one of his songs, 'This world is a framework of illusion.' Another devotee gave the reply, 'This very world is a mansion of mirth.' As the saying goes, 'The devotee of Kali, free while living, is full of Eternal Bliss.' The bhakta sees that He who is God has also become maya. Again, He Himself has become the universe and all its living beings. The bhakta sees God, maya, the universe, and the living beings as one. Some devotees see everything as Rāma: it is Rāma alone who has become everything. Some see everything as Radha and Krishna. To them it is Krishna alone who has become the twenty-four cosmic principles. It is like seeing everything green through green glasses.

"But the Bhakti scriptures admit that the manifestations of Power are different in different beings. It is Rāma who has become everything, no doubt; but He manifests Himself more in some than in others. There is one kind of manifestation of Rāma in the Incarnation of God, and another in men. Even the Incarnations are conscious of the body. Embodiment is due to maya. Rāma wept for Sita. But the Incarnation of God puts a bondage over His eyes by His own will, like children playing blindman's buff. The

children stop playing when their mother calls them. It is quite different, however, with the ordinary man. The cloth his eyes are bandaged with is fastened to his back with screws, as it were. There are eight fetters. Shame, hatred, fear, caste, lineage, good conduct, grief, and secretiveness-these are the eight fetters. And they cannot be unfastened without the help of a guru.

Earnestness in spiritual life extolled

A DEVOTEE : "Sir, please bless us."

MASTER: "God is in all beings. But you must apply to the Gas Company. It will connect the storage-tank with the pipe in your house.

"One must pray earnestly. It is said that one can realize God by directing to Him the combined intensity of three attractions, namely, the child's attraction for the mother, the husband's attraction for the chaste wife, and the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man.

Traits of a true devotee

"There are certain signs by which you can know a true devotee of God. His mind becomes quiet as he listens to his teacher's instruction, just as the poisonous snake is quieted by the music of the charmer. I don't mean the cobra. There is another sign. A real devotee develops the power of assimilating instruction. An image cannot be impressed on bare glass, but only on glass stained with a black solution, as in photography. The black solution is devotion to God. There is a third sign of a true devotee. The true devotee has controlled his senses. He has subdued his lust. The gopis were free from lust.

"You are talking about your leading a householder's life. Suppose you are a householder. It rather helps in the practice of spiritual discipline. It is like fighting from inside a fort. The Tantriks sometimes use a corpse in their religious rites. Now and then the dead body frightens them by opening its mouth. That is why they keep fried rice and grams near them, and from time to time they throw some of the grains into the corpse's mouth. Thus pacifying the corpse, they repeat the name of the Deity without any worry. Likewise, the householder should pacify his wife and the other members of his family. He should provide them with food and other necessities. Thus he removes the obstacles to his practice of spiritual discipline.

"Those who still have a few worldly experiences to enjoy should lead a householder's life and pray to God. That is why Nityananda allowed the worldly to enjoy catfish soup and the warm embrace of a young woman while repeating God's name.

"But it is quite different with genuine sannyasis. A bee lights on flowers and on nothing else. To the chatak all water except rain is tasteless. It will drink no other water, but looks up agape for the rain that falls when the star Svati is in the ascendant. It drinks only that water. A real sannyasi will not enjoy any kind of bliss except the Bliss of God. The bee lights only on flowers. The real monk is like a bee, whereas the householder devotee is like a common fly, which lights on a festering sore as well as on a sweetmeat.

"You have taken so much trouble to come here. You must be seeking God. But almost everyone is satisfied simply by seeing the garden. Only one or two look for its owner. People enjoy the beauty of the world; they do not seek its Owner.

(Pointing to the singer) "A little while ago he sang a song describing the six centres. These are dealt with in Yoga. There are two kinds of yoga: hathayoga and rajayoga. The hathayogi practises physical exercises. His goal is to acquire supernatural powers: longevity and the eight psychic powers. These are his aims. But the aim of rajayoga is the attainment of devotion, ecstatic love, knowledge, and renunciation. Of these two, rajayoga is the better.

Seven planes of the Vedas

"There is much similarity between the seven 'planes' described in the Vedānta and the six 'centres' of Yoga. The first three planes of the Vedas may be compared to the first three Yogic centres, namely, Muladhara, Svadhisthana, and Manipura. With ordinary people the mind dwells in these three planes, at the organs of evacuation and generation and at the navel. When the mind ascends to the fourth plane, the centre designated in Yoga as Anahata, it sees the individual soul as a flame. Besides, it sees light. At this the aspirant cries: 'Ah! What is this? Ah! What is this?'

"When the mind rises to the fifth plane, the aspirant wants to hear only about God. This is the Visuddha centre of Yoga. The sixth plane and the centre known by the yogi as Ajna are one and the same. When the mind rises there, the aspirant sees God. But still there is a barrier between God and the devotee. It is like the barrier of glass in a lantern, which keeps one from touching the light. King Janaka used to give instruction about Brahmajnana from the fifth plane. Sometimes he dwelt on the fifth plane, and sometimes on the sixth.

"After passing the six centres the aspirant arrives at the seventh plane. Reaching it, the mind merges in Brahman. The individual soul and the Supreme Soul become one. The aspirant goes into samadhi. His consciousness of the body disappears. He loses the knowledge of the outer world. He does not see the manifold any more. His reasoning comes to a stop.

"Trailanga Swami once said that because a man reasons he is conscious of multiplicity, of variety. Attaining samadhi, one gives up the body in twenty-one days. Spiritual consciousness is not possible without the awakening of the Kundalini.

"A man who has realized God shows certain characteristics. He becomes like a child or a madman, or an inert thing or a ghoul. Further, he is firmly convinced that he is the machine and God is its Operator, that God alone is the Doer and all others are His instruments. As some Sikh devotees once said to me, even the leaf moves because of God's will. One should be aware that everything happens by the will of Rāma. The weaver said: 'The price of the cloth, by the will of Rāma, is one rupee six annas. By the will of Rāma the robbery was committed. By the will of Rāma the robbers were

arrested. By the will of Rāma I too was arrested by the police. And at last, by the will of Rāma, I was released.' "

It was dusk. Sri Ramakrishna had had no rest since his midday meal. He had talked unceasingly to the devotees about God. At last the visitors took their leave and went home.

Friday, June 15, 1883

It was a holiday on account of the Hindu religious festival Dasahara. Among the devotees who visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar that day were Adhar, M., and Rākhāl 's father. Rākhāl 's father's father-in-law was also present. All were seated on the floor of the Master's room.

Advice to householders

Rākhāl 's father's father-in-law was a devotee of God. He asked the Master, "Sir, can one realize God while leading the life of a householder?"

MASTER (with a smile): "Why not? Live in the world like a mudfish. The mudfish lives in the mud but itself remains unstained. Or live in the world like a loose woman. She attends to her household duties, but her mind is always on her sweetheart. Do your duties in the world, fixing your mind on God. But this is extremely difficult. I said to the members of the Brahmo Samaj: 'Suppose a typhoid patient is kept in a room where there are jars of pickles and pitchers of water. How can you expect the patient to recover? The very thought of spiced pickles brings water to one's mouth.' To a man, woman is like that pickle. The craving for worldly things, which is chronic in man, is like the patient's craving for water. There is no end to this craving. The typhoid patient says, 'I shall drink a whole pitcher of water.' The situation is very difficult. There is so much confusion in the world. If you go this way, you are threatened with a shovel; if you go that way, you are threatened with a broomstick; again, in another direction, you are threatened with a shoe-beating. Besides, one cannot think of God unless one lives in solitude. The goldsmith melts gold to make ornaments. But how can he do his work well if he is disturbed again and again? Suppose you are separating rice from bits of husk. You must do it all by yourself. Every now and then you have to take the rice in your hand to see how clean it is. But how can you do your work well if you are called away again and again?"

A DEVOTEE: "What then is the way, sir?"

MASTER: "There is a way. One succeeds if one develops a strong spirit of renunciation. Give up at once, with determination, what you know to be unreal. Once, when I was seriously ill, I was taken to the physician Gangaprasad Sen. He said to me: 'I shall give you a medicine, but you mustn't drink any water. You may take pomegranate juice.' Everyone wondered how I could live without water; but I was determined not to drink it. I said to myself: 'I am a paramahamsa and not a goose. I shall drink only milk.'

"You have to spend a few days in solitude. If you but touch the 'granny' you are safe. Turn yourself into gold and then live wherever you please. After realizing God and divine love in solitude one may live in the world as well. (To Rākhāl 's father) That is why I ask the youngsters to stay with me; for they will develop love of God by staying here a few days. After that they can very well lead the life of a householder."

Problem of good and evil

DEVOTEE: "If God is responsible for everything, then why should people speak of good and evil, virtue and vice? One commits sin also by the will of God, isn't that so?"

ANOTHER DEVOTEE: "How can we understand the will of God?"

MASTER: "There is no doubt that virtue and vice exist in the world; but God Himself is unattached to them. There may be good and bad smells in the air, but the air is not attached to them. The very nature of God's creation is that good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, will always exist in the world. Among the trees in the garden one finds mango and jack-fruit, and hog plum too. Haven't you noticed that even wicked men are needed? Suppose there are rough tenants on an estate; then the landlord must send a ruffian to control them."

The conversation again turned to the life of the householder.

MASTER (to the devotees): "You see, by leading a householder's life a man needlessly dissipates his mental powers. The loss he thus incurs can be made up if he takes to monastic life. The first birth is a gift of the father; then comes the second birth, when one is invested with the sacred thread. There is still another birth at the time of being initiated into monastic life. The two obstacles to spiritual life are 'woman' and 'gold'. Attachment to 'woman' diverts one from the way leading to God. Man doesn't know what it is that causes his downfall. Once, while going to the Fort, I couldn't see at all that I was driving down a sloping road; but when the carriage went inside the Fort, I realized how far down I had come. Alas! Women keep men deluded. Captain says, 'My wife is full of wisdom.' The man possessed by a ghost does not realize it. He says, 'Why, I am all right!' "

The devotees listened to these words in deep silence.

MASTER: "It is not lust alone that one should be afraid of in the life of the world. There is also anger. Anger arises when obstacles are placed in the way of desire."

M: "At meal-time, sometimes a cat stretches out its paw to take the fish from my plate. But I cannot show any resentment."

MASTER: "Why? You may even beat it once in a while. What's the harm? A worldly man should hiss, but he shouldn't pour out his venom. He mustn't actually injure others. But

he should make a show of anger to protect himself from enemies. Otherwise they will injure him. But a sannyasi need not even hiss."

A DEVOTEE: "I find it is extremely difficult for a householder to realize God. How few people can lead the life you prescribe for them! I haven't found any."

MASTER: "Why should that be so? I have heard of a deputy magistrate named Pratap Singh. He is a great man. He has many virtues: compassion and devotion to God. He meditates on God. Once he sent for me. Certainly there are people like him.

"The practice of discipline is absolutely necessary. Why shouldn't a man succeed if he practises sadhana? But he doesn't have to work hard if he has real faith-faith in his guru's words. Once Vyasa was about to cross the Jamuna, when the gopis also arrived there, wishing to go to the other side. But no ferry-boat was in sight. They said to Vyasa, 'Revered sir, what shall we do now?' 'Don't worry', said Vyasa. 'I will take you across. But I am very hungry. Have you anything for me to eat?' The gopis had plenty of milk, cream, and butter with them. Vyasa ate it all. Then the gopis asked, 'Well, sir, what about crossing the river?' Vyasa stood on the bank of the Jamuna and said, 'O Jamuna, if I have not eaten anything today, then may your waters part so that we may all walk to the other side.' No sooner did the sage utter these words than the waters of the Jamuna parted. The gopis were speechless with wonder. 'He ate so much just now,' they said to themselves, 'and he says, "If I have not eaten anything. . ."!' Vyasa had the firm conviction that it was not himself, but the Narayana who dwelt in his heart, that had partaken of the food.

"Sankaracharya was a Brahmajnani, to be sure. But at the beginning he too had the feeling of differentiation. He didn't have absolute faith that everything in the world is Brahman. One day as he was coming out of the Ganges after his bath, he saw an untouchable, a butcher, carrying a load of meat. Inadvertently the butcher touched his body. Sankara shouted angrily, 'Hey there! How dare you touch me?' 'Revered sir,' said the butcher, 'I have not touched you, nor have you touched me. The Pure Self cannot be the body nor the five elements nor the twenty-four cosmic principles.' Then Sankara came to his senses. Once Jadabharata was carrying King Rahugana's palanquin and at the same time giving a discourse on Self-Knowledge. The king got down from the palanquin and said to Jadabharata, 'Who are you, pray?' The latter answered, 'I am Not this, not this-I am the Pure Self.' He had perfect faith that he was the Pure Self.

" 'I am He', 'I am the Pure Self'-that is the conclusion of the jnanis. But the bhaktas say, 'The whole universe is the glory of God.' Who would recognize a wealthy man without his power and riches? But it is quite different when God Himself, gratified by the aspirant's devotion, says to him, 'You are the same as Myself.' Suppose a king is seated in his court, and his cook enters the hall, sits on the throne, and says, 'O King, you and I are the same!' People will certainly call him a madman. But suppose one day the king, pleased with the cook's service, says to him: 'Come, sit beside me. There is nothing wrong in that. There is no difference between you and me.' Then, if the cook sits on the

throne with the king, there is no harm in it. It is not good for ordinary people to say, 'I am He'. The waves belong to the water. Does the water belong to the waves?

Result of yoga through bhakti

"The upshot of the whole thing is that, no matter what path you follow, yoga is impossible unless the mind becomes quiet. The mind of a yogi is under his control; he is not under the control of his mind. When the mind is quiet the prana stops functioning. Then one gets kumbhaka. One may have the same kumbhaka through bhaktiyoga as well; the prana stops functioning through love of God too. In the kirtan the musician sings, 'Nitai amar mata hati!' Repeating this, he goes into a spiritual mood and cannot sing the whole sentence. He simply sings, 'Hati! Hati' When the mood deepens he sings only, 'Ha! Ha!' Thus his prana stops through ecstasy, and kumbhaka follows.

"Suppose a man is sweeping a courtyard with his broom, and another man comes and says to him: 'Hello! So-and-so is no more. He is dead.' Now, if the dead person was not related to the sweeper, the latter goes on with his work, remarking casually: 'Ah! That's too bad. He is dead. He was a good fellow.' The sweeping goes on all the same. But if the dead man was his relative, then the broom drops from his hand. 'Ah!' he exclaims, and he too drops to the ground. His prana has stopped functioning. He can neither work nor think. Haven't you noticed, among women, that if one of them looks at something or listens to something in speechless amazement, the other women say to her, 'What? Are you in ecstasy?' In this instance, too, the prana has stopped functioning, and so she remains speechless, with mouth agape.

"It will not do merely to repeat, 'I am He, I am He.' There are certain signs of a Jnāni. Narendra has big protruding eyes. (Pointing to a devotee) He also has good eyes and forehead.

Different classes of men

"All men are by no means on the same level. It is said that there are four classes of men: the bound, the struggling, the liberated, and the ever-free. It is also not a fact that all men have to practise spiritual discipline. There are the ever-free and those who achieve perfection through spiritual discipline. Some realize God after much spiritual austerity, and some are perfect from their very birth. Prahlada is an example of the ever-free.

"Eternally perfect sages like Prahlada also practise meditation and prayer. But they have realized the fruit, God-vision, even before their spiritual practice. They are like gourds and pumpkins, which grow fruit first and then flowers.

(Looking at Rākhāl 's father) "Even though an eternally perfect soul is born in a low family, still he retains his innate perfection. He cannot do anything else. A pea germinating in a heap of cow-dung still grows into a pea-plant.

"God has given to some greater power than to others. In one man you see it as the light of a lamp, in another, as the light of a torch. One word of Vidyasagar's revealed to me the utmost limit of his intelligence. When I told him of the different manifestations of

God's Power in different beings, he said to me, 'Sir, has God then given greater power to some than to others?' At once I said: 'Yes, certainly He has; If there are not different degrees of manifestation of His Power, then why should your name be known far and wide? You see, we have come to you after hearing of your knowledge and compassion. You haven't grown two horns, have you?' With all his fame and erudition, Vidyasagar said such a childish thing as 'Has God given greater power to some than to others?' The truth is that when the fisherman draws his net, he first catches big fish like trout and carp; then he stirs up the mud with his feet, and small fish come out-minnows, mud-fish, and so on. So also, unless a man knows God, 'minnows' and the like gradually come out from within him. What can one achieve through mere scholarship?"

Sunday, June 17, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was resting in his room in the temple garden at Dakshineswar. It was afternoon. Adhar and M. arrived and saluted the Master. A Tantrik devotee also came in. Rākhāl , Hazra, and Ramlal were staying with Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER (to the devotees): "Why shouldn't one be able to attain spirituality, living the life of a householder? But it is extremely difficult. Sages like Janaka entered the world after attaining Knowledge. But still the world is a place of terror. Even a detached householder has to be careful. Once Janaka bent down his head at the sight of a bhairavi. He shrank from seeing a woman. The bhairavi said to him: 'Janaka, I see you have not yet attained Knowledge. You still differentiate between man and woman.'

"If you move about in a room filled with soot, you will soil your body, however slightly, no matter how clever you may be. I have seen householder devotees filled with spiritual emotion while performing their daily worship wearing their silk clothes. They maintain that attitude even until they take their refreshments after the worship. But afterwards they become their old selves again. They display their rajasic and tamasic natures.

"Sattva begets bhakti. Even bhakti has three aspects: sattva, rajas, and tamas. The sattva of bhakti is pure sattva. When a devotee acquires it he doesn't direct his mind to anything but God. He pays only as much attention to his body as is absolutely necessary for its protection.

"But a paramahamsa is beyond the three gunas. Though they exist in him, yet they are practically non-existent. Like a child, he is not under the control of any of the gunas. That is why paramahamsas allow small children to come near them- in order to assume their nature.

"Paramahamsas may not lay things up; but this rule does not apply to householders. They must provide for their families."

TANTRIK DEVOTEE: "Is a paramahamsa aware of virtue and vice?"

MASTER: "Keshab Sen also asked that question. I said to him, 'If I explain that to you, then you won't be able to keep your society together.' 'In that case we had better stop here', said Keshab.

"Do you know the significance of virtue and vice? A paramahamsa sees that it is God who gives us evil tendencies as well as good tendencies. Haven't you noticed that there are both sweet and bitter fruits? Some trees give sweet fruit, and some bitter or sour. God has made the mango-tree, which yields sweet fruit, and also the hog plum, which yields sour fruit."

TANTRIK: "Yes, sir. That is true. On the hill-top one sees extensive rose gardens, reaching as far as the eye can see."

MASTER: "The paramahamsa realizes that all these-good and bad, virtue and vice, real and unreal-are only the glories of God's maya. But these are very deep thoughts. One realizing this cannot keep an organization together or anything like that."

TANTRIK: "But the law of karma exists, doesn't it?"

MASTER: "That also is true. Good produces good, and bad produces bad. Don't you get the hot taste if you eat chillies? But these are all God's lila, His play."

TANTRIK: "Then what is the way for us? We shall have to reap the result of our past karma, shall we not?"

MASTER: "That may be so. But it is different with the devotees of God. Listen to a song:

O mind, you do not know how to farm!
Fallow lies the field of your life.
If you had only worked it well,
How rich a harvest you might reap!
Hedge it about with Kali's name
If you would keep your harvest safe;
This is the stoutest hedge of all,
For Death himself cannot come near it.

Sooner or later will dawn the day
When you must forfeit your precious field;
Gather, O mind, what fruit you may.
Sow for your seed the holy name
Of God that your guru has given to you,
Faithfully watering it with love;
And if you should find the task too hard,
Call upon Ramprasad for help.

He sang again:

I have securely blocked the way by which the King of Death will come;
Henceforward all my doubts and fears are set at naught for

ever.
Siva Himself is standing guard at the nine doorways of my house,
Which has one Pillar for support, and three ropes to secure it.
The Lord has made His dwelling-place the thousand-petalled lotus flower
Within the head, and comforts me with never-ceasing care.

The Master continued: "Anyone who dies in Benares, whether a brahmin or a prostitute, will become Siva. When a man sheds tears at the name of Hari, Kali, or Rāma, then he has no further need of the sandhya and other rites. All actions drop away of themselves. The fruit of action does not touch him."

Again the Master sang:

As is a man's meditation, so is his feeling of love;
As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain;
And faith is the root of all.
If in the Nectar Lake of Mother Kali's feet
My mind remains immersed,
Of little use are worship, oblations, or sacrifice.

He sang another song:

Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,
So long as I can breathe my last with Kali's name upon my lips?..

Then he said, "When a man merges himself in God, he can no longer retain wicked or sinful tendencies."

TANTRIK: "You have said rightly that he keeps only the 'Knowledge ego'."

MASTER: "Yes, he keeps only the 'Knowledge ego', the 'devotee ego', the 'servant ego', and the 'good ego'. His 'wicked ego' disappears."

TANTRIK: "Today you have destroyed many of our doubts."

MASTER: "All doubts disappear when one realizes the Self.

"Assume the tamasic aspect of bhakti. Say with force: 'What? I have uttered the names of Rāma and Kali. How can I be in bondage any more? How can I be affected by the law of karma?' "

The Master sang:

If only I can pass away repeating Durga's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,
Withhold from me deliverance,

Wretched though I may be?
I may have stolen a drink of wine, or killed a child unborn,
Or slain a woman or a cow,
Or even caused a brahmin's death;
But, though it all be true,
Nothing of this can make me feel the least uneasiness;
For through the power of Thy sweet name
My wretched soul may still aspire
Even to Brahmanhood.

The Master continued: "Faith! Faith! Faith! Once a guru said to his pupil, 'Rāma alone has become everything.' When a dog began to eat the pupil's bread, he said to it: 'O Rāma, wait a little. I shall butter Your bread.' Such was his faith in the words of his guru.

"Worthless people do not have any faith. They always doubt. But doubts do not disappear completely till one realizes the Self.

"In genuine love of God there is no desire. Only through such love does one speedily realize God. Attainment of supernatural powers and so on- these are desires. Krishna once said to Arjuna: 'Friend, you cannot realize God if you acquire even one of the eight supernatural powers. They will only add a little to your power.' "

TANTRIK: "Sir, why don't the rituals of Tantra bear fruit nowadays?"

MASTER: "It is because people cannot practise them with absolute correctness and devotion."

In conclusion the Master said: "Love of God is the one essential thing. A true lover of God has nothing to fear, nothing to worry about. He is aware that the Divine Mother knows everything. The cat handles the mouse one way, but its own kitten a very different way."

Chapter 12

THE FESTIVAL AT PĀNIHĀTI

Monday, June 18, 1883

Festival at Pānihāti

SRI RAMAKRISHNA had been invited to the great religious festival at Pānihāti, near Calcutta. This "Festival of the Flattened Rice" was inaugurated by Raghunath Das, a disciple of Sri Chaitanya. It is said that Raghunath used to run away from home, secretly practise his devotions, and enjoy the bliss of spiritual ecstasy. One day Nityananda said to him: "Thief! You run away from home and enjoy the love of God all alone. You hide it from us. I shall punish you today. You must arrange a religious festival and entertain the devotees with flattened rice." Since then the festival has been annually celebrated at Pānihāti by the Vaishnavas. Thousands of the followers of Sri Chaitanya participate in it. Its chief feature is the singing of the names and glories of God, and the dancing of the devotees in religious fervour. The centre of the festivity is the temple of Radha-Krishna, built on the bank of the Ganges.

The Master had been invited to the festival by Mani Sen, who was the custodian of the temple. Ram, M., Rākhāl , Bhavanath, and a few other disciples went with the Master in a carriage. On his way to Pānihāti Sri Ramakrishna was in a light mood and joked with the youngsters. But as soon as the carriage reached the place of the festival, the Master, to the utter amazement of' the devotees, shot into the crowd. He joined the kirtan party of Navadvip Goswami, Mani Sen's guru, and danced, totally forgetting the world. Every now and then he stood still in samādhi, carefully supported by Navadvip Goswami for fear he might fall to the ground. Thousands of devotees were gathered together for the festival. Wherever one looked there was a forest of human heads. The crowd seemed to become infected by the Master's divine fervour and swayed to and fro, chanting the name of God, until the very air seemed to reverberate with it. Drums, cymbals, and other instruments produced melodious sounds. The atmosphere became intense with spiritual fervour. The devotees felt that Gaurānga himself was being manifested in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. Flowers were showered from all sides on his feet and head. The shouting of the name of Hari was heard even at a distance, like the rumbling of the ocean.

Sri Ramakrishna entered by turn into all the moods of ecstasy. In deep samādhi he stood still, his face radiating a divine glow. In the state of partial consciousness he danced, sometimes gently and sometimes with the vigour of a lion. Again, regaining consciousness of the world, he sang, himself leading the chorus:

Behold, the two brothers have come, who weep while chanting Hari's name,
The brothers who dance in ecstasy and make the world dance in His name!
Behold them, weeping themselves, and making the whole world

weep as well,
The brothers who, in return for blows, offer to sinners Hari's love.
Behold them, drunk with Hari's love, who make the world drunk as well!
Behold, the two brothers have come, who once were Kanai and Balai of Braja,
They who would steal the butter out of the pots of the gopi maids.
Behold, the two have come, who shatter all the rules of caste,
Embracing everyone as brother, even the outcaste shunned by men;
Who lose themselves in Hari's name, making the whole world mad;
Who are none other than Hari Himself, and chant His hallowed name!
Behold them,who saved from their sinful ways the ruffians Jagai and Madhai,
They who cannot distinguish between a friend and an enemy!
Behold the two brothers, Gaur and Nitai, who come again to save mankind.

Again the Master sang:

See how all Nadia is shaking
Under the waves of Gaurānga's love! . . .

The crowd, with the Master in the centre, surged toward the temple of Radha-Krishna. Only a small number could enter. The rest stood outside the portal and jostled with one another to have a look at Sri Ramakrishna. In a mood of intoxication he began to dance in the courtyard of the shrine. Every now and then his body stood transfixed in deep samādhi. Hundreds of people around him shouted the name of God, and thousands outside caught the strain and raised the cry with full-throated voices. The echo travelled over the Ganges, striking a note in the hearts of people in the boats on the holy river, and they too chanted the name of God.

When the kirtan was over, Mani Sen took Sri Ramakrishna and Navadvip Goswami into a room and served them with refreshments. Afterwards Ram, M., and the other devotees were also served with the prasad.

In the afternoon, the Master was sitting in Mani Sen's drawing-room with the devotees. Navadvip was also near him. Mani offered the carriage hire to Sri Ramakrishna. Pointing to Ram and the others, the Master said: "Why should they accept it from you? They earn money." He became engaged in conversation with Navadvip.

Different states of bhakti

MASTER: "Bhakti matured becomes bhava. Next is mahabhava, then prema, and last of all is the attainment of God. Gaurānga experienced the states of mahabhava and prema. When prema is awakened, a devotee completely forgets the world; he also forgets his body, which is so dear to a man. Gaurānga experienced prema. He jumped into the ocean, thinking it to be the Jamuna. The ordinary jiva does not experience mahabhava or prema. He goes only as far as bhava. But Gaurānga experienced all three states. Isn't that so?"

NAVADVIP: "Yes, sir, that is true. The inmost state, the semi-conscious state, and the conscious state."

MASTER: "In the inmost state he would remain in samādhi, unconscious of the outer world. In the semi-conscious state he could only dance. In the conscious state he chanted the name of God."

Navadvip introduced his son to the Master. The young man was a student of the scriptures. He saluted Sri Ramakrishna.

NAVADVIP: "He studies the scriptures at home. Previously one hardly saw a copy of the Vedas in this country. Max Muller has translated them; so people can now read these books."

Essence of the scriptures

MASTER: "Too much study of the scriptures does more harm than good. The important thing is to know the essence of the scriptures. After that, what is the need of books? One should learn the essence and then dive deep in order to realize God.

Ideal of the Gitā

"The Divine Mother has revealed to me the essence of the Vedānta. It is that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. The essence of the Gitā is what you get by repeating the word ten times. The word becomes reversed. It is then 'tagi', which refers to renunciation. The essence of the Gitā is: 'O man, renounce everything and practise spiritual discipline for the realization of God.' "

NAVADVIP: "But how can we persuade our minds to renounce?"

MASTER: "You are a goswami. It is your duty to officiate as priest in the temple. You cannot renounce the world; otherwise, who would look after the temple and its services? You have to renounce mentally.

"It is God Himself who has kept you in the world to set an example to men. You may resolve in your mind a thousand times to renounce the world, but you will not succeed. God has given you such a nature that you must perform your worldly duties.

"Krishna said to Arjuna: 'What do you mean, you will not fight? By your mere will you cannot desist from fighting. Your very nature will make you fight.' "

At the mere mention of Krishna and Arjuna the Master went into samādhi. In the twinkling of an eye his body became motionless and his eyeballs transfixed, while his breathing could scarcely be noticed. At this sudden transformation Navadvip and his son and the other devotees looked at the Master in mute wonder.

Regaining partial consciousness, he said to Navadvip: "Yoga and bhoga. You goswamis have both. Now your only duty is to call on God and pray to Him sincerely: 'O God, I don't want the glories of Thy world-bewitching maya. I want Thee alone!' God dwells in all beings, undoubtedly. That being the case, who may be called His devotee? He who dwells in God, he who has merged his mind and life and innermost soul in God."

The Master returned to the sense plane. Referring to his samādhi, he said to Navadvip: "Some say that this state of mine is a disease. I say to them, 'How can one become unconscious by thinking of Him whose Consciousness has made the whole world conscious?' "

Mani Sen said good-bye to the invited brahmins and Vaishnavas with suitable gifts of money. He offered five rupees to Sri Ramakrishna. The latter said that he could not possibly accept any money. But Mani insisted. The Master then asked him in the name of his guru not to press him. Mani requested him again to accept the offering. Sri Ramakrishna asked M., in a distressed voice, whether he should take the money. The disciple made a vehement protest and said, "No, sir. By no means."

Friends of Mani Sen gave the money to Rākhāl , requesting him to buy some mangoes and sweets for the Master. Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "I have definitely said to Mani that I would not accept the money. I feel free now. But Rākhāl has accepted it. His is now the responsibility."

Sri Ramakrishna, accompanied by the devotees, took a carriage to return to Dakshineswar. They were going to pass the temple garden of Mati Seal on the way. For a long time the Master had been asking M. to take him to the reservoir in the garden in order that he might teach him how to meditate on the formless God. There were tame fish in the reservoir. Nobody harmed them. Visitors threw puffed rice and other bits of food into the water, and the big fish came in swarms to eat the food. Fearlessly the fish swam in the water and sported there joyously.

Coming to the reservoir, the Master said to M.: "Look at the fish. Meditating on the formless God is like swimming joyfully like these fish, in the Ocean of Bliss and Consciousness."

Monday, June 25, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was at Balarām Bose's house in Calcutta. Rākhāl and M. were seated near him. The Master was in ecstasy. He conversed with the devotees in an abstracted mood.

MASTER: "Let me assure you that a man can realize his Inner Self through sincere prayer. But to the extent that he has the desire to enjoy worldly objects, his vision of the Self becomes obstructed."

M: "Yes, sir. You always ask us to plunge into God."

MASTER (joyously): "Yes! That's it. Let me tell you that the realization of Self is possible for all, without any exception."

M: "That is true, sir. But God is the Doer. He works through different beings in different ways, according to their capacity to manifest the Divine. God gives to some full spiritual consciousness, and others He keeps in ignorance."

MASTER: "No, that is not so. One should pray to God with a longing heart. God certainly listens to prayer if it is sincere. There is no doubt about it."

A DEVOTEE: "Yes, sir. There is this 'I-consciousness' in us; therefore we must pray."

Nitya and Lila

MASTER (to M.): "A man should reach the Nitya, the Absolute, by following the trail of the Lila, the Relative. It is like reaching the roof by the stairs. After realizing the Absolute, he should climb down to the Relative and live on that plane in the company of devotees, charging his mind with the love of God. This is my final and most mature opinion.

"God has different forms, and He sports in different ways. He sports as Isvara, deva, man, and the universe. In every age He descends to earth in human form, as an Incarnation, to teach people love and devotion. There is the instance of Chaitanya. One can taste devotion and love of God only through His Incarnations. Infinite are the ways of God's play, but what I need is love and devotion. I want only the milk. The milk comes through the udder of the cow. The Incarnation is the udder."

Was Sri Ramakrislma hinting that he was an Incarnation of God? Did he suggest that those who saw him saw God? Did he thus speak about himself when speaking of Chaitanya?

It was a hot day in June 1883. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the steps of the Śiva temples in the temple garden. M. arrived with ice and other offerings and sat down on the steps after saluting the Master.

MASTER (to M.): "The husband of Mani Mallick's granddaughter was here. He read in a book that God could not be said to be quite wise and omniscient; otherwise, why should there be so much misery in the world? As regards death, it would be much better to kill a man all at once, instead of putting him through slow torture. Further, the author writes that if he himself were the Creator, he would have created a better world."

M. listened to these words in surprise and made no comment.

The ways of God are inscrutable

MASTER (to M.): "Can a man ever understand God's ways? I too think of God sometimes as good and sometimes as bad. He has kept us deluded by His great illusion. Sometimes He wakes us up and sometimes He keeps us unconscious. One moment the ignorance disappears, and the next moment it covers our mind. If you throw a brick-bat into a pond covered with moss, you get a glimpse of the water. But a few moments later the moss comes dancing back and covers the water.

Body-consciousness produces duality

"One is aware of pleasure and pain, birth and death, disease and grief, as long as one is identified with the body. All these belong to the body alone, and not to the Soul. After the death of the body, perhaps God carries one to a better place. It is like the birth of the child after the pain of delivery. Attaining Self-Knowledge, one looks on pleasure and pain, birth and death, as a dream.

"How little we know! Can a one-seer pot hold ten seers of milk? If ever a salt doll ventures into the ocean to measure its depth, it cannot come back and give us the information. It melts into the water and disappears."

At dusk the evening service began in the different temples. The Master was sitting on the small couch in his room, absorbed in contemplation of the Divine Mother. Several devotees also were there. M. was going to spend the night with the Master.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna began to talk to a devotee privately, on the verandah north of his room. He said: "It is good to meditate in the small hours of the morning and at dawn. One should also meditate daily after dusk." He instructed the devotee about meditation on the Personal God and on the Impersonal Reality.

After a time he sat on the semicircular porch west of his room. It was about nine o'clock.

MASTER: "Those who come here will certainly have all their doubts removed. What do you say?"

M: "That is true, sir."

A boat was moving in the Ganges, far away from the bank. The boatman began to sing. The sound of his voice floating over the river reached the Master's ears, and he went into a spiritual mood. The hair on his body stood on end. He said to M., "Just feel my body." M. was greatly amazed. He thought: "The Upanishads describe Brahman as permeating the universe and the ether. Has that Brahman, as sound, touched the Master's body?"

After a time Sri Ramakrishna began to converse again.

MASTER: "Those who come here must have been born with good tendencies. Isn't that true?"

M: "It is true, sir."

MASTER: "Adhar must have good tendencies."

M: "That goes without saying."

MASTER: "A guileless man easily realizes God. There are two paths: the path of righteousness and the path of wickedness. One should follow the path of righteousness."

M: "That is true, sir. If a thread has a single fibre sticking out, it cannot pass through the eye of a needle."

MASTER: "If a man finds a hair in the food he is chewing, he spits out the entire morsel."

M: "But you say that the man who has realized God cannot be injured by evil company. A blazing fire burns up even a plantain-tree."

Saturday, July 14, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at Adhar's house in Calcutta. Rākhāl, M., and other devotees were with the Master. Adhar had arranged to have Rajnaraya, the famous singer, and his party, recite the Chandi.

Rajnarayan began the recital in the worship hall. He sang:

I have surrendered my soul at the fearless feet of the Mother;
Am I afraid of Death any more? . . .

As the Master listened, he became filled with divine fervour and joined the musicians. Now and then he improvised an appropriate line. Suddenly he went into samādhi and stood still.

The singer sang again:

Who is the Woman yonder who lights the field of battle?
Darker Her body gleams even than the darkest storm-cloud,
And from Her teeth there flash the lightning's blinding flames!
Dishevelled Her hair is flying behind as She rushes about,
Undaunted in this war between the gods and the demons.
Laughing Her terrible laugh, She slays the fleeing asuras,
And with Her dazzling flashes She bares the horror of war.
How beautiful on Her brow the drops of moisture appear!
About Her dense black hair the bees are buzzing in swarms;
The moon has veiled its face, beholding this Sea of Beauty.
Tell me, who can She be, this Sorceress? Wonder of wonders!
Śiva Himself, like a corpse, lies vanquished at Her feet.
Kamalakanta has guessed who She is, with the elephant's gait;

She is none other than Kāli, Mother of all the worlds.
Sri Ramakrishna was in deep samādhi.

Saturday, July 21, 1883

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Sri Ramakrishna, with Ramlal and one or two other devotees, started from Dakshineswar for Calcutta in a carriage. As the carriage passed the gate of the Kāli temple, they met M. coming on foot with four mangoes in his hand. The carriage stopped and M. saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna was going to visit some of his devotees in Calcutta.

MASTER (to M., with a smile): "Come with us. We are going to Adhar's house."

M. got joyfully into the carriage. Having received an English education, he did not believe in the tendencies inherited from previous births. But he had admitted a few days before that it was on account of Adhar's good tendencies from past births that he showed such great devotion to the Master. Later on he had thought about this subject and had discovered that he was not yet completely convinced about inherited tendencies. He had come to Dakshineswar that day to discuss the matter with Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER: "Well, what do you think of Adhar?"

M: "He has great yearning for God."

MASTER: "Adhar, too, speaks very highly of you."

M. remained silent awhile and then began to speak of past tendencies.

M: "I haven't much faith in rebirth and inherited tendencies. Will that in any way injure my devotion to God?"

Everything is possible for God

MASTER: "It is enough to believe that all is possible in God's creation. Never allow the thought to cross your mind that your ideas are the only true ones, and that those of others are false. Then God will explain everything.

"What can a man understand of God's activities? The facets of God's creation are infinite. I do not try to understand God's actions at all. I have heard that everything is possible in God's creation, and I always bear that in mind. Therefore I do not give a thought to the world, but meditate on God alone. Once Hanuman was asked, 'What day of the lunar month is it?' Hanuman said: 'I don't know anything about the day of the month, the position of the moon and stars, or any such things. I think of Rāma alone.'

"Can one ever understand the work of God? He is so near; still it is not possible for us to know Him. Balarama did not realize that Krishna was God."

M: "That is true, sir."

Maya is the cause of ignorance

MASTER: "God has covered all with His maya. He doesn't let us know anything. Maya is 'woman and gold'. He who puts maya aside to see God, can see Him. Once, when I was explaining God's actions to someone, God suddenly showed me the lake at Kamarpukur. I saw a man removing the green scum and drinking the water. The water was clear as crystal. God revealed to me that Satchidananda is covered by the scum of maya. He who puts the green scum aside can drink the water.

"Let me tell you a very secret experience. Once I had entered the wood near the pine-grove, and was sitting there, when I had a vision of something like the hidden door of a chamber. I couldn't see the inside of the chamber. I tried to bore a hole in the door with a nail-knife, but did not succeed. As I bored, the earth fell back into the hole and filled it. Then suddenly I made a very big opening."

Uttering these words, the Master remained silent. After a time he said: "These are very profound words. I feel as if someone were pressing my mouth. . . . I have seen with my own eyes that God dwells even in the sexual organ. I saw Him once in the sexual intercourse of a dog and a bitch.

"The universe is conscious on account of the Consciousness of God. Sometimes I find that this Consciousness wriggles about, as it were, even in small fish."

The carriage came to the crossing at Shovabazar in Calcutta. The Master continued, saying, "Sometimes I find that the universe is saturated with the Consciousness of God, as the earth is soaked with water in the rainy season.

"Well, I see so many visions, but I never feel vain about them."

M. (with a smile): "That you should speak of vanity, sir!"

MASTER: "Upon my word, I don't feel vanity even in the slightest degree."

M: "There once lived a man in Greece, Socrates by name. A voice from heaven said that he was wise among men. Socrates was amazed at this revelation. He meditated on it a long time in solitude and then realized its significance. He said to his friends, 'I alone of all people have understood that I do not know anything.' But every man believes he is wise. In reality all are ignorant."

MASTER: "Now and then I think, 'What is it I know that makes so many people come to me?' Vaishnavcharan was a great pundit. He used to say to me: 'I can find in the scriptures all the things you talk about. But do you know why I come to you? I come to hear them from your mouth.' "

M: "All your words tally with the scriptures. Navadvip Goswami also said that the other day at the festival at Pānihāti. You told us that day that by repeating the word 'Gitā' a number of times one reverses it and it becomes 'tagi', which refers to renunciation.

Renunciation is the essence of the Gitā. Navadvip Goswami supported your statement from the grammatical standpoint."

MASTER: "Have you found anyone else resembling me-any pundit or holy man?"

M: "God has created you with His own hands, whereas He has made others by machine. All others He has created according to law."

MASTER (laughing, to Ramlal and the other devotees): "Listen to what he is saying!"

Sri Ramakrishna laughed for some time, and said at last. "Really and truly I have no pride-no, not even the slightest bit."

M: "Knowledge does us good in one respect at least; it makes us feel that we do not know anything, that we are nothing."

MASTER: "Right you are! I am nothing. I am nobody. "Do you believe in English astronomy?"

M: "It is possible to make new discoveries by applying the laws of Western astronomy. Observing the irregular movement of Uranus, the astronomers looked through their telescopes and discovered Neptune shining in the sky. They can also foretell eclipses."

MASTER: "Yes, that is so."

Master's visits to various devotees

The carriage drove on. They were approaching Adhar's house. Sri Ramakrishna said to M., "Dwell in the truth and you will certainly realize God."

M: "You said the other day to Navadvip Goswami:'O God, I want Thee. Please do not delude me with Thy world-bewitching maya. I want to realize Thee.' "

MASTER: "Yes, one should be able to say that from one's innermost soul."

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at Adhar's house and took a seat in the parlour. Ramlal, Adhar, M., and the other devotees sat near him. Rākhāl was staying with his father in Calcutta.

MASTER (to Adhar): "Didn't you let Rākhāl know that I was coming?"

ADHAR: "Yes, sir. I have sent him word."

Finding that the Master was eager to see Rākhāl , Adhar at once sent his carriage to fetch him. Adhar had been yearning to see the Master that day, but he had not definitely known that Sri Ramakrishna was coming.

ADHAR: "You haven't been here for a long time. I prayed to God today that you might come. I even shed tears"

The Master was pleased and said with a smile, "You don't mean that!"

It was dusk and the lamps were lighted. Sri Ramakrishna saluted the Divine Mother with folded hands and sat quietly absorbed in meditation. Then he began to chant the names of God in his sweet voice: "Govinda! Govinda! Satchidananda! Hari! Hari!" Every word he uttered showered nectar on the ears of the devotees.

Ramlal sang in praise of Kāli, the Divine Mother:

Thy name, I have heard, O Consort of Śiva, is the destroyer of our fear,
And so on Thee I cast my burden: Save me! Save me, O kindly Mother!
Out of Thy womb the world is born, and Thou it is that dost pervade it.
Art Thou Kāli? Art Thou Radha? Who can ever rightly say?
Mother, in every living creature Thou dost have Thy dwelling place;
As Kundalini Thou dost live in the lotus of the Muladhara.
Above it lies the Svadhisthana, where the four-petalled lotus blooms;
There also Thou dost make Thy home, O mystic power of Kundalini,
In the four petals of that flower, and in Vajrasana's six petals
At the navel is Manipura, the blue ten-petalled lotus flower;
Through the pathway of Sushumna, Thou dost ascend and enter there.
O Lady of the lotuses, in lotus blossoms Thou dost dwell!
Beyond them lies the Lake of Nectar, in the region of the heart,
Where the twelve-petalled lotus flower enchants the eye with scarlet flame.
When Thou dost open it, O Mother, touching it with Thy Lotus Feet,
The age-long darkness of the heart instantly scatters at Thy sight.
Above, in the throat, is the sixteen-petalled lotus flower, of smoky hue;
Within the petals of this flower there lies concealed a subtle space,
Transcending which, one sees at length the universe in Space dissolve.
And higher yet, between the eyebrows, blossoms the lotus of two petals,
Where the mind of man remains a prisoner and past controlling;
From this flower the mind desires to watch the sportive play of

life.

Highest of all, within the head, the soul-enthralling centre is,
Where shines the thousand-petalled lotus, Mahadeva's dwelling place.
Having ascended to His throne, O Spouse of Śiva, sit beside Him!
Thou art the Primal Power, O Mother! She whose senses are controlled;
The yogis meditate on Thee as Uma, great Himalaya's daughter.
Thou who art the Power of Śiva! Put to death my ceaseless cravings;
Grant that I never fall again into the ocean of this world.
Mother, Thou art the Primal Power, Thou the five cosmic principles;
Who can ever hope to know Thee, who art beyond all principles?
Only for Thy bhaktas' sake dost Thou assume Thy various forms;
But when Thy devotee's five senses merge in the five elements,
Mother, it is Thyself alone that he beholds as formless Truth.

As Ramlal sang the lines:

Above, in the throat, is the sixteen-petalled lotus flower, of smoky hue;
Within the petals of this flower there lies concealed a subtle space,
Transcending which, one sees at length the universe in Space dissolve,

The Master said to M.: "Listen. This is known as the vision of Satchidananda, the Formless Brahman. The Kundalini, rising above the Visuddha chakra, enables one to see everything as Ākāśa."

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "One attains the Absolute by going beyond the universe and its created beings conjured up by maya. By passing beyond the Nada one goes into samādhi. By repeating 'Om' one goes beyond the Nada and attains samādhi."

Adhar served Sri Ramakrishna with fruits and sweets. The Master left for Jadu Mallick's house.

Sri Ramakrishna entered the room in Jadu's house where the Divine Mother was worshipped. He stood before the image, which had been decorated with flowers,

garlands, and sandal-paste, and which radiated a heavenly beauty and splendour. Lights were burning before the pedestal. A priest was seated before the image. The Master asked one of his companions to offer a rupee in the shrine, according to the Hindu custom.

Sri Ramakrishna stood a long time with folded hands before the blissful image, the devotees standing behind him. Gradually he went into samādhi, his body becoming motionless and his eyes fixed.

With a long sigh he came back to the world of the senses and said, still intoxicated with divine fervour, "Mother, good-bye." But he could not leave the place. He remained standing there. Addressing Ramlal, he said: "Please sing that song. Then I shall be all right."

Ramlal sang:

O Mother, Consort of Śiva, Thou hast deluded this world. . . .

The Master went to the drawing-room with the devotees. Every now and then he said, "O Mother, please dwell in my heart." Jadu was sitting in the drawing-room with his friends. The Master sat down, still in an ecstatic mood, and sang:

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,
Do not deprive Thy worthless child of bliss! . . .

Finishing the song, he said to Jadu, still in a state of divine fervour: "Well, sir, what shall I sing? Shall I sing 'Mother, am I Thine eight-months child'? "

He sang:

Mother, am I Thine eight-months child? Thy red eyes cannot frighten me!
My riches are Thy Lotus Feet, which Śiva holds upon His breast;
Yet, when I seek my heritage, I meet with excuses and delays.
A deed of gift I hold in my heart, attested by Thy Husband Śiva;
I shall sue Thee, if I must, and with a single point shall win.
If Thou dost oppose me, Thou wilt learn what sort of mother's son I am.
This bitterly contested suit between the Mother and Her son-
What sport it is! says Ramprasad. I shall not cease tormenting Thee
Till Thou Thyself, shalt yield the fight and take me in Thine arms at last.

Coming down nearly to a normal state, the Master said, "I shall take some of the Divine Mother's prasad." Then he ate a little of it.

Jadu Mallick was sitting near him with several friends, among whom were a few of his flatterers.

MASTER (with a smile): "Well, why do you keep these buffoons with you?"

JADU (with a smile): "Suppose they are. Won't you redeem them?"

MASTER (smiling): "The water of the Ganges cannot purify a wine-jar."

Jadu had promised the Master that he would arrange a recital of the Chandi in his house. Some time had elapsed, but he had not yet kept his promise.

MASTER: "Well, what about the recital of the Chandi?"

JADU: "I have been busy with many things; I haven't been able to arrange it."

MASTER: "How is that? A man gives his word and doesn't take it back! 'The words of a man are like the tusks of the elephant: they come out but do not go back.' A man must be true to his word. What do you say?"

JADU (with a smile): "You are right."

MASTER: "You are a shrewd man. You do a thing after much calculation. You are like the brahmin who selects a cow that eats very little, supplies plenty of dung, and gives much milk." (All laugh.)

After a time he said to Jadu: "I now understand your nature. It is half warm and half cold. You are devoted to God and also to the world."

The Master and his devotees were served by Jadu with sweets and fruit, and then the party left for the home of Khelat Ghosh.

Khelat Ghosh's house was a big mansion, but it looked deserted. As the Master entered the house he fell into an ecstatic mood. M., Ramlal, and a few other devotees were with him. Their host was Khelat Ghosh's brother-in-law. He was an old man, a Vaishnava. His body was stamped with the name of God, according to the Vaishnava custom, and he carried in his hand a small bag containing his rosary. He had visited the Master, now and then, at Dakshineswar. But most of the Vaishnavas held narrow religious views; they criticized the Vedantists and the followers of the Śiva cult. Sri Ramakrishna soon began to speak.

Dogmatism condemned

MASTER: "It is not good to feel that one's own religion alone is true and all others are false. God is one only, and not two. Different people call on Him by different names: some as Allah, some as God, and others as Krishna, Śiva, and Brahman. It is like the water in a lake. Some drink it at one place and call it 'jal', others at another place and call it 'pani', and still others at a third place and call it 'water'. The Hindus call it 'jal', the Christians 'water', and the Mussalmans 'pani'. But it is one and the same thing. Opinions are but paths. Each religion is only a path leading to God, as rivers come from different directions and ultimately become one in the one ocean.

Oneness of God

"The Truth established in the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras is but one Satchidananda. In the Vedas It is called Brahman, in the Puranas It is called Krishna, Rāma, and so on, and in the Tantras It is called Śiva. The one Satchidananda is called Brahman, Krishna, and Śiva."

The devotees were silent.

A VAISHNAVA DEVOTEE: "Sir, why should one think of God at all"

MASTER: "If a man really has that knowledge, then he is indeed liberated though living in a body.

Shallow faith of the worldly-minded

"Not all, by any means, believe in God. They simply talk. The worldly-minded have heard from someone that God exists and that everything happens by His will; but it is not their inner belief.

"Do you know what a worldly man's idea of God is like? It is like the children's swearing by God when they quarrel. They have heard the word while listening to their elderly aunts quarreling.

"Is it possible for all to comprehend God? God has created the good and the bad, the devoted and the impious, the faithful and the sceptical. The wonders that we see all exist in His creation. In one place there is more manifestation of His Power, in another less. The sun's light is better reflected by water than by earth, and still better by a mirror. Again, there are different levels among the devotees of God: superior, mediocre, and inferior. All this has been described in the Gitā."

VAISHNAVA: "True, sir."

Various classes of devotees

MASTER: "The inferior devotee says, 'God exists, but He is very far off, up there in heaven.' The mediocre devotee says, 'God exists in all beings as life and consciousness.' The superior devotee says: 'It is God Himself who has become everything; whatever I see is only a form of God. It is He alone who has become maya, the universe, and all living beings. Nothing exists but God.' "

VAISHNAVA: "Does anyone ever attain that state of mind?"

Signs of God-vision

MASTER: "One cannot attain it unless one has seen God. But there are signs that a man has had the vision of God. A man who has seen God sometimes behaves like a madman: he laughs, weeps, dances, and sings. Sometimes he behaves like a child, a child five years old-guileless, generous, without vanity, unattached to anything, not under the control of any of the gunas, always blissful. Sometimes he behaves like a

ghoul: he doesn't differentiate between things pure and things impure; he sees no difference between things clean and things unclean. And sometimes he is like an inert thing, staring vacantly: he cannot do any work; he cannot strive for anything."

Was the Master making a veiled reference to his own states of mind?

Knowledge and ignorance

MASTER (to the Vaishnava devotee): "The feeling of 'Thee and Thine' is the outcome of Knowledge; 'I and mine' comes from ignorance. Knowledge makes one feel: 'O God, Thou art the Doer and I am Thy instrument. O God, to Thee belongs all-body, mind, house, family, living beings, and the universe. All these are Thine. Nothing belongs to me.'

"An ignorant person says, 'Oh, God is there-very far off.' The man of Knowledge knows that God is right here, very near, in the heart; that He has assumed all forms and dwells in all hearts as their Inner Controller."

Sunday, July 22, 1883

Taking advantage of the holiday, many householder devotees visited Sri Ramakrishna in his room at the Dakshineswar temple garden. The Young devotees, mostly students, generally came on week-days. Sometimes the Master asked his intimate disciples to come on a Tuesday or a Saturday, days that he considered very auspicious for special religious instruction. Adhar, Rākhāl , and M. had come from Calcutta in a hired carriage.

Sri Ramakrishna had enjoyed a little rest after his midday meal. The room had an atmosphere of purity and holiness. On the walls hung pictures of gods and goddesses, among them one of Christ rescuing the drowning Peter. Outside the room were plants laden with fragrant flowers, and the Ganges could be seen flowing toward the south. The Master was seated on the small couch, facing the north, and the devotees sat on mats and carpets spread on the floor. All eyes were directed toward him. Mani Mallick, an old Brahmo devotee about sixty-five years of age, came to pay his respects to the Master. He had returned a few months earlier from a pilgrimage to Benares and was recounting his experiences to Sri Ramakrishna.

Difficulty of the Vedantic method

MANI MALLICK: "A monk whom I met in Benares said that no religious experience is possible without the control of the sense-organs. Nothing could be achieved by merely crying, 'God! God!' "

MASTER: "Do you understand the views of teachers like him? According to them, one must first practise spiritual discipline: self-restraint, self-control, forbearance, and the like. Their aim is to attain Nirvāna. They are followers of Vedānta. They constantly discriminate, saying, 'Brahman alone is real, and the world illusory.' But this is an extremely difficult path. If the world is illusory, then you too are illusory. The teacher who gives the instruction is equally illusory. His words, too, are as illusory as a dream.

"But this experience is beyond the reach of the ordinary man. Do you know what it is like? If you burn camphor nothing remains. When wood is burnt at least a little ash is left. Finally, after the last analysis, the devotee goes into samādhi. Then he knows nothing whatsoever of 'I', 'you', or the universe.

"Padmalochan was a man of deep wisdom. He had great respect for me, though at that time I constantly repeated the name of the Divine Mother. He was the court pundit of the Maharaja of Burdwan. Once he came to Calcutta and went to live in a garden house near kamarhati. I felt a desire to see him and sent Hriday there to learn if the pundit had any vanity. I was told that he had none. Then I met him. Though a man of great knowledge and scholarship, he began to weep on hearing me sing Ramprasad's devotional songs. We talked together a long while; conversation with nobody else gave me such satisfaction. He said to me, 'Give up the desire for the company of devotees; otherwise people of all sorts will come to you and make you deviate from your spiritual ideal.' Once he entered into a controversy, by correspondence, with Utshavananda, Vaishnavcharan's guru. He told me an interesting incident. Once a meeting was called to decide which of the two deities, Śiva or Brahma, was the greater. Unable to come to any decision, the pundits at last referred the matter to Padmalochan. With characteristic guilelessness he said: 'How do I know? Neither I nor any of my ancestors back to the fourteenth generation have seen Śiva or Brahma.' About the renunciation of 'woman and gold', he said to me one day: 'Why have you given up those things? Such distinctions as "This is money and that is clay" are the outcome of ignorance.' What could I say to that? I replied: 'I don't know all these things, my dear sir. But for my part, I cannot relish such things as money and the like.'

"There was a pundit who was tremendously vain. He did not believe in the forms of God. But who can understand the inscrutable ways of the Divine? God revealed Himself to him as the Primal Power. This vision made the pundit unconscious for a long time. After regaining partial consciousness he uttered only the sound 'Ka! Ka! Ka!' He could not fully pronounce 'Kāli'."

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, you met Pundit Vidyasagar. What did you think of him?"

MASTER: "Vidyasagar has both scholarship and charity, but he lacks inner vision. Gold lies hidden within him. Had he but found it out, his activities would have been reduced; finally they would have stopped altogether. Had he but known that God resides in his heart, his mind would have been directed to God in thought and meditation. Some persons must perform selfless work a long time before they can practise dispassion and direct their minds to the spiritual ideal and at last be absorbed in God.

Charity and attachment

"The activities that Vidyasagar is engaged in are good. Charity is very noble. There is a great deal of difference between daya, compassion, and maya, attachment. Daya is good, but not maya. Maya is love for one's relatives-one's wife, children, brother, sister, nephew, father, and mother. But daya is the same love for all created beings without any distinction."

M: "Is daya also a bondage?"

The three gunas

MASTER: "Yes, it is. But that concept is something far beyond the ordinary man. Daya springs from sattva. Sattva preserves, rajas creates, and tamas destroys. But Brahman is beyond the three gunas. It is beyond Prakriti.

"None of the three gunas can reach Truth; they are like robbers, who cannot come to a public place for fear of being arrested. Sattva, rajas, and tamas are like so many robbers.

"Listen to a story. Once a man was going through a forest, when three robbers fell upon him and robbed him of all his possessions. One of the robbers said, 'What's the use of keeping this man alive?' So saying, he was about to kill him with his sword, when the second robber interrupted him, saying: 'Oh, no! What is the use of killing him? Tie him hand and foot and leave him here.' The robbers bound his hands and feet and went away.

After a while the third robber returned and said to the man: 'Ah, I am sorry. Are you hurt? I will release you from your bonds.' After setting the man free, the thief said: 'Come with me. I will take you to the public highway.' After a long time they reached the road. Then the robber said: 'Follow this road. Over there is your house.' At this the man said: 'Sir, you have been very good to me. Come with me to my house ' 'Oh, no!' the robber replied. 'I can't go there. The police will know it.'

This world itself is the forest. The three robbers prowling here are sattva, rajas, and tamas. It is they that rob a man of the Knowledge of Truth. Tamas wants to destroy him. Rajas binds him to the world. But sattva rescues him from the clutches of rajas and tamas. Under the protection of sattva, man is rescued from anger, passion, and the other evil effects of tamas. Further, sattva loosens the bonds of the world. But sattva also is a robber. It cannot give him the ultimate Knowledge of Truth, though it shows him the road leading to the Supreme Abode of God. Setting him on the path, sattva tells him: 'Look yonder. There is your home.' Even sattva is far away from the Knowledge of Brahman.

Nature of Brahman cannot he described

"What Brahman is cannot be described. Even he who knows It cannot talk about It. There is a saying that a boat, once reaching the 'black waters' of the ocean, cannot come back.

Parable of the four friends

"Once four friends, in the course of a walk, saw a place enclosed by a wall. The wall was very high. They all became eager to know what was inside. One of them climbed to the top of the wall. What he saw on looking inside made him speechless with wonder. He only cried,'Ah! Ah!' and dropped in. He could not give any information about what he

saw. The others, too, climbed the wall, uttered the same cry, 'Ah! Ah!', and jumped in. Now who could tell what was inside?

"Sages like Jadabharata and Dattatreya, after realizing Brahman, could not describe It. A man's 'I' completely disappears when he goes into samādhi after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman. That is why Ramprasad sang, addressing his mind:

If you should find the task too hard, Call upon Ramprasad for help.

The mind must completely merge itself in Knowledge. But that is not enough. 'Ramprasad', that is, the principle of 'I', must vanish too. Then alone does one get the Knowledge of Brahman."

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, is it possible then that Sukadeva did not have the ultimate Knowledge?"

MASTER: "According to some people, Sukadeva only saw and touched the Ocean of Brahman; he did not dive into It. That is why he could return to the world and impart religious instruction. According to others, he returned to the world of name and form, after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, for the purpose of teaching others. He had to recite the Bhagavata to King Parikshit and had to teach people in various ways; therefore God did not destroy his 'I' altogether. God kept in him the 'ego of Knowledge.'"

God and religious organization

DEVOTEE: "Can one keep up an organization after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman?"

MASTER: "Once I talked to Keshab Sen about the Knowledge of Brahman. He asked me to explain it further. I said, 'If I proceed further, then you won't be able to preserve your organization and following.' 'Then please stop here!' replied Keshab. (All laugh.) But still I said to Keshab: ' "I" and "mine" indicate ignorance. Without ignorance one cannot have such a feeling as "I am the doer; these are my wife, children, possessions, name and fame".' Thereupon Keshab said, 'Sir, if one gave up the "I", nothing whatsoever would remain.' I reassured him and said: 'I am not asking you to give up all of the "I". You should give up only the "unripe I". The "unripe I" makes one feel: "I am the doer. These are my wife and children. I am a teacher." Renounce this. "unripe I" and keep the "ripe I", which will make you feel that you are the servant of God, His devotee, and that God is the Doer and you are His instrument.' "

DEVOTEE: "Can the 'ripe I' form an organization?"

Two kinds of ego

MASTER: "I said to Keshab Sen that the 'I' that says, 'I am a leader, I have formed this party, I am teaching people', is the 'unripe I'. It is very difficult to preach religion. It is not possible to do so without receiving the commandment of God. The permission of God is necessary. Sukadeva had a command from God to recite the Bhagavata. If, after

realizing God, a man gets His command and becomes a preacher or teacher, then that preaching or teaching does no harm. His 'I' is not 'unripe'; it is 'ripe'.

"I asked Keshab to give up this 'unripe I'. The ego that feels, 'I am the servant of God and lover of God' does not injure one. I said to him: 'You have been constantly talking of your organization and your followers. But people also go away from your organization.' Keshab answered: 'It is true, sir. After staying in it several years, people go to another organization. What is worse, on deserting me they abuse me right and left.' 'Why don't you study their nature?' I said. 'Is there any good in making anybody and everybody a disciple?'

"I said to Keshab further: 'You should accept the Divine Mother, the Primal Energy. Brahman is not different from Its Śakti. What is Brahman is also Śakti. As long as a man remains conscious of the body, he is conscious of duality. It is only when a man tries to describe what he sees that he finds duality.' Keshab later on recognized Kāli.

"One day when Keshab was here with his disciples, I said to him that I would like to hear him preach. He delivered a lecture in the chandni. Then we all sat by the bathing-ghat and had a long conversation. I said to him: 'It is Bhagavan alone who in one form appears as bhakta, and in another as the Bhagavata. Please repeat "Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan".' Keshab and his disciples repeated the words. Then I asked him to repeat 'Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava'. Thereupon Keshab said: 'Sir, I should not go so far now. People will say that I have become an orthodox Hindu.'

"It is extremely difficult to go beyond the three gunas. One cannot reach that state without having realized God. Man dwells in the realm of maya. Maya does not permit him to see God. It has made him a victim of ignorance.

Man's inordinate attachment

"Once Hriday brought a bull-calf here. I saw, one day, that he had tied it with a rope in the garden, so that it might graze there. I asked him, 'Hriday, why do you tie the calf there every day?' 'Uncle,' he said, 'I am going to send this calf to our village. When it grows strong I shall yoke it to the plough.' As soon as I heard these words I was stunned to think: 'How inscrutable is the play of the divine maya! Kamarpukur and Sihore are so far away from Calcutta! This poor calf must go all that way. Then it will grow, and at length it will be yoked to the plough. This is indeed the world! This is indeed maya!' I fell down unconscious. Only after a long time did I regain consciousness."

It was three or four o'clock in the afternoon. M. found Sri Ramakrishna seated on the couch in an abstracted mood. After some time he heard him talking to the Divine Mother. The Master said, "O Mother, why hast Thou given him only a particle?" Remaining silent a few moments, he added: "I understand it, Mother. That little bit will be enough for him and will serve Thy purpose. That little bit will enable him to teach people."

Did the Master thus transmit spiritual powers to his disciples? Did he thus come to know that his disciples, after him, would go out into the world as teachers of men?

Rākhāl was in the room. Sri Ramakrishna was still in a state of partial consciousness when he said to Rākhāl : "You were angry with me, weren't you? Do you know why I made you angry? There was a reason. Only then would the medicine work. The surgeon first brings an abscess to a head. Only then does he apply a herb so that it may burst and dry up."

After a pause he went on: "Yes, I have found Hazra to be like a piece of dry wood. Then why does he live here? This has a meaning too. The play is enlivened by the presence of trouble-makers like Jatila and Kutila.

(To M.) "One must accept the forms of God. Do you know the meaning of the image of Jagaddhatri? She is the Bearer of the Universe. Without her support and protection the universe would fall from its place and be destroyed. The Divine Mother, Jagaddhatri, reveals Herself in the heart of one who can control the mind, which may be compared to an elephant."

RĀKHĀL: "The mind is a mad elephant."

MASTER: "Therefore the lion, the carrier of the Divine Mother, keeps it under control."

It was dusk. The evening service began in the temples. Sri Ramakrishna was chanting the names of the gods and goddesses. He was seated on the small couch, with folded hands, and became absorbed in contemplation of the Divine Mother. The world outside was flooded with moonlight, and the devotees inside the Master's room sat in silence and looked at his serene face.

In the mean time Govinda of Belgharia and some of his friends had entered the room. Sri Ramakrishna was still in a semi-conscious state. After a few minutes he said to the devotees: "Tell me your doubts. I shall explain everything."

Govinda and the other devotees looked thoughtful.

Black complexion of the Divine Mother

GOVINDA: "Revered sir, why does the Divine Mother have a black complexion?"

MASTER: "You see Her as black because you are far away from Her. Go near and you will find Her devoid of all colour. The water of a lake appears black from a distance. Go near and take the water in your hand, and you will see that it has no colour at all. Similarly, the sky looks blue from a distance. But look at the atmosphere near you; it has no colour. The nearer you come to God, the more you will realize that He has neither name nor form. If you move away from the Divine Mother, you will find Her blue, like the grass-flower. Is Syama male or female? A man once saw the image of the Divine Mother wearing a sacred thread. He said to the worshipper: 'What? You have put the sacred thread on the Mother's neck!' The worshipper said: 'Brother, I see that you have truly known the Mother. But I have not yet been able to find out whether She is male or female; that is why I have put the sacred thread on Her image.'

"That which is Syama is also Brahman. That which has form, again, is without form. That which has attributes, again, has no attributes. Brahman is Śakti; Śakti is Brahman. They are not two. These are only two aspects, male and female, of the same Reality, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute."

GOVINDA: "What is the meaning of 'yogamaya'?"

MASTER: "It signifies the yoga, or union, of Purusha and Prakriti. Whatever you perceive in the universe is the outcome of this union. Take the image of Śiva and Kāli. Kāli stands on the bosom of Śiva; Śiva lies under Her feet like a corpse; Kāli looks at Śiva. All this denotes the union of Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha is inactive; therefore Śiva lies on the ground like a corpse. Prakriti performs all Her activities in conjunction with Purusha. Thus She creates, preserves, and destroys. That is also the meaning of the conjoined images of Radha and Krishna. On account of that union, again, the images are slightly inclined toward each other.

"To denote this union, Sri Krishna wears a pearl in His nose, Radha a blue stone in hers. Radha has a fair complexion, bright as the pearl. Sri Krishna's is blue. For this reason Radha wears the blue stone. Further, Krishna's apparel is yellow, and Radha's blue.

"Who is the best devotee of God? It is he who sees, after the realization of Brahman, that God alone has become all living beings, the universe, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. One must discriminate at first, saying 'Not this, not this', and reach the roof. After that one realizes that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof, namely, brick, lime, and brick-dust. The devotee realizes that it is Brahman alone that has become all these-the living beings, the universe, and so on.

"Mere dry reasoning-I spit on it! I have no use for it! (The Master spits on the ground.)

"Why should I make myself dry through mere reasoning? May I have unalloyed love for the Lotus Feet of God as long as the consciousness of 'I' and 'you' remains with me!

(To Govinda) "Sometimes I say, 'Thou art verily I, and I am verily Thou.' Again I feel, 'Thou art Thou.' Then I do not find any trace of 'I'. It is Śakti alone that becomes flesh as God Incarnate. According to one school of thought, Rāma and Krishna are but two waves in the Ocean of Absolute Bliss and Consciousness.

Seeing God in everything

"Chaitanya, Consciousness, is awakened after Advaita-jnāna, the Knowledge of the non-dual Brahman. Then one perceives that God alone exists in all beings as Consciousness. After this realization comes Ānanda, Bliss. Advaita, Chaitanya, and Nityananda.

(to M.) "Let me ask you not to disbelieve in the forms of God. Have faith in God's forms. Meditate on that form of God which appeals to your mind.

(To Govinda) "The fact is that one does not feel the longing to know or see God as long as one wants to enjoy worldly objects. The child forgets everything when he plays with

his toys. Try to cajole him away from play with a sweetmeat; you will not succeed. He will eat only a bit of it. When he relishes neither the sweetmeat nor his play, then he says, 'I want to go to my mother.' He doesn't care for the sweetmeat any more. If a man whom he doesn't know and has never seen says to the child, 'Come along; I shall take you to your mother', the child follows him. The child will go with anyone who will carry him to his mother.

The soul becomes restless for God when one is through with the enjoyment of worldly things. Then a person has only one thought-how to realize God. He listens to whatever anyone says to him about God."

M. (to himself): "Alas! The soul becomes restless for God only when one is through with the enjoyment of worldly things."

August 18, 1883

Mystery of Divine Incarnation

Sri Ramakrishna was at Balarām Bose's house in Calcutta. He was explaining the mystery of Divine Incarnation to the devotees.

MASTER: "In order to bring people spiritual knowledge, an Incarnation of God lives in the world in the company of devotees, cherishing an attitude of love for God. It is like going up and coming down the stairs after having once reached the roof. In order to reach the roof, other people should follow the path of devotion, as long as they have not attained Knowledge and become free of desire. The roof can be reached only when all desires are done away with. The shopkeeper does not go to bed before finishing his accounts. He goes to sleep only when his accounts are finished.

(To M.) "A man will certainly succeed if he will take the plunge. Success is sure for such a man.

"Well, what do you think of the worship conducted by Keshab, Shivanath, and the other Brahmo leaders?"

M: "They are satisfied, as you say, with describing the garden, but they seldom speak of seeing the Master of the garden. Describing the garden is the beginning and end of their worship."

MASTER: "You are right. Our only duty is to seek the Master of the garden and speak to Him. The only purpose of life is to realize God."

Sri Ramakrishna then went to Adhar's house. After dusk he sang and danced in Adhar's drawing-room. M., Rākhāl , and other devotees were present. After the music he sat down, still in an ecstatic mood. He said to Rākhāl: "This religious fervour is not like rain in the rainy season, which comes in torrents and goes in torrents. It is like an image of Śiva that has not been set up by human hands but is a natural one that has sprung up,

as it were, from the bowels of the earth. The other day you left Dakshineswar in a temper. I prayed to the Divine Mother to forgive you."

The Master was still in an abstracted mood and said to Adhar, "My son, meditate on the Deity whose name you chanted." With these words he touched Adhar's tongue with his finger and wrote something on it. Did the Master thereby impart spirituality to Adhar?

Chapter 13

THE MASTER AND M.

August 19, 1883

IT WAS SUNDAY, the first day after the full moon. Sri Ramakrishna was resting after his noon meal. The midday offering had been made in the temples, and the temple doors were closed.

In the early afternoon the Master sat up on the small couch in his room. M. prostrated himself before him and sat on the floor. The Master was talking to him on the philosophy of Vedānta.

Householders and Non-dualism

MASTER (to M.): "Self-Knowledge is discussed in the Ashtāvakra Samhitā. The non-dualists say, 'Soham', that is, 'I am the Supreme Self.' This is the view of the sannyasis of the Vedantic school. But this is not the right attitude for householders, who are conscious of doing everything themselves. That being so, how can they declare, 'I am That, the actionless Supreme Self'? According to the non-dualists the Self is unattached. Good and bad, virtue and vice, and the other pairs of opposites, cannot in any way injure the Self, though they undoubtedly afflict those who have identified themselves with their bodies. Smoke soils the wall, certainly, but it cannot in any way affect Ākāśa, space. Following the Vedantists of this class, Krishnakishore used to say, 'I am Kha', meaning Ākāśa. Being a great devotee, he could say that with some justification; but it is not becoming for others to do so.

"But to feel that one is a free soul is very good. By constantly repeating, 'I am free, I am free', a man verily becomes free. On the other hand, by constantly repeating, 'I am bound, I am bound', he certainly becomes bound to worldliness. The fool who says only, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner', verily drowns himself in worldliness. One should rather say: I have chanted the name of God. How can I be a sinner? How can I be bound?'

(To M.) "You see, I am very much depressed today. Hriday has written me that he is very ill. Why should I feel dejected about it? Is it because of maya or daya?"

M. could not find suitable words for a reply, and remained silent.

Maya and compassion

MASTER: "Do you know what maya is? It is attachment to relatives-parents, brother and sister, wife and children, nephew and niece. Daya means love for all created beings. Now what is this, my feeling about Hriday? Is it maya or daya? But Hriday did so much for me: he served me whole-heartedly and nursed me when I was ill. But later he tormented me also. The torment became so unbearable that once I was about to commit suicide by jumping into the Ganges from the top of the embankment. But he did

much to serve me. Now my mind will be at rest if he gets some money. But whom shall I ask for it? Who likes to speak about such things to our rich visitors?"

At two or three o'clock in the afternoon Adhar Sen and Balarām arrived. After saluting Sri Ramakrishna, they sat on the floor and asked him if he was well. The Master said, "Yes, I am well physically, but a little troubled in mind." He did not refer to Hriday and his troubles.

The conversation turned to the Goddess Simhavahini.

MASTER: "Yes, I visited the Goddess. She is worshipped by one of the branches of the Mallick family of Calcutta. This branch of the family is now in straitened circumstances, and the house they live in is dilapidated. The walls and floor are spotted with moss and pigeon-droppings, and the cement and plaster are crumbling. But other branches of the Mallick family are well off. This branch has no signs of prosperity. (To M.) Well, what does that signify?"

M. remained silent.

MASTER: "The thing is that everyone must reap the result of his past-karma. One must admit the influence of tendencies inherited from past births and the result of the prarabdha karma. Nevertheless, in that dilapidated house I saw the face of the Goddess radiating a divine light. One must believe in the Divine Presence in the image.

"Once I went to Vishnupur. The raja of that place has several fine temples. In one of them there is an image of the Divine Mother, called Mrinmayi. There are several lakes near the temple, known as the Lalbandh, Krishnabandh, and so on. In the water of one of the lakes I could smell the ointments that women use for their hair. How do you explain that? I didn't know at that time that the woman devotees offer ointments to the Goddess Mrinmayi while visiting Her temple. Near the lake I went into samādhi, though I had not yet seen the image in the temple. In that state I saw the divine form from the waist up, rising from the water."

In the mean time other devotees had arrived. Someone referred to the political revolution and civil war in Kabul. A devotee said that Yakub Khan, the Amir of Afghanistan, had been deposed. He told the Master that the Amir was a great devotee of God.

Pleasure and pain are characteristics of physical life

MASTER: "But you must remember that pleasure and pain are the characteristics of the embodied state. In Kavi Kankan's Chandi it is written that Kaluvir was sent to prison and a heavy stone placed on his chest. Yet Kalu was born as a result of a boon from the Divine Mother of the Universe. Thus pleasure and pain are inevitable when the soul accepts a body. Again, take the case of Srimanta, who was a great devotee. Though his mother, Khullana, was very much devoted to the Divine Mother, there was no end to his troubles. He was almost beheaded. There is also the instance of the wood-cutter who was a great lover of the Divine Mother. She appeared before him and showed him much grace and love; but he had to continue his profession of wood-cutting and earn his

livelihood by that arduous work. Again, while Devaki, Krishna's mother, was in prison, she had a vision of God Himself endowed with four hands, holding mace, discus, conch-shell, and lotus. But with all that she couldn't get out of prison."

M: "Why speak only of getting out of prison? This body is the source of all our troubles. Devaki should have been freed from the body."

Law of karma

MASTER: "The truth is that one must reap the result of the prarabdha karma. The body remains as long as the results of past actions do not completely wear away. Once a blind man bathed in the Ganges and as a result was freed from his sins. But his blindness remained all the same. (All laugh.) It was because of his evil deeds in his past birth that he had to undergo that affliction."

M: "Yes,sir. The arrow that has already left the bow is beyond our control."

MASTER: "However much a bhakta may experience physical joy and sorrow, he always has knowledge and the treasure of divine love. This treasure never leaves him. Take the Pandava brothers for instance. Though they suffered so many calamities, they did not lose their God-Consciousness even once. Where can you find men like them, endowed with so much knowledge and devotion?"

Just then Narendra and Colonel Viswanath Upadhyaya entered the room. Narendra was then twenty-two years old and studying in college. They saluted the Master and sat down. The Master requested Narendra to sing. The Tānpura hung on the west wall of the room. The devotees fixed their eyes on Narendra as he began to tune the drums.

MASTER (to Narendra): "The drums don't sound as well as before."

CAPTAIN: "They are now full. Therefore they are quiet, like a vessel filled with water. Or they are like a holy man, who remains silent when his heart is full of God-Consciousness."

MASTER: "But what about sages like Nārada?"

CAPTAIN: "They talked because they were moved by the sufferings of others."

MASTER: "You are right. After attaining samādhi, Nārada, Sukadeva, and others came down a few steps, as it were, to the plane of normal consciousness and broke their silence out of compassion for the sufferings of others and to help them."

Narendra began to sing:

Oh, when will dawn for me that day of blessedness
When He who is all Good, all Beauty, and all Truth,
Will light the inmost shrine of my heart?

When shall I sink at last, ever beholding Him,
Into that Ocean of Delight? . . .

No sooner had the Master heard a few words of the song than he went into deep samādhi. He sat with folded hands, facing the east. His body was erect and his mind completely bereft of worldly consciousness. His breath had almost stopped. With unwinking eyes he sat motionless as a picture on a canvas. His mind had dived deep into the Ocean of God's Beauty.

Narendra left the room and went to the east verandah, where Hazra was seated on a blanket, with a rosary in his hand. They fell to talking. Other devotees arrived. The Master came down from samādhi and looked around. He could not find Narendra. The Tānpura was lying on the floor. He noticed that the earnest eyes of the devotees were riveted on him.

MASTER (referring to Narendra): "He has lighted the fire. Now it doesn't matter whether he stays in the room or goes out.

Joy of God-Consciousness

(To Captain and the other devotees) "Attribute to yourselves the bliss of God-Consciousness; then you too will experience ineffable joy. The bliss of God-Consciousness always exists in you. It is only hidden by the veiling and projecting power of maya. The less you are attached to the world, the more you love God."

CAPTAIN: "The farther you proceed toward your home in Calcutta, the farther you leave Benares behind. Again, the farther you proceed toward Benares, the farther behind you leave your home."

MASTER: "As Radha advanced toward Krishna, she could smell more and more of the sweet fragrance of His body. The nearer you approach to God, the more you feel His love. As the river approaches the ocean it increasingly feels the flow of the tides.

Ideals of Jnāni and bhakta

"The Jnāni experiences God-Consciousness within himself; it is like the upper Ganges, flowing in only one direction. To him the whole universe is illusory, like a dream; he is always established in the Reality of Self. But with the lover of God the case is different. His feeling does not flow in only one direction. He feels both the ebb-tide and the flood-tide of divine emotion. He laughs and weeps and dances and sings in the ecstasy of God. The lover of God likes to sport with Him. In the Ocean of God-Consciousness he sometimes swims, sometimes goes down, and sometimes rises to the surface-like pieces of ice in the water. (Laughter.)

Brahman and Śakti are not different

"The Jnāni seeks to realize Brahman. But the ideal of the bhakta is the Personal God-a God endowed with omnipotence and with the six treasures. Yet Brahman and Śakti are, in fact, not different. That which is the Blissful Mother is, again, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. They are like the gem and its lustre. When one speaks of the lustre of the gem, one thinks of the gem; and again, when one speaks of the gem, one refers to its lustre. One cannot conceive of the lustre of the gem without thinking of the gem, and one cannot conceive of the gem without thinking of its lustre.

"Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute is one, and one only. But It is associated with different limiting adjuncts on account of the different degrees of Its manifestation. That is why one finds various forms of God. The devotee sings, 'O my Divine Mother, Thou art all these!' Wherever you see actions, like creation, preservation, and dissolution, there is the manifestation of Śakti. Water is water whether it is calm or full of waves and bubbles. The Absolute alone is the Primordial Energy, which creates, preserves, and destroys. Thus it is the same 'Captain', whether he remains inactive or performs his worship or pays a visit to the Governor General. Only we designate him by different names at different times."

CAPTAIN: "Yes, sir, that is so."

MASTER: "I said those words to Keshab Sen."

CAPTAIN: "Keshab is not an orthodox Hindu. He adopts manners and customs according to his own whim. He is a well-to-do gentleman and not a holy man."

MASTER (to the other devotees): "Captain forbids me to go to see Keshab."

CAPTAIN: "But, sir, you act as you will. What can I do?"

MASTER (sharply): "Why shouldn't I go to see Keshab? You feel at ease when you go to the Governor General's house, and for money at that. Keshab thinks of God and chants His name. Isn't it you who are always saying that God Himself has become the universe and all its living beings? Doesn't God dwell in Keshab also?"

With these words the Master left the room abruptly and went to the northeast verandah. Captain and the other devotees remained, waiting for his return. M. accompanied the Master to the verandah, where Narendra was talking with Hazra. Sri Ramakrishna knew that Hazra always indulged in dry philosophical discussions. Hazra would say: "The world is unreal, like a dream. Worship, food offerings to the Deity, and so forth, are only hallucinations of the mind. The aim of spiritual life is to meditate on one's own real Self." Then he would repeat, "I am He." But, with all that, he had a soft corner in his heart for money, material things, and people's attention.

Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said to Hazra and Narendra, "Hello! What are you talking about?"

NARENDRA (smiling): "Oh, we are discussing a great many things. They are rather too deep for others."

MASTER (with a smile): "But Pure Knowledge and Pure Love are one and the same thing. Both lead the aspirants to the same goal. The path of love is much the easier."

Narendra quoted a song:

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
What need have I of knowledge or reason?

Narendra said to M. that he had been reading a book by Hamilton, who wrote: "A learned ignorance is the end of philosophy and the beginning of religion."

MASTER (to M.): "What does that mean?"

Narendra explained the sentence in Bengali. The Master beamed with joy and said in English, "Thank you! Thank you!" Everyone laughed at the charming way he said these words. They knew that his English vocabulary consisted of only half a dozen words.

It was almost dusk when most of the devotees, including Narendra, took leave of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna went out and looked at the Ganges for a few minutes from the west porch. Two priests were bathing in preparation for the evening worship. Young men of the village were strolling in the garden or standing on the concrete embankment, gazing at the murmuring river. Others, perhaps more thoughtful, were walking about in the solitude of the Panchavati.

It became dark. The maidservant lighted the lamp in Sri Ramakrishna's room and burnt incense. The evening worship began in the twelve temples of Śiva and in the shrines of Krishna and Kāli.

As it was the first day after the full moon, the moonlight soon flooded the tops of the trees and temples, and touched with silver the numberless waves of the sacred river.

The Master returned to his room. After bowing to the Divine Mother, he clapped his hands and chanted the sweet names of God. A number of holy pictures hung on the walls of the room. Among others, there were pictures of Dhruva, Prahlada, Kāli, Radha-Krishna, and the coronation of Rāma. The Master bowed low before the pictures and repeated the holy names. Then he repeated the holy words, "Brahma-Ātmā-Bhagavan; Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan; Brahma-Śakti, Śakti-Brahma; Veda, Purana, Tantra, Gitā, Gayatri." Then he said: "I have taken refuge at Thy feet, O Divine Mother; not I, but Thou. I am the machine and Thou art the Operator", and so on.

Master extols Narendra

While the Master was meditating in this fashion on the Divine Mother, a few devotees, coming in from the garden, gathered in his room. Sri Ramakrishna sat down on the

small couch. He said to the devotees: "Narendra, Bhavanath, Rākhāl , and devotees like them belong to the group of the nityasiddhas; they are eternally free. Religious practice on their part is superfluous. Look at Narendra. He doesn't care about anyone. One day he was going with me in Captain's carriage. Captain wanted him to take a good seat, but Narendra didn't even look at him. He is independent even of me. He doesn't tell me all he knows, lest I should praise his scholarship before others. He is free from ignorance and delusion. He has no bonds. He is a great soul. He has many good qualities. He is expert in music, both as a singer and player, and is also a versatile scholar. Again, he keeps his passions under control and says that he will never marry. There is a close friendship between Narendra and Bhavanath; they are just like man and woman. Narendra doesn't come here very often. That is good, for I am overwhelmed by his presence."

Monday, August 20, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on his bed, inside the mosquito net, meditating. It was about eight o'clock in the evening. M. was sitting on the floor with his friend Hari Babu. Hari, a young man of twenty-eight, had lost his wife about eleven years before and had not married a second time. He was much, devoted to his parents, brothers, and sisters.

Hazra was living at Dakshineswar. Rākhāl lived with the Master, though now and then he stayed at Adhar's house. Narendra, Bhavanath, Adhar, M., Ram, Manomohan, and other devotees visited the Master almost every week.

Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, was ill in his home in the country. The Master was worried about him. One of the devotees had sent him a little money, but the Master did not know it.

When Sri Ramakrishna came out of the mosquito net and sat on the small couch, the devotees saluted him.

MASTER (to M.): "I was meditating inside the net. It occurred to me that meditation, after all, was nothing but the imagining of a form, and so I did not enjoy it. One gets satisfaction if God reveals Himself in a flash. Again, I said to myself, 'Who is it that meditates, and on whom does he meditate?' "

M: "Yes, sir. You said that God Himself has become everything-the universe and all living beings. Even he who meditates is God."

MASTER: "What is more, one cannot meditate unless God wills it. One can meditate when God makes it possible for one to do so. What do you say?"

M: "True, sir. You feel like that because there is no 'I' in you. When there is no ego, one feels like that."

MASTER: "But it is good .to have a trace of ego, which makes it possible for a man to feel that he is the servant of God. As long as a man thinks that it is he who is doing his

duties, it is very good for him to feel that God is the Master and he God's servant. When one is conscious of doing work, one should establish with God the relationship of servant and Master."

M. was always reflecting on the nature of the Supreme Brahman.

Nature of Brahman

MASTER (to M.): "Like the Ākāśa, Brahman is without any modification. It has become manifold because of Śakti. Again, Brahman is like fire, which itself has no colour. The fire appears white if you throw a white substance into it, red if you throw a red, black if you throw a black. The three gunas-sattva, rajas, and tamas-belong to Śakti alone. Brahman Itself is beyond the three gunas. What Brahman is cannot be described. It is beyond words. That which remains after everything is eliminated by the Vedantic process of 'Not this, not this', and which is of the nature of Bliss, is Brahman.

"Suppose the husband of a young girl has come to his father-in-law's house and is seated in the drawing-room with other young men of his age. The girl and her friends are looking at them through the window. Her friends do not know her husband and ask her, pointing to one young man, 'Is that your husband?' 'No', she answers, smiling. They point to another young man and ask if he is her husband. Again she answers no. They repeat the question, referring to a third, and she gives the same answer. At last they point to her husband and ask, 'Is he the one?' She says neither yes nor no, but only smiles and keeps quiet. Her friends realize that he is her husband.

"One becomes silent on realizing the true nature of Brahman.

(To M.) "Well, why do I talk so much?"

M: "You talk in order to awaken the spiritual consciousness of the devotees. You once said that when an uncooked luchi is dropped into boiling ghee it makes a sizzling noise."

The Master began to talk to M. about Hazra.

MASTER: "Do you know the nature of a good man? He never troubles others. He doesn't harass people. The nature of some people is such that when they go to a feast they want special seats. A man who has true devotion to God never makes a false step, never gives others trouble for nothing.

"It is not good to live in the company of bad people. A man should stay away from them and thus protect himself. (To M.) Isn't that so?"

M: "Yes, sir. The mind sinks far down in the company of the wicked. But it is quite different with a hero, as you say."

MASTER: "How is that?"

M: "When a fire is feeble it goes out when even a small stick is thrown into it; but a blazing fire is not affected even if a plantain-tree is thrown into it. The tree itself is burnt to ashes."

The Master asked M. about his friend Hari Babu.

M: "He has come here to pay you his respects. He lost his wife long ago."

MASTER (to Hari): "What kind of work do you do?"

M: "Nothing in particular. But at home he takes good care of his parents and his brothers and sisters."

MASTER (with a smile): "How is that? You are like 'Elder, the pumpkin-cutter'. You are neither a man of the world nor a devotee of God. That is not good. You must have seen the sort of elderly man who lives in a family and is always ready, day or night, to entertain the children. He sits in the parlour and smokes the hubble-bubble. With nothing in particular to do, he leads a lazy life. Now and again he goes to the inner court and cuts a pumpkin; for, since women do not cut pumpkins, they send the children to ask him to come and do it. That is the extent of his usefulness-hence his nickname, 'Elder, the pumpkin-cutter'.

"You must do 'this' as well as 'that'. Do your duties in the world, and also fix your mind on the Lotus Feet of the Lord. Read books of devotion like the Bhagavata or the life of Chaitanya when you are alone and have nothing else to do."

It was about ten o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna finished a light supper of farina pudding and one or two luchis. After saluting him, M. and his friend took their leave.

Friday, September 7, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna and M. were talking in the Master's room at half past seven in the evening. No one else was present.

MASTER: "The other day I went to Calcutta. As I drove along the streets in the carriage, I observed that everyone's attention was fixed on low things. Everyone was brooding over his stomach and running after nothing but food. Everyone's mind was turned to 'woman and gold'. I saw only one or two with their attention fixed on higher things, with their minds turned to God."

M: "The present age has aggravated this stomach-worry. Trying to imitate the English, people have turned their attention to more luxuries; therefore their wants have also increased."

MASTER: "What do the English think about God?"

M: "They believe in a formless God."

MASTER: "That is also one of our beliefs."

Master's deep spiritual experiences

For a time Master and disciple remained silent. Then Sri Ramakrishna began to describe his experiences of Brahman.

MASTER: "One day I had the vision of Consciousness, non-dual and indivisible. At first it had been revealed to me that there were innumerable men, animals, and other creatures. Among them there were aristocrats, the English, the Mussalmans, myself, scavengers, dogs, and also a bearded Mussalman with an earthenware tray of rice in his hand. He put a few grains of rice into everybody's mouth. I too tasted a little.

"Another day I saw rice, vegetables, and other food-stuff, and filth and dirt as well, lying around. Suddenly the soul came out of my body and, like a flame, touched everything. It was like a protruding tongue of fire and tasted everything once, even the excreta. It was revealed to me that all these are one Substance, the non-dual and indivisible Consciousness.

"Another day it was revealed to me that I had devotees-my intimate companions, my very own. Thereafter I would climb to the roof of the kuthi as soon as the bells and the conch-shells of the evening service sounded in the temples, and cry out with a longing heart: 'Oh, where are you all? Come here! I am dying to see you!'

(To M.) "Well, what do you think of these visions?"

M: "God sports through you. This I have realized, that you are the instrument and God is the Master. God has created other beings as if with a machine, but yourself with His own hands."

MASTER: "Well, Hazra says that after the vision of God one acquires the six divine powers."

M: "Those who seek pure love don't want powers."

MASTER: "Perhaps Hazra was a poor man in his previous life, and that is why he wants so much to see the manifestation of power. He wants to know what I talk about with the cook. He says to me: 'You don't have to talk to the cook. I shall talk to the manager of the temple myself and see that you get everything you want.' (M. laughs aloud.) He talks to me that way and I say nothing."

M: "Many a time you have said that a devotee, who loves God for the sake of love does not care to see God's powers. A true devotee wants to see God as Gopala. In the beginning God becomes the magnet, and the devotee the needle. But in the end the devotee himself becomes the magnet, and God the needle; that is to say, God becomes small to His devotee."

MASTER: "Yes, it is just like the sun at dawn. You can easily look at that sun. It doesn't dazzle the eyes; rather it satisfies them. God becomes tender for the sake of His devotees. He appears before them, setting aside His powers."

Both remained silent for some time.

M: "Why should your visions not be real? If they are unreal, then the world is still more unreal; for there is only one mind that is the instrument of perception. Your pure mind sees those visions, and our ordinary minds see worldly objects."

MASTER: "I see that you have grasped the idea of unreality. Well, tell me what you think of Hazra."

M: "Oh, I don't know." (The Master laughs.)

MASTER: "Well, do you find me to be like anybody else?"

M: "No, sir."

MASTER: "Like any other paramahamsa?"

M: "No, sir. You can't be compared to anybody else."

MASTER (smiling): "Have you heard of a tree called the 'achina'?"

M: "No, sir."

MASTER: "There is a tree called by that name. But nobody knows what it is."

M: "Likewise, it is not possible to recognize you. The more a man understands you, the more uplifted he will be."

M. was silent. He said to himself: "The Master referred to 'the sun at dawn' and 'the tree unrecognizable by man'. Did he mean an Incarnation of God? Is this the play of God through man? Is the Master himself an Incarnation? Was this why he cried to the devotees from the roof of the kuthi: 'Where are you? Come to me!'?"

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the steps of the southeast verandah of the Kāli temple. Rākhāl, M., and Hazra were with him. He talked light-heartedly about his boyhood days.

When it was dusk he returned to his room and sat down on the small couch. Soon he went into samādhi and in that state began to talk to the Divine Mother. He said: "Mother, what is all this row about? Shall I go there? I shall go if You take me." The Master was to go to a devotee's house. Was it for this that he was asking the Divine Mother's permission?

Again he spoke to Her, perhaps praying about an intimate disciple:

"Mother, please make him stainless. Well, Mother, why have You given him only a particle?" Remaining silent a moment, he said: "Oh, I see. That will be enough for Your work."

Nature of the Divine Incarnation

In the same state he said, addressing the devotees: "That which is Brahman is verily Śakti. I address That, again, as the Mother. I call It Brahman when It is inactive, and Śakti when It creates, preserves, and destroys. It is like water, sometimes still and sometimes covered with waves. The Incarnation of God is a part of the lila of Śakti. The purpose of the Divine Incarnation is to teach man ecstatic love for God. The Incarnation is like the udder of the cow, the only place milk is to be got. God incarnates Himself as man. There is a great accumulation of divinity in an Incarnation, like the accumulation of fish in a deep hollow in a lake."

Some of the devotees wondered, "Is Sri Ramakrishna an Incarnation of God, like Krishna, Chaitanya, and Christ?"

Sunday, September 9, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna had finished his midday meal and was sitting on the small couch. Rākhāl , M., and Ratan were sitting on the floor. Ratan was the steward of Jadu Mallick's garden house and was devoted to the Master. Now and then Ram Chatterji and Hazra passed in or out of the room. It was about two o'clock.

Ratan told the Master that a yatra performance by Nilkantha had been arranged in Jadu Mallick's house in Calcutta.

RATAN (to the Master): "You must go. The date has been set."

MASTER: "That's good, I want to go. Nilkantha sings with great devotion."

A DEVOTEE: "That is true, sir."

MASTER: "Tears flow from his eyes as he sings. (To Ratan) I am thinking of spending the night in Calcutta when I go to see the yatra."

RATAN: "That will be fine."

Ram Chatterji and the other devotees asked Ratan about a theft in Jadu Mallick's house.

RATAN: "Yes, the golden sandals of the Deity were stolen from the shrine room in Jadu Babu's house. It has created an uproar. They are going to try to discover the thief by means of a 'charmed plate'. Everybody will sit in one room, and the plate will move in the direction of the man who stole the sandals."

MASTER (with a smile): "How does the plate move? By itself?"

RATAN: "No. A man presses it to the ground."

A DEVOTEE: "It is a kind of sleight of hand. It is a clever trick."

MASTER: "The real cleverness is the cleverness by which one realizes God. That trick is the best of all tricks."

As the conversation went on, several Bengali gentlemen entered the room and, after saluting the Master, sat down. One of them was already known to Sri Ramakrishna. These gentlemen followed the cult of Tantra. The Master knew that one of them indulged in immoral acts in the name of religion. The Tantra rituals, under certain conditions, allow the mixing of men and women devotees. But Sri Ramakrishna regarded all women, even prostitutes, as manifestations of the Divine Mother. He addressed them all as "Mother".

MASTER (with a smile): "Where is Achalananda? My ideal is different from that of Achalananda and his disciples. As for myself, I look on all women as my mother."

The visiting gentlemen sat silent.

Master's attitude toward women

MASTER: "Every woman is a mother to me. Achalananda used to stay here now and then. He would drink a great deal of consecrated wine. Hearing about my attitude toward women, he stubbornly justified his own views. He insisted again and again: 'Why should you not recognize the attitude of a "hero" toward women? Won't you admit the injunctions of Śiva? Śiva Himself is the author of the Tantra, which prescribes various disciplines, including the "heroic".' I said to him: 'But, my dear sir, I don't know. I don't like these ideas. To me every woman is a mother.'

"Achalananda did not support his own children. He said to me, 'God will support them.' I said nothing. But this is the way I felt about it: 'Who will support your children? I hope your renunciation of wife and children is not a way of earning money. People will think you are a holy man because you have renounced everything: so they will give you money. In that way you will earn plenty of money.'

"Spiritual practice with a view to winning a lawsuit and earning money, or to helping others win in court and acquire property, shows a very mean understanding.

Good use of money

"Money enables a man to get food and drink, build a house, worship the Deity, serve devotees and holy men, and help the poor when he happens to meet them. These are the good uses of money. Money is not meant for luxuries or creature comforts or for buying a position in society.

"People practise various Tantrik disciplines to acquire supernatural powers. How mean such people are! Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Friend, by acquiring one of the eight siddhis you may add a little to your power, but you will not be able to realize Me.' One cannot get rid of maya as long as one exercises supernatural powers. And maya begets egotism.

"Body and wealth are impermanent. Why go to so much trouble for their sakes? Just think of the plight of the hathayogis. Their attention is fixed on one ideal only-longevity. They do not aim at the realization of God at all. They practise such exercises as washing out the intestines, drinking milk through a tube, and the like, with that one aim in view.

"There was once a goldsmith whose tongue suddenly turned up and stuck to his palate. He looked like a man in samādhi. He became completely inert and remained so a long time. People came to worship him. After several years, his tongue suddenly returned to its natural position, and he became conscious of things as before. So he went back to his work as a goldsmith.(All laugh.)

"These are physical things and have nothing to do with God. There was a man who knew eighty-two postures and talked big about yoga-samādhi. But inwardly he was drawn to 'woman and gold'. Once he found a bank-note worth several thousand rupees. He could not resist the temptation, and swallowed it, thinking he would get it out somehow later on. The note was got out of him all right, but he was sent to jail for three years. In my guilelessness I used to think that the man had made great spiritual progress. Really, I say it upon my word!

Master's renunciation of money

"Mahendra Pal of Sinthi once gave Ramlal five rupees. Ramlal told me about it after he had gone. I asked him what the gift was for, and Ramlal said that it was meant for me. I thought it might enable me to payoff some of my debt for milk. That night I went to bed and, if you will believe me, I suddenly woke up with a pain. I felt as if a cat were scratching inside my chest. I at once went to Ramlal and asked him: 'For whom did Mahendra give this money? Was it for your aunt?'7 'No,' said Ramlal, 'it is meant for you.' I said to him, 'Go and return the money at once, or I shall have no peace of mind.' Ramlal returned the money early in the morning and I felt relieved.

"Once a rich man came here and said to me: 'Sir, you must do something so that I may win my lawsuit. I have heard of your reputation and so I have come here.' 'My dear sir,' I said to him, 'you have made a mistake. I am not the person you are looking for; Achalananda is your man.'

"A true devotee of God does not care for such things as wealth or health. He thinks: 'Why should I practise spiritual austerities for creature comforts, money, or name and fame? These are all impermanent. They last only a day or two.' "

The visiting gentlemen took leave of the Master after saluting him. When they had departed, Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said to M., "You can never make a thief listen to religion. (All laugh.)

"Well, what do you think of Narendra?"

M: "He is splendid."

MASTER: "Yes. His intelligence is as great as his learning. Besides, he is gifted in music, both as a singer and player. Then too, he has control over his passions. He says he will never marry."

M: "You once said that one who constantly talks of his sin really becomes a sinner; he cannot extricate himself from sin. But if a man has firm faith that he is the son of God, then he makes rapid strides in spiritual life."

MASTER: "Yes, faith. What tremendous faith Krishnakishore had! He used to say: 'I have spoken the name of God once. That is enough. How can I remain a sinner? I have become pure and stainless.' One day Haladhāri said: 'Even Ajamila had to perform austerities to gratify God. Can one receive the grace of God without austerities? What will one gain by speaking the name of Narayana only once?' At these remarks Krishnakishore's anger knew no bounds. The next time he came to this garden to pick flowers he wouldn't even look at Haladhāri.

"Haladhāri's father was a great devotee. At bathing-time he would stand waist-deep in the water and meditate on God, uttering the sacred mantra; then the tears would flow from his eyes.

Krishnakishore's faith in God

"One day a holy man came to the bathing-place on the Ganges at Ariadaha. We talked about seeing him. Haladhāri said, 'What shall we gain by seeing the body of a man, a mere cage made of the five elements?' Krishnakishore heard about it and said: 'What? Did Haladhāri ask what would be gained by visiting a holy man? By repeating the name of Krishna or Rāma a man transforms his physical body into a spiritual body. To such a man everything is the embodiment of Spirit. To him Krishna is the embodiment of Spirit, and His sacred Abode is the embodiment of Spirit.' He also said, 'A man who utters the name of Krishna or Rāma even once reaps the result of a hundred sandhyas.'

"One of his sons chanted the name of Rāma on his death-bed. Krishnakishore said, 'He has nothing to worry about; he has chanted the name of Rāma.' But now and then he wept. After all, it was the death of his own son.

□Nothing whatsoever is achieved by the performance of worship, japa, and devotions, without faith. Isn't that so?"

M: "Yes, sir. That is true."

MASTER: "I see people coming to the Ganges to bathe. They talk their heads off about everything under the sun. The widowed aunt says: 'Without me they cannot perform the Durga Puja. I have to look after even the smallest detail. Again, I have to supervise everything when there is a marriage festiva1 in the family, even the bed of the bride and groom.'"

M: "Why should we blame them? How else will they pass the time?"

MASTER (with a smile): "Some people have their shrine rooms in their attics. The women arrange the offerings and flowers and make the sandal-paste. But, while doing so, they never say a word about God. The burden of the conversation is: 'What shall we cook today? I couldn't get good vegetables in the market. That curry was delicious yesterday. That boy is my cousin. Hello there! Have you that job still? Don't ask me how I am. My Hari is no more.' Just fancy! They talk of such things in the shrine room at the time of worship!"

M: "Yes, sir, it is so in the majority of cases. As you say, can one who has passionate yearning for God continue formal worship and devotions for long?"

Sri Ramakrishna and M. were now conversing alone.

M: "Sir, if it is God Himself who has become everything, then why do people have so many different feelings?"

MASTER: "Undoubtedly God exists in all beings as the All-pervading Spirit, but the manifestations of His Power are different in different beings. In some places there is a manifestation of the power of Knowledge; in others, of the power of ignorance. In some places there is a greater manifestation of power than in others. Don't you see that among human beings there are cheats and gamblers, to say nothing of men who are like tigers. I think of them as the 'cheat God', the 'tiger God'."

M. (with a smile): "We should salute them from a distance. If we go near the 'tiger God' and embrace him, he may devour us."

MASTER: "He and His Power, Brahman and Its Power-nothing else exists but this. In a hymn to Rāma, Nārada said: 'O Rāma, You are Śiva, and Sita is Bhagavati; You are Brahma, and Sita is Brahmani; You are Indra, and Sita is Indrani; You are Narayana, and Sita is Lakshmi. O Rāma, You are the symbol of all that is masculine, and Sita of all that is feminine.' "

M: "Sir, what is the Spirit-form of God like?"

Sri Ramakrishna reflected a moment and said softly: "Shall I tell you what it is like? It is like water. . . . One understands all this through spiritual discipline.

"Believe in the form of God. It is only after attaining Brahmajnana that one sees non-duality, the oneness of Brahman and Its Śakti. Brahman and Śakti are identical, like fire and its power to burn. When a man thinks of fire, he must also think of its power to burn. Again, when he thinks of the power to burn, he must also think of fire. Further, Brahman and Śakti are like milk and its whiteness, water and its wetness.

Vijnāna or Transcendental Knowledge

"But there is a stage beyond even Brahmajnana. After jnāna comes vijnāna. He who is aware of knowledge is also aware of ignorance. The sage Vasishtha was stricken with grief at the death of his hundred sons. Asked by Lakshmana why a man of knowledge

should grieve for such a reason, Rāma said, 'Brother, go beyond both knowledge and ignorance.' He who has knowledge has ignorance also. If a thorn has entered your foot, get another thorn and with its help take out the first; then throwaway the second also."

M: "Should one throwaway both knowledge and ignorance?"

MASTER: "Yes. That is why one should acquire vijnāna. You see, he who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. He who is aware of happiness is also aware of suffering. He who is aware of virtue is also aware of vice. He who is aware of good is also aware of evil. He who is aware of holiness is also aware of unholiness. He who is aware of 'I' is also aware of 'you'.

"What is vijnāna? It is knowing God in a special way. The awareness and conviction that fire exists in wood is jnāna, knowledge. But to cook rice on that fire, eat the rice, and get nourishment from it is vijnāna. To know by one's inner experience that God exists is jnāna. But to talk to Him, to enjoy Him as Child, as Friend, as Master, as Beloved, is vijnāna. The realization that God alone has become the universe and all living beings is vijnāna.

"According to one school of thought, God cannot be seen. Who sees whom? Is God outside you, that you can see Him? One sees only oneself. Having once entered the 'black waters' of the ocean, the ship does not come back and so cannot describe what it experiences."

M: "It is true, sir. As you say, having climbed to the top of the monument, one becomes unaware of what is below: horses and carriages, men and women, houses, shops and offices, and so on."

MASTER: "I don't go to the Kāli temple nowadays. Is that an offence? At one time Narendra used to say, 'What? He still goes to the Kāli temple!' "

M: "Every day you are in a new state of mind. How can you ever offend God?"

MASTER: "Someone said to Sen, about Hriday: 'He is very ill. Please bring two pieces of cloth and a couple of shirts for him. We will send them to his village.' Sen offered only two rupees. How do you explain that? He has so much money, and yet he is so miserly! What do you say to that?"

M: "Those who seek God cannot behave that way-I mean those whose goal is the attainment of Knowledge."

MASTER: "God alone is the Reality and all else is unreal."

Saturday, September 22, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was seated in the drawing-room of Adhar's house in Calcutta, with Rākhāl , Adhar, M., Ishan, and other devotees. Many gentlemen of the neighbourhood were also present. It was afternoon.

The Master was very fond of Ishan. He had been a superintendent in the Accountant General's office, and later on his children also occupied high government positions. One of them was a class-mate of Narendra. Ishan's purse was always open for the poor and needy. When he retired from service, he devoted his time to spiritual practices and charity. He often visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar.

MASTER (to Ishan): "Please tell us the story of the boy who posted the letter."

ISHAN (with a smile): "A boy once heard that God is our Creator. So he wrote a letter to God, setting forth his prayers, and posted it. The address he put on the envelope was 'Heaven'."

MASTER (with a smile): "Did you hear that story? One succeeds in spiritual life when one develops a faith like that boy's. (To Ishan) Tell us about the renunciation of activities."

ISHAN: "After the attainment of God, religious duties such as the sandyha drop away. One day some people were sitting on the bank of the Ganges performing the sandyha. But one of them abstained from it. On being asked the reason, he said: 'I am observing asoucha. I cannot perform the sandyha ceremony.8 In my case the defilement is due to both a birth and a death. My mother, Ignorance, is dead, and my son, Self-Knowledge, has been born.'"

MASTER: "Tell us, also, how caste distinctions drop away when one attains Self-Knowledge."

ISHAN: "Sankaracharya was once climbing the steps after finishing his bath in the Ganges, when he saw just in front of him an untouchable who had a pack of dogs with him. 'You have touched me!' said Sankara. 'Revered sir,' said the pariah, 'I have not touched you, nor have you touched me. The Self is the Inner Ruler of all beings and cannot be contaminated. Is there any difference between the sun's reflection in wine and its reflection in the Ganges?' "

MASTER (with a smile): "And about harmony: how one can realize God through all paths."

Ishan (smiling): "Both Hari and Hara are derived from the same root. The difference is only in the pratyaya. In reality, He who is Hari is also Hara. If a man has faith in God, then it doesn't matter whom he worships."

MASTER: "And please tell us also how the heart of the sādhu is the greatest of all."

ISHAN: "This earth is the largest thing we see anywhere around us. But larger than the earth is the ocean, and larger than the ocean is the sky. But Vishnu, the Godhead, has covered earth, sky, and the nether world with one of His feet. And that foot of Vishnu is enshrined in the sādhu's heart. Therefore the heart of a holy man is the greatest of all."

The devotees were delighted with Ishan's words.

Ishan intended to retire to a solitary place and practise a special discipline of the Gayatri, through which Brahman is invoked. But the Master said that the Knowledge of Brahman was not possible without the complete destruction of worldliness. Further, he said that it was impossible for a man totally to withdraw his mind from the objects of the senses in the Kaliyuga, when his life was dependent on food. That is why the Master discouraged people from attempting the Vedic worship of Brahman and asked them to worship Śakti, the Divine Mother, who is identical with Brahman.

MASTER (to Ishan): "Why do you waste your time simply repeating 'Neti, neti'? Nothing whatsoever can be specified about Brahman, except that It exists.

"Whatever we see or think about is the manifestation of the glory of the Primordial Energy, the Primal Consciousness. Creation, preservation, and destruction, living beings and the universe, and further, meditation and the meditator, bhakti and prema-all these are manifestations of the glory of that Power.

"But Brahman is identical with Its Power. On returning from Ceylon, Hanuman praised Rāma, saying: 'O Rāma, You are the Supreme Brahman, and Sita is Your Śakti. You and She are identical' Brahman and Śakti are like the snake and. its wriggling motion. Thinking of the snake, one must think of its wriggling motion, and thinking of its wriggling motion, one must think of the snake. Or they are like milk and its whiteness. Thinking of milk, one has to think of its colour, that is, whiteness, and thinking of the whiteness of milk, one has to think of milk itself. Or they are like water and its wetness. Thinking of water, one has to think of its wetness, and thinking of the wetness of water, one has to think of water.

"This Primal Power, Mahamaya, has covered Brahman. As soon as the covering is withdrawn, one realizes: 'I am what I was before', 'I am Thou; Thou art I'.

"As long as that covering remains, the Vedantic formula 'I am He', that is, man is the Supreme Brahman, does not rightly apply. The wave is part of the water, but the water is not part of the wave. As long as that covering remains, one should call on God as Mother. Addressing God, the devotee should say, 'Thou art the Mother and I am Thy child; Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant.' It is good to have the attitude of the servant toward the master. From this relationship of master and servant spring up other attitudes: the attitude of serene love for God, the attitude of friend toward friend, and so forth. When the master loves his servant, he may say to him, 'Come, sit by my side; there is no difference between you and me.' But if the servant comes forward of his own will to sit by the master, will not the master be angry?

"God's play on earth as an Incarnation is the manifestation of the glory of the ChitŚakti, the Divine Power. That which is Brahman is also Rāma, Krishna, and Śiva."

ISHAN: "Yes, sir. Both Hari and Hara are derived from the same root. The difference lies only in the pratyaya."

MASTER: "Yes, there is only One without a second. The Vedas speak of It as 'Om Satchidananda Brahma', the Puranas as 'Om Satchidananda Krishna,' and the Tantra as 'Om Satchidananda Śiva'.

"The ChitŚakti, as Mahamaya, has deluded all with ignorance. It is said in the Adhyātma Rāmāyana that when the rishis saw Rāma, they prayed to Him in these words only: 'O Rāma, please do not delude us with Your world-bewitching maya.' "

ISHAN: "What is this maya?"

MASTER: "Whatever you see, think, or hear is maya. In a word, 'woman and gold' is the covering of maya.

"There is no harm in chewing betel-leaf, eating fish, smoking, or rubbing the body with oil. What will one achieve by renouncing only these things? The one thing needful is the renunciation of 'woman and gold'. That renunciation is the real and supreme renunciation. Householders should go into solitude now and then, to practise spiritual discipline in order to cultivate devotion to God; they should renounce mentally. But the sannyasi should renounce both mentally and physically.

"I once said to Keshab, 'How can a typhoid patient be cured if he remains in a room where a pitcher of water and a jar of pickles are kept?' Now and then one should live in solitude ".

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, what do you think of the Navavidhan? It seems to me like a hotchpotch of everything."

MASTER: "Some say it is a modern thing. That sets me wondering: 'Then is the God of the Brahmo Samaj a new God?' The Brahmos speak of their cult as the Navavidhan, as a New Dispensation. Well, it may be so. Who knows? There are six systems of philosophy; so perhaps it is like one of these.

"But do you know where those who speak of the formless God make their mistake? It is where they say that God is formless only, and that those who differ with them are wrong.

"But I know that God is both with and without form. And He may have many more aspects. It is possible for Him to be everything.

(To Ishan) "The ChitŚakti, Mahamaya, has become the twenty-four cosmic principles. One day as I was meditating, my mind wandered away to Rashke's house. He is a scavenger. I said to my mind, 'Stay there, you rogue!' The Divine Mother revealed to me that the men and women in this house were mere masks; inside them was the same Divine Power, Kundalini, that rises up through the six spiritual centres of the body.

"Is the Primal Energy man or woman? Once at Kamarpukur I saw the worship of Kāli in the house of the Lahas. They put a sacred thread.11 on the image of the Divine

Mother. One man asked, 'Why have they put the sacred thread on the Mother's person?' The master of the house said: 'Brother, I see that you have rightly understood the Mother. But I do not yet know whether the Divine Mother is male or female.'

"It is said that Mahamaya swallowed Śiva. When the six centres in Her were awakened, Śiva came out through Her thigh. Then Śiva created the Tantra philosophy.

"Take refuge in the ChitŚakti, the Mahamaya."

ISHAN: "Please bestow your grace on me."

MASTER: "Say to God with a guileless heart, 'O God, reveal Thyself to me.' And weep. Pray to God, 'O God, keep my mind away from "woman, and gold".' And dive deep. Can a man get pearls by floating or swimming on the surface? He must dive deep.

Faith in the guru

"One must get instruction from a guru. Once a man was looking for a stone image of Śiva. Someone said to him: 'Go to a certain river. There you will find a tree. Near it is a whirlpool. Dive into the water there, and you will find the image of Śiva.' So I say that one must get instruction from a teacher."

ISHAN: "That is true, sir."

MASTER: "It is Satchidananda that comes to us in the form of the guru. If a man is initiated by a human guru, he will not achieve anything if he regards his guru as a mere man. The guru should be regarded as the direct manifestation of God. Only then can the disciple have faith in the mantra given by the guru. Once a man has faith he, achieves all. The sudra Ekalavya learnt archery in the forest before a clay image of Drona; He worshipped the image as the living Drona; that by itself enabled him to attain mastery in archery.

"Don't mix intimately with brahmin pundits. Their only concern is to earn money. I have seen brahmin priests reciting the Chandi while performing the swastyayana. It is hard to tell whether they are reading the sacred book or something else. They turn half the pages without reading them. (All laugh.)

"A nail-knife suffices to kill oneself. One needs sword and shield to kill others. That is the purpose of the sastras.

"One doesn't really need to study the different scriptures. If one has no discrimination, one doesn't achieve anything through mere scholarship, even though one studies all the six systems of philosophy. Call on God, crying to Him secretly in solitude. He will give all that you need."

Sri Ramakrishna had heard that Ishan was building a house on the bank of the Ganges for the practice of spiritual discipline. He asked Ishan eagerly: "Has the house been

built? Let me tell you that the less people know of your spiritual life, the better it will be for you. Devotees endowed with sattva meditate in a secluded corner or in a forest, or withdraw into the mind. Sometimes they meditate inside the mosquito net."

Now and then Ishan invited Hazra to his house. Hazra had a craze for outward purity. Sri Ramakrishna often discouraged him in this.

MASTER (to Ishan): "Let me tell you another thing. Don't be over-fastidious about outward purity. Once a sādhu felt very thirsty. A water-carrier was carrying water in his skin water-bag, and offered the water to the holy man. The sādhu asked if the skin was clean. The carrier said: 'Revered sir; my skin bag is perfectly clean. But inside your skin are all sorts of filthy things. That is why I can ask you to drink water from my skin. It won't injure you.' By 'your skin', the carrier meant the body, the belly, and so forth.

"Have faith in the name of God. Then you won't need even to go to holy places." Sri Ramakrishna sang, intoxicated with divine fervour:

Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,

So long as I can breathe my last with Kāli's name upon my lips?

Ishan remained silent.

MASTER (to Ishan): "Tell me if you have any more doubts."

ISHAN: "You said everything when you spoke of faith."

MASTER: "God can be realized by true faith alone. And the realization is hastened if you believe everything about God. The cow that picks and chooses its food gives milk only in dribblets, but if she eats all kinds of plants, then her milk flows in torrents.

"Once I heard a story. A man heard the command of God that he should see his Ideal Deity in a ram. He at once believed it. It is God who exists in all beings.

"A guru said to his disciple, 'It is Rāma alone who resides in all bodies.' The disciple was a man of great faith. One day a dog snatched a piece of bread from him and started to run away. He ran after the dog, with a jar of butter in his hand, and cried again and again: 'O Rāma, stand still a minute. That bread hasn't been buttered.'

"What tremendous faith Krishnakishore had! He used to say, 'By chanting "Om Krishna, Om Rāma", one gets the result of a million sandhyas.' Once he said to me secretly, 'I don't like the sandhya and other devotions any more; but don't tell anyone.'

"Sometimes I too feel that way. The Mother reveals to me that She Herself has become everything. One day I was coming from the pine-grove toward the Panchavati. A dog followed me. I stood still for a while near the Panchavati. The thought came to my mind that the Mother might say something to me through that dog.

"You were absolutely right when you said that through faith alone one achieves all."

ISHAN: "But we are householders."

MASTER: "What if you are? Through His grace even the impossible becomes possible. Ramprasad sang, 'This world is a mere framework of illusion.' Another man composed a song by way of reply:

This very world is a mansion of mirth;
Here I can eat, here drink and make merry.
Janaka's might was unsurpassed;
What did he lack of the world or the Spirit?
Holding to one as well as the other,
He drank his milk from a brimming cup!

"One should first realize God through spiritual discipline in solitude, and then live in the world. Only then can one be a King Janaka. What can you achieve otherwise?

"Further, take the case of Śiva. He has everything-Kartika, Ganesa, Lakshmi, and Sarasvati. Still, sometimes He dances in a state of divine fervour, chanting the name of Rāma, and sometimes He is absorbed in samādhi."

Chapter 14

INSTRUCTION TO VAISHNAVĀS AND BRĀHMOS

Sunday, September 23, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting in his room at Dakshineswar with Rākhāl , M., and other devotees. Hazra sat on the porch outside. The Master was conversing with the devotees.

MASTER (to a devotee): "Narendra doesn't like even you, nowadays. (To M.) Why didn't he come to see me at Adhar's house?

Eulogy of Narendra

"How versatile Narendra is! He is gifted in singing, in playing on instruments, and in studies. He is independent and doesn't care about anybody. The other day he was returning to Calcutta with Captain in his carriage. Captain begged Narendra to sit beside him, but he took a seat opposite. He didn't even look at Captain.

"What can a man achieve through mere scholarship? What is needed is prayer and spiritual discipline. Gauri of Indesh was both a scholar and a devotee. He was a worshipper of the Divine Mother. Now and then he would be overpowered with spiritual fervour. When he chanted a hymn to the Mother, the pundits would seem like earth-worms beside him. I too would be overcome with ecstasy.

"At first he was a bigoted worshipper of Śakti. He used to pick up tulsi leaves with a couple of sticks, so as not to touch them with his fingers. (All laugh.) Then he went home. When he came back he didn't behave that way any more. He gave remarkable interpretations of Hindu mythology. He would say that the ten heads of Ravana represented the ten organs. Kumbhakarna was the symbol, of tamas, Ravana of rajas, and Bibhishana of sattva. That was why Bibhishana obtained favour with Rāma."

After the Master's midday meal, while he was resting, Ram, Tārak, and some other devotees arrived from Calcutta.

Nityagopal, Tārak, and several others were staying with Ram, a house-holder disciple of the Master. Nityagopal was always in an exalted spiritual mood. Tārak's mind, too, was always indrawn; he seldom exchanged words with others. Ram looked after their physical needs. Rākhāl now and then spent a few days at Adhar's house.

RAM (to the Master): "We have been taking lessons on the drum."

MASTER (to Ram): "Nityagopal too?"

RAM: "No, sir. He plays a little."

MASTER: "And Tārak?"

RAM: "He knows a good deal."

MASTER: "Then he won't keep his eyes on the ground so much. If the mind is much directed to something else, it doesn't dwell deeply on God."

RAM: "I have been studying the drum only to accompany the kirtan."

MASTER (to M.): "I hear that you too are taking singing lessons. Is that so?"

M: "No, sir. I just open my mouth now and then."

MASTER: "Have you practised that song: 'O Mother, make me mad with Thy love'? If you have, please sing it. The song expresses my ideal perfectly."

The conversation turned to Hazra's hatred for certain people, which Sri Ramakrishna did not like.

MASTER (to the devotees): "I used frequently to visit a certain house at Kamarpukur. The boys of the family were of my age. The other day they came here and spent two or three days with me. Their mother, like Hazra, used to hate people. Then something happened to her foot, and gangrene set in. On account of the foul smell, no one could enter her room. I told the incident to Hazra and asked him not to hate anyone."

Master in spiritual mood

Toward evening, as Sri Ramakrishna was standing in the northwest corner of the courtyard, he went into samādhi. In those days the Master remained almost always in an ecstatic state. He would lose consciousness of the world at the slightest suggestion from outside. But for scant conversation with visiting devotees, he remained in an indrawn mood and was unable to perform his daily worship and devotions.

Coming down to the relative world, he began to talk to the Divine Mother, still standing where he was. "O Mother," he said, "worship has left me, and japa also. Please see, Mother, that I do not become an inert thing. Let my attitude toward God be that of the servant toward the master. O Mother, let me talk about Thee and chant Thy holy name. I want to sing Thy glories. Give me a little strength of body that I may move about, that I may go to places where Thy devotees live, and sing Thy name."

In the morning Sri Ramakrishna had been to the Kāli temple to offer flowers at the Mother's feet.

Continuing, the Master said: "O Mother, I offered flowers at Thy feet this morning. I thought: 'That is good. My mind is again going back to formal worship.' Then why do I feel like this now? Why art Thou turning me into a sort of inert thing?"

The moon had not yet risen. It was a dark night. The Master, still in an abstracted mood, sat on the small couch in his room and continued his talk with the Divine Mother. He said: "Why this special discipline of the Gayatri? Why this jumping from this roof to that? Who told him to do it? Perhaps he is doing it of his own accord. . . . Well, he will practise a little of that discipline."

The previous day Sri Ramakrishna had discouraged Ishan about Vedic worship, saying that it was not suitable for the Kaliyuga. He had asked Ishan to worship God as the Divine Mother.

The Master said to M., "Are these all my fancies, or are they real?" M. remained silent with wonder at the Master's intimate relationship with the Divine Mother. He thought She must be within us as well as without. Indeed She must be very near us; or why should the Master speak to Her in a whisper?

Wednesday, September 26, 1883

There were very few devotees with the Master, for most of them came on Sundays. Rākhāl and Lātu were living with him the greater part of the time. M. arrived in the afternoon and found the Master seated on the small couch. The conversation turned to Narendra.

MASTER (to M.): "Have you seen Narendra lately? (With a smile) He said of me: 'He still goes to the Kāli temple, But he will not when he truly understands.' His people are very much dissatisfied with him because he comes here now and then. The other day he came here in a hired carriage, and Surendra paid for it. Narendra's aunt almost had a row with Surendra about it."

The Master left the couch and went to the northeast verandah, where Hazra, Kishori, Rākhāl , and a few other devotees were sitting.

MASTER (to M.): "How is it that you are here today? Have you no school?"

M: "Our school closed today at half past one."

MASTER: "Why so early?"

M: "Vidyasagar visited the school. He owns the school. So the boys get a half holiday whenever he comes."

Efficacy of truthfulness

MASTER: "Why doesn't Vidyasagar keep his word? 'If one who holds to truth and looks on woman as his mother does not realize God, then Tulsi is a liar.' If a man holds to truth he will certainly realize God. The other day Vidyasagar said he would come here and visit me. But he hasn't kept his word."

Difference between scholar and holy man

"There is a big difference between a scholar and a holy man. The mind of a mere scholar is fixed on 'woman and gold', but the sādhu's mind is on the Lotus Feet of Hari. A scholar says one thing and does another. But it is quite a different matter with a sādhu. The words and actions of a man who has given his mind to the Lotus Feet of God are altogether different. In Benares I saw a young sannyasi who belonged to the sect of Nanak.. He was the same age as you. He used to refer to me as the 'loving monk'. His sect has a monastery in Benares. I was invited there one day. I found that the mohant was like a housewife. I asked him, 'What is the way?' 'For the Kaliyuga', he said, 'the path of devotion as enjoined by Nārada.' He was reading a book. When the reading was over, he recited: 'Vishnu is in water, Vishnu is on land, Vishnu is on the mountain top; the whole world is pervaded by Vishnu.' At the end he said, 'Peace! Peace! Abiding Peace!'

Path of love suited to modern times

"One day he was reading the Gitā. He was so strict about his monastic rules that he would not read a holy book looking at a worldly man. So he turned his face toward me and his back on Mathur, who was also present. It was this holy man who told me of Nārada's path of devotion as suited to the people of the Kaliyuga."

M: "Are not sādhus of his class followers of the Vedānta?"

MASTER: "Yes, they are. But they also accept the path of devotion. The fact is that in the Kaliyuga one cannot wholly follow the path laid down in the Vedas. Once a man said to me that he would perform the Purascharana of the Gayatri. I said: 'Why don't you do that according to the Tantra? In the Kaliyuga the discipline of Tantra is very efficacious.'

"It is extremely difficult to perform the rites enjoined in the Vedas. Further, at the present time people lead the life of slaves It is said that those who serve others for twelve years or so become slaves. They acquire the traits of those they serve. While serving their masters they acquire the rajas, the tamas, the spirit of violence, the love of luxury, and the other traits of their masters. Not only do they serve their masters, but they also enjoy a pension after their term of service is over.

Description of various monks

"Once a Vedantic monk came here. He used to dance at the sight of a cloud. He would go into an ecstasy of joy over a rain-storm. He would get very angry if, anyone went near him when he meditated. One day I came to him while he was meditating, and that made him very cross. He discriminated constantly, 'Brahman alone is real and the world is illusory.' Since the appearance of diversity is due to maya, he walked about with a prism from a chandelier in his hand. One sees different colours through the prism; in reality there is no such thing as colour. Likewise, nothing exists, in reality, except Brahman. But there is an appearance of the manifold because of maya, egoism. He would not look at an object more than once, lest he should be deluded by maya and attachment. He would discriminate, while taking his bath, at the sight of birds flying in the. sky. He knew grammar. He stayed here for three days. One day he heard the

sound of a flute near the embankment and said that a man who had realized Brahman would go into samādhi at such a sound."

While talking about the monk, the Master showed his devotees the manners and movements of a paramahamsa: the gait of a child, face beaming with laughter, eyes swimming in joy, and body completely naked. Then he again took his seat on the small couch and poured out his soul-enthralling words.

MASTER (to M.): "I learnt Vedānta from Nangta: 'Brahman alone is real; the world is illusory.' The magician performs his magic. He produces a mango-tree which even bears mangoes. But this is all sleight of hand. The magician alone is real."

M: "It seems that the whole of life is a long sleep. This much I understand, that we are not seeing things rightly. We perceive the world with a mind by which we cannot comprehend even the nature of the sky. So how can our perceptions be correct?"

MASTER: "There is another way of looking at it. We do not see the sky rightly. It looks as if the sky were touching the ground at the horizon. How can a man see correctly? His mind is delirious, like the mind of a typhoid patient."

The Master sang in his sweet voice:

What a delirious fever is this that I suffer from!
O Mother, Thy grace is my only cure. . . .

Continuing, the Master said: "Truly it is a state of delirium. Just see how worldly men quarrel among themselves. No one knows what they quarrel about. Oh, how they quarrel! 'May such and such a thing befall you!' How much shouting! How much abuse!"

M: "I said to Kishori: The box is empty; there is nothing inside. But two men pull at it from either side, thinking the box contains money.' Well, the body alone is the cause of all this mischief, isn't it? The jnanis see all this and say to themselves, 'What a relief one feels when this pillow-case of the body drops off.'"

The Master and M. went toward the Kāli temple.

MASTER: "Why should you say such things? This world may be a 'frame work of illusion', but it is also said that it is a 'mansion of mirth'. Let the body remain. One can also turn this world into a mansion of mirth."

M: "But where is unbroken bliss in this world?"

MASTER: "Yes, where is it?"

Sri Ramakrishna stood in front of the shrine of Kāli and prostrated himself before the Divine Mother. M. followed him. Then the Master sat on the lower floor in front of the shrine room, facing the blissful image, and leaned against a pillar of the natmandir. He

wore a red-bordered cloth, part of which was on his shoulder and back. M. sat by his side.

M: "Since there is no unbroken happiness in the world, why should one assume a body at all? I know that the body is meant only to reap the results of past action. But who knows what sort of action it is performing now? The unfortunate part is that we are being crushed."

MASTER: "If a pea falls into filth, it grows into a pea-plant none the less."

M: "But still there are the eight bonds."

Divine grace removes bondage

MASTER: "They are not eight bonds, but eight fetters. But what if they are? These fetters fall off in a moment, by the grace of God. Do you know what it is like? Suppose a room has been kept dark a thousand years. The moment a man brings a light into it, the darkness vanishes. Not little by little. Haven't you seen the magician's feat? He takes string with many knots, and ties one end to something, keeping the other in his hand. Then he shakes the string once or twice, and immediately all the knots come undone. But another man cannot untie the knots however he may try. All the knots of ignorance come undone in the twinkling of an eye, through the guru's grace.

"Well, can you tell me why Keshab Sen has changed so much lately? He used to come here very often. He learnt here how to bow low before a holy man. One day I told him that one should not salute a holy man as he had been doing. Harish says rightly: 'All the cheques must be approved here. Only then will they be cashed in the bank.'" (Laughter.)

M. listened to these words breathlessly. He began to realize that Satchidananda, in the form of the guru, passes the "cheque".

MASTER: "Do not reason. Who can ever know God? I have heard it from Nangta, once for all, that this whole universe is only a fragment of Brahman.

"Hazra is given to too much calculation. He says, 'This much of God has become the universe and this much is the balance.' My head aches at his calculations. I know that I know nothing. Sometimes I think of God as good, and sometimes as bad. What can I know of Him?"

M: "It is true, sir. Can anyone ever know God? Each thinks, with his little bit of intelligence, that he has understood all of God. As you say, an ant went to a sugar hill and, finding that one grain of. sugar filled its stomach, thought that the next time it would take the entire hill into its hole."

Surrender to the Divine Mother

MASTER: "Who can ever know God? I don't even try. I only call on Him as Mother. Let Mother do whatever She likes. I shall know Her if it is Her will; but I shall be happy to

remain ignorant if She wills otherwise. My nature is that of a kitten. It only cries, 'Mew, mew!' The rest it leaves to its mother. The mother cat puts the kitten sometimes in the kitchen and sometimes on the master's bed. The young child wants only his mother. He doesn't know how wealthy his mother is, and he doesn't even want to know. He knows only, 'I have a mother; why should I worry?' Even the child of the maidservant knows that he has a mother. If he quarrels with the son of the master, he says: 'I shall tell my mother. I have a mother.' My attitude, too, is that of a child."

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna caught M.'s attention and said, touching his own chest: "Well, there must be something here. Isn't that so?"

M. looked wonderingly at the Master. He said to himself: "Does the Mother Herself dwell in the Master's heart? Is it the Divine Mother who has assumed this human body for the welfare of humanity?"

Sri Ramakrishna was praying to the Divine Mother: "O Mother! O Embodiment of Om! Mother, how many things people say about Thee! But I don't understand any of them. I don't know anything, Mother. I have taken refuge at Thy feet. I have sought protection in Thee. O Mother, I pray only that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet, love that seeks no return. And Mother, do not delude me with Thy world-bewitching maya. I seek Thy protection. I have taken refuge in Thee."

The evening worship in the temples was over. Sri Ramakrishna was again seated in his room with M.

M. had been visiting the Master for the past two years and, had received his grace and blessings. He had been told that God was both with form and without form, that He assumed forms for the sake of His devotees. To the worshipper of the formless God, the Master said: "Hold to your conviction, but remember that all is possible with God. He has form, and again, He is formless. He can be many things more."

MASTER (to M.): "You have accepted an ideal, that of God without form-isn't that so?"

M: "Yes, sir. But I also believe what you say-that all is possible with God. It is quite possible for God to have forms.

MASTER: "Good. Remember further that, as Consciousness, He pervades the entire universe of the living and non-living."

M: "I think of Him as the consciousness in conscious beings."

MASTER: "Stick to that ideal now. There is no need of tearing down and changing one's attitude. You will gradually come to realize that the consciousness in conscious beings is the Consciousness of God. He alone is Consciousness.

"Let me ask you one thing. Do you feel attracted to money and treasures?"

M: "No, sir. But I think of earning money in order to be free from anxiety, to be able to think of God without worry."

MASTER: "Oh, that's perfectly natural."

M: "Is it greed? I don't think so."

MASTER: "You are right. Otherwise, who will look after your children? What will become of them if you feel that you are not the doer?"

M: "I have heard that one cannot attain Knowledge as long as one has the consciousness of duty. Duty is like the scorching sun."

MASTER: "Keep your present attitude. It will be different when the consciousness of duty drops away of itself."

They remained silent a few minutes.

M: "To enter the world after attaining partial knowledge! Why, it is like dying in full consciousness, as in cholera!"

MASTER: "Oh, Ram! Ram!"

The idea in M.'s mind was that just as a cholera patient feels excruciating pain at the time of death, because of retaining consciousness, so also a Jnāni with partial knowledge must feel extremely miserable leading the life of the world, which he knows to be illusory.

M: "People who are completely ignorant are like typhoid patients, who remain unconscious at the time of death and so do not feel the pain."

MASTER: "Tell me, what does one attain through money? Jaygopal Sen is such a wealthy man; but he complains that his children don't obey him."

M: "Is poverty the only painful thing in the world? There are the six passions besides. Then disease and grief."

MASTER: "And also name and fame, the desire to win people's recognition. Well, what do you think my attitude is?"

M: "It is like that of a man just awakened from sleep. He becomes aware of himself. You are always united with God."

MASTER: "Do you ever dream of me?"

M: "Yes, sir. Many times."

MASTER: "How? Did you dream of me as giving you instruction?"

M. remained silent.

MASTER: "If you ever see me instructing you, then know that it is Satchidananda Himself that does so."

M. related his dream experiences to Sri Ramakrishna, who listened to them attentively.

MASTER (to M.): "That is very good. Don't reason any more. You are a follower of Śakti."

Wednesday, October 10, 1883

Visit to Adhar's house

Adhar had invited the Master to come to his house on the occasion of the Durga Puja festival. It was the third day of the worship of the Divine Mother. When Sri Ramakrishna arrived at Adhar's house, he found Adhar's friend Sarada, Balarām's father, and Adhar's neighbours and relatives waiting for him.

The Master went into the worship hall to see the evening worship. When it was over, he remained standing there in an abstracted mood and sang in praise of the Divine Mother:

Glories of the Divine Mother
Out of my deep affliction rescue me, O Redeemer!

Terrified by the threats of the King of Death am I!
Left to myself, I shall perish soon;
Save me, oh, save me now, I pray!
Mother of all the worlds! Thou, the Support of mankind!
Thou, the Bewitcher of all, the Mother of all that has life!
Vrindāvan's charming Radha art Thou,
Dearest playmate of Braja's Beloved.
Blissful comrade of Krishna, well-spring of Krishna's lila,
Child of Himālaya, best of the gopis, beloved of Govinda!
Sacred Ganga, Giver of moksha!
Śakti! The universe sings Thy praise.
Thou art the Spouse of Śiva, the Ever-blessed, the All;
Sometimes Thou takest form and sometimes art absolute.
Eternal Beloved of Mahādeva,
Who can fathom Thine infinite glories?

The Master went to Adhar's drawing-room on the second floor and took a seat, surrounded by the guests. Still in a mood of divine fervour, he said: "Gentlemen, I have eaten. Now go and enjoy the feast." Was the Master hinting that the Divine Mother had partaken of Adhar's offering? Did he identify himself with the Divine Mother and therefore say, "I have eaten"?

Then, addressing the Divine Mother, he continued: "Shall I eat, O Mother? Or will You eat? O Mother, the very Embodiment of the Wine of Divine Bliss!" Did the Master look on himself as one with the Divine Mother? Had the Mother incarnated Herself as the Son to instruct mankind in the ways of God? Was this why the Master said, "I have eaten"?

In that state of divine ecstasy Sri Ramakrishna saw the six centres in his body, and the Divine Mother dwelling in them. He sang a song to that effect.

Again he sang:

My mind is overwhelmed with wonder,
Pondering the Mother's mystery;
Her very name removes
The fear of Kala, Death himself;
Beneath Her feet lies Maha-Kala.

Why should Her hue be kala, black?
Many the forms of black, but She
Appears astoundingly black;
When contemplated in the heart,
She lights the lotus that blossoms there.

Her form is black, and She is named
Kāli, the Black One. Blacker than black
Is She! Beholding Her,
Man is bewitched for evermore;
No other form can he enjoy.

In wonderment asks Ramprasad:
Where dwells this Woman so amazing?
At Her mere name, his mind
Becomes at once absorbed in Her,
Though he has never yet beheld Her.

The fear of the devotees flies away if they but seek shelter at the feet of the Divine Mother. Was that why the Master sang the following song?:

I have surrendered my soul at the fearless feet of the Mother;
Am I afraid of Death any more?
Unto the tuft of hair on my head
Is tied the almighty mantra, Mother Kāli's name.
My body I have sold in the market-place of the world
And with it have bought Sri Durga's name.
Deep within my heart I have planted the name of Kāli,
The Wish-fulfilling Tree of heaven;
When Yama, King of Death, appears,
To him I shall open my heart and show it growing there.
I have cast out from me my six unflagging foes;

Ready am I to sail life's sea,
Crying, "To Durga, victory!"

Sarada was stricken with grief on account of his son's death. So Adhar had taken him to Dakshineswar to visit the Master. Sarada was a devotee of Sri Chaitanya. Sri Ramakrishna looked at him and was inspired with the ideal of Gaurānga.

He sang:

Why has My body turned so golden? It is not time for this to be:
Many the ages that must pass, before as Gaurānga I appear.
Here in the age of Dwapara My sport is not yet at an end;
How strange this transformation is!
The peacock glistens, all of gold; arid golden, too, the cuckoo gleams!
Everything around Me here has turned to gold! Naught else appears
But gold, whichever way I look.
What can it mean, this miracle, that everything I see is gold?

Ah, I can guess its meaning now:

Radha has come to Mathura, and that is why My skin is gold.
For she is like the bhramara, and so has given Me her hue.
Dark blue My body was but now; yet in the twinkling of an eye
It turned to gold. Have I become Radha by contemplating her?

I cannot imagine where I am-in Mathura or Navadvip.
But how could this have come to pass?
Not yet is Balarama born as Nitai, nor has Nārada
Become Srivas, nor Yaśoda as Mother Sachi yet returned.
Then why should I, among them all, alone assume a golden face?
Not yet is Father Nanda born as Jagannath; then why should I
Be thus transmuted into gold?
Perhaps because in Mathura sweet Radha has appeared, My skin
Has borrowed Gaurānga's golden hue.

Sri Ramakrishna sang again, still overpowered with the ideal of Gaurānga:

Surely Gaurānga is lost in a state of blissful ecstasy;
In an exuberance of joy, he laughs and weeps and dances and sings.
He takes a wood for Vrindāvan, the Ganges for the blue Jamuna;
Loudly he sobs and weeps. Yet, though he is all gold without,
He is all black within-black with the blackness of Krishna!

The Master continued to sing, assuming the attitude of a woman devotee infatuated with love for Gaurānga:

Why do my neighbours raise such a scandal?
Why do they cast aspersions upon me
Simply because of Gaurānga?
How can they understand my feelings?
How can I ever explain?
Can I ever explain at all?
Alas, to whom shall I explain it?
Ah, but they make me die of shame!
Once on a time, at the house of Srivas,
Gora was loudly singing the kirtan,
When, on the ground of the courtyard,
Falling, he rolled in an ecstasy.
I, who was standing near him,
Seeing him where he lay entranced.
Was suddenly lost to outward sense.
Until the wife of Srivas revived me.

Another day, in the bhaktas' procession,

Gora was sweetly singing the kirtan;
Clasping the outcastes to him,
He softened the unbelievers' hearts.
Through Nadia's market-place
He chanted Lord Hari's holy name.
I followed the throng, and from close by
Caught a glimpse of his golden feet.

Once by the Ganges' bank he stood,
His body bright as the sun and moon
Charming all with his beauty.
I too had come, to fetch some water,
And, as I looked from one side,
My water-jar slipped and fell to the ground.
My sister-in-law, the gossip, saw me,
And now she is spreading it everywhere.

Balarām's father was a Vaishnava; hence the Master also sang of the divine love of the gopis for their beloved Krishna:

I have not found my Krishna, O friend! How cheerless my home without Him!
Ah, if Krishna could only be the hair upon my head,
Carefully I should braid it then, and deck it with bakul-flowers;

Carefully I should fashion the braids out of my Krishna-hair.
Krishna is black, and black is my hair; black would be one with black!
Ah, if Krishna could only be the ring I wear in my nose,
Always from my nose He would hang, and my two lips could touch Him.
But it can never be, alas! Why should I idly dream?
Why should Krishna care at all to be the ring in my nose?

Ah, if Krishna could only be the bracelets on my arms,
Always He would cling to my wrists, and proudly I should walk,
Shaking my bracelets to make them sound, shaking my arms to show them;
Down the king's highway I should walk, wearing my Krishna-bracelets.

Balarām's father was a wealthy man with estates in different parts of Orissa. An orthodox member of the Vaishnava sect, he had built temples and arranged for distribution of food to the pilgrims at various holy places. He had been spending the last years of his life in Vrindāvan. The Vaishnavas, for the most part, are bigoted in their religious views. Some of them harbour malicious feelings toward the followers of the Tantra and Vedānta. But Sri Ramakrishna never encouraged such a narrow outlook. According to his teachings, through earnestness and yearning all lovers of God will ultimately reach the same goal. The Master began the conversation in order to broaden the religious views of Balarām's father.

Master's harmony of religions

MASTER (to M.): "Once I thought, 'Why should I be one-sided?' Therefore I was initiated into Vaishnavism in Vrindāvan and took the garb of a Vaishnava monk. I spent three days practising the Vaishnava discipline. Again, at Dakshineswar I was initiated into the mystery of Rāmā worship. I painted my forehead with a long mark and put on a string with a diamond round my neck. But after a few days I gave them up.

"A certain man had a tub. People would come to him to have their clothes dyed. The tub contained a solution of dye. Whatever colour a man wanted for his cloth, he would get by dipping the cloth in the tub. One man was amazed to see this and said to the dyer, 'Please give me the dye you have in your tub.' "

Was the Master hinting that people professing different religions would come to him and have their spiritual consciousness awakened according to their own ideals?

MASTER (to Balarām's father): "Don't read books any more. But you may read books on devotion, such as the life of Chaitanya.

"The whole thing is to love God and taste His sweetness. He is sweetness and the devotee is its enjoyer. The devotee drinks the sweet Bliss of God. Further, God is the lotus and the devotee the bee. The devotee sips the honey of the lotus.

"As a devotee cannot live without God, so also God cannot live without His devotee. Then the devotee becomes the sweetness, and God its enjoyer. The devotee becomes the lotus, and God the bee. It is the Godhead that has become these two in order to enjoy Its own Bliss. That is the significance of the episode of Radha and Krishna.

"At the beginning of spiritual life the devotee should observe such rites as pilgrimage, putting a string of beads around his neck, and so forth. But outward ceremonies gradually drop off as he attains the goal, the vision of God. Then his only activity is the repetition of God's name, and contemplation and meditation on Him.

"The pennies equivalent to sixteen rupees make a great heap. But sixteen silver coins do not look like such a big amount. Again, the quantity becomes much smaller when you change the sixteen rupees into one gold mohur. And if you change the gold into a tiny piece of diamond, people hardly notice it."

Orthodox Vaishnavas insist on the outer insignia of religion. They criticize any devotee who does not wear these marks. Was that why the Master said that, after the vision of God, a devotee becomes indifferent to outer marks, giving up formal worship when the goal of spiritual life is attained?

MASTER (to Balarām's father): "The Kartabhajas group the devotees into four classes: the pravartaka, the sadhaka, the siddha, and the siddha of the siddha. The pravartaka, the beginner, puts the mark of his religion on his forehead, wears a string of beads around his neck, and observes other outer conventions. The sadhaka, the struggling devotee, does not care so much for elaborate rites. An example of this class is the Baul. The siddha, the perfect, firmly believes that God exists. The siddha of the siddha, the supremely perfect, like Chaitanya, not only has realized God but also has become intimate with Him and talks with Him all the time. This is the last limit of realization.

Different classes of spiritual aspirants

"There are many kinds of spiritual aspirants. Those endowed with sattva perform their spiritual practices secretly. They look like ordinary people, but they meditate inside the mosquito net.

"Aspirants endowed with rajas exhibit outward pomp-a string of beads around the neck, a mark on the forehead, an ochre robe, a silk cloth, a rosary with a gold bead, and so on. They are like stall-keepers advertising their wares with signboards.

"All religions and all paths call upon their followers to pray to one and the same God. Therefore one should not show disrespect to any religion or religious opinion. It is God alone who is called Satchidananda Brahman in the Vedas, Satchidananda Krishna in the Puranas, and Satchidananda Śiva in the Tantras. It is one and the same Satchidananda.

"There are different sects of Vaishnavas. That which is called Brahman in the Vedas is called Ālekh-Niranjan by one Vaishnava sect. 'Ālekh' means That which cannot be

pointed out or perceived by the sense-organs. According to this sect, Radha and Krishna are only two bubbles of the Ālekh.

"According to the Vedānta, there is no Incarnation of God. The Vedantists say that Rāmā and Krishna are but two waves in the Ocean of Satchidananda.

"In reality there are not two. There is only One. A man may call on God by any name; if he is sincere in his prayer he will certainly reach Him. He will succeed if he has longing."

As Sri Ramakrishna spoke these words to the devotees, he was overwhelmed with divine fervour. Coming down to partial consciousness of the world, he said to Balarām's father, "Are you the father of Balarām?"

All sat in silence. Balarām's aged father was silently telling his beads.

Futility of worship without yearning

MASTER (to M. and the others): "Well, these people practise so much japa and go to so many sacred places, but why are they like this? Why, do they make no progress? In their case it seems as if the year consists of eighteen months.

"Once I said to Harish: 'What is the use of going to Benares if one does not feel restless for God? And if one feels that longing, then this very place is Benares.'

"They make so many pilgrimages and repeat the name of God so much, but why do they not realize anything? It is because they have no longing for God. God reveals Himself to the devotee if only he calls upon Him with a longing heart.

"At the beginning of a yatra performance much light-hearted restlessness is to be observed on the stage. At that time one does not see Krishna. Next the sage Nārada enters with his flute and sings longingly, 'O Govinda! O my Life! O my Soul!' Then Krishna can no longer remain away and appears with the cowherd boys."

Tuesday, October 16, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was in his room with Rākhāl , Balarām's father, Beni Pāl, M., Mani Mallick, Ishan, Kishori, and other devotees.

MASTER: "Liberal-minded devotees accept all the forms of God: Krishna, Kāli, Śiva, Rāmā, and so on."

BALARĀM'S FATHER: "Yes, sir. It is like a woman's recognizing her husband, whatever clothes he wears."

Unwavering devotion to God

MASTER: "But again, there is a thing called nishtha, single-minded devotion. When the gopis went to Mathura they saw Krishna with a turban on His head. At this they pulled down their veils and said, 'Who is this man? Where is our Krishna with the peacock

feather on His crest and the yellow cloth on His body?' Hanuman also had that unswerving devotion. He came to Dwaraka in the cycle of Dwapara. Krishna said to Rukmini, His queen, 'Hanuman will not be satisfied unless he sees the form of Rāmā.' So, to please Hanuman, Krishna assumed the form of Rāma.

"But, my dear sir, I am in a peculiar state of mind. My mind constantly descends from the Absolute to the Relative, and again ascends from the Relative to the Absolute.

"The attainment of the Absolute is called the Knowledge of Brahman. But it is extremely difficult to acquire. A man cannot acquire the Knowledge of Brahman unless he completely rids himself of his attachment to the world. When the Divine Mother was born as the daughter of King Himalaya, She showed Her various forms to Her father. The king said, 'I want to see Brahman.' Thereupon the Divine Mother said: 'Father, if that is your desire, then you must seek the company of holy men. You must go into solitude, away from the world, and now and then live in holy company.'

The many and the One

"The manifold has come from the One alone, the Relative from the Absolute. There is a state of consciousness where the many disappears, and the One, as well; for the many must exist as long as the One exists. Brahman is without comparison. It is impossible to explain Brahman by analogy. It is between light and darkness. It is Light, but not the light that we perceive, not material light.

"Again, when God changes the state of my mind, when He brings my mind down to the plane of the Relative, I perceive that it is He who has become all these-the Creator, maya, the living beings, and the universe.

"Again, sometimes He shows me that He has created the universe and all living beings. He is the Master, and the universe His garden.

Knowledge and ignorance

"'He is the Master, and the universe and all its living beings belong to Him'-that is Knowledge. And, 'I am the doer', 'I am the guru', 'I am the father'-that is ignorance. 'This is my house; this is my family; this is my wealth; these are my relatives'-this also is ignorance."

BALARĀM'S FATHER: "That is true, sir."

MASTER: "As long as you do not feel that God is the Master, you must come back to the world, you must be born again and again. There will be no rebirth when you can truly say, 'O God, Thou art the Master.' As long as you cannot say, 'O Lord, Thou alone art real', you will not be released from the life of the world. This going and coming, this rebirth, is inevitable. There will be no liberation. Further, what can you achieve by saying, 'It is mine'? The manager of an estate may say, 'This is our garden; these are our couches and furniture.' But when he is dismissed by the master, he hasn't the right to take away even a chest of worthless mango-wood given to him for his use.

"The feeling of 'I and mine' has covered the Reality. Because of this we do not see Truth. Attainment of Chaitanya, Divine Consciousness, is not possible without the knowledge of Advaita, Non-duality. After realizing Chaitanya one enjoys Nityananda, Eternal Bliss. One enjoys this Bliss after attaining the state of a paramahamsa.

"Vedānta does not recognize the Incarnation of God. According to it, Chaitanyadeva is only a bubble of the non-dual Brahman.

"Do you know what the vision of Divine Consciousness is like? It is like the sudden illumination of a dark room when a match is struck.

"The Incarnation of God is accepted by those who follow the path of bhakti. A woman belonging to the Kartabhaja sect observed my condition, and remarked: 'You have inner realization. Don't dance and sing too much. Ripe grapes must be preserved carefully in cotton. The mother-in-law lessens her daughter-in-law's activities when the daughter-in-law is with child. One characteristic of God-realization is that the activities of a man with such realization gradually drop away. Inside this man [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] is the real Jewel.'

"Watching me eat, she remarked, 'Sir, are you yourself eating, or are you feeding someone else?'

"The feeling of ego has covered the Truth. Narendra once said, 'As the "I" of man recedes, the "I" of God approaches.' Kedār says, 'The more clay there is in the jar, the less water it holds.'

"Krishna said to Arjuna: 'Brother, you will not realize Me if you possess even one of the eight siddhis.' These give only a little power. With healing and the like one may do only a little good to others. Isn't that true?

"Therefore I prayed to the Divine Mother for pure love only, a love that does not seek any return. I never, asked for occult powers."

While talking thus, Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi. He sat there motionless, completely forgetful of the outer world. Then, coming down to the sense world, he sang:

Ah, friend! I have not found Him yet, whose love has driven me mad. . . .

At the Master's request, Ramlal sang a song describing how Chaitanya embraced the monastic life:

Oh, what a vision I have beheld in Keshab Bharati's hut!
Gora, in all his matchless grace,
Shedding tears in a thousand streams!

Like a mad elephant
He dances in ecstasy and sings,
Drunk with an overwhelming love.

Rolling flat upon the ground and swimming in his tears,
He weeps and shouts Lord Hari's name,
Piercing the very heavens with his cries,
Loud as a lion's roar;
Then most humbly he begs men's love,
To feel himself the servant of Cod.

Shorn of his locks, he has put on the yogi's ochre robe;
Even the hardest heart must melt
To see his pure and heavenly love.
Smitten by man's deep woe,
He has abandoned everything
And pours out love unstintingly.

Oh, would that Premdas were his slave and, passing from door to door,
Might sing Gaurānga's endless praise!

The Master asked Mani Mallick to quote the words of Tulsidas to the effect that one who had developed love of God could not observe caste distinctions.

MANI: "The throat of the chatak bird is pierced with thirst. All around are the waters of the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Saraju, and of innumerable other rivers and lakes; but the bird will not touch any of these. It only looks up expectantly for the rain that falls when the star Svati is in the ascendant."

MASTER: "That means that love for the Lotus Feet of God is alone real, and all else illusory."

MANI: "Tulsi also said: 'At the touch of the philosopher's stone, the eight metals become gold. Likewise all castes, even the butcher and the untouchable, become pure by repeating Hari's name. Without Hari's name the people of the four castes are but butchers.'"

MASTER: "The hide that the scriptures forbid one to touch can be taken inside the temple after it has been tanned.

Chanting God's holy name

"Man becomes pure by repeating the name of God. Therefore one should practise the chanting of God's name. I said to Jadu Mallick's mother: 'In the hour of death you will think only of worldly things-of family, children, executing the will, and so forth. The thought of God will not come to your mind. The way to remember God in the hour of death is to practise, now, the repetition of His name and the chanting of His glories. If

one keeps up this practice, then in the hour of death one will repeat the name of God. When the cat pounces upon the bird, the bird only squawks and does not say, 'Rāma, Rāma, Hare-Krishna'.

"It is good to prepare for death. One should constantly think of God and chant His name in solitude during the last years of one's life. If the elephant is put into the stable after its bath it is not soiled again by dirt and dust."

Balarām's father, Mani Mallick, and Beni Pāl were all elderly men. Did the Master give this instruction especially for their benefit?

MASTER: "Why do I ask you to think of God and chant His name in solitude? Living in the world day and night, one suffers from worries. Haven't you noticed brother killing brother for a foot of land? The Sikhs said to me, 'The cause of all worry and confusion is these three: land, woman, and money.'

"You are leading a householder's life. Why should you be afraid of the world? When Rāma said to Dasaratha that He was going to renounce the world, it worried His father, and the king sought counsel of Vasishtha. Vasishtha said to Rāma: 'Rāma, why should You give up the world? Reason with me; Is this world outside God? What is there to renounce and what is there to accept? Nothing whatever exists but God. It is Brahman alone that appears as Isvara, maya, living beings, and the universe.' "

BALARĀM'S FATHER: "It is very difficult, sir."

MASTER: "The aspirant, while practising spiritual discipline, looks upon the world as a 'framework of illusion'. Again, after the attainment of Knowledge, the vision of God, this very world becomes to him a 'mansion of mirth'.

"It is written in the books of the Vaishnavas: 'God can be attained through faith alone; reasoning pushes Him far away.' Faith alone!

"What faith Krishnakishore had! At Vrindāvan a low-caste man drew water for him from a well. Krishnakishore said to him, 'Repeat the name of Śiva.' After the man had repeated the name of Śiva, Krishnakishore unhesitatingly drank the water. He used to say, 'If a man chants the name of God, does he need to spend money any more for the atonement of his sins? How foolish!' He was amazed to see people worshipping God with the sacred tulsi-leaf in order to get rid of their illnesses. At the bathing-ghat here he said to us, 'Please bless me, that I may pass my days repeating Rāma's holy name.' Whenever I went to his house he would dance with joy at the sight of me. Rāma said to Lakshmana, 'Brother, whenever you find people singing and dancing in the ecstasy of divine love, know for certain that I am there.' Chaitanya is an example of such ecstatic love. He laughed and wept and danced and sang in divine ecstasy. He was an Incarnation. God incarnated Himself through Chaitanya."

Sri Ramakrishna sang a song describing the divine love of Chaitanya. Then Balarām's father, Mani Mallick, Beni Pāl, and several other devotees took leave of the Master.

In the evening, devotees from Kansaritola, Calcutta, arrived. The Master danced and sang with them in a state of divine fervour. After dancing, he went into a spiritual mood and said, "I shall go part of the way myself." Kishori came forward to massage his feet, but the Master did not allow anyone to touch him.

Ishan arrived. The Master was seated, still in a spiritual mood. After a while he became engaged in talk with Ishan. It was Ishan's desire to practise the Purascharana of the Gayatri.

MASTER (to Ishan): "Follow your own intuition. I hope there is no more doubt in your mind. Is there any? The path of the Vedas is not meant for the Kaliyuga. The path of Tantra is efficacious."

ISHAN: "I have almost resolved to perform an atonement ceremony."

MASTER: "Do you mean to say that one cannot follow the path of Tantra? That which is Brahman is also Śakti, Kāli. Knowing the secret that Kāli is one with the highest Brahman, I have discarded, once for all, both righteousness and sin."

ISHAN: "It is mentioned in a hymn in the Chandi that Brahman alone is the Primal Energy. Brahman is identical with Śakti."

MASTER: "It will not do simply to express that idea in words. Only when you assimilate it will all be well with you.

"When the heart becomes pure through the practice of spiritual discipline, then one rightly feels that God alone is the Doer. He alone has become mind, life, and intelligence. We are only His instruments. Thou it is that holdest the elephant in the mire; Thou, that helpest the lame man scale the loftiest hill.

"When your heart becomes pure, then you will realize that it is God who makes us perform such rites as the Purascharana.

Thou workest Thine own work; men only call it theirs.

"All doubts disappear after the realization of God. Then the devotee meets the favourable wind. He becomes free from worry. He is like the boatman who, when the favourable wind blows, unfurls the sail, holds the rudder lightly, and enjoys a smoke."

Ishan took his leave and Sri Ramakrishna talked with M. No one else was present. He asked M. what he thought of Narendra, Rākhāl , Adhar, and Hazra, and whether they were guileless. "And", asked the Master, "what do you think of me?".

M. said: "You are simple and at the same time deep. It is extremely difficult to understand you."

Sri Ramakrishna laughed.

November 26, 1883

It was the day of the annual festival of the Sinduriapatti Brahmo Samaj. The ceremony was to be performed in Manilal Mallick's house. The worship hall was beautifully decorated with flowers, wreaths, and evergreens, and many devotees were assembled, eagerly awaiting the worship. Their enthusiasm had been greatly heightened by the news that Sri Ramakrishna was going to grace the occasion with his presence. Keshab, Vijay, Shivanath, and other leaders of the Brahmo Samaj held him in high respect. His God intoxicated state of mind, his intense love of spiritual life, his burning faith, his intimate communion with God, and his respect for women, whom he regarded as veritable manifestations of the Divine Mother, together with the unsullied purity of his character, his complete renunciation of worldly talk, his love and respect for all religious faiths, and his eagerness to meet devotees of all creeds, attracted the members of the Brahmo Samaj to him. Devotees came that day from far-off places to join the festival, for it would give them a chance to get a glimpse of the Master and listen to his inspiring talk.

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the house before the worship began, and became engaged in conversation with Vijaykrishna Goswami and the other devotees. The lamps were lighted and the divine service was about to begin.

The Master asked if Shivanath would come to the festival. A Brahmo devotee said that he had other important things to do and was not coming.

Truthfulness leads to God

MASTER: "I feel very happy when I see Shivanath. He always seems to be absorbed in the bliss of bhakti. Further, a man who is respected by so many surely possesses some divine power. But he has one great defect: he doesn't keep his word. Once he said to me that, he would come to Dakshineswar, but he neither came nor sent me word. That is not good. It is said that truthfulness alone constitutes the spiritual discipline of the Kaliyuga. If a man clings tenaciously to truth he ultimately realizes God. Without this regard for truth, one gradually loses everything. If by chance I say that I will go to the pine-grove, I must go there even if there is no further need of it, lest I lose my attachment to truth. After my vision of the Divine Mother, I prayed to Her, taking a flower in my hands: 'Mother, here is Thy knowledge and here is Thy ignorance. Take them both, and give me only pure love. Here is Thy holiness and here is Thy unholiness. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy good and here is Thy evil. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy righteousness, and here is Thy unrighteousness. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love.' I mentioned all these, but I could not say: 'Mother, here is Thy truth and here is Thy falsehood. Take them both.' I gave up everything at Her feet but could not bring myself to give up truth."

Soon the service began according to the rules of the Brahmo Samaj. The preacher was seated on the dais. After the opening prayer he recited holy texts of the Vedas and was joined by the congregation in the invocation to the Supreme Brahman. They chanted in chorus: "Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, and Infinity. It shines as Bliss and Immortality.

Brahman is Peace, Blessedness, the One without a Second; It is pure and unstained by sin." The minds of the devotees were stilled, and they closed their eyes in meditation.

The Master went into deep samādhi. He sat there transfixed and speechless. After some time he opened his eyes, looked around, and suddenly stood up with the words "Brahma! Brahma!" on his lips. Soon the devotional music began, accompanied by drums and cymbals. In a state of divine fervour the Master began to dance with the devotees. Vijay and the other Brahmos danced around him. The guests and the devotees were enchanted. Many of them drank the sweet bliss of God's name and forgot the world. The happiness of the material world appeared bitter to them, at least for the time being.

After the kirtan all sat around the Master, eager to hear his words.

Advice to householders

MASTER: "It is difficult to lead the life of a householder in a spirit of detachment. Once Pratap said to me: 'Sir, we follow the example of King Janaka. He led the life of a householder in a detached spirit. We shall follow him.' I said to him: 'Can one be like King Janaka by merely wishing it? How many austerities he practised in order to acquire divine knowledge! He practised the most intense form of asceticism for many years and only then returned to the life of the world.'

"Is there, then, no hope for householders? Certainly there is. They must practise spiritual discipline in solitude for some days. Thus they will acquire knowledge and devotion. Then it will not hurt them to lead the life of the world. But when you practise discipline in solitude, keep yourself entirely away from your family. You must not allow your wife, son, daughter, mother, father, sister, brother, friends, or relatives near you. While thus practising discipline in solitude, you should think: 'I have no one else in the world. God is my all.' You must also pray to Him, with tears in your eyes, for knowledge and devotion.

"If you ask me how long you should live in solitude away from your family, I should say that it would be good for you if you could spend even one day in such a manner. Three days at a time are still better. One may live in solitude for twelve days, a month, three months, or a year, according to one's convenience and ability. One hasn't much to fear if one leads the life of a householder after attaining knowledge and devotion.

"If you break a jack-fruit after rubbing your hands with oil, then its sticky milk will not smear your hands. While playing the game of hide-and-seek, you are safe if you but once touch the 'granny'. Be turned into gold by touching the philosopher's stone. After that you may remain buried underground a thousand years; when you are taken out you will still be gold.

"The mind is like milk. If you keep the mind in the world, which is like water, then the milk and water will get mixed. That is why people keep milk in a quiet place and let it set into curd, and then churn butter from it. Likewise, through spiritual discipline practised in solitude, churn the butter of knowledge and devotion from the milk of the

mind. Then that butter can easily be kept in the water of the world. It will not get mixed with the world. The mind will float detached on the water of the world."

Vijay had just returned from Gaya, where he had spent a long time in solitude and holy company. He had put on the ochre robe of a monk and was in an exalted state of mind, always indrawn. He was sitting before the Master with his head bent down, as if absorbed in some deep thought.

Casting his benign glance on Vijay, the Master said: "Vijay, have you found your room?

"Let me tell you a parable: Once two holy men, in the course of their wanderings, entered a city. One of them, with wondering eyes and mouth agape, was looking at the market-place, the stalls, and the buildings, when he met his companion. The latter said: 'You seem to be filled with wonder at the city. Where is your baggage?' He replied: 'First of all I found a room. I put my things in it, locked the door, and felt totally relieved. Now I am going about the city enjoying all the fun.'

"So I am asking you, Vijay, if you have found your room. (To M. and the others) You see, the spring in Vijay's heart has been covered all these days. Now it is open. . .

(To V ijay) "Well, Shivanath is always in trouble and turmoil. He has to write for magzines and perform many other duties. Worldly duties bring much worry and anxiety along with them.

"It is narrated in the Bhagavata that the Avadhuta had twenty-four gurus, one of whom was a kite. In a certain place the fishermen were catching fish. A kite swooped down and snatched a fish. At the sight of the fish, about a thousand crows chased the kite and made a great noise with their cawing. Whichever way the kite flew with the fish, the crows followed it. The kite flew to the south and the crows followed it there. The kite flew to the north and still the crows followed after it. The kite went east and west, but with the same result. As the kite began to fly about in confusion, lo, the fish dropped from its mouth. The crows at once let the kite alone and flew after the fish. Thus relieved of its worries, the kite sat on the branch of a tree and thought: 'That wretched fish was at the root of all my troubles. I have now got rid of it and therefore I am at peace.'

"The Avadhuta learnt this lesson from the kite, that as long as a man has the fish, that is, worldly desires, he must perform actions and consequently suffer from worry, anxiety, and restlessness. No sooner does he renounce these desires than his activities fall away and he enjoys peace of soul.

"But work without any selfish motive is good. It does not create any worry. But it is very difficult to be totally unselfish. We may think that our work is selfless, but selfishness comes, unknown to us, from no one knows where. But if a man has already undergone great spiritual discipline, then as a result of it he may be able to do work without any selfish motive. After the vision of God a man can easily do unselfish work.

In most cases action drops away after the attainment of God. Only a few, like Nārada, work to bring light to mankind.

"The Avadhuta accepted a bee as another teacher. Bees accumulate their honey by days of hard labour. But they cannot enjoy their honey, for a man soon breaks the comb and takes it away. The Avadhuta learnt this lesson from the bees, that one should not lay things up. Sādhus should depend one hundred per cent on God. They must not gather for the morrow. But this does not apply to the householder. He must bring up his family; therefore it is necessary for him to provide. Birds and monks do not hoard. Yet birds also hoard after their chicks are hatched: they collect food in their beaks for their young ones.

"Let me tell you one thing, Vijay. Don't trust a sādhu if he keeps bag, and baggage with him and a bundle of clothes with many knots. I have seen such sādhus under the banyan tree in the Panchavati. Two or three of them were seated there. One was picking over lentils, some were sewing their clothes, and all were gossiping about a feast they had enjoyed in a rich man's house. They said among themselves, 'That rich man spent a hundred thousand rupees on the feast and fed the sādhus sumptuously with cake, sweets, and many such delicious things.' " (All laugh)

VIJAY: "It is true, sir. "I have seen such sādhus at Gaya. They are called the lotawalla sādhus of Gaya."

MASTER (to Vijay): "When love of God is awakened, work drops away of itself. If God makes some men work, let them work. It is now time for you to give up everything. Renounce all and say, 'O mind, may you and I alone behold the Mother, letting no One else intrude.' "

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna began to sing in his soul-enthralling voice:

Cherish my precious Mother Syama
Tenderly within, O mind;
May you and I alone behold Her,
Letting no one else intrude.

O mind, in solitude enjoy Her,
Keeping the passions all outside;
Take but the tongue, that now and again
It may cry out, "O Mother! Mother!"

Suffer no breath of base desire
To enter and approach us there,
But bid true knowledge stand on guard,
Alert and watchful evermore.

The Master said to Vijay: "Surrender yourself completely to God, and set aside all such things as fear and shame. Give up such feelings as, 'What will people think of me if I

dance in the ecstasy of God's holy name?' The saying, 'One cannot have the vision of God as long as one has these three- shame, hatred, and fear', is very true. Shame, hatred, fear, caste, pride, secretiveness, and the like are so many bonds. Man is free when he is liberated from all these.

"When bound by ties one is jiva, and when free from ties one is Śiva. Prema, ecstatic love of God, is a rare thing.

Steps of bhakti

"First of all one acquires bhakti. Bhakti is single-minded devotion to God, like the devotion a wife feels for her husband. It is very difficult to have unalloyed devotion to God. Through such devotion one's mind and soul merge in Him.

"Then comes bhava, intense love. Through bhava a man becomes speechless. His nerve currents are stilled. Kumbhaka comes by itself. It is like the case of a man whose breath and speech stop when he fires a gun.

"But prema, ecstatic love, is an extremely rare thing. Chaitanya had that love. When one has prema one forgets all outer things. One forgets the world. One even forgets one's own body, which is so dear to a man."

The Master began to sing:

Oh, when will dawn the blessed day
When tears of joy will flow from my eyes
As I repeat Lord Hari's name?
Oh, when will dawn the blessed day
When all my craving for the world
Will vanish straightway from my heart,
And with the thrill of His holy name
All of my hair will stand on end?
Oh, when will dawn that blessed day?

So the talk of divine things was proceeding, when some invited Brahmo devotees entered the room. There were among them a few pundits and high government officials.

Sri Ramakrishna had said that bhava stills the nerve currents of the devotee. He continued: "When Arjuna was about to shoot at the target, the eye of a fish, his eyes were fixed on the eye of the fish, and on nothing else. He didn't even notice any part of the fish except the eye. In such a state the breathing stops and one experiences kumbhaka.

"Another characteristic of God-vision is that a great spiritual current rushes up along the spine and goes toward the brain. If then the devotee goes into samādhi, he sees God."

Looking at the Brahmo devotees who had just arrived, the Master said: "Mere pundits, devoid of divine love, talk incoherently. Pundit Samadhyayi once said, in the course of

his sermon: 'God is dry. Make Him sweet by your love and devotion.' Imagine! To describe Him, as dry, whom the Vedas declare as the Essence of Bliss! It makes one feel that the pundit didn't know what God really is. That was why his words were so incoherent.

"A man once said, 'There are many horses in my uncle's cow-shed.' From that one could know that the man had no horses at all. No one keeps a horse in a cow-shed.

Transitoriness of earthly things

"Some people pride themselves on their riches and power-their wealth, honour, and social position. But these are only transitory. Nothing will remain with you in death.

"There is a song that runs:

Remember this, O mind! Nobody is your own:
Vain is your wandering in this world.
Trapped in the subtle snare of maya as you are,
Do not forget the Mother's name.

Only a day or two men honour you on earth
As lord and master; all too soon
That form, so honoured now, must needs be cast away,
When Death, the Master, seizes you.

Even your beloved wife, for whom, while yet you live,
You fret yourself almost to death,
Will not go with you then; she too will say farewell,
And shun your corpse as an evil thing.

"One must not be proud of one's money. If you say that you are rich, then one can remind you that there are richer men than you, and others richer still, and so on. At dusk the glow-worm comes out and thinks that it lights the world. But its pride is crushed when the stars appear in the sky. The stars feel that they give light to the earth. But when the moon rises the stars fade in shame. The moon feels that the world smiles at its light and that it lights the earth. Then the eastern horizon becomes red, and the sun rises. The moon fades and after a while is no longer seen.

"If wealthy people would think that way, they would get rid of their pride in their wealth."

Manilal had provided a sumptuous feast in celebration of the festival. He entertained the Master and the other guests with great love and attention. It was late at night when they returned to their homes.

Chapter 15

LAST VISIT TO KESHAB

Wednesday, November 28, 1883

AT TWO O'CLOCK in the afternoon, M. was pacing the foot-path of the Circular Road in front of the Lily Cottage, where Keshab Chandra Sen lived. He was eagerly awaiting the arrival of Sri Ramakrishna. Keshab's illness had taken a serious turn, and there was very little chance of his recovery. Since the Master loved Keshab dearly, he was coming from Dakshineswar to pay him a visit.

On the east side of the Circular Road was Victoria College, where the ladies of Keshab's Brahmo Samaj and their daughters received their education. To the north of the college was a spacious garden house inhabited by an English family. M. noticed that there was a commotion in the house and wondered what was going on. Presently a hearse arrived with the drivers dressed in black, and the members of the household appeared, looking very sad. There had been a death in the family.

"Whither does the soul go, leaving behind this mortal body?" Pondering the age-old question, M. waited, watching the carriages that came from the north.

Master's visit to Keshab

About five o'clock a carriage stopped in front of the Lily Cottage and Sri Ramakrishna got out with Lātu and several other devotees, including Rākhāl . He was received by Keshab's relatives, who led him and the devotees upstairs to the verandah south of the drawing-room. The Master seated himself on a couch.

After a long wait he became impatient to see Keshab. Keshab's disciples said that he was resting and would be there presently. Sri Ramakrishna became more and more impatient and said to Keshab's disciples: "Look here, what need is there of his coming to me? Why can't I go in and see him?"

PRASANNA (humbly): "Sir, he will come in a few minutes."

MASTER: "Go away! It is you who are making all this fuss. Let me go in." Prasanna began to talk about Keshab in order to divert the Master's attention. He said: "Keshab is now an altogether different person. Like you, sir, he talks to the Divine Mother. He hears what the Mother says, and laughs and cries."

When he was told that Keshab talked to the Divine Mother and laughed and cried, the Master became ecstatic. Presently he went into samādhi.

It was winter and the Master was wearing a green flannel coat with a shawl thrown over it. He sat straight, with his eyes fixed, deep in ecstasy. A long time passed in this way. There was no indication of his returning to the normal plane of consciousness.

Gradually it became dark. Lamps were lighted in the drawing-room, where the Master was now to go. While he was slowly coming down to the plane of ordinary consciousness, he was taken there, though with great difficulty. The room was well furnished. At the sight of the furniture, the Master muttered to himself, "These things were necessary before, but of what use are they now?" Seeing Rākhāl, he said, "Oh, hello! Are you here?" Then, seating himself on a couch, he again lost consciousness of the outer world, and, looking around as if seeing someone, he said: "Hello, Mother! I see that You too have come. How You are showing off in Your Benares sari! Don't bother me now, please. Sit down and be quiet."

The Master was in a state of intense divine intoxication. In the well-lighted room the Brahmo devotees sat around the Master; Lātu, Rākhāl, and M. remained near him. He was saying to himself, still filled with divine fervour: "The body and the soul! The body was born and it will die. But for the soul there is no death. It is like the betel-nut. When the nut is ripe it does not stick to the shell. But when it is green it is difficult to separate it from the shell. After realizing God, one does not identify oneself any more with the body. Then one knows that body and soul are two different things."

Keshab's serious illness

At this moment Keshab entered the room. He came through the east door. Those who remembered the man who had preached in the Town Hall or the Brahmo Samaj temple were shocked to see this skeleton covered with skin. He could hardly stand. He walked holding to the wall for support. With great difficulty he sat down in front of the couch. In the mean time Sri Ramakrishna had got down from the couch and was sitting on the floor. Keshab bowed low before the Master and remained in that position a long time, touching the Master's feet with his forehead. Then he sat up. Sri Ramakrishna was still in a state of ecstasy. He muttered to himself. He talked to the Divine Mother.

Raising his voice, Keshab said: "I am here, sir. I am here." He took Sri Ramakrishna's left hand and stroked it gently. But the Master was in deep samādhi, completely intoxicated with divine love. A stream of words came from his lips as he talked to himself, and the devotees listened to him spellbound.

Brahman manifesting Itself as the universe

MASTER: "As long as a man associates himself with upadhis, so long he sees the manifold, such as Keshab, Prasanna, Amrita, and so on; but on attaining Perfect Knowledge he sees only one Consciousness everywhere. The same Perfect Knowledge, again, makes him realize that the one Consciousness has become the universe and its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. But the manifestations of Divine Power are different in different beings. It is He, undoubtedly, who has become everything; but in some cases there is a greater manifestation than in others.

"Vidyasagar once asked me, 'Can it be true that God has endowed some with greater power and some with less?' I replied: 'If that were not so, how is it that one man may be stronger than fifty? If that were not the case, again, how is it that we have all come here to see you?'

"The soul through which God sports is endowed with His special power. The landlord may reside in any part of his estate, but he is generally to be found in a particular drawing-room. The devotee is God's drawing-room. God loves to sport in the heart of His devotee. It is there that His special power is manifest.

Signs of a true devotee

"What is the sign of such a devotee? When you see a man doing great works, you may know that God's special power is manifested through him.

Identity of Brahman and Śakti

"The Primordial Power and the Supreme Brahman are identical. You can never think of the one without the other. They are like the gem and its brilliance. One cannot think of the brilliance without the gem, or of the gem without its brilliance. Again, it is like the snake and its wriggling motion. One cannot think of the wriggling motion without the snake, or of the snake without its wriggling motion.

"It is the Primordial Power that has become the universe and its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. It is a case of involution and evolution.

Master's love for pure-souled disciples

"Why do I feel so restless for Rākhāl , Narendra, and the other youngsters? Hazra once asked me, 'When will you think of God if you are always anxious about these boys?' (Keshab and the others smile.) That worried me greatly. I prayed to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, see what a fix I am in! Hazra scolds me because I worry about these young men.' Afterwards I asked Bholanath about it. He said to me that such a state of mind is described in the Mahabharata. How else will a man established in samādhi occupy his mind in the phenomenal world, after coming down from samādhi? That is why he seeks the company of devotees endowed with sattva. I gave a sigh of relief when Bholanath told me of the Mahabharata.

"Hazra is not to blame. During the period of struggle one should follow the method of discrimination-'Not this, not this'-and direct the whole mind to God. But the state of perfection is quite different. After reaching God one reaffirms what formerly one denied. To extract butter you must separate it from the buttermilk. Then you discover that butter and buttermilk are intrinsically related to one another. They belong to the same stuff. The butter is not essentially different from the buttermilk, nor the buttermilk essentially different from the butter. After realizing God one knows definitely that it is He who has become everything. In some objects He is manifested more clearly, and in others less clearly.

"When a flood comes from the ocean, all the land is deep under water. Before the flood, the boat could have reached the ocean only by following the winding course of the river. But after the flood, one can row straight to the ocean. One need not take a roundabout course. After the harvest has been reaped, one need not take the roundabout course along the balk of the field. One can cross the field at any point.

"After the realization of God, He is seen in all beings. But His greater manifestation is in man. Again, among men, God manifests Himself more clearly in those devotees who are sattvic, in those who have no desire whatever to enjoy 'woman and gold'. Where can a man of samādhi rest his mind, after coming down from the plane of samādhi? That is why he feels the need of seeking the company of pure-hearted devotees, endowed with sattva and free from attachment to 'woman and gold'. How else could such a person occupy himself in the relative plane of consciousness?

"He who is Brahman is the *Ādyāśakti*, the Primal Energy. When inactive He is called Brahman, the Purusha; He is called Śakti, or Prakriti, when engaged in creation, preservation, and destruction. These are the two aspects of Reality: Purusha and Prakriti. He who is the Purusha is also Prakriti. Both are the embodiment of Bliss.

"If you are aware of the Male Principle, you cannot ignore the Female Principle: He who is aware of the father must also think of the mother. (Keshab laughs) He who knows darkness also knows light. He who knows night also knows day. He who knows happiness also knows misery. You understand this, don't you?"

KESHAB: "Yes, sir. I do."

MASTER: "My Mother! Who is my Mother? Ah, She is the Mother of the Universe. It is She who creates and preserves the world, who always protects Her children, and who grants whatever they desire: dharma, artha, kama, moksha. A true son cannot live away from his mother. The Mother knows everything. The child only eats, drinks, and makes merry; he doesn't worry himself about the things of the world."

KESHAB: "Yes, sir. It is quite true."

While talking, Sri Ramakrishna regained the normal consciousness of the world. With a smile on his face he conversed with Keshab. The roomful of men watched them eagerly, and listened to their words. Everybody was amazed to find that neither Keshab nor the Master inquired about each other's health. They talked only of God.

Meditating on God and not on His glories

MASTER (to Keshab): "Why do the members of the Brahmo Samaj dwell so much on God's glories? Is there any great need of repeating such things as 'O God, Thou hast created the moon, the sun, and the stars'? Most people are filled with admiration for the garden only. How few care to see its owner! Who is greater, the garden or its owner?

"After a few drinks at a tavern, do I care to Know how many gallons of wine are stored there? One bottle is enough for me.

"When I met Narendra, I never asked him 'Who is your father? How many houses does he own?'

"Shall I tell you the truth? Man loves his own riches, and so he thinks that God loves His, too. He thinks that God will be pleased if we glorify His riches. Once Sambhu said

to me, 'Please bless me, that I may die leaving my riches at the Lotus Feet of God.' I answered: 'These are riches only to you. What riches can you offer God? To Him these are mere dust and straw.'

"Once a thief broke into the temple of Vishnu and robbed the image of its jewels. Mathur Babu and I went to the temple to see what was the matter. Addressing the image, Mathur said bitterly: 'What a shame, Lord! You are so worthless! The thief took all the ornaments from Your body, and You couldn't do a thing about it.' Thereupon I said to Mathur: 'Shame on you! How improper your words are! To God, the jewels you talk so much about are only lumps of clay. Lakshmi, the Goddess of Fortune, is His Consort. Do you mean to say that He should spend sleepless nights because a thief has taken your few rupees? You mustn't say such things.'

"Can one ever bring God under control through wealth? He can be tamed only through love. What does He want? Certainly not wealth! He wants from His devotees love, devotion, feeling, discrimination, and renunciation.

Different classes worshippers

"One looks on God exactly according to one's own inner feeling. Take, for instance, a devotee with an excess of tamas. He thinks that the Divine Mother eats goat. So he slaughters one for Her. Again, the devotee endowed with rajas cooks rice and various other dishes for the Mother. But the sattvic devotee doesn't make any outer show of his worship. People don't even know he is worshipping. If he has no flowers, he worships God with mere Ganges water and the leaves of the bel-tree. His food offering to the Deity consists of sweetened puffed rice or a few candies. Occasionally he cooks a little rice pudding for the Deity

"There is also another class of devotees, those who are beyond the three gunas. They have the nature of a child. Their worship consists in chanting God's name-just His name.

Meaning of Keshab's illness

(To Keshab, with a smile) "Why is it that you are ill? There is a reason for it. Many spiritual feelings have passed through your body; therefore it has fallen ill. At the time an emotion is aroused, one understands very little about it. The blow that it delivers to the body is felt only after a long while. I have seen big steamers going by on the Ganges, at the time hardly noticing their passing. But oh, my! What a terrific noise is heard after a while, when the waves splash against the banks! Perhaps a piece of the bank breaks loose and falls into the water.

"An elephant entering a hut creates havoc within and ultimately shakes it down. The elephant of divine emotion enters the hut of this body and shatters it to pieces.

"Do you know what actually happens? When a house is on fire, at first a few things inside burn. Then comes the great commotion. Just so, the fire of Knowledge at first destroys such enemies of spiritual life as passion, anger, and so forth. Then comes the turn of ego. And lastly a violent commotion is seen in the physical frame.

"You may think that everything is going to be over. But God will not release you as long as the slightest trace of your illness is left. You simply cannot leave the hospital if your name is registered there. As long as the illness is not perfectly cured, the doctor won't give you a permit to go. Why did you register your name in the hospital at all?" (All laugh.)

Master's own illness

Keshab laughed again and again at the Master's allusion to the hospital. Then Sri Ramakrishna spoke of his own illness. (To Keshab) "Hriday used to say, 'Never before have I seen such ecstasy for God, and never before have I seen such illness.' I was then sriously ill with stubborn diarrhoea. It was as if millions of ants were gnawing at my brain. But all the same, spiritual talk went on day and night. Dr. Rāma of Natagore was called in to see me. He found me discussing spiritual truth. 'What a madman!' he said. 'Nothing is left of him but a few bones, and still he is reasoning like that!' "

MASTER (to Keshab): "All depends on God's will.

O Mother, all is done after Thine own sweet will;
Thou art in truth self-willed, Redeemer of mankind!
Thou workest Thine own work; men only call it theirs.

"In order to take full advantage of the dew, the gardener removes the soil from the Basra rose down to the very root. The plant thrives better on account of the moisture. Perhaps that is why you too are being shaken to the very root. (Keshab and the Master laugh.) It may be that you will do tremendous things when you come back.

"Whenever I hear that you are ill I become extremely restless. After hearing of your last illness I, used to weep to the Divine Mother in the small hours of the morning. I prayed to Her, 'O Mother, if anything happens to Keshab, with whom, then, shall I talk in Calcutta?' Coming to Calcutta, I offered fruits and sweets to the Divine Mother with a prayer for your well-being."

The devotees were deeply touched to hear of Sri Ramakrishna's love for Keshab and his longing for the Brahmo leader.

MASTER: "But this time, to tell the truth, I didn't feel anxious to that extent. Only for two or three days did I feel a little worried."

Keshab's venerable mother came to the east door of the room, the same door through which Keshab had entered. Umanath said aloud to the Master, "Sir, here is mother saluting you."

Sri Ramakrishna smiled. Umanath said again, "Mother asks you to bless Keshab that he may be cured of his illness."

MASTER (to Keshab's mother): "Please pray to the Divine Mother, who is the Bestower of all bliss. She will take away your troubles.

(To keshab) "Don't spend long hours in the inner apartments. You will sink down and down in the company of women. You will feel better if you hear only talk of God."

The Master uttered these words in a serious voice and then began to laugh like a boy. He said to Keshab, "Let me see your hand." He weighed it playfully, like a child. At last he said: "No, your hand is light. Hypocrites have heavy hands."(All laugh.) .

Umanath again said to the Master from the door. "Mother asks you to bless Keshab."

MASTER (gravely): "What can I do? God alone, blesses all. 'Thou workest Thine, own work; men only call it theirs.'

"God laughs on two occasions. He laughs when two brothers divide land between them. They put a string across the land and say to each other, 'This side is mine, and that side is yours. God laughs and says to Himself, 'Why, this whole universe is Mine; and about a little clod they say, "This side is mine, and that side is yours"!'

"God laughs again when the physician says to the mother weeping bitterly because of her child's desperate illness: 'Don't be afraid, mother. I shall cure your child.' The physician does not know that no one can save the child if God wills that he should die." (All are silent.)

Just then Keshab was seized with a fit of coughing, which lasted for a long time. The sight of his suffering made everyone, sad. He became exhausted and could stay no longer. He bowed low before the Master and left the room, holding to the wall as before.

Some refreshments had been arranged for the Master. Keshab's eldest son was seated near him. Amrita introduced the boy and requested Sri Ramakrishna to bless him. The Master said, "It is not given to me to bless anyone." With a sweet smile he stroked the boy's body gently.

AMRITA (with a smile): "All right, then do as you please."

MASTER (to the devotees): " I cannot say such a thing as 'May you be healed.' I never ask the Divine Mother to give me the power of healing. I pray to Her only for pure love.

Master praises Keshab

"Is Keshab a small person? He is respected by all, seekers after wealth as well as holy men. Once I visited Dayananda, who was then staying at a garden house. I saw he was extremely anxious about Keshab's coming; he went out every few minutes to see whether he had arrived. I learnt later on that Keshab had made an appointment with him that day. Keshab, I understood, had no faith in the sacrifices and the deities mentioned in the Vedas. Referring to this, Dayananda said: 'Why, the Lord has created so many things. Could He not make deities as well?' "

Continuing, the Master said: "Keshab is free from the pride of a small minded religious teacher. To many people he has said, 'If you have any doubts, go there2 to have them

solved.' It is my way, too, to say: 'What shall I do with people's respect? Let Keshab's virtues increase a millionfold.' Keshab is certainly a great man. Everyone respects him, seekers after wealth as well as holy men." Thus did Sri Ramakrishna praise Keshab before the latter's disciples.

After partaking of the refreshments the Master was ready to leave. The Brahmo devotees accompanied him to the cab, which was standing in the street. While coming down the stairs the Master noticed that there was no light on the ground floor. He said to Amrita and Keshab's other disciples: "These places should be well lighted. A house without light becomes stricken with poverty. Please see that it doesn't happen again."

Then Sri Ramakrishna left for Dakshineswar with one or two devotees.

On his way to Dakshineswar from Keshab's cottage Sri Ramakrishna stopped at Jaygopal Sen's house. It was about seven o'clock in the evening.

In the drawing-room, Jaygopal's relatives and neighbours had gathered. Vaikuntha, Jaygopal's brother, said to the Master: "Sir, we are worldly people. Please give us some advice."

Advice to the worldly-minded

MASTER: "Do your duty to the world after knowing God. With one hand hold to the Lotus Feet of the Lord and with the other do your work."

VAIKUNTHA: "Is the world unreal?"

MASTER: "Yes, it is unreal as long as one has not realized God. Through ignorance man forgets God and speaks always of 'I' and 'mine'. He sinks down and down, entangled in maya, deluded by 'woman and gold'. Maya robs him of his knowledge to such an extent that he cannot find the way of escape, though such a way exists.

"Listen to a song:

When such delusion veils the world, through Mahamaya's spell,
That Brahma is bereft of sense
And Vishnu loses consciousness,
What hope is left for men? . .

"You all know from your experience how impermanent the world is. Look at it this way. How many people have come into the world and again passed away! People are born and they die. This moment the world is and the next it is not. It is impermanent. Those you think to be your very own will not exist for you when you close your eyes in death. Again, you see people who have no immediate relatives, and yet for the sake of a grandson they will not go to Benares to lead a holy life. 'Oh, what will become of my Haru then?' they argue.

The narrow channel first is made, and there the trap is set;
But open though the passage lies,

The fish, once safely through the gate,
Do not come out again.

Yet even though a way leads forth,
Encased within its own cocoon,
The worm remains to die.

This kind of world is illusory and impermanent."

A NEIGHBOUR: "Why, sir, should one hold to God with one hand and to the world with the other? Why should one even stretch out one hand to hold to the world, if it is impermanent?"

MASTER: "The world is not impermanent if one lives there after knowing God. Listen to another song:

O mind, you do not know how to farm!
Fallow lies the field of your life.
If you had only worked it well,
How rich a harvest you might reap!
Hedge it about with Kāli's name
If you would keep your harvest safe;
This is the stoutest hedge of all,
For Death himself cannot come near it. . . .
"Did you listen to the song?
Hedge it about with Kāli's name
If you would keep your harvest safe.
Surrender yourself to God and you will achieve everything.
This is the stoutest hedge of all,
For Death himself cannot come near it.

Ideal householder's life

"Yes, it is a strong hedge indeed. If you but, realize God, you won't see the world as unsubstantial. He who has realized God knows that God Himself has become the world and all living beings. When you feed your child, you should feel that you are feeding God. You should look on your father and mother as veritable manifestations of God and the Divine Mother, and serve them as such. If a man enters the world after realizing God, he does not generally keep up physical relations with his wife. Both of them are devotees; they love to talk only of God and pass their time in spiritual conversation. They serve other devotees of God, for they know that God alone has become all living beings; and, knowing this, they devote their lives to the service of others."

NEIGHBOUR: "But, sir, such a husband and wife are not to be found anywhere."

MASTER: "Yes, they can be found, though they may be very rare. Worldly people cannot recognize them. In order to lead such a life both husband and wife must be spiritual. It is possible to lead such a life if both of them have tasted the Bliss of God. God's special

grace is necessary to create such a couple; otherwise there will always be misunderstanding between them. In that case the one has to leave the other. Life becomes very miserable if husband and wife do not agree. The wife will say to her husband day and night: 'Why did my father marry me to such a person? I can't get enough to eat or to feed my children. I haven't clothes enough to cover my body or to give to my children. I haven't received a single piece of jewelry from you. How happy you have made me! Ah! You keep your eyes closed and mutter the name of God! Now do give up all these crazy ideas.' "

DEVOTEE: "There are such obstacles, certainly. Besides, the children may be disobedient. There is no end of difficulties. Now, sir, what is the way?"

Solitude and holy company

MASTER: "It is extremely difficult to practise spiritual discipline and at the same time lead a householder's life. There are many handicaps: disease, grief, poverty, misunderstanding with one's wife, and disobedient, stupid, and stubborn children. I don't have to give you a list of them.

"But still there is a way out. One should pray to God, going now and then into solitude, and make efforts to realize Him."

NEIGHBOUR: "Must one leave home then?"

MASTER: "No, not altogether. Whenever you have leisure, go into solitude for a day or two. At that time don't have any relations with the outside world and don't hold any conversation with worldly people on worldly affairs. You must live either in solitude or in the company of holy men."

NEIGHBOUR: "How can one recognize a holy man?"

MASTER: "He who has surrendered his body, mind, and innermost self to God is surely a holy man. He who has renounced 'woman and gold' is surely a holy man. He is a holy man who does not regard woman with the eyes of a worldly person. He never forgets to look upon a woman as his mother, and to offer her his worship if he happens to be near her. The holy man constantly thinks of God and does not indulge in any talk except about spiritual things. Furthermore, he serves all beings, knowing that God resides in everybody's heart. These, in general, are the signs of a holy man."

NEIGHBOUR: "Must one always live in solitude?"

MASTER: "Haven't you seen the trees on the foot-path along a street? They are fenced around as long as they are very young; otherwise cattle destroy them. But there is no longer any need of fences when their trunks grow thick and strong. Then they won't break even if an elephant is tied to them. Just so, there will be no need for you to worry and fear if you make your mind as strong as a thick tree-trunk. First of all try to acquire discrimination. Break the jack-fruit open only after you have rubbed your hands with oil; then its sticky milk won't smear them."

NEIGHBOUR: "What is discrimination?"

MASTER: "Discrimination is the reasoning by which one knows that God alone is real and all else is unreal. Real means eternal, and unreal means impermanent. He who has acquired discrimination knows that God is the only Substance and all else is non-existent. With the awakening of this spirit of discrimination a man wants to know God. On the contrary, if a man loves the unreal-such things as creature comforts, name, fame, and wealth, then he doesn't want to know God, who is of the very nature of Reality. Through discrimination between the Real and the unreal one seeks to know God.

"Listen to a song:

Come, let us go for a walk, O mind, to Kāli, the Wish-fulfilling Tree,
And there beneath It gather the four fruits of life.
Of your two wives, Dispassion and Worldliness,
Bring along Dispassion only, on your way to the Tree,
And ask her son Discrimination about the Truth. . . .

"By turning the mind within oneself one acquires discrimination, and through discrimination one thinks of Truth. Then the mind feels the desire to go for a walk to Kāli, the Wish-fulfilling Tree. Reaching that Tree, that is to say, going near to God, you can without any effort gather four fruits, namely, dharma, artha, kama, and moksha. Yes, after realizing God, one can also get, if one so desires, dharma, artha, and kama, which are necessary for leading the worldly life."

NEIGHBOUR: "Then why should one call the world maya?"

God and the world

MASTER: "As long as one has not realized God, one should renounce the world, following the process of 'Neti, neti.' But he who has attained God knows that it is God who has become all this. Then he sees that God, maya, living beings, and the universe form one whole. God includes the universe and its living beings. Suppose you have separated the shell, flesh, and seeds of a bel-fruit and someone asks you the weight of the fruit. Will you leave aside the shell and the seeds, and weigh only the flesh? Not at all. To know the real weight of the fruit, you must weigh the whole of it-the shell, the flesh, and the seeds. Only then can you tell its real weight. The shell may be likened to the universe, and the seeds to living beings. While one is engaged in discrimination one says to oneself that the universe and the living beings are non-Self and unsubstantial. At that time one thinks of the flesh alone as the substance, and the shell and seeds as unsubstantial. But after discrimination is over, one feels that all three parts of the fruit together form a unity. Then one further realizes that the stuff that has produced the flesh of the fruit has also produced the shell and seeds. To know the real nature of the bel-fruit one must know all three.

"It is the process of evolution and involution. The world, after its dissolution, remains involved in God; and God, at the time of creation, evolves as the world. Butter goes with buttermilk, and buttermilk goes with butter. If there is a thing called buttermilk, then butter also exists; and if there is a thing called butter, then buttermilk also exists. If the Self exists, then the non-Self must also exist.

"The phenomenal world belongs to that very Reality to which the Absolute belongs; again, the Absolute belongs to that very Reality to which the phenomenal world belongs. He who is realized as God has also become the universe and its living beings. One who knows the Truth knows that it is He alone who has become father and mother, child and neighbour, man and animal, good and bad, holy and unholy, and so forth."

Virtue and vice

NEIGHBOUR: "Then is there no virtue and no sin?"

MASTER: "They both exist and do not exist. If God keeps the ego in a man, then He keeps in him the sense of differentiation and also the sense of virtue and sin. But in a rare few He completely effaces the ego and these go beyond virtue and sin, good and bad. As long as a man has not realized God, he retains the sense of differentiation and the knowledge of good and bad. You may say: 'Virtue and sin are the same to me. I am doing only as God bids me.' But you know in your heart of hearts that those are mere words. No sooner do you commit an evil deed than you feel a palpitation in your heart. Even after God has been realized, He keeps in the mind of the devotee, if He so desires, the feeling of the 'servant ego'. In that state the devotee says, 'O God, Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant.' Such a devotee enjoys only spiritual talk and spiritual deeds. He does not enjoy the company of ungodly people. He does not care for any work that is not of a holy nature. So you see that God keeps the sense of differentiation even in such a devotee."

NEIGHBOUR: "You ask us, sir, to live in the world after knowing God. Can God really be known?"

MASTER: "God cannot be known by the sense-organs or by this mind; but He can be known by the pure mind, the mind that is free from worldiy desires."

NEIGHBOUR: "Who can know God?"

MASTER: "Right. Who can really know Him? But as for us, it is enough to know as much of Him as we need. What need have I of a whole well of water? One jar is more than enough for me. An ant went to a sugar hill. Did it need the entire hill? A grain or two of sugar was more than enough."

NEIGHBOUR: "Sir, we are like typhoid patients. How can we be satisfied with one jar of water? We feel like knowing, the whole of God."

MASTER: "That's true. But there is also medicine for typhoid."

NEIGHBOUR: "What is that medicine, sir?"

MASTER: "The company of holy men, repeating the name of God and singing His glories, and unceasing prayer. I prayed to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, I don't seek knowledge. Here, take Thy knowledge, take Thy ignorance. Give me only pure love for Thy Lotus Feet.' I didn't ask for anything else.

"As is the disease, so must the remedy be. The Lord says in the Gitā: 'O Arjuna, take refuge in Me. I shall deliver you from all sins.' Take shelter at His feet: He will give you right understanding. He will take entire responsibility for you. Then you will get rid of the typhoid. Can one ever know God with such a mind as this? Can one pour four seers of milk into a one-seer pot? Can we ever know God unless He lets us know Him? Therefore I say, take shelter in God. Let Him do whatever He likes. He is self-willed. What power is there in a man?"

Chapter 16

WITH THE DEVOTEES AT DAKSHINESWAR (II)

Sunday, December 9, 1883

Chaitanya's exalted state

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was seated on the small couch in his room with Adhar, Manomohan, Rākhāl , M., Harish, and other devotees. It was about two o' clock in the afternoon. The Master was describing to them the exalted state of Sri Chaitanya.

MASTER: "Chaitanya experienced three states of mind. First, the conscious state, when his mind dwelt on the gross and the subtle. Second, the semi-conscious state, when his mind entered the causal body and was absorbed in the bliss of divine intoxication. Third, the inmost state, when his mind was merged in the Great Cause.

This agrees very well with the five koshas, or 'sheaths', described in the Vedānta. The gross body corresponds to the annamayakosha and the pranamayakosha, the subtle body to the manomayakosha and the vijnanamayakosha, and the causal body to the Ānandamayakosha. The Mahakarana, the Great Cause, is beyond the five sheaths. When Chaitanya's mind merged in That, he would go into samādhi. This is called the nirvikalpa or jada samādhi.

"While conscious of the outer world, Chaitanya sang the name of God; while in the state of partial consciousness, he danced with the devotees; and while in the inmost state of consciousness, he remained absorbed in samādhi."

M. (to himself): "Is the Master hinting at the different states of his own mind? There is much similarity between Chaitanya and the Master."

MASTER: "Chaitanya was Divine Love incarnate. He came down to earth to teach people how to love God. One achieves everything when one loves God. There is no need of hathayoga."

Practice of Hathayoga

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, what is hathayoga like?"

MASTER: "A man practising hathayoga dwells a great deal on his body. He washes his intestines by means of a bamboo tube through his anus. He draws ghee and milk through his sexual organ. He learns how to manipulate his tongue by performing exercises. He sits in a fixed posture and bow and then levitates. All these are actions of prana. A magician was performing his feats when his tongue turned up and clove to the roof of his mouth. Immediately his body became motionless. People thought he was dead. He was buried and remained many years in the grave. After a long time the grave somehow broke open. Suddenly the man regained consciousness of the world and cried out, 'Come delusion! Come confusion!' (All laugh.) All these are actions of prana.

"The Vedantists do not accept hathayoga. There is also rajayoga. Rajayoga describes how to achieve union with God through the mind by means of discrimination and bhakti. This yoga is good. Hathayoga is not good. The life of a man in the Kaliyuga is dependent on food."

Sri Ramakrishna was standing in the road by the side of the nahabat. He was on his way to his room, having come from the pine-grove. He saw M. seated on the verandah of the nahabat, behind the fence, absorbed in meditation.

MASTER: "Hello! You are here? You will get results very soon. If you practise a little, then someone will come forward to help you."

M. looked up at the Master, startled; he remained sitting on the floor.

MASTER: "The time is ripe for you. The mother bird does not break the shell of the egg until the right time arrives. What I told you is indeed your Ideal."

Sri Ramakrishna again mentioned to M. his spiritual Ideal.

MASTER: "It is not necessary for all to practise great austerity. But I went through great suffering. I used to lie on the ground with my head resting on a mound for a pillow. I hardly noticed the passing of the days. I only called on God and wept, 'O Mother! O Mother!'"

M. had been visiting Sri Ramakrishna for the past two years. Since he had been educated along English lines, he had acquired a fondness for Western philosophy and science, and had liked to hear Keshab and other scholars lecture. Sri Ramakrishna would address him now and then as the "English-man". Since coming to Sri Ramakrishna, M. had lost all relish for lectures and for books written by English scholars. The only thing that appealed to him now was to see the Master day and night, and hear the words that fell from his blessed lips. M. constantly dwelt on certain of Sri Ramakrishna's sayings. The Master had said, "One can certainly see God through the practice of spiritual discipline", and again, "The vision of God is the only goal of human life."

MASTER (to M.): "If you practise only a little, someone will come forward to tell you the right path. Observe the ekadasi.

Master's intimate relationship with disciples

"You are my very own, my relative; otherwise, why should you come here so frequently? While listening to the kirtan, I had a vision of Rākhāl in the midst of Sri Krishna's companions in Vrindāvan. Narendra belongs to a very high level. Hirananda too; how childlike his nature is! What sweet disposition he has! I want to see him too.

"Once I saw the companions of Chaitanya, not in a trance but with these very eyes. Formerly I was in such an exalted state of mind that I could see all these things with my naked eyes; but now I see them in samādhi. I saw the companions of Chaitanya with

these naked eyes. I think I saw you there, and Balarām too, You must have noticed that when I see certain people I jump up with a start. Do you know why? A man feels that way when he sees his own people after a long time.

"I used to pray to the Mother, crying: 'Mother, if I do not find the devotees I'll surely die. Please bring them to me immediately.' In those days whatever desire arose in my mind would come to pass. I planted a tulsi-grove in the Panchavati in order to practise japa and meditation. I wanted very much to fence it around with bamboo sticks. Soon afterwards a bundle of bamboo sticks and some string were carried by the flood-tide of the Ganges right in front of the Panchavati. A temple servant noticed them and joyfully told me.

"In that state of divine exaltation I could no longer perform the formal worship. 'Mother,' I said, 'who will look after me? I haven't the power to take care of myself. I want to listen only to talk about Thee. I want to feed Thy devotees. I want to give a little help to those whom I chance to meet. How will all that be possible, Mother? Give me a rich man to stand by me.' That is why Mathur Babu did so much to serve me.

"I said further, 'Certainly I shall not have any children, Mother. But it is my desire that a boy with sincere love for God should always remain with me. Give me such a boy.' That is the reason Rākhāl came here. Those whom I think of as my own are part and parcel of me."

The Master started again for the Panchavati accompanied by M. No one else was with them. Sri Ramakrishna with a smile narrated to him various incidents of the past years of his life.

MASTER: "You see, one day I. saw a strange figure covering the whole space from the Kāli temple to the Panchavati. Do you believe this?"

M. remained silent with wonder. He plucked one or two leaves from a branch in the Panchavati and put them in his pocket.

MASTER: "See there-that branch has been broken. I used to sit under it."

M: "I took a young twig from that tree-I have it at home."

MASTER (with a smile): "Why?"

M: "I feel happy when I look at it. After all this is over, this place will be considered very holy."

MASTER (smiling): "What kind of holy place? Like Panihati?"

Almost every year, for some time past, the Master had been attending the religious festival at Panihati.

It was evening. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch in his room, absorbed in meditation on the Divine Mother. The evening worship in the temples began, with the music of gong and conch-shell. M. was going to spend the night with the Master.

Ater a time Sri Ramakrishna asked M. to read from the Bhaktamala, a book about the Vaishnava saints.

Story of a Vaishnava devotee

M. read: "There was a king named Jayamal who loved Krishna with all his heart. He followed with unfailing devotion all the rites and ceremonies associated with the adoration of Krishna, whom he worshipped under the name of Syamalasundara. Completely satisfied with his own Ideal Deity, he never directed his attention to any other god or goddess. One of the inflexible rules of his devotions was to worship the Deity daily till almost midday. He would never deviate from this practice, even at the risk of his wealth or his kingdom. Learning this secret, an enemy king invaded the kingdom during the morning hours. Jayamal's soldiers could not fight without his command; so they watched the invasion silently. Slowly the enemy surrounded the moat of the capital; yet Jayamal did not come out of his shrine room. His mother came to him and wept bitterly, trying to persuade the king to fight. He said to her calmly: "Why are you worried? Syamalasundara gave me this kingdom. What can I do if He has decided to take it away? On the other hand, none will be able to do me harm if He protects me. Our own efforts are vain!"

And actually, in the mean time, Syamalasundara, the Deity Himself, had taken the king's horse from the stable and had ridden fully armed to the field. Alone He faced the hostile king and alone destroyed his army. Having crushed the enemy forces, the Deity returned to the temple and fastened the horse near by.

Jayamal, on completing his worship, came out and discovered the horse there, panting and covered with sweat. "Who has been riding my horse?" he demanded. "Who brought it to the temple?" The officers declared they knew nothing about it. In a pensive mood the king proceeded to the battle-field with his army and there found the enemy, with the exception of their leader, lying dead. He was staring uncomprehendingly at the scene, when the enemy king approached, worshipped him, and said: "Please permit me to tell you something. How could I fight? You have a warrior who could conquer the entire world. I do not want your wealth or your kingdom; indeed, I will gladly give you my own, if you will tell me about that Blue Warrior, your friend. No sooner did I turn my eyes on him than he cast a spell on my heart and soul."

Jayamal then realized it had been none other than Syamalasundara that had appeared on the battle-field. The enemy king understood too. He worshipped Jayamal and through his blessings received Krishna's grace.

MASTER: "Do you believe all that? Do you believe Krishna rode on that horse and killed Jayamal's enemies?"

M: "I believe that Jayamal, Krishna's devotee, prayed to Him with a yearning heart. But I don't know whether the enemy really saw Him coming to the battle-field on a horse. Krishna might have come there riding the horse, but I do not know whether they really saw Him."

MASTER (with a smile): "The book contains nice stories about devotees. But it is one-sided. Also, it abuses those who differ with its views."

The following morning the Master and M. were talking in the garden.

M: "Then I shall stay here."

MASTER: "Well, you all come here so often. What does it mean? People visit a holyman once at the most. But you all come here so often. What is the significance of that?"

M. remained silent. The Master himself gave the reply.

MASTER: "Could you come here unless you belonged to my inner circle? That means you all are my own relatives, my own people-like father and son, brother and sister.

"I do not tell you everything. If I did, would you come here any more?

"Once Sukadeva went to Janaka to be instructed in the Knowledge of Brahman; Janaka said, 'First give me my fee.' 'But', said Sukadeva, 'why should I give you the fee before receiving the instruction?' Janaka laughed and said: 'Will you be conscious of guru and disciple after attaining Brahmajnana? That is why I asked you to give me the fee first.' "

It was night. The moon rose, flooding all the quarters with its silvery light. M. was walking alone in the garden of the temple. On one side of the path stood the Panchavati, the bakul-grove, the nahabat, and the Master's room, and on the other side flowed the Ganges, reflecting millions of broken moons on its rippling surface.

M. said to himself: "Can one really see God? The Master says it is possible. He says that, if one makes a little effort, then someone comes forward and shows the way. Well, I am married. I have children. Can one realize God in spite of all that?"

M. reflected awhile and continued his soliloquy: "Surely one can. Otherwise, why should the Master say so? Why shouldn't it be possible through the grace of God?

"Here is the world around me-the sun, moon, stars, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. How did they come into existence? Who is their Creator? What am I to Him? Life is indeed vain without this knowledge.

"Sri Ramakrishna is certainly the best of men. In all my life I have not seen another great soul like him. He must have seen God. Otherwise, how could he talk with God day and night, addressing Him so intimately as 'Mother'? Otherwise, how could he love God so intimately? Such is his love for God that he forgets the outer world. He goes into

samādhi and remains like a lifeless thing. Again, in the ecstasy of that love, he laughs and cries and dances and sings."

Friday, December 14, 1883

At nine o'clock in the morning Sri Ramakrishna was standing on the southeast verandah near the door of his room, with Ramlal by his side. Rākhāl and Lātu were moving about. M. arrived and prostrated himself before the Master. Sri Ramakrishna said to him affectionately: "You have come. That's very good. Today is an auspicious day."

It was the last day of the Bengali month and the day of the full moon. M. was going to spend a few days with the Master practising spiritual discipline. The Master had said to him, "If an aspirant practises a little spiritual discipline, then someone comes forward to help him."

The Master had said to M: "You should not eat every day at the guesthouse of the Kāli temple. The guest-house is intended to supply free food to monks and the destitute. Bring your own cook with you." M. had accordingly done so. The Master arranged a place for the man to cook and he asked Ramlal to speak to the milkman about milk.

A little later Ramlal began to read from the Adhyātma Rāmāyana. The Master and M. listened while he read:

Rāma had married Sita after breaking the great bow of Śiva. On the way to Ayhodhya with His bride, Rāma was confronted by the warrior sage Parasurama, who was about to make trouble for Him. Parasurama threw a bow at Rāma and challenged Him to string it. Dasaratha, Rāma's father, was seized with fear. With a smile, Rāma took the bow in His left hand and strung it. Then twanging the bow-string, He fixed an arrow and asked Parasurama where to shoot it. That curbed the pride of the warrior sage. Prostrating himself before Rāma, Parasurama worshipped Him as the Supreme Brahman.

As Sri Ramakrishna listened to Parasurama's hymn, he went into a spiritual mood and now and then chanted the name of Rāma in his melodious voice.

Then the Master asked Ramlal to read about Guhaka. Ramlal read:

Guhaka, the pariah, was chief of the untouchables and an intimate friend of Rāma. When Rāma, Sita, and Lakshmana were starting into the forest to redeem Dasaratha's pledge, Guhaka ferried them across the river. Rāma embraced Guhaka tenderly and told him He was going to spend fourteen years in exile, wearing the bark of trees and eating herbs, fruits, and roots that grew in the woods. He promised to visit Guhaka again on His way back to Ayhodhya after the period of exile was over. The pariah king waited patiently. But when the fourteenth year had run out and Rāma had not returned, Guhaka lighted a funeral pyre. He was on the point of entering it when Hanuman arrived as Rāma's messenger. In a celestial chariot Rāma and Sita soon appeared, and Guhaka's joy was unbounded.

After the midday meal Sri Ramakrishna lay down on his bed to rest. M. was seated on the floor. Presently Dr. Shyama and a few devotees arrived. The Master sat up on the bed and began to converse with them.

Work and worship

MASTER: "It is by no means necessary for a man always to be engaged in his duties. Actions drop away when one realizes, God, as the flower drops of itself when the fruit appears.

"He who has realized God no longer performs religious duties such as the sandhya. In his case the sandhya merges in the Gayatri. When that happens, it is enough for a person to repeat just the Gayatri mantra. Then the Gayatri merges in Om. After that one no longer chants even the Gayatri; it is enough then to chant simply Om. How long should a man practise such devotions as the sandhya? As long as he does not feel a thrill in his body and shed tears of joy while repeating the name of Rāma or of Hari. People worship God to win money or a lawsuit. That is not good."

A DEVOTEE: "We find that everyone strives after money. Even Keshab Sen married his daughter to a prince."

MASTER: "Keshab's case is quite different. God provides everything for a genuine devotee, even without his making any effort. The son of a real king gets his monthly allowance. I am not talking of lawyers and men of that sort, who go through suffering in order to earn money, and who become slaves of others to that end. I am speaking of a real prince. A true devotee has no desire. He does not care for money. Money comes to him of itself. The Gitā describes such a devotee as 'content with what comes to him without effort'. A good brahmin, without any personal motive, can accept food even from the house of an untouchable. He does not desire it; it comes of its own accord."

How to live in the world

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, how should one live in the world?"

MASTER: "Live in the world as the mud fish lives in the mud. One develops love of God by going away from the world into solitude, now and then, and meditating on God. After that one can live in the world unattached. The mud is there, and the fish has to live in it, but its body is not stained by the mud. Such a man can lead the life of a householder in a spirit of detachment"

The Master noticed that M. was listening to his words with great attention.

MASTER (looking at M.): "One can realize God if one feels intense dispassion for worldly things. A man with such dispassion feels that the world is like a forest on fire. He regards his wife and children as a deep well. If he really feels that kind of dispassion, he renounces home and family. It is not enough for him to live in the world in a spirit of detachment.

"'Woman and gold' alone is maya. If maya is once recognized, it feels ashamed of itself and takes to flight. A man put on a tiger skin and tried to frighten another man. But the latter said: 'Ah! I have recognized you! You are our Hare.' At that the man dressed in the skin went away smiling to frighten someone else.

Women as embodiments of the Divine Mother

"All women are the embodiments of Śakti. It is the Primal Power that has become women and appears to us in the form of women. It is said in the Adhyātma Rāmāyana that Nārada and others praised Rāma, saying: 'O Rāma, Thou alone art all that we see as male, and Sita, all that we see as female. Thou art Indra, and Sita is Indrani; Thou art Śiva and Sita is Sivani; Thou art man, and Sita is woman. What more need I say? Thou alone dost exist wherever there is a male, and Sita wherever there is a female.'

(To the devotees) "One cannot renounce by the mere wish. There are prarabdha karma-inherited tendencies-and the like. Once a yogi said to a king, 'Live with me in the forest and think of God.' The king replied: 'That I cannot very well do. I could live with you, but I still have the desire for enjoyment. If I live in this forest, perhaps I shall create a kingdom even here. I still have desires.'

"Natabar Panja used to look after his cows in this garden during his boyhood. He had many desires. Hence he has established a castor-oil factory and earned a great deal of money. He has a prosperous castor-oil business at Alambazar.

"There is one sect that prescribes spiritual discipline in company with women. I was once taken to the women belonging to the Kartabhaja sect. They all sat around me. I addressed them as 'mother'. At that they whispered among themselves: 'He is still a pravartaka. He doesn't know the way.' According to that sect the pravartaka is the beginner. Then comes the sadhaka, the struggling aspirant, and last of all the siddha of the siddha, the supremely perfect. A woman walked over to Vaishnavcharan and sat near him. Asked about it, he answered, 'She feels just like a young girl.' One quickly strays from the religious path by looking on woman as wife: But to regard her as mother is a pure attitude."

Some of the devotees took leave of the Master, saying that they were going to visit the temple of Kāli and several of the other temples.

M. went walking alone in the Panchavati and other places in the temple garden. He thought about the Master's assurance that God can be easily realized, and about his exhortation to lead a life of intense renunciation, and his saying that maya, when recognized, takes to flight.

Image worship

At half past three in the afternoon M. again entered the Master's room and sat on the floor. A teacher from the Broughton Institution had come with several students to pay a visit to Sri Ramakrishna. They were conversing together. Now and then the teacher asked questions. The conversation was about the worship of images.

MASTER (to the teacher): "What is wrong with image worship? The Vedānta says that Brahman manifests Itself where there is 'Existence, Light, and Love'. Therefore nothing exists but Brahman.

"How long do small girls play with their dolls? As long as they are not married and do not live with their husbands. After marriage they put the dolls away in a box. What further need is there of worshipping the image after the vision of God?"

God-vision through yearning

The Master glanced at M. and said: "One attains God when one feels yearning for Him. An intense restlessness is needed. Through it the whole mind goes to God.

"A man had a daughter who became a widow when she was very young. She had never known her husband: She noticed the husbands of other girls and said one day to her father, 'Where is my husband?' The father replied: 'Govinda is your husband. He will come to you if you call Him.' At these words the girl went to her room, closed the door, and cried to Govinda, saying: 'O Govinda, corne to me! Show Yourself to me! Why don't You come?' God could not resist the girl's piteous cry and appeared before her.

"One must have childlike faith-and the intense yearning that a child feels to see its mother. That yearning is like the red sky in the east at dawn. After such a sky the sun must rise. Immediately after that yearning one sees God.

"Let me tell you the story of a boy named Jatila. He used to walk to school through the woods, and the journey frightened him; One day he told his mother of his fear. She replied: 'Why should you be afraid? Call Madhusudana.' 'Mother,' asked the boy, 'who is Madhusudana?' The mother said, 'He is your Elder Brother.' One day after this, when the boy again felt afraid in the woods, he cried out, 'O Brother Madhusudana!' But there was no response. He began to weep aloud: 'Where are You, Brother Madhusudana? Come to me. I am afraid.' Then God could no longer stay away. He appeared before the boy and said: 'Here I am. Why are you frightened?' And so, saying He took the boy out of the woods and showed him the way to school. When He took leave of the boy, God said: 'I will come whenever you call Me. Do not be afraid.' One must have this faith of a child, this yearning.

"A brahmin used to worship his Family Deity daily with food offerings. One day he had to go away on business. As he was about to leave the house, he said to his young son: 'Give the offering to the Deity today. See that God is fed.' The boy offered food in the shrine, but the image remained silent on the altar. It would neither talk nor eat. The boy waited a long time, but still the image did not move. But the boy firmly believed that God would come down from His throne, sit on the floor, and partake of the food. Again and again he prayed to the Deity, saying: 'O Lord, come down and eat the food. It is already very late. I cannot sit here any longer.' But the image did not utter a word. The boy burst into tears and cried: 'O Lord, my father asked me to feed You. Why won't You come down? Why won't You eat from my hands?' The boy wept for some time with a longing soul. At last the Deity, smiling, came down from the altar and sat before the

meal and ate it. After feeding the Deity, the boy came out of the shrine room. His relatives said: 'The worship is over. Now bring away the offering.' 'Yes,' said the boy, 'the worship is over. But God has eaten everything.' 'How is that?' asked the relatives. The boy replied innocently, 'Why, God has eaten the food.' They entered the shrine and were speechless with wonder to see that the Deity had really eaten every bit of the offering."

Late in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was talking to M. They were standing on the south side of the nahabat. Since it was winter the Master was wrapped in his woolen shawl.

MASTER: "Where will you sleep? In the hut in the Panchavati?"

M: "Won't they let me have the room on the upper floor of the nahabat?"

M. selected the nahabat because he had a poetic temperament. From there he could see the sky, the Ganges, the moonlight, and the flowers in the garden.

MASTER: "Oh, they'll let you have it. But I suggested the Panchavati because so much contemplation and meditation have been practised there and the name of God has been chanted there so often."

It was evening. Incense was burning in the Master's room. He was sitting on the small couch, absorbed in meditation. M. was sitting on the floor with Rākhāl, Lātu, and Ramlal.

Singing of devotional songs

The Master said to M., "The sum and substance of the whole thing is to cultivate devotion for God and love Him." At Sri Ramakrishna's request Ramlal sang a few songs, the Master himself singing the first line of each.

Ramlal sang:

Oh, what a vision I have beheld in Keshab Bharati's hut!
Gora, in all his matchless grace,
Shedding tears in a thousand streams!
Like a mad elephant
He dances in ecstasy and sings,
Drunk with an overwhelming love. . . .
Then he sang:
Though I am never loath to grant salvation,
I hesitate indeed to grant pure love.
Whoever wins pure love surpasses all;
He is adored by men;
He triumphs over the three worlds. . . .

Sri Ramakrishna said to Ramlal, "Sing that one-*'Gaur and Nitai, ye blessed brothers'*." Ramlal began the song and the Master joined him:

Gaur and Nitai, ye blessed brothers!
I have heard how kind you are,
And therefore I have come to you.
When I visited Benares,
Śiva, Lord of Kasi, told me
Of the Parabrahman's birth,
As man, in Mother Sachi's home.
O Brahman, Thee I recognize!
Many a sādhu have I seen,
But never one so kind as you.

Once at Braja you were born
As Kanai and Balai, His brother;
Now, once more, in Nadia,
As Gaur and Nitai do you appear,
Hiding the shapes that then you wore.
In Braja's pastures running freely,
Once you frolicked; now, for play,
You roll on the ground in Nadia,
Chanting aloud Lord Hari's name.
Laughing, shouting, once you played
At Braja with your cowherd friends;
And now you chant Lord Hari's name.

O Gaur, how cleverly you hide
The dark-blue form you wore at Braja!
But your slanting eyes betray you.
Through the blessing of your name
The sinner is set free, they say;
And so my soul is filled with hope.
Now with eager heart I hasten
To your feet: Lord! I implore you,
Keep me safe within their shadow.

You redeemed Jagai and Madhai,
Wretched sinners though they were;
I pray you, do the same for me.
I have heard that you embrace
All men as brothers, even the outcaste,
Whispering in the ears of all
Lord Hari's life-renewing name.

Late at night M. sat alone in the nahabat. The sky, the river, the garden, the steeples of the temples; the trees, and the Panchavati were flooded with moonlight. Deep silence reigned everywhere, broken only by the melodious murmuring of the Ganges. M. was meditating on Sri Ramakrishna.

At three o'clock in the morning M. left his seat. He proceeded toward the Panchavati as Sri Ramakrishna had suggested. He did not care for the nahabat any more and resolved to stay in the hut in the Panchavati.

Suddenly he heard a distant sound, as if someone were wailing piteously, "Oh, where art Thou, Brother Madhusudana?" The light of the full moon streamed through the thick foliage of the Panchavati, and as he proceeded he saw at a distance one of the Master's disciples sitting alone in the grove, crying helplessly, "Oh, where art Thou, Brother Madhusudana?"
Silently M. watched him.

Saturday, December 15, 1883

Story of Prahlada

M. had been staying at Dakshineswar with Sri Ramakrishna. The Master was sitting in his room, listening to the life of Prahlada, which Ramlal was reading from the Bhaktamala. M. was sitting on the floor. Rākhāl, Lātu, and Harish were also in the room, and Hazra was on the verandah. While listening to the story of Prahlada's love for God, Sri Ramakrishna went into an ecstatic mood.

Hiranyakasipu, the king of the demons and father of Prahlada, had put his son to endless torture to divert the boy's mind from the love of God. But through divine grace all the king's attempts to kill Prahlada were ineffective. At last God appeared, assuming the form of Nrisimha, the Man-lion, and killed Hiranyakasipu. The gods were frightened at the rage and roaring of the Man-lion and thought that the destruction of the world was imminent.

They sent Prahlada to pacify the Deity. The boy sang a hymn to Him in words of love, and the Man-lion, moved by affection, licked Prahlada's body.

Still in an ecstatic mood, the Master said, "Ah! Ah! What love for the devotee!" The Master went into deep samādhi. He sat there motionless. A tear-drop could be seen at the corner of each of his eyes.

Master admonishes M.

The Master came down to the plane of the sense world and spoke to M., expressing his abhorrence for those who, while practising spiritual discipline, enjoyed sex-life.

MASTER: "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? You have children, and still you enjoy intercourse with your wife. Don't you hate yourself for thus leading an animal life? Don't you hate yourself for dallying with a body which contains only blood, phlegm, filth, and excreta? He who contemplates the Lotus Feet of God looks on even the most beautiful woman as mere ash from the cremation ground. To enjoy a body which will not last and which consists of such impure ingredients as intestines, bile, flesh, and bone! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

M. sat there silently, hanging his head in shame.

MASTER: "A man who has tasted even a drop of God's ecstatic love looks on 'woman and gold' as most insignificant. He who has tasted syrup made from sugar candy regards a drink made from treacle as a mere trifle. One gradually obtains that love for God if one but prays to Him with a yearning heart and always chants His name and glories."

The Master was in an ecstasy of love. He began to dance about the room and sing:

Who is singing Hari's name upon the sacred Ganges' bank?
Is it Nitai that has come, the giver of heavenly love?

It was ten o'clock in the morning. Ramlal had finished the daily worship in the Kāli temple. The Master went to the temple accompanied by M. Entering the shrine, the Master sat before the image. He offered a flower or two at the feet of the Divine Mother. Then he put a flower on his own head and began to meditate. He sang a song to the Divine Mother:

Thy name, I have heard, O Consort of Śiva, is the destroyer of our fear,
And so on Thee I cast my burden: Save me! Save me, O kindly Mother!

Sri Ramakrishna returned from the Kāli temple and sat on the southeast verandah of his room. He ate some refreshments which had been offered at the temple, and the devotees also received a share.

Rākhāl sat by the Master and read about Lord Erskine from Self-Help by Smiles.

MASTER (to M.): "What does the book say?"

M: "It says that Lord Erskine performed his duty without desiring any result for himself. Disinterested duty."

MASTER: "That is very good. But the characteristic of a man of Perfect Knowledge is that he doesn't keep a single book with him. He carries all his Knowledge on the tip of his tongue. There's the instance of Sukadeva. Books-I mean the scriptures-contain a mixture of sand and sugar. The sādhu takes the sugar, leaving aside the sand. He takes only the essence."

Vaishnavcharan, the musician, arrived and sang a few devotional songs.

M. spent the night in the nahabat.

Sunday, December 16, 1883

Sri Ramakrishna was seated with M. on the semicircular porch of his room at about ten o'clock in the morning. The fragrance of gardenias, jasmines, oleanders, roses, and other flowers filled the air. The Master was singing looking at M:

Thou must save me, sweetest Mother! Unto Thee I come for refuge,
Helpless as a bird imprisoned in a cage.
I have done unnumbered wrongs, and aimlessly I roam about,
Misled by maya's spell, bereft of wisdom's light,
Comfortless as a mother cow whose calf has wandered far away.

MASTER: "But why? Why should I live like a 'bird imprisoned in a cage'? Fie! For shame!"

As the Master said these words he went into an ecstatic mood. His body became motionless and his mind stopped functioning; tears streamed down his cheeks. After a while he said, "O Mother, make me like Sita, completely forgetful of everything-body and limbs-, totally unconscious of hands, feet, and sense-organs-only the one thought in her mind, 'Where is Rāma?' "

Was the Master inspired by the ideal of Sita to teach M. the yearning that a devotee should feel for God? Sita's very life was centred in Rāma. Completely absorbed in the thought of Rāma, Sita forgot even the body, which is so dear to all.

At four o'clock in the afternoon Mr. Mukherji, a relative of Prankrishna, arrived in the company of a brahmin well versed in the scriptures.

MUKHERJI: "I am very happy to meet you, sir."

MASTER: "God dwells in all beings. He is the gold in all. In some places it is more clearly manifest than in others. God dwells in the worldly-minded, no doubt, but He is hidden there, like gold under deep layers of clay."

MUKHERJI: "Sir, what is the difference between worldly and other-worldly things?"

Brahman and the world

MASTER: "While striving for the realization of God, the aspirant has to practise renunciation, applying the logic of 'Neti, neti'-'Not this, not this', But after attaining the vision of God, he realizes that God alone has become all things.

"At one time Rāma was overpowered by the spirit of renunciation. Dasaratha, worried at this, went to the sageVasishtha and begged him to persuade Rāma not to give up the world. The sage came to Rāma and found him in a gloomy mood. The fire of intense renunciation had been raging in the Prince's mind. Vasishtha said: 'Rāma, why should You renounce the world? Is the world outside God? Reason with me.' Rāma realized that the world had evolved from the Supreme Brahman. So, He said nothing.

"Buttermilk is made from the same substance as butter. One who realizes this knows that butter goes with buttermilk and buttermilk with butter. After separating the butter with great effort-that is to say, after attaining Brahmajnana-you will realize that as long as butter exists, buttermilk also must exist. Wherever there is butter there must be

buttermilk as well. As long as one feels that Brahman exists, one must also be aware that the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles exist as well.

Nature of Brahman

"What Brahman is cannot be described in words. Everything has been polluted, like food that has touched the tongue-that is, everything has been described in words. But no one has been able to describe Brahman. It is therefore unpolluted. I said this to Vidyasagar and he was delighted.

"But the Knowledge of Brahman cannot be realized if the aspirant is worldly-minded even in the slightest degree. He succeeds in acquiring this Knowledge only when his mind is totally free from 'woman and gold'. Parvati once said to Her father, 'Father, seek the company of holy men if you want the Knowledge of Brahman.' "

Addressing Mr. Mukherji, Sri Ramakrishna said: "You are rich, and still you call on God. That is very good indeed. It is said in the Gitā that those who fall from the path of yoga are born in their next birth as devotees of God in rich families."

Mr. Mukherji quoted the line from the Gitā.

MASTER: "God, if He so desires, can keep a Jnāni in the world too. The world and all living beings have been created by His will. But He is self-willed."

MUKHERJI (with a smile): "How can God have any will? Does He lack anything?"

MASTER (with a smile): "What's wrong in that? Water is water whether it is still or in waves. The snake is a snake whether it is coiled up motionless or wriggles along. A man is the same man whether sitting still or engaged in action.

"How can you eliminate from the Reality the universe and its living beings? If you do that, It will lack Its full weight. You cannot find out the total weight of the bel-fruit if you eliminate the seeds and shell.

"Brahman is unattached. One finds good and bad smells in the air, but the air itself is untainted. Brahman and Śakti are identical. It is the Primordial Power that has become the world and all living beings."

MUKHERJI: "Why does one deviate from the path of yoga?"

MASTER: "As the saying goes: 'In my mother's womb I was in a state of yoga; coming into the world, I have eaten its clay. The midwife has cut one shackle, the navel cord; but how shall I cut the shackle of maya?'

"Woman and gold"

"Maya is nothing but 'woman' and 'gold'. A man attains yoga when he has freed his mind from these two. The Self-the Supreme Self-is the magnet; the individual self is the needle. The individual self experiences the state of yoga when it is attracted by the

Supreme Self to Itself. But the magnet cannot attract the needle if the needle is covered with clay; it can draw the needle only when the clay is removed. The clay of 'woman' and 'gold' must be removed."

MUKHERJI: "How can one remove it?"

MASTER: "Weep for God with a longing heart. Tears shed for Him will wash away the clay. When you have thus freed yourself from impurity, you will be attracted by the magnet. Only then will you attain yoga."

MUKHERJI: "Priceless words!"

MASTER: "If a man is able to weep for God, he will see Him. He will go into samādhi. Perfection in yoga is samādhi. A man achieves kumbhaka without any yogic exercise if he but weeps for God. The next stage is samādhi.

"There is another method -that of meditation. In the Sahasrara, Śiva manifests Himself in a special manner. The aspirant should meditate on Him. The body is like a tray; the mind and buddhi are like water. The Sun of Satchidananda is reflected in this water. Meditating on the reflected sun, one sees the Real Sun through the grace of God.

"But the worldly man must constantly live in the company of holy men. It is necessary for all, even for sannyasis. But it is especially necessary for the householder. His disease has become chronic because he has to live constantly in the midst of 'woman and gold'."

MUKHERJI: "Yes, sir. The disease has indeed become chronic"

MASTER: "Give God the power of attorney. Let Him do whatever He wants. Be like a kitten and cry to Him with a fervent heart. The mother cat puts the kitten wherever she wants to. The kitten doesn't know anything. It is left sometimes on the bed and sometimes near the hearth."

MUKHERJI: "It is good to read sacred books like the Gitā."

MASTER: "But what will you gain by mere reading? Some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and there are some, besides, who have drunk it. God can indeed be seen; what is more, one can talk to Him.

Different stages of spiritual progress

"The first stage is that of the beginner. He studies and hears. Second is the stage of the struggling aspirant. He prays to God, meditates on Him, and sings His name and glories. The third stage is that of the perfect soul. He has seen God, realized Him directly and immediately in his inner Consciousness. Last is the stage of the supremely perfect, like Chaitanya. Such a devotee establishes a definite relationship with God, looking on Him as his Son or Beloved."

M., Rākhāl, Jogin, Lātu, and the other devotees were entranced by these words of divine realization.

Mr. Mukherji and his friend were taking leave of the Master. After saluting him, they stood up. The Master also stood up to show them courtesy.

MUKHERJI (smiling): "That you should stand up or sit down!"

MASTER (smiling): "But what's the harm? Water is water whether it is placid or in waves. I am like a cast-off leaf in the wind. The wind blows that leaf wherever it lists. I am the machine and God is its Operator."

Mr. Mukherji and his friend left the room. M. thought: "According to the Vedānta all is like a dream. Are all these-the ego, the universe, and the living beings-unreal then?"

M. had studied a little of the Vedānta. He also had read the German philosophers, such as Kant and Hegel, whose writings are only a faint echo of the Vedānta. But Sri Ramakrishna did not arrive at his conclusions by reasoning, as do ordinary scholars. It was the Divine Mother of the Universe who revealed the Truth to him. These were the thoughts that passed through M.'s mind.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna and M. were conversing on the porch west of the Master's room. No one else was there. It was a late winter afternoon, and the sun had not yet gone below the horizon.

Is the world unreal?

M: "Is the world unreal?"

MASTER: "Why should it be unreal? What you are asking is a matter for philosophical discussion.

"In the beginning, when a man reasons following the Vedantic method of 'Not this, not this', he realizes that Brahman is not the living beings, not the universe, not the twenty-four cosmic principles. All these things become like dreams to him. Then comes the affirmation of what has been denied, and he feels that God Himself has become the universe and all living beings.

"Suppose you are climbing to the roof by the stairs. As long as you are aware of the roof, you are also aware of the stairs. He who is aware of the high is also aware of the low. But after reaching the roof you realize that the stairs are made of the same materials-brick, lime, and brick-dust-as the roof.

"Further, I have given the illustration of the bel-fruit. Both changeability and unchangeability belong to one and the same Reality.

"The ego cannot be done away with. As long as 'I-consciousness' exists, living beings and the universe must also exist. After realizing God, one sees that, it is He Himself who

has become the universe and the living beings. But one cannot realize this by mere reasoning.

"Śiva has two states of mind. First, the state of samādhi, when He is transfixed in the Great Yoga. He is then Ātmārāma, satisfied in the Self. Second, the state when He descends from samādhi and keeps a trace of ego. Then He dances about, chanting, 'Rāma, Rāma!'"

Did the Master describe Śiva to hint at his own state of mind?

It was evening. Sri Ramakrishna was meditating on the Divine Mother and chanting Her holy name. The devotees also went off to solitary places and meditate on their Chosen Ideals. Evening worship began at the temple garden in the shrines of Kāli, Radha-Krishna, and Śiva.

It was the second day of the dark fortnight of the moon. Soon the moon rose in the sky, bathing temples, trees, flowers, and the rippling surface of the Ganges in its light. The Master was sitting on the couch and M. on the floor. The conversation turned to the Vedānta.

MASTER (to M.): "Why should the universe be unreal? That is a speculation of the philosophers. After realizing God, one sees that it is God Himself who has become the universe and all living beings.

Divine Mother is the Universal Consciousness

"The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kāli temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The Image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness-all was Consciousness.

"I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss-the Bliss of Satchidananda. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kāli temple; but in him also I saw the Power of the Divine Mother vibrating.

"That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that the Divine Mother Herself had become everything-even the cat. The manager of the temple garden wrote to Mathur Babu saying that I was feeding the cat with the offering intended for the Divine Mother. But Mathur Babu had insight into the state of my mind. He wrote back to the manager: 'Let him do whatever he likes. You must not say anything to him.'

"After realizing God, one sees all this aright-that it is He who has become the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. But what remains when God completely effaces the ego cannot be described in words. As Ramprasad said in one of his songs, 'Then alone will you know whether you are good or I am good!' I get into even that state now and then.

"A man sees a thing in one way through reasoning and in an altogether different way when God Himself shows it to him."

Monday, December 17, 1883

It was about eight o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna was in his room with M., when Dr. Madhu arrived and sat down beside the Master on the small couch. He was an elderly man and full of wit. He used to visit the Master when the latter felt indisposed.

MASTER: "The whole thing, in a nutshell is that one must develop ecstatic love for Satchidananda. What kind of love? How should one love God? Gauri used to say that one must become like Sita to understand Rāma; like Bhagavati, the Divine Mother, to understand Bhagavan, Śiva. One must practise austerity, as Bhagavati did, in order to attain Śiva. One must cultivate the attitude of Prakriti in order to realize Purusha-the attitude of a friend, a handmaid, or a mother.

"I saw Sita in a vision. I found that her entire mind was concentrated on Rāma. She was totally indifferent to everything-her hands, her feet, her clothes, her jewels. It seemed that Rāma had filled every bit of her life and she could not remain alive without Rāma."

M: "Yes, sir. She was mad with love for Rāma."

MASTER: "Mad! That's the word. One must become mad with love in order to realize God. But that love is not possible if the mind dwells on 'woman and gold'. Sex-life with a woman! What happiness is there in that? The realization of God gives ten million times more happiness. Gauri used to say that when a man attains ecstatic love of God all the pores of the skin, even the roots of the hair, become like so many sexual organs, and in every pore the aspirant enjoys the happiness of communion with the Ātman.

"One must call on God with a longing heart. One must learn from the guru how God can be realized. Only if the guru himself has attained Perfect Knowledge can he show the way.

"A man, gets rid of all desires when he has Perfect Knowledge. He becomes like a child five years old. Sages like Dattatreya and Jadabharata had the nature of a child."

M: "One hears about them. But there were many others like them that the world doesn't hear about."

MASTER: "Yes. The Jnāni gets rid of all desire if any is left, it does not hurt him. At the touch of the philosopher's stone the sword is transformed into gold. Then that sword cannot do any killing. Just so, the Jnāni keeps only a semblance of anger and passion. They are anger and passion only in name and cannot injure him."

M: "Yes, sir. The Jnāni goes beyond the three gunas, as you say. He is not under the control of any of the gunas-sattva, rajas, or tamas. All these three are so many robbers, as it were."

MASTER: "Yes, one must assimilate that."

M: "In this world there are perhaps not more than three or four men of Perfect Knowledge."

MASTER: "Why do you say that? One sees many holy men and sannyasis in the monasteries of upper India."

M: "Well, I too can become a sannyasi like one of those."

The Master fixed his gaze on M. and said, "By renouncing everything?"

M: "What can a man achieve unless he gets rid of maya? What will a man gain by merely being a sannyasi, if he cannot subdue maya?"

Both remained silent a few minutes.

M: "Sir, what is the nature of the divine love transcending the three gunas?"

MASTER: "Attaining that love, the devotee sees everything full of Spirit and Consciousness. To him 'Krishna is Consciousness, and His sacred Abode is also Consciousness'. The devotee, too, is Consciousness. Everything is Consciousness. Very few people attain such love."

DR. MADHU: "The love transcending the three gunas means, in other words, that the devotee is not under the control of any of the gunas."

MASTER (smiling): "Yes, that's it. He becomes like a child five years old, not under the control of any of the gunas."

The Master was resting after his noon meal. Mani Mallick arrived and saluted him. Sri Ramakrishna remained lying on the couch and said a word or two to Mani.

MANI: "I hear you visited Keshab Sen."

MASTER: "Yes. How is he now?"

MANI: "He hasn't recovered to any extent from his illness."

MASTER: "I found him to be very rajasic. I had to wait a long time before I could see him."

The Master sat up on the couch and continued his conversation with the devotees.

MASTER (to M.): "I became mad for Rāma. I used to walk about carrying an image of Ramlala given to me by a monk. I bathed it, fed it, and laid it down to sleep. I carried it wherever I went. I became mad for Ramlala."

Chapter 17

M. AT DAKSHINESWAR (I)

Tuesday, December 18, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was seated in his room with his devotees. He spoke highly of Devendranath Tagore's love of God and renunciation, and then said, pointing to Rākhāl and the other young devotees, "Devendra is a good man; but blessed indeed are those young aspirants who, like Sukadeva, practise renunciation from their very boyhood and think of God day and night without being involved in worldly life.

Nature of worldly people

"The worldly man always has some desire or other, though at times he shows much devotion to God. Once Mathur Babu was entangled in a lawsuit. He said to me in the shrine of Kāli, 'Sir, please offer this flower to the Divine Mother.' I offered it unsuspectingly, but he firmly believed that he would attain his objective if I offered the flower.

"What devotion Rati's mother had! How often she used to come here and how much she served me! She was a Vaishnava. One day she noticed that I ate the food offered at the Kāli temple, and that stopped her coming. Her devotion to God was one-sided. It isn't possible to understand a person right away."

It was a winter morning, and the Master was sitting near the east door of his room, wrapped in his moleskin shawl. He looked at the sun and suddenly went into samādhi. His eyes stopped blinking and he lost all consciousness of the outer world. After a long time he came down to the plane of the sense world. Rākhāl, Hazra, M., and other devotees were seated near him.

MASTER (to Hazra): "The state of samādhi is certainly inspired by love. Once, at Syambazar, they arranged a kirtan at Natavar Goswami's house. There I had a vision of Krishna and the gopis of Vrindāvan. I felt that my subtle body was walking at Krishna's heels.

"I went into samādhi when similar devotional songs were sung at the Hari Sabha in Jorashanko in Calcutta. That day they feared I might give up the body."

After the Master had finished his bath, he again spoke of the ecstatic love of the gopis. He said to M. and the other devotees: "One should accept the fervent attachment of the gopis to their beloved Krishna. Sing songs like this:

Tell me, friend, how far is the grove
Where Krishna, my Beloved, dwells?
His fragrance reaches me even here;
But I am tired and can walk no farther."

Again he sang:

I am not going home, O friend,
For there it is hard for me to chant my Krishna's name. . . .

Sri Ramakrishna had vowed to offer green coconut and sugar to Siddhesvari, the Divine Mother, for Rākhāl's welfare. He asked M. whether he would pay for the offerings.

That afternoon the Master, accompanied by M., Rākhāl, and some other devotees, set out in a carriage for the temple of Siddhesvari in Calcutta. On the way the offerings were purchased. On reaching the temple, the Master asked the devotees to offer the fruit and sugar to the Divine Mother. They saw the priests and their friends playing cards in the temple. Sri Ramakrishna said: "To play cards in a temple! One should think of God here."

From the temple the Master went to Jadu Mallick's house. Jadu was surrounded by his admirers, well-dressed dandies. He welcomed the Master.

MASTER ((with a smile): "Why do you keep so many clowns and flatterers with you?"

JADU (smiling): "That you may liberate them." (Laughter.)

MASTER: "Flatterers think that the rich man will loosen his purse-strings for them. But it is very difficult to get anything from him. Once a jackal saw a bullock and would not give up his company. The bullock roamed about and the jackal followed him. The jackal thought: 'There hang the bullock's testicles. Some time or other they will drop to the ground and I shall eat them.' When the bullock slept on the ground, the jackal lay down too, and when the bullock moved about, the jackal followed him. Many days passed in this way, but the bullock's testicles still clung to his body. The jackal went away disappointed. (All laugh.) That also happens to flatterers."

Jadu and his mother served refreshments to Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees.

Wednesday, December 19, 1883

It was nine o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to M. near the bel-tree at Dakshineswar. This tree, under which the Master had practised the most austere sadhana, stood in the northern end of the temple garden. Farther north ran a high wall, and just outside was the government magazine. West of the bel-tree was a row of tall pines that rustled in the wind. Below the trees flowed the Ganges, and to the south could be seen the sacred grove of the Panchavati. The dense trees and underbrush hid the temples. No noise of the outside world reached the bel-tree.

MASTER (to M.): "But one cannot realize God without renouncing 'woman and gold'."

M: "Why? Did not Vasishtha say to Rāma, 'O Rāma, You may renounce the world if the world is outside God'?"

MASTER (smiling): "He said that to Rāma so that Rāma might destroy Ravana. Rāma accepted the life of a householder and married to fulfil that mission."

M. stood there like a log, stunned and speechless.

Sri Ramakrishna went to the Panchavati on his way back to his room. M. accompanied him. It was then about ten o'clock.

Path of the Impersonal God

M: "Sir, is there no spiritual discipline leading to realization of the Impersonal God?"

MASTER: "Yes, there is. But the path is extremely difficult. After intense austerities the rishis of olden times realized God as their inner most consciousness and experienced the real nature of Brahman. But how hard they had to work! They went out of their dwellings in the early morning and all day practised austerities and meditation. Returning home at nightfall, they took a light supper of fruit and roots.

"But an aspirant cannot succeed in this form of spiritual discipline if his mind is stained with worldliness even in the slightest degree. The mind must withdraw totally from all objects of form, taste, smell, touch, and sound. Only thus does it become pure. The Pure Mind is the same as the Pure Ātman. But such a mind must be altogether free from 'woman and gold'. When it becomes pure, one has another experience. One realizes: 'God alone is the Doer, and I am His instrument.' One does not feel oneself to be absolutely necessary to others either in their misery or in their happiness.

"Once a wicked man beat into unconsciousness a monk who lived in a monastery. On regaining consciousness he was asked by his friends, 'Who is feeding you milk?' The monk said, 'He who beat me is now feeding me.' "

M: "Yes, sir. I know that story."

Obstacles to samādhi

MASTER: "It is not enough to know it. One must assimilate its meaning. It is the thought of worldly objects that prevents the mind from going into samādhi. One becomes established in samādhi when one is completely rid of worldliness. It is possible for me to give up the body in samādhi; but I have a slight desire to enjoy the love of God and the company of His devotees. Therefore I pay a little attention to my body.

"There is another kind of samādhi, called unmana samādhi. One attains it by suddenly gathering the dispersed mind. You understand what that is, don't you?"

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "Yes. It is the sudden withdrawal of the dispersed mind to the Ideal. But that samādhi does not last long. Worldly thoughts intrude and destroy it. The yogi slips down from his yoga.

"At Kamarpukur I have seen the mongoose living in its hole up in the wall. It feels snug there. Sometimes people tie a brick to its tail; then the pull of the brick makes it come out of its hole. Every time the mongoose tries to be comfortable inside the hole, it has to come out because of the pull of the brick. Such is the effect of brooding on worldly objects that it makes the yogi stray from the path of yoga.

"Worldly people may now and then experience samādhi. The lotus blooms, no doubt, when the sun is up; but its petals close again when the sun is covered by a cloud. Worldly thought is the cloud."

M: "Isn't it possible to develop both jnāna and bhakti by the practice of spiritual discipline?"

MASTER: "Through the path of bhakti a man may attain them both. If it is necessary, God gives him the Knowledge of Brahman. But a highly qualified aspirant may develop both jnāna and bhakti at the same time. Such is the case with the Isvarakotis-Chaitanya for example. But the case of ordinary devotees is different.

"There are five kinds of light: the light of a lamp, the light of various kinds of fire, the light of the moon, the light of the sun, and lastly the combined light of the sun and the moon. Bhakti is the light of the moon, and jnāna the light of the sun.

"Sometimes it is seen that the sun has hardly set when the moon rises in the sky. In an Incarnation of God one sees, at the same time, the sun of Knowledge and the moon of Love.

"Can everyone, by the mere wish, develop Knowledge and Love at the same time? It depends on the person. One bamboo is more hollow than another. Is it possible for all to comprehend the nature of God? Can a one seer pot hold five seers of milk?"

M: "But what about the grace of God? Through His grace a camel can pass through the eye of a needle."

MASTER: "But is it possible to obtain God's grace just like that? A beggar may get a penny, if he asks for it. But suppose he asks you right off for his train fare: How about that?"

M. stood silent. The Master, too, remained silent. Suddenly he said: "Yes, it is true. Through the grace of God some may get both jnāna and bhakti."

M. saluted the Master and went back to the bel-tree.

At midday, finding that M. had not yet returned, Sri Ramakrishna started toward the bel-tree; but on reaching the Panchavati he met M. carrying his prayer carpet and water-jug. M. saluted the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna said to M: "I was coming to look for you. Because of your delay I thought you might have scaled the wall and run away. I watched your eyes this morning and felt apprehensive lest you should go away like Narayan Shastri. Then I said to myself: 'No, he won't run away. He thinks a great deal before doing anything.' "

The same night the Master talked to M., Rākhāl , Lātu, Harish, and a few other devotees.

MASTER (to M.): "Some people give a metaphysical interpretation of the Vrindāvan episode of Sri Krishna's life. What do you say about it?"

M: "There are various opinions. What if there are? You have told us the story of Bhishmadeva's weeping, on his bed of arrows, because he could not understand anything of God's ways.

"Again, you have told us that Hanuman used to say: 'I don't know any thing about the day of the week, the position of the stars, and so forth. I only meditate on Rāma.'

"Further, you have said to us that in the last analysis there are two things only. Brahman and Its Power. You have also said that, after the attainment of Brahmajnana, a man realizes these two to be One, the One that has no two"

MASTER: "Yes, that is true. Your ideal is to reach the goal. You may reach it by going either through a thorny forest or along a good road.

"Diverse opinions certainly exist. Nangta used to say that the monks could not be feasted because of the diversity of their views. Once a feast was arranged for the sannyasis. Monks belonging to many sects were invited. Everyone claimed that his sect should be fed first, but no conclusion could be arrived at. At last they all went away and the food had to be given to the prostitutes."

M: "Totapuri was indeed a great soul."

MASTER: "But Hazra says he was an ordinary man. There's no use in discussing these things. Everyone says that his watch alone gives the correct time.

"You see, Narayan Shastri developed a spirit of intense renunciation. He was a great scholar. He gave up his wife and went away. A man attains yoga when he completely effaces 'woman and gold' from his mind. With some, the characteristics of the yogi are well marked.

"I shall have to tell you something of the six centres. The mind of the yogi passes through these, and he realizes God through His grace. Have you heard of the six centres?"

M: "These are the 'seven planes' of the Vedānta."

MASTER: "Not the Vedānta, but the Vedas. Do you know what the six centres are like? They are the 'lotuses' in the subtle body. The yogis see them. They are like the fruits and leaves of a wax tree."

M: "Yes, sir. The yogis can perceive them. I have read that there is a kind of glass through which a tiny object looks very big. Likewise, through yoga one can see those subtle lotuses."

Following Sri Ramakrishna's direction, M. spent the night in the hut at the Panchavati. In the early hours of the morning he was singing alone:

I am without the least benefit of prayer and austerity, O Lord!
I am the lowliest of the lowly; make me pure with Thy hallowed touch.
One by one I pass my days in hope of reaching Thy Lotus Feet,
But Thee, alas, I have not found. . . .

Suddenly M. glanced toward the window and saw the Master standing there. Sri Ramakrishna's eyes became heavy with tears as M. sang the line:

I am the lowliest of the lowly; make me pure with Thy hallowed touch.

M. sang again:

I shall put on the ochre robe and ear-rings made of conch-shell;
Thus, in the garb of a yogini, from place to place I shall wander,
Till I have found my cruel Hari. . . .

M. saw that the Master was walking with Rākhāl.

Friday, December 21, 1883

In the morning the Master and M. were conversing alone under the bel-tree. The Master told him many secrets of spiritual discipline, exhorting him to renounce "woman and gold". He further said that the mind at times becomes one's guru.

After his midday meal the Master went to the Panchavati wearing a beautiful yellow robe. Two or three Vaishnava monks were there, clad in the dress of their sect.

In the afternoon a monk belonging to the sect of Nanak arrived. He was a worshipper of the formless God. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to meditate as well on God with form. The Master said to him: "Dive deep; one does not get the precious gems by merely floating on the surface. God is without form, no doubt; but He also has form. By meditating on God with form one speedily acquires devotion; then one can meditate on the formless God. It is like throwing a letter away, after learning its contents, and then setting out to follow its instructions."

Saturday, December 22, 1883

Rākhāl, Harish, M., and Lātu had been staying with Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. About nine o'clock in the morning the Master was sitting with them on the southeast verandah of his room, when Balarām's father and Devendra Ghosh of Syampukur arrived.

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, how does one obtain love for God?"

MASTER: "Go forward. The king dwells beyond the seven gates. You can see him only after passing through all the gates.

"At the time of the installation of Annapurna at Chanak, I said to Dwarika Babu: 'Large fish live in the deep water of a big lake. Throw some spiced bait into the water; then the fish will come, attracted by its smell; now and then they will make the water splash. Devotion and ecstatic love are like the spiced bait.

Divine Incarnations

"God sports in the world as man. He incarnates Himself as man-as in the case of Krishna, Rāma, and Chaitanya. Once I said to Keshab: 'The greatest manifestation of God is in man. There are small holes in the balk of a field, where crabs and fish accumulate in the rainy season. If you want to find them you must seek them in the holes. If you seek God, you must seek Him in the Incarnations.'

"The Divine Mother of the Universe manifests Herself through this three-and-a-half cubit man. There is a song that says:

O Mother, what a machine is this that Thou hast made!
What pranks Thou playest with this toy
Three and a half cubits high!

"One needs spiritual practice in order to know God and recognize Divine Incarnations. Big fish live in the large lake, but to see them one must throw spiced bait in the water. There is butter in milk, but one must churn the milk to get it. There is oil in mustard-seed, but one must press the seed to extract the oil."

DEVOTEE: "Has God form, or is He formless?"

MASTER:"Wait, wait! First of all you must go to Calcutta; then only will you know where the Maidan, the Asiatic Society, and the Bengal Bank are located. If you want to go to the brahmin quarter of Khardaha, you must first of all go to Khardaha.

"Why should it not be possible to practice the discipline of the formless God? But it is very difficult to follow that path. One cannot follow it without renouncing 'woman and gold'. There must be complete renunciation, both inner and outer. You cannot succeed in this path if you have the slightest trace of worldliness.

"It is easy to worship God with form. But it is not easy as all that.

"One should not discuss the discipline of the Impersonal God or the path of knowledge with a bhakta. Through great effort perhaps he is just cultivating a little devotion. You will injure it if you explain away everything as a mere dream.

"Kabir was a worshipper of the Impersonal God. He did not believe in Śiva, Kāli, or Krishna. He used to make fun of them and say that Kāli lived on the offerings of rice and banana, and that Krishna danced like a monkey when the gopis clapped their hands. (*All laugh*).

"One who worships God without form perhaps sees at first the deity with ten arms, then the deity with four arms, then the Baby Krishna with two arms. At last he sees the Indivissible Light and merges in It.

"It is said that sages like Dattatreya and Jadabharata did not return to the relative plane after having the visition of Brahman. According to some people Sukadeva tasted only a drop of that Ocean of Brahman-Consciousness. He saw and heard the rumbling of the waves of that Ocean, but did not dive into It.

"A brahmachari once said to me, 'One who goes beyond Kedār cannot keep his body alive.' Likewise, a man cannot preserve his body after attaining Brahmajnana.1 The body drops off in twenty-one days.

"There was an infinite field beyond a high wall. Four friends tried to find out what was beyond the wall. Three of them, one after the other, climbed the wall, saw the field, burst into loud laughter, and dropped to the other side. These three could not give any information about the field. Only the fourth man came back and told people about it. He is like those who retain their bodies, even after attaining Brahmajnana, in order to teach others. Divine Incarnations belong to this class.

"Parvati was born as the daughter of King Himalaya. After Her birth She revealed to the king Her various divine forms. The father said: 'Well, Daughter, You have shown me all these forms. That is nice. But You have another aspect, which is Brahman. Please show me that.' 'Father,' replied Parvati, 'if you seek the Knowledge of Brahman, then renounce the world and live in the company of holy men.' But King Himalaya insisted. Thereupon Parvati revealed Her Brahman-form, and immediately the king fell down unconscious.

"All that I have just said belongs to the realm of reasoning. Brahman alone is real and the world illusory-that is reasoning. And everything but Brahman is like a dream. But this is an extremely difficult path. To one who follows it even the divine play in the world becomes like a dream and appears unreal; his 'I' also vanishes. The followers of this path do not accept the Divine Incarnation. It is a very difficult path. The lovers of God should not hear much of such reasoning.

"That is why God incarnates Himself as man and teaches people the path of devotion. He exhorts people to cultivate self-surrender to God. Following the path of devotion, one realizes everything through His grace both Knowledge and Supreme Wisdom.

"God sports in this world. He is under the control of His devotee. 'Syama, the Divine Mother, is Herself tied by the cord of the love of Her devotee.'

"Sometimes God becomes the magnet and the devotee the needle, and sometimes the devotee becomes the magnet and God the needle. The devotee attracts God to him. God is the Beloved of His devotee and is under his control.

"According to one school, the gopis of Vrindāvan, like Yaśoda, had believed in the formless God in their previous births; but they did not derive any satisfaction from this belief. That is why later on they enjoyed so much bliss in the company of Sri Krishna in the Vrindāvan episode of His life. One day Krishna said to the gopis: 'Come along. I shall show you the Abode of the Eternal. Let us go to the Jamuna for a bath.' As they dived into the water of the river, they at once saw Goloka. Next they saw the Indivisible Light. Thereupon Yaśoda exclaimed: 'O Krishna, we don't care for these things any more. We would like to see You in Your human form. I want to take You in my arms and feed You.'

God and His devotee

"So the greatest manifestation of God is through His Incarnations. The devotee should worship and serve an Incarnation of God as long as He lives in a human body. 'At the break of day He disappears into the secret chamber of His House.'

God manifesting Himself as living beings

"Not all, by any means, can recognize an Incarnation of God. Assuming a human body, the Incarnation falls victim to disease, grief, hunger, thirst, and all such things, like ordinary mortals. Rāma wept for Sita. 'Brahman weeps, entrapped in the snare of the five elements.'

"It is said in the Purana that God, in His Incarnation as the Sow, lived happily with His young ones even after the destruction of Hiranyāksha. As the Sow, He nursed them and forgot all about His abode in heaven. At last Śiva killed the sow body with his trident, and God, laughing aloud, went to His own abode."

In the afternoon Bhavanath arrived. Rākhāl , M., Harish, and other devotees were in the room.

MASTER (*to Bhavanath*): "To love an Incarnation of God- that is enough. Ah, what ecstatic love the gopis had for Krishna!"

Sri Ramakrishna began to sing, asuming the attitude of the gopis:

O Krishna! You are the Soul of my soul...

Then he sang:

I am not going home, O friend,
For there it is hard for me to chant my Krishna's name...

And again:

O Friend, that day I stood at my door as You were going to the woods...

Continuing, the Master said: "When Krishna suddenly disappeared in the act of dancing and playing with gopis, they were beside themselves with grief. Looking at tree, they said: 'O tree, you must be a great hermit. You must have seen Krishna. Otherwise, why do you stand there motionless, as if absorbed in samādhi?' Looking at the earth covered with green grass, they said" 'O earth, you must have seen Kirshna. Otherwise, why does your hair stand on end? you must have enjoyed the thrill of His touch.' Looking at the madhavi creeper, they said, 'O madhavi, give us back our Madhava!' The gopis were intoxicated with ecstatic love for Krishna. Akrura came to Vrindāvan to take Krishna and Balarama to Mathura. When they mounted the chariot, the gopis clung to the wheels. They would not let the chariot move."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sang, assuming the attitude of Akrura:

Hold not, hold not the chariot's wheels!
Is it the wheels that make it move?
The Mover of its wheels is Krishna,
By whose will the worlds are moved....

MASTER: "*'Is it the wheels that make it move?' 'By whose will the worlds are moved.'* 'The driver moves the chariot at His Master's bidding.' I feel deeply touched by these lines."

Sunday, December 23, 1883

At nine o'clock in the morning Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the southwest porch of his room, with Rākhāl , Lātu, M., Harish, and some other devotees. M. had now been nine days with the Master at Dakshineswar. Earlier in the morning Manomohan had arrived from Konnagar on this way to Calcutta. Hazra, too, was present.

A Vaishnava was singging. Referring to one of the songs, Sri Ramakrishna said: "I didn't enjoy that song very much. The songs of the earlier writers seem to me to have more of the right spirit. Once I sang for Nangta at the Panchavati: *'To arms! To arms, O man! Death storms your house in battle array.'* I sang another: *'O Mother, I have no one else to blame: Alas! I sink in the well these very hands have dug.'*

"Nangta, the Vedantist, was a man of profound knowledge. The song moved him to tears though he didn't understand its meaning. Padmalochan also wept when I sang the songs of Ramprasad about the Divine Mother. And he was truly a great pundit."

After the midday meal Sri Ramakrishna rested a few minutes in his room. M. was sitting on the floor. The Master was delighted to hear the music that was being played in the nahabat. He then explained to M. that Brahman alone has become the universe and all living beings.

MASTER: "Referring to a certain place, someone once said to me: 'Nobody sings the name of God there. It has no holy atmosphere.' No sooner did he say this than I

perceived that it was God alone who had become all living beings. They appeared as countless bubbles, or reflections in the Ocean of Satchidananda.

"Again, I find sometimes that living beings are like so many pills made of Indivisible Consciousness. Once I was on my way to Burdwan from Kamarpukur. At one place I ran to the meadow to see how living beings are sustained. I saw ants crawling there. It appeared to me that every place was filled with Consciousness."

Hazra entered the room and sat on the floor.

MASTER: "Again, I perceive that living beings are like different flowers with various layers of petals. They are also revealed to me as bubbles, some big, some small."

Master's childlike mood

While describing in this way the vision of different divine forms, the Master went into an ecstatic state and said, "I have become! I am here!" Uttering these words he went into samādhi. His body was motionless. He remained in that state a long time and then gradually regained partial consciousness of the world. He began to laugh like a boy and pace the room. His eyes radiated bliss as if he had seen a wondrous vision. His gaze was not fixed on any particular object, and his face beamed with joy. Still pacing the room, the Master said: "I saw the paramahamsa who stayed under the banyan tree walking thus with just such a smile. Am I too in that state of mind?"

He sat on the small couch and engaged in conversation with the Divine Mother.

MASTER: "I don't even care to know. Mother, may I have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet!

(To M.) "One attains this state immediately after freeing oneself of all grief and desire.

(To the Divine Mother) "Mother, Thou hast done away with my worship. Please see, Mother, that I don't give up all desire. Mother, the paramahamsa is but a child. Doesn't a child need a mother? Therefore Thou art the Mother and I am the child. How can the child live without the Mother?"

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to the Divine Mother in a voice that would have melted even a stone. Again he addressed Her, saying: "mere knowledge of Advaita! I spit on it! Thou doest exist as long as Thou dost keep the ego in me. The paramahamsa is but a child. Doesn't a child need a mother?"

M. sat there speechless and looked at the divine manifestation in the Master. He said to himself: "The Master is an ocean of mercy that knows no motive. He has kept himself in the state of a paramahamsa that he might, as teacher, awaken the spiritual consciousness of myself and other earnest souls."

M. further thought: "The Master says, 'Advaita-Chaitanya-Nitayananda'; that is to say, through the knowledge of the Non-dual Brahman one attains Consciousness and enjoys Eternal Bliss. The master has not only attained the knowledge of non-duality but is in a

state of Eternal Blisss. He is always drunk with ecstatic love for the Mother of the Universe."

With folded hands Hazara looked at the Master and said every now and they:"How blessed you are! How blessed you are!"

MASTER (*to Hazra*): "But you have hardly any faith; you simply live here to add to the play, like Jatila and Kutila."

In the afternoon M. paced the temple garden alone. He was deeply absorbed in the thought of the Master and was pondering the Master's words concerning the attainment of the exalted state of the paramahamsa, after the elimination of grief and desire. M. said to himself: "Who is this Sri Ramakrishna, acting as my teacher? Has God embodied Himself for our welfare? The master himself says that none but an Incarnation can come down to the phenomenal plane from the state of nirvikalpa samādhi."

Monday, December 24, 1883

At eight o'clock in the morning Sri Ramakrishna and M. were talking together in the pine-grove at the northern end of the temple garden. This was the eleventh day of M.'s stay with the Master.

It was winter. The sun had just risen. The river was flowing north with the tide. Not far off could be seen the bel-tree where the Master had practised great spiritual austerities. Sri Ramakrishna faced the east as he talked to his disciple and told him about the Knowledge of Brahman.

MASTER: "The formless God is real, and equally real is God with form. Nangta used to instruct me about the nature of Satchidananda Brahman. He would say that It is like an infinite ocean- water everywhere, to the right, left, above, and below. Water enveloped in water. It is the Water of the Great Cause, motionless. Waves spring up when It becomes active. Its activities are creation, preservation and destruction.

"Again, he ued to say that Brahman is where reason comes to stop. There is the instance of camphor. Nothing remains after it is burnt-not even a trace of ash.

"Brahman is beyond mind and speech. A salt doll entered the ocean to measure its depth; but it did not return to tell others how deep the ocean was. It melted in the ocean itself.

"The rishis once said to Rāma: 'O Rāma, sages like Bharadvaja may very well call you an Incarnation of God, but we cannot do that. We adore the Word-Brahman. 3 We do not want the human form of God.' Rāma smiled and went away, pleased with their adoration.

Different manifestations of the Absolute

"But the Nitya and the Lila are the two aspects of the same Reality. As I have said before, it is like the roof and the steps leading to it. The Absolute plays in many ways:

as Isvara, as the gods, as man, and as the universe. The Incarnation is the play of the Absolute as man. Do you know how the Absolute plays as man? It is like the rushing down of water from a big roof through a pipe; the power of Satchidananda-nay, Satchidananda Itself-descends through the conduit of a human form as water descends through the pipe. Only twelve sages, Bharadvaja and the others, recognized Rāma as an Incarnation of God. Not everyone can recognize an Incarnation.

"It is God alone who incarnates Himself as man to teach people the ways of love and knowledge. Well, what do you think of me?

"Once my father went to Gaya. There Raghuvir said to him in a dream, 'I shall be born as your son.' Thereupon my father said to Him: 'O Lord, I am a poor brahmin. How shall I be able to serve You?' 'Don't worry about it', Raghuvir replied. 'It will be taken care of.'

"My sister, Hriday's mother, used to worship my feet with flowers and sandal-paste. One day I placed my foot on her head and said to her, 'You will die in Benares.'

"Once Mathur Babu said to me: 'Father, there is nothing inside you but God. Your body is like an empty shell. It may look from outside like a pumpkin, but inside there is nothing-neither flesh nor seed. Once I saw you as someone moving with a veil on.'

Master's vision of Gaurānga

(To M.) "I am shown everything beforehand. Once I saw Gaurānga and his devotees singing kirtan in the Panchavati. I think I saw Balarām there and you too.

"I wanted to know the experiences of Gaurānga and was shown them at Syambazar in our native district. A crowd gathered; they even climbed the trees and the walls; they stayed with me day and night. For seven days I had no privacy whatever. Thereupon I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I have had enough of it.'

"I am at peace now. I shall have to be born once more. Therefore I am not giving all knowledge to my companions. (With a smile) Suppose I give you all knowledge; will you then come to me again so willingly?

"I recognized you on hearing you read the Chaitanya Bhagavat. You are my own. The same substance, like father and son. All of you are coming here again. When you pull one part of the kalmi creeper, all the branches come toward you. You are all relatives-like brothers. Suppose Rākhāl, Harish, and the others had gone to Puri, and you were there too. Would you live separately?

Parable of the grass-eating tiger

"Before you came here, you didn't know who you were. Now you will know. It is God who, as the guru, makes one know.

"Nangta told the story of the tigress and the herd of goats. Once a tigress attacked a herd of goats. A hunter saw her from a distance and killed her. The tigress was

pregnant and gave birth to a cub as she expired. The cub began to grow in the company of the goats. At first it was nursed by the she-goats, and later on, as it grew bigger, it began to eat grass and bleat like the goats. Gradually the cub became a big tiger; but still it ate grass and bleated. When atached by other animals, it would run away, like the goats. One day a fierce-looking tiger attacked the herd. It was amazed to see a tiger in the herd eating grass and running away with the goats at its approach. It lef the goats and caught hold of the grass-eating tiger, which began to bleat and tried to run away. But the fierce tiger dragged it to the water and said: 'Now look at your face in the water. You see, you have the pot-face of a tiger; it is exactly like mine.' Next it pressed a piece of meat into its mouth. At first the grass-eating tiger refused to eat the meat. Then it got the taste of the meat and relished it. At last the fierce tiger said to the grass-eater: 'What a disgrace! You lived with goats and ate grass like them!' And the other was really ashamed of itself.

"Eating grass is like enjoying 'woman and gold'. To bleat and run away like a goat is to behave like an ordinary man. Going away with the new tiger is like taking shelter with the guru, who awakens one's spiritual consciousness, and recognizing him alone as one's relative. To see one's face rightly is to know one's real Self."

Sri Ramakrishna stood up. There was silence all around, distrubed only the by the gentle rustling of the pine-needless and the murmuring of the Ganges. The Master went to the Panchavati and then to his room, talking all the while with M. The disciple followed him, fascinated. At the Panchavati Sri Ramakrishan touched with his forehead the raised platform around the banyan-tree. This was the place of his intense spiritual discipline, where he had wept bitterly for the vision of the Divine Mother, where he had held intimate communion with Her, and where he had seen many divine forms.

The maser and M. passed the cluster of bakul-tress and came to the nahabat. Hazara awas there. The master said to him:" Don't eat too much, and give up this craze for outer cleanliness. People with a craze do not attain Knowledge. Follow conventions only as much as necessary. Don't go to excess." The Master entered his room and sat on the couch.

Sri Ramakrishna was resting after his midday meal when Surendra, Ram, and other devotees arrived from Calcutta. It was about one o'clock. While M. was strolling alone under the pine-tress, Harish came there and told him that the Master wanted him in his room. Someone was going to read from the *'Śiva Samhita*, a book containing instructions about yoga and six centres.

M. entered the room and saluted the Master. The devotees were seated on the floor, but no one was reading the book. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to the devotees.

MASTER:"The gopis cherished escstatic love for Krishna. There are two elements in such love: 'I-ness' and 'my-ness'. 'I-ness' is the feeling that Krishna will be ill if 'I' do not serve Him. In this attitude the devotee does not look upon his Ideal as God.

"'My-ness' is to feel that the Beloved is 'my' own. The gopis had such a feeling of 'my-ness' toward Krishna that they would place their subtle bodies under His feet lest His soles should get hurt.

"Yaśoda remarked: 'I don't understand your Chintamani Krishna. To me He is simply Gopala.' The gopis also said: 'Oh, where is Krishna, our Beloved? Where is Krishna, our Sweetheart?' They were not conscious of His being God.

"It is like a small child saying 'my daddy'. If someone says to the child, 'No, he is not your daddy', the child says, 'Yes, he is my daddy.'

God, incarnated as man, acts like a man

"God, incarnating Himself as man, behave exactly like a man. That is why it is difficult to recognize an Incarnation. When God becomes man, He is exactly like man. He has the same hunger, thirst, disease, grief, and sometimes even fear. Rāma was stricken with grief for Sita. Krishna carried on His head the shoes and wooden stool of His father Nanda.

"In the theatre, when an actor comes on the stage in the role of a holy man, he behaves like one, and not like the actor who is taking the part of the king. He plays his own role.

"Once an impersonator dressed himself as a world-renouncing monk. Pleased with the correctness of his disguise, some rich people offered him a rupee. He did not accept the money but went away shaking his head. Afterwards he removed his disguise and appeared in his usual dress. Then he said to the rich people, 'Please give me the rupee.' They replied: 'Why, you went away refusing our present. Why do you ask for it now?' The man said: 'But then I was in the role of a holy man. I could not accept money.' Likewise, when God becomes man He behaves exactly like a man.

"At Vrindāvan one sees many places associated with Krishna's life."

SURENDRA: "We were there during the holidays. Visitors were continually pestered for money. The priests and others asked for it continually. We told them that we were going to leave for Calcutta the next day, but we fled from Vrindāvan that very night."

MASTER: "What is that? Shame! You said you would leave the place the next day and ran away that very day. What a shame!"

SURENDRA (embarrassed): "Here and there we saw the babajis in the woods practising spiritual discipline in solitude."

MASTER: "Did you give them anything?"

SURENDRA: "No, sir."

MASTER: "That was not proper of you. One should give something to monks and devotees. Those who have the means should help such persons when they meet them.

Master's reminiscences of Mathura and Vrindāvan

"I went to Vrindāvan with Mathur Babu. The moment I came to the Dhruva Ghat at Mathura, in a flash I saw Vasudeva crossing the Jamuna with Krishna in his arms.

"One evening I was taking a stroll on the beach of the river. There were small thatched huts on the beach and big plum-trees. It was the 'cow-dust' hour. The cows were returning from the pasture, raising dust with their hoofs. I saw them fording the river. Then came some cowherd boys crossing the river with their cows. No sooner did I behold this scene than I cried out, 'O Krishna, whre are You?' and becam unconscious.

"I wanted to visit Syamakunda and Radhakunda; so Mathur Babu sent me there in a palanquin. We had a long way to go. Food was put in the palanquin. While going over the meadow I was overpowerd with emotion and wept: 'O Krishna, I find everything the same; only You are not here. This is the very meadow where You tended the cows.' Hriday followed me on foot. I was bathed in tears. I couldn't ask the bearers to stop the palanquin.

"At Syamakunda and Radhakunda I saw the holy men living in small mud huts. Facing away from the road lest their eyes should fall on men, they were engaged in spiritual discipline. One should visit the 'Twelve Grove'.

"I went in to samdhi at the sight of the image of Bankuvihari. In that state I wanted to touch it. I did not want to visit Govindaji twice. At Mathura I dreamt of Krishna as the cowherd boy. Hriday dnd Mathur Babu had the same dream.

(To Surendra) "You have both- yoga and bhoga. There are different classes of sages: the brahmarshi, the devarshi, and the rajarshi. Sukadeva is an example of the brahmarshi. He didn't keep even one book with him. An example of the devarhi is Nārada. Janaka was a rajarshi, devoted to selfless work.

"The devotee of the Divine Mother attains dharma and moksha. He enjoys artha and kama as well. Once I saw you in a vision as the child of the Divine Mother. You have both- yoga and bhoga; otherwise your countenance would look dry.

"The man who renounces all looks dry. Once I saw a devotee of the Divine Mother at the bathing-ghat on the Ganges. He was eating his meal and at the same time worhipping the Mother. He looked on himself as the Mother's child.

"But it isn't good to have much money. I find that Jadu Mallick is drowned in worldliness. It is because he has too much money. Nabin Niyogi, too, has both yoga and bhoga. I saw him and his son waving the fan before the image of the Divine Mother at the time of the Durga Puja."

SURENDRA:"Sir, why can't I meditate?"

MASTER:"You remember God and think of Him, don't you?"

SURENDRA:"Yes, sir. I go to sleep repeating the word 'Mother'."

MASTER:"That is very good. It will be enough if you remember God and think of Him."

Sri Ramakrishna had taken Surendra's responsibilities on himself. Why should Surendra worry about anything?

It was evening. The Master was sitting on the floor of this room with the devotees. He was talking to them about yoga and the six centes. These are described in the *Śiva Samhita*.

MASTER:"Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna are the three principal nerves. All the lotuses are located in the Sushumna. They are formed of Consciousness, like a tree made of wax-the branches, twigs, fruits, and so forth all of wax. The Kundalini lies in the lotus of the Muladhara. That lotus has four petals. The Primordial Energy resides in all bodies as the Kundalini. She is like a sleeping snake coiled up-'of the form of a sleeping snake, having the Muladhara for Her abode'. (To M.) The Kundalini is speedily awakened if one follows the path of bhakti. God cannot be seen unless She is awakened. Sing earnestly and secretly in solitude:

> *Waken, O Mother! O Kundalini, whose nature is Bliss Eternal!*
> *Thou art the serpent coiled in sleep, in the lotus of the Muladhara.*

"Ramprasad achieved perfection through singing. One obtains the vision of God if one sings with yearning heart."

M: "Grief and distress of mind disappear if one has these experiences but once."

Proper time for spiritual unfoldment

MASTER: "That is true. Distress of mind disappears for ever. I shall tell you a few things about yoga. But you see, the mother bird doesn't break the shell until the chick inside the egg is matured. The egg is hatched in the fullness of time. It is necessary to practise some spiritual discipline. The guru no doubt does everything for the disciple; but at the end he makes the disciple work a little himself. When cutting down a big tree, a man cuts almost through the trunk; then he stands aside for a moment, and the tree falls down with a crash.

"The farmer brings water to his field through a canal from the river. He stands aside when only a little digging remains to be done to connect the field with the water. Then the earth becomes soaked and falls of itself, and the water of the river pours into the canal in torrents.

"A man is able to see God as soon as he gets rid of ego and other limitations. He sees God as soon as he is free from such feelings as 'I am a scholar', 'I am the son of such and such a person', 'I am wealthy', 'I am honourable', and so forth.

"'God alone is real and all else unreal; the world is illusory'-that is discrimination. One cannot assimilate spiritual instruction without discrimination.

"Through the practice of spiritual discipline one attains perfection, by the grace of God. But one must also labour a little. Then one sees God and enjoys bliss. If a man hears that a jar filled with gold is buried at a certain place, he rushes there and begins to dig. He sweats as he goes on digging. After much digging he feels the spade strike something. Then he throws away the spade and looks for the jar. At the sight of the jar he dances for joy. Then he takes up the jar and pours out the gold coins. He takes them into his hand, counts them, and feels the ecstasy of joy. Vision-touch-enjoyment. Isn't it so?"

M: "Yes, sir."

The Master was silent a moment and then went on.

MASTER: "Those who are my own will come here even if I scold them. Look at Narendra's nature! At first he used to abuse my Mother Kāli very much. One day I said to him sharply, 'Rascal! Don't come here any more.'

He slowly left the room and prepared a smoke. He who is one's own will not be angry even if scolded. What do you say?"

M: "That is true, sir."

MASTER: "Narendra is perfect from his very birth. He is devoted to the ideal of the formless God."

M. (*smiling*): "Whenever he comes here he brings along great excitement."

Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said, "Yes, excitement indeed."

The following day was Tuesday, the ekadasi day of the lunar fortnight. It was eleven o'clock in the morning and the Master had not yet taken his meal. M., Rākhāl, and other devotees were sitting in the Master's room.

MASTER (to M.): "One should fast on the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight. That purifies the mind and helps one to develop love of God. Isn't that so?"

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "But you may take milk and puffed rice. Don't you think so?"

Chapter 18

M. AT DAKSHINESWAR (II)

December 26, 1883

SRI RAMAKRISHNA, accompanied by Manilal Mallick, M., and several other devotees, was in a carriage on his way to Ram's new garden.

The garden, which Ram had recently purchased, was next to Surendra's. Ram adored the Master as an Incarnation of God. He visited Sri Ramakrishna frequently at Dakshineswar. Manilal Mallick was a member of the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmos do not believe in Divine Incarnations.

MASTER (to Manilal): "In order to meditate on God, one should try at first to think of Him as free from upadhis, limitations. God is beyond upadhis. He is beyond speech and mind. But it is very difficult to achieve perfection in this form of meditation.

"But it is easy to meditate on an Incarnation-God born as man. Yes, God in man. The body is a mere covering. It is like a lantern with a light burning inside, or like a glass case in which one sees precious things."

Arriving at the garden, the Master got out of the carriage and accompanied Ram and the other devotees to the sacred tulsi-grove. Standing near it, he said: "How nice! It is a fine place. You can easily meditate on God here."

Sri Ramakrishna sat down in the house, which stood to the south of the lake. Ram offered him a plate of fruit and sweets which he enjoyed with the devotees. After a short time he went around the garden.

Next Sri Ramakrishna proceeded toward Surendra's garden. He walked on foot a little distance and saw a sādhu sitting on a couch under a tree. At once he went up to the holy man and joyfully began a conversation with him.

MASTER: "To which order of monks do you belong? Have you any title-Giri, Puri, or the like?"

SĀDHU: "People call me a paramahamsa."

Brahman and Śakti identical

MASTER: "That is good. 'I am Śiva'-that is a good attitude. But I must tell you something else. The process of creation, preservation, and destruction that is going on day and night is due to Śakti, the Power of God. This Primal Power and Brahman are one and the same. Śakti cannot exist without Brahman, just as waves cannot exist without water. There cannot be any instrumental music without an instrument.

"As long as God keeps us in His relative world, so long we feel that there are two. If one accepts Śakti, one accepts Brahman as well. If one is aware of night, one is also aware of day. If one is aware of knowledge, one is also aware of ignorance.

"But there is another state in which God reveals to His devotee that Brahman is beyond both knowledge and ignorance. It cannot be described in words. What exists, exists."

After a pleasant conversation with the sādhu, the Master returned to the carriage, the holy man walking with him. Sri Ramakrishna looked upon him as a friend of long acquaintance, and they walked arm in arm.

The Master arrived at Surendra's garden. The very first thing he talked about was the sādhu.

MASTER: "He is a very nice man. (To Ram) Bring him to Dakshineswar when you come. He is really a good man. There is a line in a song to the effect that a man cannot recognize a holy person unless he is holy himself.

Many forms of divine manifestation

"The sādhu believes in God without form. That is good. God is both formless and endowed with form. He is many things more. The Absolute and the Relative belong to one and the same Reality. What is beyond speech and mind is born in the flesh, assuming various forms and engaging in various activities. From that one Om have sprung 'Om Śiva', 'Om Kāli', and 'Om Krishna'. Suppose the master of a house has sent out a small boy of the family to invite people to a feast. All look on the boy with great fondness and affection because he is the son or grandson of a prominent man."

The Master took refreshments at Surendra's garden house and then set out for Dakshineswar with the devotees.

Thursday, December 27, 1883

The temple garden was filled with the sweet music of the dawn service; which mingled with the morning melody from the nahabat. Leaving his bed, Sri Ramakrishna chanted the names of God in sweet tones. Then he bowed before the pictures of the different deities in his room and went to the west porch to salute the Ganges.

Some of the devotees who had spent the night at the temple garden came to the Master's room and bowed before him. Rākhāl was staying with the Master, and Baburam had come the previous evening. M. had been staying there two weeks.

Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "I have been invited to Ishan's this morning. Baburam will accompany me, and you too." M. made ready to go with the Master.

At eight o'clock the carriage hired for the Master stood waiting in front of the nahabat. On all sides plants and trees were in flower, and the river sparkled in the sunlight of the bright winter's day. The Master bowed once more before the pictures. Then, still chanting the name of the Divine Mother, he got into the carriage, followed by M. and

Baburam. The devotees took with them Sri Ramakrishna's woolen shawl, woolen cap, and small bag of spices.

Sri Ramakrishna was very happy during the trip and enjoyed it like a child. About nine o'clock the carriage stopped at the door of Ishan's house.

Ishan and his relatives greeted the Master and led him to the parlour on the first floor. Shrish, Ishan's son, was introduced to Sri Ramakrishna. The young man practised law at Alipur. He had been a brilliant student, having stood first in two of the university examinations, but he was extremely modest.

MASTER (to Shrish): "What is your profession?"

SHRISH: "I am practising law at Alipur."

MASTER (to M.): "For such a man to be a lawyer! (To Shrish) Well, have you any questions to ask? Perhaps you want to know how to live unattached in the world. Isn't that so?"

SHRISH: "Under the pressure of duties people do many unrighteous things in the world. Further, some are engaged in good work, and some in evil. Is this due to their actions in previous births? Is that why they act this way?"

Duties and ceremonial devotions

MASTER: "How long should a man perform his duties? As long as he has not attained God. Duties drop away after the realization of God. Then one goes beyond good and evil. The flower drops off as soon as the fruit appears. The flower serves the purpose of begetting the fruit.

"How long should a devotee perform daily devotions such as the sandhya? As long as his hair does not stand on end and his eyes do not shed tears at the name of God. These things indicate that the devotee has realized God. From these one knows that he has attained pure love of God. Realizing God one goes beyond virtue and vice.

I bow my head, says Prasad, before desire and liberation;
Knowing the secret that Kāli is one with the highest Brahman,
I have discarded, once for all, both righteousness and sin.

"The more you advance toward God, the less He will give you worldly duties to perform."

SHRISH: "It is extremely difficult to proceed toward God while leading the life of a householder."

Practice of God-communion

MASTER: "Why so? What about the yoga of practice? At Kamarpukur I have seen the women of the carpenter families selling flattened rice. Let me tell you how alert they are while doing their business. The pestle of the husking-machine that flattens the paddy

constantly falls into the hole of the mortar. The woman turns the paddy in the hole with one hand and with the other holds her baby on her lap as she nurses it. In the mean time customers arrive. The machine goes on pounding the paddy, and she carries on her bargains with the customers'. She says to them, 'Pay the few pennies you owe me before you take anything more.' You see, she has all these things to do at the same time-nurse the baby, turn the paddy as the pestle pounds it, take the flattened rice out of the hole, and talk to the buyers. This is called the yoga of practice. Fifteen parts of her mind out of sixteen are fixed on the pestle of the husking-machine, lest it should pound her hand. With only one part of her mind she nurses the baby and talks to the buyers. Likewise, he who leads the life of a householder should devote fifteen parts of his mind to God; otherwise he will face ruin and fall into the clutches of Death. He should perform the duties of the world with only one part of his mind.

"A man may lead the life of a householder after attaining Knowledge. But he must attain Knowledge first. If the milk of the mind is kept in the water of the world, they get mixed. Therefore he should turn the milk into curd and extract butter from it by churning it in solitude; then he may keep the butter in the water of the world. Therefore, you see, spiritual discipline is necessary. When the Aśwattha tree is a mere sapling, it must be enclosed by a fence; otherwise the cattle will eat it. But the fence may be taken away when the trunk grows thick and strong. Then even an elephant tied to the tree cannot harm it.

Necessity of spiritual discipline

"Therefore at the beginning the aspirant should go into solitude now and then. Spiritual discipline is necessary. You want to eat rice; suppose you sit down somewhere and say, 'Wood contains fire and fire cooks rice.' Can saying it cook the rice? You must get two pieces of wood and by rubbing them together bring out the fire.

"By eating siddhi one becomes intoxicated and feels happy. But suppose you haven't eaten the stuff or done anything else with it; you simply sit down somewhere and mutter, 'Siddhi! siddhi!' Will that intoxicate you or make you happy?

"You may learn a great deal from books; but it is all futile if you have no love for God and no desire to realize Him. A mere pundit, without discrimination and renunciation, has his attention fixed on 'woman and gold'. The vulture soars very high but its eyes are fixed on the charnel-pit.

"That alone is knowledge through which one is able to know God. All else is futile. Well, what is your idea about God?"

SHRISH: "Sir, I feel that there is an All-knowing Person. We get an indication of His Knowledge by looking at His creation. Let me give an illustration. God has made devices to keep fish and other aquatic animals alive in cold regions. As water grows colder, it gradually shrinks. But the amazing thing is that, just before turning into ice, the water becomes light and expands. In the freezing cold, fish can easily live in the

water of a lake: the surface of the lake may be frozen, but the water below is all liquid. If a very cool breeze blows, it is obstructed by the ice. The water below remains warm."

MASTER: "That God exists may be known by looking at the universe. But it is one thing to hear of God, another thing to see God, and still another thing to talk to God. Some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and some, again, have tasted it. You feel happy when you see milk; you are nourished and strengthened when you drink it. You will get peace of mind only when you have seen God. You will enjoy bliss and gain strength only when you have talked to Him."

SHRISH: "We do not have time to pray to God."

MASTER (with a smile): "That is true. Nothing comes to pass except at the right time. Going to bed, a child said to his mother, 'Mother, please wake me up when I feel the call of nature.' 'My son,' said the mother, 'that urge itself will wake you up. I don't have to wake you.'

"It is all decided beforehand by God what each one shall receive. A mother-in-law used to measure rice with a dish for her daughters-in-law. But it was not enough for them. One day the dish was broken and that made the girls happy. But the mother-in-law said to them, 'Children, you may shout and dance, but I can measure the rice with the palm of my hand.'

Self-surrender to God

(To Shrish): "Surrender everything at the feet of God. What else can you do? Give Him the power of attorney. Let Him do whatever He thinks best. If you rely on a great man, he will never injure you.

Illustration of monkey and kitten

"It is no doubt necessary to practise spiritual discipline; but there are two kinds of aspirants. The nature of the one kind is like that of the young monkey, and the nature of the other kind is like that of the kitten. The young monkey, with great exertion, somehow clings to its mother. Likewise, there are some aspirants who think that in order to realize God they must repeat His name a certain number of times, meditate on Him for a certain period, and practise a certain amount of austerity. An aspirant of this kind makes his own efforts to catch hold of God. But the kitten, of itself, cannot cling to its mother. It lies on the ground and cries, 'Mew, mew!' It leaves everything to its mother. The mother cat sometimes puts it on a bed, sometimes on the roof behind a pile of wood. She carries the kitten in her mouth hither and thither. The kitten doesn't know how to cling to the mother. Likewise, there are some aspirants who cannot practise spiritual discipline by calculating about japa or the period of meditation. All that they do is cry to God with yearning hearts. God hears their cry and cannot keep Himself away. He reveals Himself to them."

At noon the host wished to feed the Master and the devotees. Sri Ramakrishna was smilingly pacing the room. Now and then he exchanged a few words with the musician.

MUSICIAN: "It is God alone who is both the 'instrument' and the 'cause'. Duryodhana said to Krishna: 'O Lord, Thou art seated in my heart. I act as Thou makest me act.'"

MASTER (with a smile): "Yes, that is true. It is God alone who acts through us. He is the Doer, undoubtedly, and man is His instrument. But it is also true that an action cannot fail to produce its result. Your stomach will certainly burn if you eat hot chilli. It is God who has ordained that chilli will burn your stomach. If you commit a sin, you must bear its fruit. But one who has attained perfection, realized God, cannot commit sin. An expert singer cannot sing a false note. A man with a trained voice sings the notes correctly: sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni."

The meal was ready. The Master and the devotees went to the inner court, where they were treated to a generous feast.

About. three o'clock in the afternoon the Master was seated again in Ishan's drawing-room with M. and Shrish. He resumed his conversation with Shrish.

MASTER: "What is your attitude toward God? 'I am He', or 'Master and servant'? For the householder it is very good to look on God as the Master. The householder is conscious of doing the duties of life himself. Under such conditions how can he say, 'I am He'? To him who says, 'I am He' the world appears to be a dream. His mind, his body, even his ego, are dreams to him. Therefore he cannot perform worldly duties. So it is very good for the householder to look on himself as the servant and on God as the Master.

"Hanuman had the attitude of a servant. He said to Rāma: 'O Rāma, sometimes I meditate on You as the whole and on myself as the part. Sometimes I feel that You are the Master and I am the servant. But when I have the Knowledge of Reality, I see that I am You and You are I.'

"In the state of Perfect Knowledge one may feel, 'I am He'; but that is far beyond the ordinary man's experience."

SHRISH: "That is true, sir. The attitude of a servant relieves a man of all his worries. The servant depends entirely upon his master. A dog is devoted to its master. It depends upon him and is at peace."

God with form and the formless Deity

MASTER: "Well, what suits your taste-God with form or the formless Reality? But to tell you the truth, He who is formless is also endowed with form. To His bhaktas He reveals Himself as having a form. It is like a great ocean, an infinite expanse of water, without any trace of shore. Here and there some of the water has been frozen. Intense cold has turned it into ice. Just so, under the cooling influence, so to speak, of the bhakta's love, the Infinite appears to take a form. Again, the ice melts when the sun rises; it becomes water as before. Just so, one who follows the path of knowledge -the path of discrimination-does not see the form of God any more. To him everything is formless.

The ice melts into formless water with the rise of the Sun of Knowledge. But mark this: form and formlessness belong to one and the same Reality."

At dusk the Master was ready to start for Dakshineswar. He stood on the south porch of the drawing-room, talking to Ishan. Someone remarked that the chanting of God's holy name did not always produce results. Ishan said: "How can you say that? The seeds of an Aśwattha tree are no doubt tiny, but in them lie the germs of big trees. It may take a very long time for them to grow."

"Yes, Yes!" said the Master. "It takes a long time to see the effect."

Next to Ishan's was his father-in-law's house. Sri Ramakrishna stood at the door of this house, ready to get into the carriage. Ishan and his friends stood around to bid him adieu. Sri Ramakrishna said to Ishan: "You are living in the world as a mudfish lives in the mud. It lives in the mud but its body is not stained.

"There are both vidyā and avidyā in this world of maya. Who may be called a paramahamsa? He who, like a swan, can take the milk from a mixture of milk and water, leaving aside the water. He who, like an ant, can take the sugar from a mixture of sugar and sand, leaving aside the sand."

It was evening. The Master stopped at Ram's house on his way to Dakshineswar. He was taken to the drawing-room and there he engaged in conversation with Mahendra Goswami. Mahendra belonged to the Vaishnava sect and was Ram's neighbour. Sri Ramakrishna was fond of him.

MASTER: "The worshippers of Vishnu and the worshippers of Śakti will all ultimately reach one and the same goal; the ways may be different. The true Vaishnavas do not criticize the Saktas."

GOSWAMI (smiling): "Śiva and Parvati are our Father and Mother." Sri Ramakrishna, out of his stock of a dozen English words, said sweetly, "Thank you!" Then he added, "Yes, Father and Mother!"

GOSWAMI: "Besides, it is a sin to criticize anyone, especially a devotee of God. All sins may be forgiven, but not the sin of criticizing a devotee."

MASTER: "But this idea of sin does not by any means affect all. For instance, the Isvarakotis, such as Incarnations of God, are above sin. Sri Chaitanya is an example.

"A child, walking on a narrow ridge and holding to his father, may slip into the ditch. But that can never happens if the father holds the child by the hand.

The Master's prayer for pure love

"Listen. I prayed to the Divine Mother for pure love. I said to Her: 'Here is Thy righteousness, here is Thy unrighteousness. Take them both and give me pure love for Thee. Here is Thy purity, here is Thy impurity. Take them both and give me pure love

for Thee. O Mother, here is Thy virtue, here is Thy vice. Take them both and give me pure love for Thee.' "

GOSWAMI: "Yes, sir. That is right."

Unswerving devotion to God

MASTER: "You should undoubtedly bow before all views. But there is a thing called unswerving devotion to one ideal. True, you should salute everyone. But you must love one ideal with your whole soul. That is unswerving devotion.

"Hanuman could not take delight in any other form than that of Rāma. The gopis had such single-minded love for the cowherd Krishna of Vrindāvan that they did not care to see the turbaned Krishna of Dwaraka.

"A wife may serve her husband's brothers by fetching water, or in other ways, but she cannot serve them in the way she does her husband. With him she has a special relationship."

Ram treated the Master to sweets. Sri Ramakrishna was ready to start for Dakshineswar. He put on his woolen shawl and cap, and got into the carriage with M. and the other devotees. Ram and his friends saluted the Master.

Saturday, December 29, 1883

It was the day of the new moon, auspicious for the worship of the Divine Mother. At one o'clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna got into a carriage to visit the temple of Kāli at Kalighat. He intended to stop at Adhar's house on the way, since Adhar was to accompany him to the temple. While the carriage was waiting near the north porch of the Master's room, M. went to the Master and said, "Sir, may I also go with you?"

MASTER: "Why?"

M: "I should like to visit my home in Calcutta."

Sri Ramakrishna reflected a moment and said: "Must you go home? Why? You are quite all right here."

M. wanted to see his people a few hours, but evidently the Master did not approve.

Sunday, December 30, 1883

At three o'clock in the afternoon, while M. was walking up and down under a tree, a devotee came to him and said that the Master had sent for him. M. went to Sri Ramakrishna's room and found a number of devotees there. He saluted the Master.

Ram, Kedār, and others had arrived from Calcutta. Ram had brought with him the Vedantist monk whom the Master had visited near his garden a few days earlier. On that occasion Sri Ramakrishna had asked him to bring the sādhu to Dakshineswar.

The monk was sitting on the small couch with the Master. They were talking happily in Hindusthani.

MASTER: "What do you feel about all this?"

MONK: "It is all like a dream."

MASTER: "Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. Well sir, what is Brahman?"

MONK: "Brahman is the Sound. It is Om."

MASTER: "But there must be something indicated by the sound. Isn't that so?"

MONK: "That Itself is the thing indicated as well as the indicator."

At these words Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi and sat motionless. The monk and the devotees looked wonderingly at him in his ecstatic condition. Kedār said to the monk: "Look at him, sir. This is samādhi."

The monk had read of samādhi but had never seen it before. After a few minutes the Master began gradually to come down to the normal plane of consciousness. He said to the Divine Mother: "Mother, I want to be normal. Please don't make me unconscious. I should like to talk to the sādhu about Satchidananda. Mother, I want to be merry talking about Satchidananda."

The monk was amazed to see the Master's condition and to hear these words. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "Please do away with your 'I am He'. Let us now keep 'I' and 'Thou' to enjoy the fun."

A little later the Master was walking in the Panchavati with Ram, Kedār, M., and the other devotees.

MASTER (to Kedār, with a smile): "What did you think of the sādhu?"

KEDĀR: "It is all dry knowledge. The pot has just been put on the fire, but as yet there is no rice in it."

MASTER: "That may be true. But he has renounced everything. He who has renounced the world has already made great progress. The sādhu belongs to the stage of the beginner. Nothing can be achieved without the realization of God. When a man is intoxicated with ecstatic love of God, he dosn't take delight in anything else. Then-

Cherish my precious Mother Syama
Tenderly within, O mind;
May you and I alone behold Her,
Letting no one else intrude."

Kedār repeated the words of a song in keeping with the Master's feeling:

How shall I open my heart, O friend?
It is forbidden me to speak.
I am about to die, for lack of a kindred soul
To understand my misery. . . .

Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room. About four o'clock the door of the Kāli temple was opened, and the Master walked to the temple with the monk; M. accompanied them. Entering the inner chamber, the Master prostrate himself reverently before the image. The monk, with folded hands, also bowed his head repeatedly before Kāli.

MASTER: "What do you think of Kāli?"

MONK (with devotion): "Kāli is supreme."

MASTER: "Kāli and Brahman are identical. Is that not so?"

MONK: "As long as one's mind is turned to the outer world, one must accept Kāli. As long as a man sees the outer world, and discriminates between good and evil, he must accept good and reject evil. To be sure, all names and forms are illusory; but as long as the mind sees the outer world, the aspirant must give up woman. The ideas of good and evil are applied to one who is still a student on the path; otherwise he will stray from the path of righteousness.

Thus conversing, the Master and the monk returned from the temple.

MASTER (to M.): "Did you notice that the sādhu bowed before Kāli?"

M: "Yes, sir."

Monday, December 31, 1883

At four o'clock in the afternoon the Master was sitting in his room with M., Rākhāl, Lātu, Harish, and other devotees.

Addressing M. and Balarām, the Master said: "Haladhāri followed the path of knowledge. Day and night he used to study the Upanishads, the Adhyātma Rāmāyana, and similar books on Vedānta. He would turn up his nose at the mention of the forms of God. Once I ate from the leaf-plates of the beggars. At this Haladhāri said to me, 'How will you be able to marry your children?' I said: 'You rascal! Shall I ever have children? May your mouth that repeats words from the Gitā and the Vedānta be blighted!' Just fancy! He declared that the world was illusory and, again, would meditate in the temple of Vishnu with turned-up nose."

In the evening Balarām and the other devotees returned to Calcutta. The Master remained in his room, absorbed in contemplation of the Divine Mother: After a while the sweet music of the evening worship in the temples was heard.

A little later the Master began to talk to the Mother in a tender voice that touched the heart of M., who was seated on the floor. After repeating, "Hari Om! Hari Om! Om!", the Master said: "Mother, don't make me unconscious with the Knowledge of Brahman. Mother, I don't want Brahmajnana. I want to be merry. I want to play." Again he said: "Mother, I don't know the Vedānta; and Mother, I don't even care to know. The Vedas and the Vedānta remain so far below when Thou art realized, O Divine Mother!" Then he said: "O Krishna, I shall say to Thee, 'Eat, my Child! Take this, my Child!' O Krishna, I shall say to Thee, 'My Child, Thou hast assumed this body for my sake.' "

Wednesday, January 2, 1884

Rākhāl , Lātu, Harish, Ramlal, and M. had been staying with Sri Ramakrishna at the temple garden. About three o'clock in the afternoon M. found the Master on the west porch of his room engaged in conversation with a Tantrik devotee. The Tantrik was wearing an ochre cloth. Sri Ramakrishna asked M. to sit by his side. Perhaps the Master intended to instruct him through his talk with the Tantrik devotee. Mahima Chakravarty had sent the latter to the Master.

MASTER (to the Tantrik): "It is a part of the Tantrik discipline to drink wine from a human skull. This wine is called 'karana'. Isn't that so?"

TANTRIK: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "But I cannot touch wine at all."

TANTRIK: "You have spontaneous Divine Bliss. One who enjoys that Bliss wants nothing else."

MASTER: "I don't care for japa and austerity. But I have constant remembrance and consciousness of God.

"Tell me, when they speak of the six centres, what do they mean?"

TAN'TRIK: "These are like different holy places. In each of the centres dwell Śiva and Śakti. One cannot see them with the physical eyes. One cannot take them out by cutting open the body."

M. listened silently to the conversation. Looking at him, the Master asked the Tantrik devotee, "Can a man attain perfection without the help of a vija mantra, a sacred word from the guru?"

TANTRIK: "Yes, he can if he has faith-faith in the words of the guru."

The Master turned to M. and said, drawing his attention, "Faith!"

After the Tantrik devotee had taken his leave, Jaygopal Sen, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, arrived. The Master talked with him.

MASTER (to Jaygopal): "One should not harbour malice toward any person or any opinion. The believers in the formless God and the worshippers of God with form are all, without exception, going toward God alone. The Jnāni, the yogi, the bhakta-all, without exception, are seeking Him alone. The follower of the path of knowledge calls Him 'Brahman'. The yogi calls Him 'Ātman' or 'Paramatman'. The bhakta calls Him 'Bhagavan'. Further, it is said that there is the Eternal Lord and His Eternal Servant."

JAYGOPAL: "How can we know that all paths are true?"

MASTER: "A man can reach God if he follows one path rjghtly. Then he can learn about all the other paths. It is like reaching the roof by some means or other. Then one is able to climb down by the wooden or stone stairs, by a bamboo pole, or even by a rope.

"A devotee can know everything when God's grace descends on him. If you but realize Him, you will be able to know all about Him. You should somehow meet the master of a house and become acquainted with him; then he himself will tell you how many houses he owns and all about his gardens and government seurities."

How to receive God's grace

JAYGOPAL: "How does one receive the grace of God?"

MASTER: "Constantly you have to chant the name and glories of God and give up worldly thoughts as much as you can. With the greatest effort you may try to bring water into your field for your crops, but it may all leak out through holes in the ridges. Then all your efforts to bring the water by digging a canal will be futile.

"You will feel restless for God when your heart becomes pure and your mind free from attachment to the things of the world. Then alone will your prayer reach God. A telegraph wire cannot carry messages if it has a break or some other defect.

"I used to cry for God all alone, with a longing heart. I used to weep, 'O God, where art Thou?' Weeping thus, I would lose all consciousness of the world. My mind would merge in the Mahāvāyu.

Renunciation of worldly attachment

"How can one attain yoga? By completely renouncing attachment to worldly things. The mind must be pure and without blemish, like the telegraph wire that has no defect.

Unselfish love of God

"One must not cherish any desire whatever. The devotion of a man who has any desire is selfish. But desireless devotion is love for its own sake. You may love me or not, but I love you: this is love for its own sake.

"The thing is that one must love God. Through intense love one attains the vision of Him. The attraction of the husband for the chaste wife, the attraction of the child for its mother, the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man-when a man can blend these three into one, and direct it all to God, then he gets the vision of God."

Jaygopal was a man of the world. Was this why the Master gave instruction suited to him?

At eight o'clock that evening the Master was sitting in his room with Rākhāl and M. It was the twenty-first day of M.'s stay with Sri Ramakrishna. The Master had forbidden him to indulge in reasoning.

Futility of reasoning

MASTER (to Rākhāl): "It is not good to reason too much. First comes God, and then the world. Realize God first; then you will know all about His world. (To M. and Rākhāl) If first one is introduced to Jadu Mallick, then one can know everything about him-the number of his houses, gardens, government securities, and so on. For this reason the rishi Nārada advised Valmiki1 to repeat the word 'mara'. 'Ma' means God, and 'ra' the world. First comes God, and then the world. Krishnakishore said that the word 'mara' is a holy mantra because it was given to Valmiki by the rishi. 'Ma' means God, and 'rā' the world.

"Therefore, like Valmiki, one should at first renounce everything and cry to God in solitude with a longing heart. The first thing necessary is the vision of God; then comes reasoning-about the scriptures and the world.

(To M.) "That is why I have been telling you not to reason any more. I came from the pine-grove to say that to you. Through too much reasoning your spiritual life will be injured; you will at last become like Hazra. I used to roam at night in the streets, all alone, and cry to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, blight with Thy thunderbolt my desire to reason!' Tell me that you won't reason any more."

M: "Yes, sir. I won't reason any more."

MASTER: "Everything can be achieved through bhakti alone. Those who want the Knowledge of Brahman will certainly achieve that also by following the trail of bhakti.

"Can a man blessed with the grace of God ever lack Knowledge? At Kamarpukur I have seen grain-dealers measuring paddy. As one heap is measured away another heap is pushed forward to be measured. The Mother supplies the devotees with the 'heap' of Knowledge. .

"After attaining God, one looks on a pundit as mere straw and dust. Padmalochan said to me: 'What does it matter if I accompany you to a meeting at the house of a fisherman? With you I can dine even at the house of a pariah.'

"Everything can be realized simply through love of God. If one is able to love God, one does not lack anything. Kartika and Ganesa were seated near Bhagavati, who had a necklace of gems around Her neck. The Divine Mother said to them, 'I will present this necklace to him who is the first to go around the universe.' Thereupon Kartika, without losing a moment, set out on the peacock, his carrier. Ganesa, on the other hand, in a

leisurely fashion went around the Divine Mother and prostrated himself before Her. He knew that She contained within Herself the entire universe. The Divine Mother was pleased with him and put the necklace around his neck. After a long while Kartika returned and found his brother seated there with the necklace on.

The Master's visions

"Weeping, I prayed to the Mother: 'O Mother, reveal to me what is contained in the Vedas and the Vedānta. Reveal to me what is in the Purana and the Tantra.' One by one She has revealed all these to me.

"Yes, She has taught me everything. Oh, how many things she has shown me! One day She showed me Śiva and Śakti everywhere. Everywhere I saw the comunion of Śiva and Śakti. Śiva and Śakti existing in all living things-men, animals, trees, plants. I saw them in the communion of all male and female elements.

"Another day I was shown heaps of human heads, mountain high. Nothing else existed, and I was seated alone in their midst.

"Still another day She showed me an ocean. Taking the form of a salt doll, I was going to measure its depth. While doing this, through the grace of the guru I was turned to stone. Then I saw a ship and at once got into it.

The helmsman was the guru. I hope you pray every day to Satchidananda, who is the Guru. Do you?"

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "The guru was the helmsman in that boat. I saw that 'I' and 'you' were two different things. Again I jumped into the ocean, and was changed into a fish. I found myself swimming joyfully in the Ocean of Satchidananda.

"These are all deep mysteries. What can you understand through reasoning? You will realize everything when God Himself teaches you. Then you will not lack any knowledge."

Friday, January 4, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room. M. was still staying with the Master, devoting his time to the practice of spiritual discipline. He had been spending a great part of each day in prayer and meditation under the bel-tree, where the Master had performed great austerities and had seen many wonderful visions of God.

Master exhorts M. not to reason & Different attitudes toward God

MASTER (to M.): "Don't reason any more. In the end, reasoning only injures the aspirant. One should assume a particular attitude toward God while praying to Him-the attitude of friend or servant or son or 'hero'.

"I assume the attitude of a child. To me every woman is my mother. The divine Maya, seeing this attitude in an aspirant, moves away from his path out of sheer shame.

"The attitude of 'hero' is extremely difficult. The Saktas and the Bauls among the Vaishnavas follow it, but it is very hard to keep one's spiritual life pure in that attitude. One can assume other attitudes toward God as well the attitude in which the devotee serenely contemplates God as the Creator, the attitude of service to Him, the attitude of friendship, the attitude of motherly affection, or the attitude of conjugal love. The conjugal relationship, the attitude of a woman to her husband or sweetheart, contains all the rest-serenity, service, friendship, and motherly affection. (To M.) Which one of these appeals to your mind?"

M: "I like them all."

MASTER: "When one attains perfection one takes delight in all these relationships. In that state a devotee has not the slightest trace of lust. The holy books of the Vaishnavas speak of Chandidas and the washerwoman. Their love was entirely free from lust.

"In that state a devotee looks on himself as a woman. He does not regard himself as a man. Sanatana Goswami refused to see Mirabai because she was a woman. Mira informed him that at Vrindāvan the only man was Krishna and that all others were His handmaids. 'Was it right of Sanatana to think of himself as a man?' Mira inquired."

Master and the Brahmo Samaj

At dusk M. was sitting at the Master's feet. Sri Ramakrishna had been told that Keshab's illness had taken a turn for the worse. He was talking about Keshab and incidentally about the Brahmo Samaj.

MASTER (to M.): "Do they only give lectures in the Brahmo Samaj? Or do they also meditate? I understand that they call their service in the temple 'upasana'.

"Keshab at one time thought a great deal of Christianity and the Christian views. At that time, and even before, he belonged to Devendranath Tagore's organization."

M: "Had Keshab Babu come here from the very beginning, he would not have been so preoccupied with social reform. He would not have been so busy with the abolition of the caste system, widow remarriage, intercaste marriage, women's education, and such social activities."

MASTER: "Keshab now believes in Kāli as the Embodiment of Spirit and Consciousness, the Primal Energy. Besides, he repeats the holy name of the Mother and chants Her glories.

"Do you think the Brahmo Samaj will develop in the future into a sort of social-reform organization?"

M: "The soil of this country is different. Only what is true survives here."

MASTER: "Yes, that is so. The Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Religion declared by the rishis, will alone endure. But there will also remain some sects like the Brahmo Samaj. Everything appears and disappears through the will of God."

Earlier in the afternoon several devotees from Calcutta had visited the Master and had sung many songs. One of the songs contained the following idea: "O Mother, You have cajoled us with red toys. You will certainly come running to us when we throw them away and cry ourselves hoarse for You."

MASTER (to M.): "How well they sang about the red toys!"

M: "Yes, sir. You once told Kesbab about the red toys."

MASTER: "Yes. I also told him about the Chidakasa, the Inner Consciousness, and about many other things. Oh, how happy we were! We used to sing and dance together."

Saturday, January 5, 1884

It was the twenty-third day of M.'s stay with Sri Ramakrishna. M. had finished his midday meal about one o'clock and was resting in the nahabat when suddenly he heard someone call his name three or four times. Coming out, he saw Sri Ramakrishna calling to him from the verandah north of his room.

M. saluted the Master and they conversed on the south verandah.

MASTER: "I want to know how you meditate. When I meditated under the bel-tree I used to see various visions clearly. One day I saw in front of me money, a shawl, a tray of sandesh and two women. I asked my mind, 'Mind, do you want any of these?' I saw the sandesh to be mere filth. One of the women had a big ring in her nose. I could see both their inside and outside-entrails, filth, bone, flesh, and blood. The mind did not want any of these-money, shawl, sweets, or women. It remained fixed at the Lotus Feet of God.

"A small balance has two needles, the upper and the lower. The mind is the lower needle. I was always afraid lest the mind should move away from the upper needle-God. Further, I would see a man always sitting by me with a trident in his hand. He threatened to strike me with it if the lower needle moved away from the upper one.

"But no spiritual progress is possible without the renunciation of 'woman and gold'. I renounced these three: land, wife, and wealth. Once I went to the Registry Office to register some land, the title of which was in the name of Raghuvir. The officer asked me to sign my name; but I didn't do it, because I couldn't feel that it was 'my' land. I was shown much respect as the guru of Keshab Sen. They presented me with mangoes, but I couldn't carry them home. A sannyasi cannot lay things up.

"How can one expect to attain God without renunciation? Suppose one thing is placed upon another; how can you get the second without removing the first?

"One must pray to God without any selfish desire. But selfish worship, if practised with perseverance, is gradually turned into selfless worship. Dhruva practised tapasya to obtain his kingdom, but at last he realized God. He said, 'Why should a man give up gold if he gets it while searching for glass beads?'

Master and philanthropy

"God can be realized when a man acquires sattva. Householders engage in philanthropic work, such as charity, mostly with a motive. That is not good. But actions without motives are good. Yet it is very difficult to leave motives out of one's actions.

"When you realize God, will you pray to Him, 'O God, please grant that I may dig reservoirs, build roads, and found hospitals and dispensaries'? After the realization of God all such desires are left behind.

"Then mustn't one perform acts of compassion, such as charity to the poor? I do not forbid it. If a man has money, he should give it to remove the sorrows and sufferings that come to his notice. In such an event the wise man says, 'Give the poor something.' But inwardly he feels: 'What can I do? God alone is the Doer. I am nothing.'

"The great souls, deeply affected by the sufferings of men, show them the way to God. Sankaracharya kept the 'ego of Knowledge' in order to teach mankind. The gift of knowledge and devotion is far superior to the gift of food. Therefore Chaitanyadeva distributed bhakti to all, including the outcaste. Happiness and suffering are the inevitable characteristics of the body. You have come to eat mangoes. Fulfil that desire. The one thing needful is jnāna and bhakti. God alone is Substance; all else is illusory.

"It is God alone who does everything. You may say that in that case man may commit sin. But that is not true. If a man is firmly convinced that God alone is the Doer and that he himself is nothing, then he will never make a false step.

Meaning of free will

"It is God alone who has planted in man's mind what the 'Englishman' calls free will. People who have not realized God would become engaged in more and more sinful actions if God had not planted in them the notion of free will. Sin would have increased if God had not made the sinner feel that he alone was responsible for his sin.

"Those who have realized God are aware that free will is a mere appearance. In reality man is the machine and God its Operator, man is the carriage and God its Driver."

It was about four o'clock. Rākhāl and several other devotees were listening to a kirtan by M. in the hut at the Panchavati. Rākhāl went into a spiritual mood while listening to the devotional song. After a while the Master came to the Panchavati accompanied by Baburam and Harish. Other devotees followed.'

RĀKHĀL: "How well he [referring to M.] sang kirtan for us! He made us all very happy."

The Master sang in an ecstatic mood:

O friends, how great is my relief
To hear you chanting Krishna's name! . . .

To the devotees he said, "Always sing devotional songs" Continuing, he said: "To love God and live in the company of the devotees: that is all. What more is there?" He said, again: "When Krishna went to Mathura, Yaśoda came to Radha, who was absorbed in meditation. Afterwards Radha said to Yaśoda: 'I am the Primordial Energy. Ask a boon of Me.' 'What other boon shall I ask of You?' said Yaśoda. Only bless me that I may serve God with my body, mind, and tongue; that I may behold His devotees with these eyes, that I may meditate on Him with this mind, and that I may chant His name and glories with this tongue.'

"But those who are firmly established in God may do as well without the devotees. This is true of those who feel the presence of God both within and without. Sometimes they don't enjoy the devotees' company. You don't whitewash a wall inlaid with mother of pearl-the lime won't stick."

The Master returned presently from the Panchavati, talking to M.

MASTER: "You have the voice of a woman. Can't you practise a song such as this?

Tell me, friend, how far is the grove
Where Krishna, my Beloved, dwells?

(To M., pointing to Baburam) "You see, my own people have become strangers; Ramlal and my other relatives seem to be foreigners. And strangers have become my own. Don't you notice how I tell Baburam to go and wash his face? The devotees have become relatives.

(Looking at the Panchavati) "I used to sit there. In course of time I became mad. That phase also passed away. Kala, Śiva, is Brahman. That which sports with Kala is Kāli, the Primal Energy. Kāli moves even the Immutable."

Saying this, the Master sang:

My mind is overwhelmed with wonder,
Pondering the Mother's mystery;
Her very name removes
The fear of Kala, Death himself;
Beneath Her feet lies Maha-Kala. . . .

Then he said to M.: "Today is Saturday. Go to the temple of Kāli."

As the Master came to the bakul-tree he spoke to M. again: "Chidatma and ChitŚakti. The Purusha is the Chidatma and Prakriti the ChitŚakti. Sri Krishna is the Chidatma and Sri Radha the ChitŚakti. The devotees are so many forms of the ChitŚakti. They should think of themselves as companions or handmaids of the ChitŚakti, Sri Radha. This is the whole gist of the thing.'"

After dusk Sri Ramakrishna went to the Kāli temple and was pleased to see M. meditating there.

The evening worship was over in the temples. The Master returned to his room and sat on the couch, absorbed in meditation on the Divine Mother. M. sat on the floor. There was no one else in the room.

The Master was in samādhi. He began to come gradually down to the normal plane. His mind was still filled with the consciousness of the Divine Mother. In that state he was speaking to Her like a small child making importunate demands on his mother. He said in a piteous voice: "Mother, why haven't You revealed to me that form of Yours, the form that bewitches the world? I pleaded with You so much for it. But You wouldn't listen to me. You act as You please."

The voice in which these words were uttered was very touching.

He went on: "Mother, one needs faith. Away with this wretched reasoning! Let it be blighted! One needs faith-faith in the words of the guru, childlike faith. The mother says to her child, 'A ghost lives there'; and the child is firmly convinced that the ghost is there. Again, the mother says to the child, 'A holy man is there', and the child is sure of it. Further, the mother says, pointing to a man, 'He is your elder brother', and the child believes that the man is one hundred and twenty-five per cent his brother. One needs faith. But why should I blame them, Mother? What can they do? It is necessary to go through reasoning once. Didn't You see how much I told him about it the other day? But it all proved useless."

Master's prayer to the Divine Mother

The Master was weeping and praying to the Mother in a voice choked with emotion. He prayed to Her with tearful eyes for the welfare of the devotees: "Mother, may those who come to You have all their desires fulfilled! But please don't make them give up everything at once, Mother. Well, You may do whatever You like in the end. If You keep them in the world, Mother, then please reveal Yourself to them now and then. Otherwise, how will they live? How will they be encouraged if they don't see You once in a while? But You may do whatever You like in the end."

Advice to M

The Master was still in the ecstatic mood. Suddenly he said to M: "Look here, you have had enough of reasoning. No more of it. Promise that you won't reason any more."

M. (with folded hands): "Yes, sir. I won't."

MASTER: "You have had enough of it. When you came to me the first time, I told you your spiritual Ideal. I know everything about you, do I not?"

M. (with folded hands): "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "Yes, I know everything: what your Ideal is, who you are, your inside and outside, the events of your past lives, and your future. Do I not?"

M. (with folded hands): "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "I scolded you on learning that you had a son. Now go home and live there. Let them know that you belong to them. But you must remember in your heart of hearts that you do not belong to them nor they to you."

M. sat in silence. The Master went on instructing him.

MASTER: "You have now learnt to fly. But keep your loving relationship with your father. Can't you prostrate yourself before him?"

M. (with folded hands): "Yes, sir. I can."

MASTER: "What more shall I say to you? You, know everything. You understand, don't you?"

M. sat there without uttering a word.

MASTER: "You have understood, haven't you?"

M: "Yes, sir, I now understand a little."

MASTER: "No, you understand a great deal. Rākhāl 's father is pleased about his staying here."

M. remained with folded hands.

MASTER: "Yes, what you are thinking will also come to pass."

Sri Ramakrishna now came down to the normal state of mind. Rākhāl and Ramlal entered the room. At the Master's bidding Ramlal sang:

Who is the Woman yonder who lights the field of battle?
Darker Her body gleams even than the darkest storm-cloud
And from Her teeth there Bash the lightning's blinding flames…

He sang again:

Who is this terrible Woman, dark as the sky at midnight?
Who is this Woman dancing over the field of battle?...

MASTER: "The Divine Mother and the earthly mother. It is the Divine Mother who exists in the form of the universe and pervades everything as Consciousness. The earthly mother gives birth to this body. I used to go into samādhi uttering the word 'Ma'. While repeating the word I would draw the Mother of the Universe to me, as it were, like the fishermen casting their net and after a while drawing it in. When they draw in the net they find big fish inside it.

"Gauri once said that one attains true Knowledge when one realizes the identity of Kāli and Gaurānga. That which is Brahman is also Śakti, Kāli. It is That, again, which, assuming the human form, has become Gaurānga."

At the Master's request, Ramlal sang again, this time about Gaurānga.

MASTER (to M.): "The Nitya and the Lila are the two aspects of the Reality. God, plays in the world as man for the sake of His devotees. They can love God only if they see Him in a human form; only then can they show their affection for Him as their Brother, Sister, Father, Mother, or Child.

"It is just for this love of the devotees that God contracts Himself into a human form and descends on earth to play His lila."

Chapter 19

THE MASTER AND HIS INJURED ARM

Saturday, February 2, 1884

IT WAS THREE O'CLOCK in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna had been conversing with Rākhāl , Mahimacharan, Hazra, and other devotees, when M. entered the room and saluted him. He brought with him splint, pad, and lint to bandage the Master's injured arm.

Master's injured arm

One day, while going toward the pine-grove, Sri Ramakrishna had fallen near the railing and dislocated a bone in his left arm. He had been in an ecstatic mood at the time and no one had been with him.

MASTER (to M.): "Hello! What was ailing you? Are you quite well now?"

M: "Yes, sir, I am all right now."

MASTER (to Mahima): "Well, if I am the machine and God is its operator, then why should this have happened to me?"

The Master was sitting on the couch, listening to the story of Mahimacharan's pilgrimage. Mahima had visited several holy places twelve years before.

MAHIMA: "I found a brahmachari in a garden at Sicrole in Benares. He said he had been living there for twenty years but did not know its owner. He asked me if I worked in an office. On my answering in the negative, he said, 'Then are you a wandering holy man?' I saw a sādhu on the bank of the Narmada. He repeated the Gayatri mentally. It so thrilled him that the hair on his body stood on end. And when he repeated the Gayatri and Om aloud, it thrilled those who sat near him and caused their hair to stand on end."

The Master was in the mood of a child. Being hungry he said to M., "What have you brought for me?" Looking at Rākhāl he went into samādhi.

He was gradually coming down to the normal plane. To bring his mind back to the consciousness of the body, he said: "I shall eat some jilipi. I shall drink some water."

Weeping like a child, he said to the Divine Mother: "O Brahmamayi! O Mother! Why hast Thou done this to me? My arm is badly hurt. (To the devotees) Will I be all right again?" They consoled him, as one would a child, and said: "Surely. You will be quite well again."

MASTER (to Rākhāl): "You aren't to blame for it, though you are living here to look after me; for even if you had accompanied me, you certainly wouldn't have gone up to the railing."

The Master again went into a spiritual mood and said: "Om! Om! Om! Mother, what is this that I am saying? Don't make me unconscious, Mother, with the Knowledge of Brahman. Don't give me Brahmajnana. I am but Thy child. I am easily worried and frightened. I want a Mother. A million salutations to the Knowledge of Brahman! Give it to those who seek it. O Ānandamayi! O Blissful Mother!"

Uttering loudly the word "Ānandamayi", he burst into tears and said:

Mother, this is the grief that sorely grieves my heart.
That even with Thee for Mother, and though I am wide awake,
There should be robbery in my house.

Again he said to the Divine Mother: "What wrong have I done, Mother? Do I ever do anything? It is Thou, Mother, who doest everything. I am the machine and Thou art its Operator.

(To Rākhāl, smiling) "See that you don't fall! Don't be piqued and cheat yourself."

Again addressing the Mother, Sri Ramakrishna said: "Do I weep because I am hurt? Not at all:

Mother, this is the grief that sorely grieves my heart,
That even with Thee for Mother, and though I am wide awake,
There should be robbery in my house."

The Master was again talking and laughing, like a child who, though ailing, sometimes forgets his illness and laughs and plays about.

MASTER (to the devotees): "It will avail you nothing unless you realize Satchidananda. There is nothing like discrimination and renunciation. The worldly man's devotion to God is momentary—like a drop of water on a redhot frying-pan. Perchance he looks at a flower and exclaims, 'Ah, what a wonderful creation of God!'

Yearning for God

"One must be restless for God. If a son clamours persistently for his share of the property, his parents consult with each other and give it to him even though he is a minor. God will certainly listen to your prayers if you feel restless for Him. Since He has begotten us, surely we can claim our inheritance from Him. He is our own Father, our own Mother. We can force our demand on Him. We can say to him, 'Reveal Thyself to me or I shall cut my throat with a knife!' "

Sri Ramakrishna taught the devotees how to call on the Divine Mother.

Master's prayer to the Divine Mother

MASTER: "I used to pray to Her in this way: 'O Mother! O Blissful One! Reveal Thyself to me. Thou must!' Again, I would say to Her: 'O Lord of the lowly! O Lord of the universe! Surely I am not outside Thy universe. I am bereft of knowledge. I am without discipline. I have no devotion. I know nothing. Thou must be gracious and reveal Thyself to me.' "

Thus the Master taught the devotees how to pray. They were deeply touched. Tears filled Mahimacharan's eyes.

Sri Ramakrishna looked at him and sang:

Cry to your Mother Syama with a real cry, O mind!
And how can She hold Herself from you?
How can Syama stay away?

Several devotees arrived from Shibpur. Since they had come from a great distance the Master could not disappoint them. He told them some of the essentials of spiritual life.

MASTER: "God alone is real, and all else illusory. The garden and its owner. God and His splendour. But people look at the garden only. How few seek out the owner!"

Prayer and discrimination

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, what is the way?"

MASTER: "Discrimination between the Real and the unreal. One should always discriminate to the effect that God alone is real and the world unreal. And one should pray with sincere longing."

DEVOTEE: "But, sir, where is our leisure for these things?"

MASTER: "Those who have the time must meditate and worship. But those who cannot possibly do so must bow down whole-heartedly to God twice a day. He abides in the hearts of all; He knows that worldly people have many things to do. What else is possible for them? You don't have time to pray to God; therefore give Him the power of attorney. But all is in vain unless you attain God and see Him."

ANOTHER DEVOTEE: "Sir, to see you is the same as to see God."

MASTER: "Don't ever say that again. The waves belong to the Ganges, not the Ganges to the waves. A man cannot realize God unless he gets rid of all such egotistic ideas as 'I am such an important man' or 'I am so and so'. Level the mound of 'I' to the ground by dissolving it with tears of devotion."

DEVOTEE: "Why has God put us in the world?"

MASTER: "To perpetuate His creation. It is His will, His maya. He has deluded man with 'woman and gold'."

DEVOTEE: "Why has He deluded us? Why has He so willed?"

MASTER: "If but once He should give man a taste of divine joy, then man would not care to lead a worldly life. The creation would come to an end.

"The grain-dealer stores rice in huge bags in his warehouse. Near them he puts some puffed rice in a tray. This is to keep the rats away. The puffed rice tastes sweet to the rats and they nibble at it all night; they do not seek the rice itself. But just think! One seer of rice yields fourteen seers of puffed rice. How infinitely superior is the joy of God to the pleasure of 'woman and gold'! To one who thinks of the beauty of God, the beauty of even Rambha and Tilottama appears as but the ashes of a funeral pyre."

DEVOTEE: "Why do we not feel intense restlessness to realize Him?"

MASTER: "A man does not feel restless for God until all his worldly desires are satisfied. He does not remember the Mother of the Universe until his share of the enjoyment of 'woman and gold' is completed. A child absorbed in play does not seek his mother. But after his play is over, he says, 'Mother! I must go to my mother.' Hriday's son was playing with the pigeons, calling to them, 'Come! Ti, ti!' When he had had enough of play he began to cry. Then a stranger came and said: 'Come with me. I will take you to your mother.' Unhesitatingly he climbed on the man's shoulders and was off.

"Those who are eternally free do not have to enter worldly life. Their desire for enjoyment has been satisfied with their very birth."

At five o'clock in the afternoon Dr. Madhusudan arrived. While he prepared the bandage for the Master's arm, Sri Ramakrishna laughed like a child and said, "You are the Madhusudan of both this world and the next!"

DR. MADHUSUDAN (smiling): "I only labour under the weight of my name."

The power of God's name

MASTER (smiling): "Why, is the name a trifling thing? God is not different from His name. Satyabhama tried to balance Krishna with gold and precious stones, but could not do it. Then Rukmini put a tulsi-leaf with the name of Krishna on the scales. That balanced the Lord."

The doctor was ready to bandage the Master's arm. A bed was spread on the floor and the Master, laughing, lay down upon it. He said, intoning the words: "Ah! This is Radha's final stage. But Brinde says, 'Who knows what is yet to be?' "

The devotees were sitting around the Master. He sang:

The gopis all were gathered about the shore of the lake.

Sri Ramakrishna laughed and the devotees laughed with him.

After his arm was bandaged he said: "I haven't very much faith in your Calcutta physicians. When Sambhu became delirious, Dr. Sarvadhikari said: 'Oh, it is nothing. It is just grogginess from the medicine. And a little while after, Sambhu breathed his last."

It was evening and the worship in the temples was over. A few minutes later Adhar arrived from Calcutta to see the Master. Mahimacharan, Rākhāl , and M. were in the room.

ADHAR: "How are you?"

MASTER (affectionately): "Look here. How my arm hurts! (Smiling) You don't have to ask how I am!"

Adhar sat on the floor with the devotees. The Master said to him, "Please stroke here gently." Adhar sat on the end of the couch and gently stroked Sri Ramakrishna's feet.

The Master conversed with Mahimācharan.

MASTER: "It will be very good if you can practise unselfish love for God. A man who has such love says: 'O Lord, I do not seek salvation, fame, wealth, or cure of disease. None of these do I seek. I want only Thee.' Many are the people who come to a rich man with various desires. But if someone comes to him simply out of love, not wanting any favour, then the rich man feels attracted to him. Prahlada had this unselfish love, this pure love for God without any worldly end."

Mahimacharan sat silent. The Master turned to him.

Ego separates one from Brahman

MASTER: "Now let me tell you something that will agree with your mood. According to the Vedānta one has to know the real nature of one's own Self. But such knowledge is impossible without the renunciation of ego. The ego is like a stick that seems to divide the water in two. It makes you feel that you are one and I am another. When the ego disappears in samādhi, then one knows Brahman to be one's own inner consciousness.

"One must renounce the 'I' that makes one feel, 'I am Mahima Chakravarty', 'I am a learned man', and so on. But the 'ego of Knowledge' does not injure one. Sankaracharya retained the 'ego of Knowledge' in order to teach mankind.

Warning about lust

"One cannot obtain the Knowledge of Brahman unless one is extremely cautious about women. Therefore it is very difficult for those who live in the world to get such Knowledge. However clever you may be, you will stain your body if you live in a sooty room. The company of a young woman evokes lust even in a lustless man.

"But it is not so harmful for a householder who follows the path of knowledge to enjoy conjugal happiness with his own wife now and then. He may satisfy his sexual impulse like any other natural impulse. Yes, you may enjoy a sweetmeat once in a while. (Mahimacharan laughs.) It is not so harmful for a householder.

Hard discipline for sannyasi

"But it is extremely harmful for a sannyasi. He must not look even at the portrait of a woman. A monk enjoying a woman is like a man swallowing the spittle he has already spat out. A sannyasi must not sit near a woman and talk to her, even if she is intensely pious. No, he must not talk to a woman even though he may have controlled his passion.

"A sannyasi must renounce both 'woman' and 'gold'. As he must not look even at the portrait of a woman, so also he must not touch gold, that is to say, money. It is bad for him even to keep money near him, for it brings in its train calculation, worry, insolence, anger, and such evils. There is an instance in the sun: it shines brightly; suddenly a cloud appears and hides it.

"That is why I didn't agree to the Mārwāri's depositing money for me with Hriday. I said: 'No, I won't allow even that. If I keep money near me, it will certainly raise clouds.'

"Why all these strict rules for a sannyasi? It is for the welfare of mankind as well as for his own good. A sannyasi may himself lead an unattached life and may have controlled his passion, but he must renounce 'woman and gold' to set an example to the world.

"A man will have the courage to practise renunciation if he sees one hundred percent renunciation in a sannyasi. Then only will he try to give up 'woman and gold'. If a sannyasi does not set this example, then who will?

"One may lead a householder's life after realizing God. It is like churning butter from milk and then keeping the butter in water. Janaka led the life of a householder after attaining Brahmajnana.

"Janaka fenced with two swords, the one of jnāna and the other of karma. The sannyasi renounces action; therefore he fences with one sword only, that of knowledge. A householder, endowed with knowledge like Janaka's, can enjoy fruit both from the tree and from the ground. He can serve holy men, entertain guests, and do other things like that. I said to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, I don't want to be a dry sādhu.'

"After attaining Brahmajnana one does not have to discriminate even about food. The rishis of olden times, endowed with the Knowledge of Brahman and having experienced divine bliss, ate everything, even pork.

(To Mahima) "Generally speaking there are two kinds of yoga: karmayoga and manoyoga, that is to say, union with God through work and through the mind.

Four stages of life

"There are four stages of life: brahmacharya, garhasthya, Vanaprastha, and sannyas. During the first three stages a man has to perform his worldly duties. The sannyasi carries only his staff, water-pot, and begging-bowl. He too may perform certain nityakarma, but his mind is not attached to it; he is not conscious of doing such work. Some sannyasis perform nityakarma to set an example to the world. If a householder or a man belonging to the other stages of life performs action without attachment, then he is united with God through such action.

"In the case of a paramahamsa, like Sukadeva, all karmas-all puja, japa, tarpan, sandhya, and so forth-drop away. In this state a man communes with God through the mind alone. Sometimes he may be pleased to perform outward activities for the welfare of mankind. But his recollection and contemplation of God remain uninterrupted."

It was about eight o'clock in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna asked Mahimacharan to recite a few hymns from the scriptures. Mahima read the first verse of the Uttara Gitā, describing the nature of the Supreme Brahman:

He, Brahman, is one, partless, stainless, and beyond the ether;
Without beginning or end, unknowable by mind or intelligence.

Finally he came to the seventh verse of the third chapter, which reads:

The twice-born worships the Deity in fire,
The munis contemplate Him in the heart,
Men of limited wisdom see Him in the image,
And the yogis who have attained samesightedness
Behold Him everywhere.

No sooner did the Master hear the words "the yogis who have attained samesightedness" than he stood up and went into samādhi, his arm supported by the splint and bandage. Speechless, the devotees looked at this yogi who had himself attained the state of samesightedness.

After a long time the Master regained consciousness of the outer world and took his seat. He asked Mahima to recite verses describing the love of God. The latter recited from the Nārada Pancharatra:

What need is there of penance if God is worshipped with love?
What is the use of penance if God is not worshipped with love?
What need is there of penance if God is seen within and without?
What is the use of penance if God is not seen within and without?
O Brahman! O my child! Cease from practising further penances.
Hasten to Sankara, the Ocean of Heavenly Wisdom;

Obtain from Him the love of God, the pure love praised by devotees,
Which snaps in twain the shackles that bind you to the world.

MASTER: "Ah! Ah!"

On hearing these verses the Master was about to go again into an ecstatic mood, but he restrained himself with effort.

Mahima read from the Yati–Panchaka:

I am She, the Divine Mother, in whom the illusion of the universe of animate and inanimate things is seen, as in magic, and in whom the universe shines, being the play of Her mind. I am She, the Embodiment of Consciousness, who is the Self of the universe, the only Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss.

When the Master heard the line, "I am She, the Embodiment of Consciousness", he said with a smile, "Whatever is in the microcosm is also in the macrocosm."

Next Mahima read the Six Stanzas of *Nirvāna*:

Om. I am neither mind, intelligence, ego, nor chitta,
Neither ears nor tongue nor the senses of smell and sight;
Nor am I ether, earth, fire, water, or air:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

I am neither the prana, nor the five vital breaths,
Neither the seven elements of the body nor its five sheaths,
Nor hands nor feet nor tongue, nor the organs of sex and voiding:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

Neither loathing nor liking have I, neither greed nor delusion;
No sense have I of ego or pride, neither dharma nor moksha;
Neither desire of the mind nor object for its desiring:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

Neither right nor wrong doing am I, neither pleasure nor pain,
Nor the mantra, the sacred place, the Vedas, the sacrifice;
Neither the act of eating, the eater, nor the food:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

Death or fear I have none, nor any distinction of caste;
Neither father nor mother nor even a birth have I;
Neither friend nor comrade, neither disciple nor guru:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

I have no form or fancy; the All-pervading am I;
Everywhere I exist, yet I am beyond the senses;
Neither salvation am I, nor anything that may be known:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

Each time Mahima repeated: *"I am Śiva! I am Śiva!",* the Master rejoined with a smile: "Not I! Not I! Thou art Knowledge Absolute."

Mahima read a few more verses and also a description of the six psychic centres of the body. He said that in Benares he had witnessed the death of a yogi in the state of yoga.

MAHIMA: "There are fine passages in the Rāma Gitā."

MASTER: "You are speaking of the Rāma Gitā. Then you must be a staunch Vedantist. How many books of that kind the sādhus used to read here!"

Mahima recited the description of Om:

It is like the unceasing flow of oil; like the long peal of a bell.

About the characteristics of samādhi he read: "The man established in samādhi sees the upper region filled with Ātman, the nether region filled with Ātman, the middle region filled with Ātman. He sees all filled with Ātman."

Adhar and Mahima saluted the Master and departed.

At noon the following day, after his midday meal, Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch, when Ram, Surendra, and a few other devotees arrived from Calcutta. They were worried about the Master's injured arm. The arm was bandaged. M. was present.

MASTER (to the devotees): "The Mother has put me in such a state of mind that I cannot hide anything from anyone. Mine is the condition of a child. Rākhāl doesn't understand it. He covers my injured arm, wrapping my body with a cloth lest others should see my injury and criticize me. He took Dr. Madhu aside and reported my illness. But I shouted and said: 'Hello! Where are you, Madhusudan? Come and see. My arm is broken!'

"I used to sleep in the same room with Mathur and his wife. They took care of me as if I were their own child. I was then passing through a state of divine madness. Mathur would ask me, 'Father, do you hear our conversation?' 'Yes', I would reply.

"Once Mathur's wife became suspicious of his movements and said to him, 'If you go anywhere, he must accompany you.' One day Mathur went to a certain place and asked me to wait downstairs. He returned after half an hour and said to me: 'Come, father, let us go now. The carriage is waiting.' When Mathur's wife asked me about it, I reported the thing correctly. I said to her: 'We went to a certain house. He told me to stay

downstairs and himself went upstairs. He came down after half an hour and we left the place.' Of course she understood the thing in her own way.

"A partner of Mathur's estate used to take fruits and vegetables stealthily from the temple garden. When the other partners asked me about it, I told them the exact truth."

Sunday, February 24, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was resting in his room after his midday meal, and Mani Mallick was sitting on the floor beside him, when M. arrived. M. saluted the Master and sat down beside Mani. The Master's injured arm was bandaged.

MASTER (to M.): "How did you come?"

M: "I came as far as Alambazar in a carriage and from there I walked."

MANILAL: "Oh, he is so hot!"

MASTER (with a smile): "This makes me think that all these are not mere fancies of my brain. Otherwise why should these 'Englishmen' take so much trouble to come here?"

Sri Ramakrishna began to talk to them about his health and his injured arm.

Master's childlike impatience

MASTER: "Now and then I become impatient about my arm. I show it to this or that man and ask him whether I shall get well again. That makes Rākhāl angry. He doesn't understand my mood. Now and then I say to myself, 'Let him go away.' Again I say to the Mother: 'Mother, where will he go? Why should he burn himself in the frying-pan of the world?'

"This childlike impatience of mine is nothing new. I used to ask Mathur Babu to feel my pulse and tell me whether I was ill.

"Well, where then is my faith in God? Once I was going to Kamarpukur in a bullock-cart, when several persons came up to the cart with clubs in their hands. They looked like highwaymen. I began to chant the names of the gods. Sometimes I repeated the names of Rāma and Durga, and some times 'Om Tat Sat', so that in case one failed another would work.

(To M.) "Can you tell me why I am so impatient?"

M: "Your mind, sir, is always absorbed in samādhi. You have kept a fraction of it on your body for the welfare of the devotees. Therefore you feel impatient now and then for your body's safety."

MASTER: "That is true. A little of the mind is attached to the body. It wants to enjoy the love of God and the company of the devotees."

Mani Mallick told the Master about an exhibition that was being held in Calcutta. He described a beautiful image of Yaśoda with the Baby Krishna on her lap. Sri Ramakrishna's eyes filled with tears. On hearing about Yaśoda, the embodiment of maternal love, his spiritual consciousness was kindled and he wept.

MANILAL: "If you were not unwell, you could visit the exhibition in the Maidan."

MASTER (to M. and the others): "I shan't be able to see everything even if I go. Perhaps my eyes will fall on some certain thing and I shall become unconscious. Then I shall not be able to see the rest. I was taken to the Zoological Garden. I Went into samādhi at the sight of the lion, for the carrier of the Mother awakened in my mind the consciousness of the Mother Herself. In that state who could see the other animals? I had to return home after seeing only the lion. Hence Jadu Mallick's mother first suggested that I should go to the exhibition and then said I should not."

Mani Mallick, about sixty-five years old, had been a member of the Brahmo Samaj for many years, and Sri Ramakrishna gave him instruction that would agree with his mood.

MASTER: "Pundit Jaynarayan had very liberal views. I visited him once and liked his attitude. But his sons wore high boots. He told me he intended to go to Benares and live there, and at last he carried out his intention; for later on he did live in Benares and die there. When one grows old one should retire, like Jaynarayan, and devote oneself to the thought of God. What do you say?"

MANILAL: "True, sir. I don't relish the worries and troubles of the world."

MASTER: "Gauri used to worship his wife with offerings of flowers. All women are manifestations of the Divine Mother. (To Manilal) Please tell them that little story of yours."

MANILAL (smiling): "Once several men were crossing the Ganges in a boat. One of them, a pundit, was making a great display of his erudition, saying that he had studied various books-the Vedas, the Vedānta, and the six systems of philosophy. He asked a fellow passenger, 'Do you know the Vedānta?' 'No, revered sir.' 'The Samkhya and the Patanjala?' 'No, revered sir.' 'Have you read no philosophy whatsoever?' 'No, revered sir.' The pundit was talking in this vain way and the passenger sitting in silence, when a great storm arose and the boat was about to sink. The passenger said to the pundit, 'Sir, can you swim?' 'No', replied the pundit. The passenger said, 'I don't know the Samkhya or the Patanjala, but I can swim.' "

MASTER (smiling): "What will a man gain by knowing many scriptures? The one thing needful is to know how to cross the river of the world. God alone is real, and all else illusory.

"While Arjuna was aiming his arrow at the eye of the bird, Drona asked him: 'What do you see? Do you see these kings?' 'No, sir', replied Arjuna. 'Do you 'See me'?' 'No.' 'The

tree?' 'No.' 'The bird on the tree?' 'No.' 'What do you see then?' 'Only the eye of the bird.'

"He who sees only the eye of the bird can hit the mark. He alone is clever who sees that God is real and all else is illusory. What need have I of other information? Hanuman once remarked: 'I don't know anything about the phase of the moon or the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rāma.'

(To M.) "Please buy a few fans for our use here.

(To Manilal) "Look here, pay a visit to his [meaning M.'s] father. The sight of a devotee will inspire you.

God's manifestation as man

(To M.) "Since my arm was injured a deep change has come over me. I now delight only in the Naralila, the human manifestation of God. Nitya and Lila. The Nitya is the Indivisible Satchidananda, and the Lila, or Sport, takes various forms, such as the Lila as God, the Lila as the deities, the Lila as man, and the Lila as the universe.

"Vaishnavcharan. used to say that one has attained Perfect Knowledge if one believes in God sporting as man. I wouldn't adopt it then. But now I realize that he was right. Vaishnavcharan liked pictures of man expressing tenderness and love.

(To Manilal) "It is God Himself who is sporting in the form of man. It is He alone, who has become Mani Mallick. The Sikhs teach: 'Thou art Satchidananda.'

"Now and then man catches a glimpse of his real Self and becomes speechless with wonder. At such times he swims in an ocean of joy. It is like suddenly meeting a dear relative. (To M.) The other day as I was coming here in a carriage, I felt like that at the sight of Baburam. When Śiva realizes His own Self, He dances about in joy exclaiming, 'What am I! What am I!'

"The same thing has been described in the Adhyātma Rāmāyana. Nārada said, 'O Rāma, all men are Thy forms, and it is Sita who has become all women.' On looking at the actors in the Ramlila, I felt that Narayana Himself had taken these human forms. The genuine and the imitation appeared to be the same.

"Why do people worship virgins? All women are so many forms of the Divine Mother. But Her manifestation is greatest in pure-souled virgins.

(To M.) "Why do I become impatient when I am ill? Because the Mother has placed me in the state of a child. The child depends entirely on its mother. The child of the maidservant, when he quarrels with the child of the master, says, 'I shall tell my mother.'

"I was taken to Radhabazar to be photographed. It had been arranged that I should go to Rajendra Mitra's house that day. I heard that Keshab would be there. I planned to

tell them certain things, but I forgot it all when I went to Radhabazar. I said: 'O Mother, Thou wilt speak. What shall I say?'

"I have not the nature of a Jnāni. He considers himself great. He says, 'What? How can I be ill?'

"Koar Singh once said to me, 'You still worry about your body.' But it is my nature to believe that my Mother knows everything. It was She who would speak at Rajendra Mitra's house. Hers are the only effective words. One ray of light from the Goddess of Wisdom stuns a thousand scholars.

"The Mother has kept me in the state of a bhakta, a vijnāni. That is why I joke with Rākhāl and the others. Had I been in the condition of a Jnāni I couldn't do that.

"In this state I realize that it is the Mother alone who has become everything. I see Her everywhere. In the Kāli temple I found that the Mother Herself had become everything-even the wicked, even the brother of Bhagavat Pundit.

"Once I was about to scold Ramlal's mother, but I had to restrain myself. I saw her to be a form of the Divine Mother. I worship virgins because I see in them the Divine Mother. My wife strokes my feet, but I salute her afterwards.

"You salute me by touching my feet. But had Hriday been here, who would have dared to touch them? He wouldn't have allowed anyone to do it. I have to return your salutes because the Mother has placed me in a state in which I see God in everything.

"You see, one cannot exclude even a wicked person. A tulsi-leaf, however dry or small, can be used for worship in the temple."

Sunday, March 2, 1884

Trailokya's songs

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch in his room, listening to devotional music by Trailokya Sannyal of the Brahmo Samaj. He had not yet recovered from the effects of the injury to his arm, which was still supported by a splint. Many devotees, including, Narendra, Srendra, and M., were sitting on the floor.

Narendra's father, a lawyer of the High Court of Calcutta, had passed away suddenly. He had not been able to make provision for the family, which consequently faced grave financial difficulties. The members of the family sometimes had to go without food. Narendra was therefore passing his days in great anxiety.

Trailokya sang about the Divine Mother:

O Mother, I hide myself in Thy loving bosom;
I gaze at Thy face and cry out, "Mother! Mother!"
I sink in the Sea of Bliss and am lost to sense
In yoga-sleep; I gaze with unwinking eyes

Upon Thy face, powerless to turn away.
O Mother, I am terrified by this world;
My spirit trembles and cries out in fear.
Keep me, sweet Mother, in Thy loving bosom;
Cover me with the spreading skirt of Thy love.
The Master shed tears of love and cried out, "Ah me! Ah me!"

Trailokya sang again:

O Lord, Destroyer of my shame! Who but Thyself can save
The honour of Thy devotee?
Thou art the Ruler of my soul, my very life's Support,
And I am Thy slave for evermore. . . .

He continued:

Seeking a shelter at Thy feet,
I have forever set aside
My pride of caste and race, O Lord,
And turned my back on fear and shame.
A lonely pilgrim on life's way,
Where shall I go for succour now?
For Thy sake, Lord, I bear men's blame;
They rail at me with bitter words
And hate me for my love of Thee.
Both friends and strangers use me ill.

Thou art the Guardian of my name;
Thou mayest save or slay me, Lord!
Upon the honour of Thy servant
Rests, O Lord, Thy name as well;
Thou art the Ruler of my soul,
The glow of love within my heart;
Do with me as it pleases Thee!

Once more he sang:

Lord, Thou hast taken me from home and made me captive with Thy love;
Shield me for ever at Thy feet, O Thou Beloved One!
Upon the Nectar of Thy love, feed me both day and night,
And save Premdas, who is Thy slave.

The Master again shed tears of joy. He sang some lines from a song of Ramprasad:

Glory and shame, bitter and sweet, are Thine alone;
This world is nothing but Thy play.
Then why, O Blissful One, dost Thou cause a rift in it?

Addressing Trailokya, the Master said: "Ah! How touching your songs are! They are genuine. Only he who has gone to the ocean can fetch its water."

Trailokya sang again:

Thou it is that dancest, Lord, and Thou that singest the song;
Thou it is that clappest Thy hands in time with the music's beat;
But man, who is an onlooker merely, foolishly thinks it is he.

Though but a puppet, man becomes a god if he moves with Thee;
Thou art the Mover of the machine, the Driver of the car;
But man is weighted down with woe, dreaming that he is free.

Thou art the Root of everything, Thou the Soul of our souls;
Thou art the Master of our hearts; through Thine unbounded grace
Thou turnest even the meanest sinner into the mightiest saint.

The singing came to an end. The Master engaged in conversation with the devotees.

Process of negation and affirmation & God Himself has become everything

MASTER: "God alone is the Master, and again, He is the Servant. This attitude indicates Perfect Knowledge. At first one discriminates, 'Not this, not this', and feels that God alone is real and all else is illusory. Afterwards the same person finds that it is God Himself who has become all this-the universe, maya, and the living beings. First negation and then affirmation. This is the view held by the Puranas. A vilwa-fruit, for instance, includes flesh, seeds, and shell. You get the flesh by discarding the shell and seeds. But if you want to know the weight of the fruit, you cannot find it if you discard the shell and seeds. Just so, one should attain Sarchidananda by negating the universe and its living beings. But after the attainment of Satchidananda one finds that Satchidananda Itself has become the universe and the living beings. It is of one substance that the flesh and the shell and seeds are made, just like butter and buttermilk.

The world does not exist apart from God

"It may be asked, 'How has Satchidananda become so hard?' This earth does indeed feel very hard to the touch. The answer is that blood and semen are thin liquids, and yet out of them comes such a big creature as man. Everything is possible for God. First of all reach the indivisible Satchidananda, and then, coming down, look at the universe. You will then find that everything is Its manifestation. It is God alone who has become everything. The world by no means exists apart from Him.

"All elements finally merge in Ākāśa. Again, at the time of creation, Ākāśa evolves into mahat and mahat into Ahamkāra. In this way the whole world-system is evolved. It is the process of involution and evolution. A devotee of God accepts everything. He accepts the universe and its created beings as well as the indivisible Satchidananda.

"But the yogi's path is different. He does not come back after reaching the Paramatman, the Supreme Soul. He becomes united with It.

"The 'partial knower' limits God to one object only. He thinks that God cannot exist in anything beyond that.

Three classes of devotees

"There are three classes of devotees. The lowest one says, 'God is up there.' That is, he points to heaven. The mediocre devotee says that God dwells in the heart as the 'Inner Controller'. But the highest devotee says: 'God alone has become everything. All that we perceive is so many forms of God.' Narendra used to make fun of me and say: 'Yes, God has become all! Then a pot is God, a cup is God!' (Laughter.)

Vision of God destroys doubts

"All doubts disappear when one sees God. It is one thing to hear of God, but quite a different thing to see Him. A man cannot have one hundred per cent conviction through mere hearing. But if he beholds God face to face, then he is wholly convinced.

"Formal worship drops away after the vision of God. It was thus that my worship in the temple came to an end. I used to worship the Deity in the Kāli temple. It was suddenly revealed to me that everything is Pure Spirit. The utensils of worship, the altar, the door-frame-all Pure Spirit. Men, animals, and other living beings-all Pure Spirit. Then like a madman I began to shower flowers in all directions. Whatever I saw I worshipped.

"One day, while worshipping Śiva, I was about to offer a bel-leaf on the head of the image, when it was revealed to me that this Virat, this Universe, itself is Śiva. After that my worship of Śiva through the image came to an end. Another day I had been plucking flowers, when it was revealed to me that the flowering plants were so many bouquets."

TRAILOKYA: "Ah! How beautiful is God's creation!"

MASTER: "Oh no, it is not that. It was revealed to me in a flash. I didn't calculate about it. It was shown to me that each plant was a bouquet adorning the Universal Form of God. That was the end of my plucking flowers. I look on man in just the same way. When I see a man, I see that it is God Himself who walks on earth, as it were, rocking to and fro, like a pillow floating on the waves. The pillow moves with the waves. It bobs up and down.

"The body has, indeed, only a momentary existence. God alone is real. Now the body exists, and now it does not. Years ago, when I had been suffering terribly from indigestion, Hriday said to me, 'Do ask the Mother to cure you.' I felt ashamed to speak to Her about my illness. I said to Her:

'Mother, I saw a skeleton in the Asiatic Society Museum. It was pieced together with wires into a human form. O Mother, please keep my body together a little, like that, so that I may sing Thy name and glories.'

"Why this desire to live? After Ravana's death Rāma and Lakshmana entered his capital and saw Nikasha, his old mother, running away. Lakshmana was surprised at this and said to Rāma, 'All her children are dead, but still life attracts her so much!' Rāma called Nikasha to His side and said: 'Don't be afraid. Why are you running away?' She replied: 'Rāma, it was not fear that made me flee from You. I have been able to see all these wondrous actions of Yours simply because I am alive. I shall see many more things like these if I continue to live. Hence I desire to live.'

"Without desires the body cannot live. (Smiling) I had one or two desires. I prayed to the Mother, 'O Mother, give me the company of those who have renounced "woman and gold".' I said further: 'I should like to enjoy the society of Thy jnanis and bhaktas. So give me a little strength that I may walk hither and thither and visit those people.' But She did not give me the strength to walk."

TRAILOKYA (smiling): "Have all the desires been fulfilled?"

MASTER (smiling): "No, there are still a few left. (All laugh.)

"The body is really impermanent. When my arm was broken I said to the Mother, 'Mother, it hurts me very much.' At once She revealed to me a carriage and its driver. Here and there a few screws were loose. The carriage moved as the driver directed it. It had no power of its own.

"Why then do I take care of the body? It is to enjoy God, to sing His name and glories, and to go about visiting His jnanis and bhaktas."

Master's sympathy for Narendra's suffering

Narendra was sitting on the floor in front of the Master.

MASTER (to Trailokya and the other devotees): "The joys and sorrows of the body are inevitable. Look at Narendra. His father is dead, and his people have been put to extreme suffering. He can't find any way out of it. God places one sometimes in happiness and sometimes in misery."

TRAILOKYA: "Revered sir, God will be gracious to Narendra."

MASTER (with a smile): "But when? It is true that no one starves at the temple of Annapurna in Benares; but some must wait for food till evening.

"Once Hriday asked Sambhu Mallick for some money. Sambhu held the views of 'Englishmen' on such matters. He said to Hriday: 'Why should I give you money? You can earn your livelihood by working. Even now you are earning something. The case of a very poor person is different. The purpose of charity is fulfilled if one gives money to the blind or the lame.' Thereupon Hriday said: 'Sir, please don't say that. I don't need your money. May God help me not to become blind or deaf or extremely poor! I don't want you to give, and I don't want to receive.' "

The Master spoke as if piqued because God had not yet shown His kindness to Narendra. Now and then he cast an affectionate glance at his beloved disciple.

NARENDRA: "I am now studying the views of the atheists."

MASTER: "There are two doctrines: the existence and the non-existence of God. Why don't you accept the first?"

SURENDRA: "God is just. He must look after His devotees."

MASTER: "It is said in the scriptures that only those who have been charitable in their former births get money in this life. But to tell you the truth, this world is God's maya. And there are many confusing things in this realm of maya. One cannot comprehend them.

God's ways are inscrutable

"The ways of God are inscrutable indeed. Bhishma lay on his bed of arrows. The Pandava brothers visited him in Krishna's company. Presently Bhishma burst into tears. The Pandavas said to Krishna: 'Krishna, how amazing this is! Our grandsire Bhishma is one of the eight Vasus. Another man as wise as he is not to be found. Yet even he is bewildered by maya and weeps at death.' 'But', said Krishna, 'Bhishma isn't weeping on that account. You may ask him about it.' When asked, Bhishma said: 'O Krishna, I am unable to understand anything of the ways of God; God Himself is the constant companion of the Pandavas, and still they have no end of trouble. That is why I weep. When I reflect on this, I realize that one cannot understand anything of God's ways.'

"God has revealed to me that only the Paramatman, whom the Vedas describe as the Pure Soul, is as immutable as Mount Sumeru, unattached, and beyond pain and pleasure. There is much confusion in this world of His maya. One can by no means say that 'this' will come after 'that' or 'this' will produce 'that'."

SURENDRA (smiling): "If by giving away money in a. previous birth one gets wealth in this life, then we should all give away money now."

MASTER: "Those who have money should give it to the poor and needy. (To Trailokya) Jaygopal Sen is well-to-do. He should be charitable. That he is not so is to his discredit. There are some who are miserly even though they have money. There is no knowing who will enjoy their money afterwards.

"Jaygopal came here the other day. He drove over here in a carriage. The lamps were broken, the horse seemed to have been returned from the charnel-house, and the coachman looked as if he had just been discharged from the Medical College Hospital. And he brought me two rotten pomegranates!" (All laugh.)

SURENDRA: "Jaygopal Babu belongs to the Brahmo Samaj. I understand that now there is not one worth-while man in Keshab's organization. Vijay Goswami, Shivanath, and other notables have organized the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj."

MASTER (smiling): "Govinda Adhikari, it is said, would not keep good actors in his theatre lest they should claim a share of the profit. (All laugh.)

"The other day I saw a disciple of Keshab. A theatrical performance was being given in Keshab's house, and I saw the disciple dancing on the stage with a child in his arms. I understand that this man delivers 'lectures'. He had better lecture to himself."

Trailokya sang:

Upon the Sea of Blissful Awareness waves of ecstatic love arise:
Rapture divine! Play of God's Bliss!
Oh, how enthralling!
Wondrous waves of the sweetness of God, ever new and ever enchanting,
Rise on the surface, ever assuming
Forms ever fresh.
Then once more in the Great Communion all are merged, as the barrier walls
Of time and space dissolve and vanish:
Dance then, O mind!
Dance in delight, with hands upraised, chanting Lord Hari's holy name.

Sri Ramakrishna requested Trailokya to sing the song beginning, "O Mother, make me mad with Thy love".

Trailokya sang:

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
What need have I of knowledge or reason?
Make me drunk with Thy love's Wine:
O Thou who stealest Thy bhaktas' hearts,
Drown me deep in the Sea of Thy love!
Here in this world, this madhouse of Thine
Some laugh, some weep, some dance for joy:
Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Gaurānga,
All are drunk with the Wine of Thy love.
O Mother, when shall I be blessed
By joining their blissful company?

Chapter 20

RULES FOR HOUSEHOLDERS AND MONKS

Sunday, March 9, 1884

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting in his room at Dakshineswar with many devotees. Among them were Mani Mallick, Mahendra Kaviraj, Balarām, M., Bhavanath, Rākhāl, Lātu, and Harish. The Master's injured arm was in a splint. In spite of the injury he was constantly absorbed in samādhi or instructing the devotees.

Mani Mallick and Bhavanath referred to the exhibition which was then being held near the Asiatic Museum. They said: "Many maharajas have sent precious articles to the exhibition-gold couches and the like. It is worth seeing."

MASTER (to the devotees, with a smile): "Yes, you gain much by visiting those things. You realize that those articles of gold and the other things sent by maharajas are mere trash. That is a great gain in itself. When I used to go to Calcutta with Hriday, he would show me the Viceroy's palace and say: 'Look, uncle! There is the Viceroy's palace with the big columns.' The Mother revealed to me that they were merely clay bricks laid one on top of another.

God and His splendour

"God and His splendour. God alone is real; the splendour has but a two days existence. The magician and his magic. All become speechless with wonder at the magic, but it is all unreal. The magician alone is real. The rich man and his garden. People see only the garden; they should look for its rich owner."

MANI MALLICK (to the Master): "What a big electric light they have at the exhibition! It makes us think how great He must be who has made such an electric light."

God Himself has become everything

MASTER (to Mani): "But according to one view it is He Himself who has become everything. Even those who say that are He. It is Satchidananda Itself that has become all-the Creator, māyā, the universe, and living beings."

The conversation turned to the museum.

Influence of company

MASTER (to the devotees): "I visited the museum once. I was shown fossils. A whole animal has become stone! Just see what an effect has been produced by company! Likewise, by constantly living in the company of a holy man one verily becomes holy."

MANI (smiling): "Had you visited the exhibition only once, we could receive instruction for ten or fifteen years."

MASTER (with a smile): "How so? You mean illustrations?"

BALARĀM: "No, you shouldn't go. Your arm won't heal if you go here and there."

MASTER: "I should like to have two pictures. One of a yogi seated before a lighted log, and another of a yogi smoking hemp and the charcoal blazing up as he pulls. Such pictures kindle my spiritual consciousness, as an imitation fruit awakens the idea of a real one.

Obstacles to Yoga

"The obstacle to yoga is 'woman and gold'. Yoga is possible when the mind becomes pure. The seat of the mind is between the eyebrows; but its look is fixed on the navel and the organs of generation and evacuation, that is to say, on 'woman and gold'. But through spiritual discipline the same mind looks upward.

Spiritual discipline

"What are the spiritual disciplines that give the mind its upward direction? One learns all this by constantly living in holy company. The rishis of olden times lived either in solitude or in the company of holy persons; therefore they could easily renounce 'woman and gold' and 'fix their minds on God. They had no fear nor did they mind the criticism of others.

Will-power needed for renunciation

"In order to be able to renounce, one must pray to God for the will power to do so. One must immediately renounce what one feels to be unreal. The rishis had this will-power. Through it they controlled the sense-organs. If the tortoise once tucks in its limbs, you cannot make it bring them out even by cutting it into four pieces.

Master denounces hypocrisy

"The worldly man is a hypocrite. He cannot be guileless. He professes to love God, but he is attracted by worldly objects. He doesn't give God even a very small part of the love he feels for 'woman and gold'. But he says that he loves God. (To Mani Mallick) Give up hypocrisy."

MANI: "Regarding whom, God or man?"

MASTER: "Regarding everything-man as well as God. One must not be a hypocrite.

"How guileless Bhavanath is! After his marriage he came to me and asked, 'Why do I feel so much love for my wife?' Alas, he is so guileless!

"Isn't it natural for a man to love his wife? This is due to the world bewitching māyā of the Divine Mother of the Universe. A man feels about his wife that he has no one else in the world so near and dear; that she is his very own in life and death, here and hereafter.

"Again, how much a man suffers for his wife! Still he believes that there is no other relative so near. Look at the sad plight of a husband. Perhaps he earns twenty rupees a month and is the father of three children. He hasn't the means to feed them well. His roof leaks, but he hasn't the wherewithal to repair it. He cannot afford to buy new books for his son. He cannot invest his son with the sacred thread. He begs a few pennies from his different friends.

The ideal of a spiritual family

"But a wife endowed with spiritual wisdom is a real partner in life. She greatly helps her husband to follow the religious path. After the birth of one or two children they live like brother and sister. Both of them are devotees of God-His servant and His handmaid. Their family is a spiritual family. They are always happy with God and His devotees. They know that God alone is their own, from everlasting to everlasting. They are like the Pandava brothers; they do not forget God in happiness or in sorrow.

"The longing of the worldly-minded for God is momentary, like a drop of water on a red-hot frying-pan. The water hisses and dries up in an instant. The attention of the worldly-minded is directed to the enjoyment of worldly pleasure. Therefore they do not feel yearning and restlessness for God.

Different forms of austerity

"People may observe the ekadasi in three ways. First, the 'waterless' ekadasi-they are not permitted to drink even a drop of water. Likewise, an all-renouncing religious mendicant completely gives up all forms of enjoyment. Second, while observing the ekadasi they take milk and sandesh. Likewise, a householder devotee keeps in his house simple objects of enjoyment. Third, while observing the ekadasi they eat luchi and chakka. They eat their fill. They keep a couple of loaves soaking in milk, which they will eat later on

"A man practises spiritual discipline, but his mind is on 'woman and gold'-it is turned toward enjoyment. Therefore, in his case, the spiritual discipline does not produce the right result.

"Hazra used to practise much japa and austerity here. But in the country he has his wife, children, and land. Therefore along with his Spiritual discipline he carried on the business of a broker. Such people cannot be true to their word. One moment they say they will give up fish, but the next moment they break their vow.

"Is there anything that a man will not do for money? He will even compel a brahmin or a holy man to carry a load.

"In my room sweets would turn bad; still I could not give them away to the worldly-minded. I could accept dirty water from others, but not even touch the jar of a worldly person.

"At the sight of rich people Hazra would call them to him. He would give them long lectures. He would say to them: 'You see Rākhāl and the other youngsters. They do not practise any spiritual discipline. They simply wander about merrily.'

"A man may live in a mountain cave, smear his body with ashes, observe fasts; and practise austere discipline; but if his mind dwells on worldly objects, on 'woman and gold', I say, 'Shame on him!' But I say that a man is blessed indeed who eats, drinks, and roams about, but who keeps his mind free from 'woman and gold'.

(Pointing to Mani Mallick) "There is no picture of a holy man at his house. Divine feeling is awakened through such pictures."

MANILAL: "Yes, there is. In one room there is a picture of a pious Christian woman engaged in prayer. There is another picture in which a man holds to the Hill of Faith; below is an ocean of immeasurable depth. If he gives up his hold on faith, he will drop into the bottomless water. There is still a third picture. Several virgins are keeping vigil, feeding their lamps with oil in expectation of the Bridegroom. A sleeping virgin is by their side. She will not behold the Bridegroom when He arrives. God is described here as the Bridegroom."

MASTER (smiling): "That's very nice."

MANILAL: "I have other pictures too-one of the 'Tree of Faith' and another of 'Sin and Virtue'."

MASTER (to Bhavanath): "Those are good pictures. Go to his house and see them."

The Master remained silent a few minutes.

Sin and repentance

MASTER: "Now and then I reflect on these ideas and find that I do not like them. In the beginning of spiritual life a man should think about sin and how to get rid of it. But when, through the grace of God, devotion and ecstatic love are awakened in his heart, then he altogether forgets virtue and sin. Then he leaves the scriptures and their injunctions far behind. Thoughts of repentance and penance do not bother him at all.

"It is like going to your destination along a winding river. This requires great effort and a long time. But when there is a flood all around, then you can go straight to your destination in a short time. Then you find the land lying under water deep as a bamboo pole.

"In the beginning of spiritual life one goes by a roundabout way. One has to suffer a great deal. But the path becomes very easy when ecstatic love is awakened in the heart. It is like going over the paddy-field after the harvest is over. You may then walk in any direction. Before the harvest you had to go along the winding balk, but now you can walk in any direction. There may be stubble in the field, but you will not be hurt by

it if you walk with your shoes on. Just so, an aspirant does not suffer if he has discrimination, dispassion, and faith in the guru's words."

Rules for concentration

MANILAL (to the Master): "Well, what is the rule for concentration? Where should one concentrate?"

MASTER: "The heart is a splendid place. One can meditate there or in the Sahasrara. These are rules for meditation given in the scriptures. But you may meditate wherever you like. Every place is filled with Brahman-Consciousness. Is there any place where It does not exist? Narayana, in Vali's presence, covered with two steps the heavens, the earth, and the interspaces. Is there then any place left uncovered by God? A dirty place is as holy as the bank of the Ganges. It is said that the whole creation is the Virat, the Universal Form of God.

Two forms of meditation

"There are two kinds of meditation, one on the formless God and the other on God with form. But meditation on the formless God is extremely difficult. In that meditation you must wipe out all that you see or hear. You contemplate only the nature of your Inner Self. Meditating on His Inner Self, Shiva dances about. He exclaims, 'What am I! What am I!' This is called the Shiva yoga'. While practising this form of meditation, one directs one's look to the forehead. It is meditation on the nature of one's Inner Self after negating the world, following the Vedantic method of 'Neti, neti'.

"There is another form of meditation, known as the 'Vishnu yoga', The eyes are fixed on the tip of the nose. Half the look is directed inward and the other half outward. This is how one meditates on God with form. Sometimes Shiva meditates on God with form, and dances. At that time he exclaims, 'Rāma! Rāma!' and dances about."

Meaning of Om

Sri Ramakrishna then explained the sacred Word "Om" and the true Knowledge of Brahman and the state of mind after the attainment of Brahmajnana.

MASTER: "The sound Om is Brahman. The rishis and sages practised austerity to realize that Sound-Brahman. After attaining perfection one hears the sound of this eternal Word rising spontaneously from the navel.

"'What will you gain', some sages ask, 'by merely hearing this sound?' You hear the roar of the ocean from a distance. By following the roar you can reach the ocean. As long as there is the roar, there must also be the ocean. By following the trail of Om you attain Brahman, of which the Word is the symbol. That Brahman has been described by the Vedas as the ultimate goal. But such vision is not possible as long as you are conscious of your ego. A man realizes Brahman only when he feels neither 'I' nor 'you', neither 'one' nor 'many'.

"Think of the sun and of ten jars filled with water. The sun is reflected in each jar. At first you see one real sun and ten reflected ones. If you break nine of the jars, there will

remain only the real sun and one reflection. Each jar represents a jiva. Following the reflection one can find the real sun. Through the individual soul one can reach the Supreme Soul. Through spiritual discipline the individual soul can get the vision of the Supreme Soul. What remains when the last jar is broken cannot be described.

Ignorance, knowledge, and Supreme Wisdom

"The jiva at first remains in a state of ignorance. He is not conscious of God, but of the multiplicity. He sees many things around him. On attaining Knowledge he becomes conscious that God dwells in all beings. Suppose a man has a thorn in the sole of his foot. He gets another thorn and takes out the first one. In other words, he removes the thorn of ajnāna, ignorance, by means of the thorn of jnāna, knowledge. But on attaining vijnāna, he discards both thorns, knowledge and ignorance. Then he talks intimately with God day and night. It is no mere vision of God.

"He who has merely heard of milk is 'ignorant'. He who has seen milk has 'knowledge'. But he who has drunk milk and been strengthened by it has attained vijnāna."

Thus the Master described his own state of mind to the devotees. He was indeed a vijnāni.

MASTER (to the devotees): "There is a difference between, a *Sādhu* endowed with jnāna and one endowed with vijnāna. The Jnāni *Sādhu* has a certain way of sitting. He twirls his moustache and asks the visitor, 'Well, sir! Have you any question to ask?' But the man who always sees God and talks to Him intimately has an altogether different nature. He is sometimes like an inert thing, sometimes like a ghoul, sometimes like a child, and sometimes like a madman.

"When he is in *samādhi*, he becomes unconscious of the outer world and appears inert. He sees everything to be full of Brahman-Consciousness; therefore he behaves like a ghoul. He is not conscious of the holy and the unholy. He does not observe any formal purity. To him everything is Brahman. He is not aware of filth as such. Even rice and other cooked food after a few days become like filth.

"Again, he is like a madman. People notice his ways and actions and think of him as insane. Or sometimes he is like a child-no bondage, no shame, no hatred, no hesitation, or the like.

"One reaches this state of mind after having the vision of God. When a boat passes by a magnetic hill, its screws and nails become loose and drop out. Lust, anger, and the other passions cannot exist after the vision of God.

"Once a thunderbolt struck the Kāli temple. I noticed that it flattened the points of the screws.

"It is no longer possible for the man who has seen God to beget children and perpetuate the creation. When a grain of paddy is sown it grows into a plant; but a grain of boiled paddy does not germinate.

"He who has seen God retains his 'I' only in name. No evil can be done by that 'I'. It is a mere appearance, like the mark left on the coconut tree by its branch. The branch has fallen off. Only the mark remains.

The two egos

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'Give up the ego that makes you feel, "I am the doer; I am teaching people." 'Keshab said to me, 'Sir, then I cannot keep the organization.' Thereupon I said to him, 'Give up the "wicked ego".' One doesn't have to renounce the ego that makes one feel, 'I am the servant of God; I am His devotee.' One doesn't develop the 'divine ego' as long as one retains the 'wicked ego'. If a man is in charge of the store-room, the master of the house doesn't feel responsible for it.

God's manifestation through man

(To the devotees) "You see, my nature is changing on account of this injury to my arm. It is being revealed to me that there is a greater manifestation of God in man than in other created beings. God is telling me, as it were: 'I dwell in men. Be merry with men.' Among men God manifests Himself in a still greater degree in pure-souled devotees. That is why I feel great longing for Narendra, Rākhāl, and other such youngsters.

"One often sees small holes along the edge of a lake. Fish and crabs accumulate there. Just so, there is a greater accumulation of divinity in man. It is said that man is greater than the salagram. Man is Narayana Himself. If God can manifest Himself through an image, then why not through man also?

"God is born as man for the purpose of sporting as man. Rāma, Krishna, and Chaitanya are examples. By meditating on an incarnation of God one meditates on God Himself."

Bhagavan Das, a Brahmo devotee, arrived.

The Eternal Religion

MASTER (to Bhagavan Das): "The Eternal Religion, the religion of the rishis, has been in existence from time out of mind and will exist eternally. There exist in this Sanatana Dharma all forms of worship-worship of God with form and worship of the Impersonal Deity as well. It contains all paths-the path of knowledge, the path of devotion, and so on. Other forms of religion, the modern cults, will remain for a few days and then disappear."

March 23, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room after his midday meal, with Rākhāl, Ram, and some other devotees. He was not quite well. The injured arm was still bandaged.

But in spite of his illness, his room was a veritable mart of joy and he the centre of it. Devotees thronged there daily to see the Master. Spiritual talk went on incessantly, and, the very air of the room vibrated with bliss. Sometimes the Master would sing the name and glories of God, and sometimes he would go into *samādhi*, the devotees being

amazed at the ease with which the Master freed himself from the consciousness of the body.

RAM: "There is talk of Narendra's marrying Mr. R. Mitra's daughter. Narendra has been offered a large dowry."

MASTER (smiling): "Yes, Narendra may thus become a leader of society or something like that. He will be an outstanding man, whatever career he follows."

The Master did not much encourage the conversation about Narendra.

MASTER (to Ram): "Well, can you tell me why I become so impatient when I am ill? Sometimes I ask this man and sometimes that man how I may be cured. You see, one must either believe everyone or no one at all.

"It is God Himself who has become the physicians. Therefore one must believe all of them. But one cannot have faith in them if one thinks of them as mere men.

"Sambhu was fearfully delirious. Dr. Sarvadhikari said that the delirium was due to the strong medicine. Haladhāri asked the doctor to feel his pulse. The doctor said: 'Let me see your eyes. Oh, it is an enlargement of the spleen!' Haladhāri said he had nothing of the sort. But Dr. Madhu gives good medicine."

RAM: "The medicine by itself does no good, though it greatly helps nature."

MASTER: "If that is so, why does opium cause constipation?"

Ram referred to Keshab Sen's death.

RAM: "You were quite right. You said that a gardener uncovers the roots of a good rose-plant so that it may absorb the dew and grow stronger and healthier. The words of a holy man have been fulfilled."

MASTER: "I don't know about that. I wasn't calculating when I said it. It is you who say that."

RAM: "The Brahmos have published something about you in their magazine."

MASTER: "Published about me? Why? Why should they write now? I eat and drink and make merry. I don't know anything else.

Man teaches by God's power

"I once asked Keshab, 'Why have you written about me?' He said that it would bring people here. But man cannot teach by his own power. One cannot conquer ignorance without the power of God.

"At one time two men were engaged to wrestle. One of them was Hanuman Singh and the other a Mussalman from the Punjab. The Mussalman was a strong, stout man. He had eaten lustily of butter and meat for fifteen days before the day of the wrestling-match, and even on that day. All thought he would be the victor. Hanuman Singh, on the other hand, clad in a dirty cloth, had eaten sparingly for some days before the day of the match and devoted himself to repeating the holy name of Mahavir. On the day of the match he observed a complete fast. All thought that he would surely be defeated. But it was he who won, while the man who had feasted for fifteen days lost the fight.

"What is the use of printing and advertising? He who teaches men gets his power from God. None but a man of renunciation can teach others. I am the greatest of all fools!" (All laugh.)

A DEVOTEE: "Then how is it that the Vedas and the Vedānta, and many things besides, come out of your mouth?"

MASTER (smiling): "During my boyhood I could understand what the *Sādhus* read at the Lahas' house at Kamarpukur, although I would miss a little here and there. If a pundit speaks to me in Sanskrit I can follow him, but I cannot speak it myself.

"To realize God is the one goal of life. While aiming his arrow at the mark, Arjuna said, 'I see only the eye of the bird and nothing else-not the kings, not the trees, not even the bird itself.'

"The realization of God is enough for me. What does it matter if I don't know Sanskrit?

"The grace of God falls alike on all His children, learned and illiterate—whoever longs for Him. The father has the same love for all his children. Suppose a father has five children. One calls him 'Baba', some 'Ba', and some 'Pa'. These last cannot pronounce the whole word. Does the father love those who address him as 'Baba' more than those who call him 'Pa'? The father knows that these last are simply too young to say 'Baba' correctly.

"Since this injury to my arm a change has been coming over my mind. I have been feeling much inclined to the Naralila. It is God Himself who plays about as human beings. If God can be worshipped through a clay image, then why not through a man?

"Once a merchant was shipwrecked. He floated to the shore of Ceylon, where Bibhishana was the king of the monsters. Bibhishana ordered his servants to bring the merchant to him. At the sight of him Bibhishana was overwhelmed with joy and said: 'Ah! He looks like my Rāma. The same human form!' He adorned the merchant with robes and jewels, and worshipped him. When I first heard this story, I felt such joy that I cannot describe it.

"Vaishnavcharan said to me, 'If a person looks on his beloved as his Ishta, he finds it very easy to direct his mind to God.' The men and women of a particular sect at Syambazar, near Kamarpukur, say to each other, 'Whom do you love?' 'I love so-and-

so.' 'Then know him to be your God.' When I heard this, I said to them: 'That is not my way. I look on all women as my mother.' I found out that they talked big but led immoral lives. The women then asked me if they would have salvation. 'Yes,' I said, 'if you are absolutely faithful to one man and look on him as your God. But you cannot be liberated if you live with five men.' "

RAM: "I understand that Kedār Babu has recently visited the Kartabhajas' place."

MASTER: "He gathers honey from various flowers. (To Ram, Nityagopal, and the others) If a devotee believes one hundred per cent that his Chosen Ideal is God, then he attains God and sees Him.

"People of bygone generations had tremendous faith. What faith Haladhāri's father had! Once he was on the way to his daughter's house when he noticed some beautiful flowers and vilwa-leaves. He gathered them for the worship of the Family Deity and walked back five or six miles to his own house.

"Once a theatrical troupe in the village was enacting the life of Rāma. When Kaikeyi asked Rāma to go into exile in the forest, Haladhāri's father, who had been watching the performance, sprang up. He went to the actor who played Kaikeyi, crying out, 'You wretch!', and was about to burn the actor's face with a torch. He was a very pious man. After finishing his ablutions he would stand in the water and meditate on the Deity, reciting the invocation: 'I meditate on Thee, of red hue and four faces', while tears streamed down his cheeks.

"When my father walked along the lanes of the village wearing his wooden sandals, the shopkeepers would stand up out of respect and say, 'there he comes!' When he bathed in the Haldārpukur, the villagers would not have the courage to get into the water. Before bathing they would inquire if he had finished his bath.

"When my father chanted the name of Raghuvir, his chest would turn crimson. This also happened to me. When I saw the cows at Vrindāvan returning from the pasture, I was transported into a divine mood and my body became red.

"Very strong was the faith of the people in those days. One hears that God used to dance then, taking the form of Kāli, while the devotee clapped his hands keeping time."

A hathayogi was staying in the hut at the Panchavati. Ramprasanna, the son of Krishnakishore of Ariadāhā, and several other men had become his devotees: The yogi needed twenty-five rupees a month for his milk and opium; so Ramprasanna had requested Sri Ramakrishna to speak to his devotees about the yogi and get some money. The Master said to several devotees: "A hathayogi has come to the Panchavati. Go and visit him. See what sort of man he is."

A young man of twenty-seven or twenty-eight, known as Thakur Dada, entered the room with a few friends and saluted the Master. He lived at Baranagore and was the son of a brahmin pundit. He was practising the kathakata in order to earn money to meet his

family's expenses. At one time he had been seized with the spirit of renunciation and had gone away from his family. Even now he practised spiritual discipline at home.

MASTER: "Have you come on foot? Where do you live?"

DADA: "Yes, sir, I have walked from home. I live at Baranagore."

MASTER: "Have you come here for any particular purpose?"

DADA: "I have come here to visit you. I pray to God. But why do I suffer now and then from worries? For a few days I feel very happy. Why do I feel restless afterwards?"

MASTER: "I see. Things have not been fitted quite exactly. The machine works smoothly if the mechanic fits the cogs of the wheels correctly. In your case there is an obstruction somewhere."

DADA: "Yes, sir. That must be so."

MASTER: "Are you initiated?"

DADA: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "Do you have faith in your mantra?"

A friend of Thākur Dādā said that the latter could sing well. The Master asked him to sing.

Thākur Dādā sang:

I shall become a yogi and dwell in Love's mountain cave;
I shall be lost in yoga beside the Fountain-head of Bliss.
I shall appease my hunger for Knowledge with the fruit of Truth;
I shall worship the feet of God with the flower of Dispassion.

I shall not seek a well to slake the burning thirst of my heart,
But I shall draw the water of Peace into the jar of my soul.
Drinking the glorious Nectar of Thy blessed Lotus Feet,
I shall both laugh and dance and weep and sing on the heights of Joy.

MASTER: "Ah, what a nice song! *'Fountain-head of Bliss'!* 'Fruit of Truth'! *'Laugh and dance and weep and sing'!* Your song tastes very sweet to me. Why should you worry?

"Pleasure and pain are inevitable in the life of the world. One suffers now and then from a little worry and trouble. A man living in a room full of soot cannot avoid being a little stained."

DĀDĀ: "Please tell me what I should do now."

MASTER: "Chant the name of Hari morning and evening, clapping your hands. Come once more when my arm is healed a bit."

Mahimacharan entered the room and saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "Ah! He has sung a nice song. Please sing it again." Thakur Dada repeated the song.

MASTER (to Mahima): "Please recite that verse, the one about devotion to Hari"

Mahimacharan recited, quoting from the Nārada Pancharatra:

What need is there of penance if God is worshipped with love?
What is the use of penance if God is not worshipped with love?
What need is there of penance if God is seen within and without?
What is the use of penance if God is not seen within and without?

MASTER: "Recite that part also-'Obtain from Him the love of God'."

Mahima recited:

O Brahman! O my child! Cease from practising further penances.
Hasten to Sankara, the Ocean of Heavenly Wisdom;
Obtain from Him the love of God, the pure love praised by devotees,
Which snaps in twain the shackles that bind you to the world.

MASTER: "Yes, Sankara will bestow the love of God."

MAHIMA: "One who is free from bondage is the eternal Shiva."

MASTER: "Shame, hatred, fear, hesitation-these are the shackles. What do you say?"

MAHIMA: "Yes, sir. And also the desire to conceal, and shrinking before praise."

Signs of Knowledge

MASTER: "There are two signs of knowledge. First, an unshakable buddhi. No matter how many sorrows, afflictions, dangers, and obstacles one may be faced with, one's mind does not undergo any change. It is like the blacksmith's anvil, which receives constant blows from the hammer and still remains unshaken. And second, manliness-very strong grit. If lust and anger injure a man, he must renounce them once for all. If a tortoise once tucks in its limbs, it won't put them out again though you may cut it into four pieces.

Two kinds of renunciation

(To Thakur Dada and the others) There are two kinds of renunciation: intense and feeble. Feeble renunciation is a slow process; one moves in a slow rhythm. Intense renunciation is like the sharp edge of a razor. It cuts the bondage of māyā easily and at once.

"One farmer labours for days to bring water from the lake to his field. But his efforts are futile because he has no grit. Another farmer, after labouring for two or three days, takes a vow and says, 'I will bring water into my field today, and not till then will I go home.' He puts aside all thought of his bath or his meal. He labours the whole day and feels great joy when in the evening he finds water entering his field with a murmuring sound. Then he goes home and says to his wife: 'Now give me some oil. I shall take my bath.' After finishing his bath and his meal he lies down to sleep with a peaceful mind.

"A certain woman said to her husband: 'So-and-so has developed a spirit of great dispassion for the world, but I don't see anything of the sort in you. He has sixteen wives. He is giving them up one by one.' The husband, with a towel in his shoulder, was going to the lake for his bath. He said to his wife: 'You are crazy! He won't be able to give up the world. Is it ever possible to renounce bit by bit? I can renounce. Look! Here I go.' He didn't stop even to settle his household affairs. He left home just as he was, the towel on his shoulder, and went away. That is intense renunciation.

"There is another kind of renunciation, called 'Markata Vairāgya', 'monkey renunciation'. A man, harrowed by distress at home, puts on an ochre robe and goes away to Benares. For many days he does not send home any news of himself. Then he writes to his people: 'Don't be worried about me. I have got a job here.'

"There is always trouble in family life. The wife may be disobedient. Perhaps the husband earns only twenty rupees a month. He hasn't the means to perform the 'rice-eating ceremony' for his baby. He cannot educate his son. The house is dilapidated. The roof leaks and he hasn't the money to repair it.

Advantage of a householder's life

"Therefore when the youngsters come here I ask them whether they have anyone at home. (To Mahima) Why should householders renounce the world? What great troubles the wandering monks pass through! The wife of a certain man said to him: 'You want to renounce the world? Why? You will have to beg morsels from eight different homes. But here you get all your food at one place. Isn't that nice?'

"Wandering monks, while searching for a sadavrata, may have to go six miles out of their way. I have seen them travelling along the regular road after their pilgrimage to Puri and making a detour to find an eating-place.

"You are leading a householder's life. That is very good. It is like fighting from a fort. There are many disadvantages in fighting in an open field. So many dangers, too. Bullets may hit you.

"But one should spend some time in solitude and attain Knowledge. Then one can lead the life of a householder. Janaka lived in the world after attaining Knowledge. When you have gained it, you may live anywhere. Then nothing matters."

MAHIMA: "Sir, why does a man become deluded by worldly objects?"

MASTER: "It is because he lives in their midst without having realized God. Man never succumbs to delusion after he has realized God. The moth no longer enjoys darkness if it has once seen the light.

Practice of continence

"To be able to realize God, one must practise absolute continence. Sages like Sukadeva are examples of an urdhvareta. Their chastity was absolutely unbroken. There is another class, who previously have had discharges of semen but who later on have controlled them. A man controlling the seminal fluid for twelve years develops a special power. He grows a new inner nerve called the nerve of memory. Through that nerve he remembers all, he understands all.

"Loss of semen impairs the strength. But it does not injure one if one loses it in a dream. That semen one gets from food. What remains after nocturnal discharge is enough. But one must not know a woman.

"The semen that remains after nocturnal discharge is very 'refined'. The Lahas kept jars of molasses in their house. Every jar had a hole in it. After a year they found that the molasses had crystallized like sugar candy. The unnecessary watery part had leaked out through the hole.

Sannyasi's absolute self-control

"A sannyasi must absolutely renounce woman. You are already involved; but that doesn't matter.

"A sannyasi must not look even at the picture of a woman. But this is too difficult for an ordinary man. Sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni are the seven notes of the scale. It is not possible to keep your voice on 'ni' a long time.

"To lose semen is extremely harmful for a sannyasi. Therefore he must live so carefully that he will not have to see the form of a woman. He must keep himself away from a woman even if she is a devotee of God. It is injurious for him to look even at the picture of a woman. He will lose semen in a dream, if not in the waking state.

"A sannyasi may have control over his senses, but to set an example to mankind he should not talk with women. He must not talk to one very long, even if she is a devotee of God. .

"Living as a sannyasi is like observing the ekadasi without drinking even a drop of water. There are two other ways of observing the day. You may eat fruit or take luchi and curry. With the luchi and curry you may also take slices of bread soaked in milk. (All laugh.)

(Smiling) "Absolute fasting is not possible for you.

"Once I saw Krishnakishore eating luchi and curry on an ekadasi day. I said to Hriday, 'Hridu, I want to observe Krishnakishore's ekadasi!' (All laugh.) And so I did one day. I ate my fill. The next day I had to fast." (Laughter.)

The devotees who had gone to the Panchavati to visit the hathayogi came back.

MASTER (addressing them): "Well, what do you think of him? I dare say you have measured him with your own tape."

Sri Ramakrishna saw that very few of the devotees were willing to give money to the hathayogi.

MASTER: "You don't like a *Sādhu* if you have to give him money. Rajendra Mitra draws a salary of eight hundred rupees a month. He had been to Allahabad to see the kumbhamela. I asked him, 'Well, what kind of *Sādhus* did you see at the fair?' Rajendra said: 'I didn't find any very great *Sādhu* there. I noticed one, it is true. But even he accepted money.'

"I say to myself, 'If no one gives money to a *Sādhu*, then how will he feed himself?' There is no collection plate here; therefore all come. And I say to myself: 'Alas! They love their money. Let them have it.' "

The Master rested awhile. A devotee sat on the end of the small couch and gently stroked his feet. The Master said to him softly: "That which is formless again has form. One should believe in the forms of God also. By meditating on Kāli the aspirant realizes God as Kāli. Next he finds that the form merges in the Indivisible Absolute. That which is the Indivisible Satchidananda is verily Kāli."

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the semicircular porch west of his room, talking with Mahima and other devotees about the hathayogi. The talk drifted to Ramprasanna, the son of Krishnakishore. The Master was fond of the young man.

MASTER: "Ramprasanna roams about aimlessly. The other day he came here and sat in the room, but he did not speak a word. He pressed his nostrils with his fingers, practising pranayama. I offered him something to eat, but he wouldn't take it. On another occasion I had asked him to sit by me. He squatted on the floor placing one leg upon the other. He was rather discourteous to Captain. I weep at his mother's suffering.

(To Mahima) "Ramprasanna asked me to speak to you about the hathayogi. The yogi's daily expenses are six and a half *ānnās*. But he won't tell you about it himself."

MAHIMA: "Who will listen to him even if he does?"

Mani Sen of Panihati entered the room with several friends, one of whom was a physician. Mani asked the Master about his injured arm. The doctor did not approve of the medicine prescribed by Pratap Mazumdar. The Master said to him: "Why should you say that? Pratap is no fool. "

Suddenly Lātu cried out, "Oh! The medicine bottle has dropped and broken."

It was not yet dusk. The Master, seated on the couch, was talking to M. Mahimacharan was on the semicircular porch engaged in a loud discussion of the scriptures with the physician friend of Mani Sen. Sri Ramakrishna heard it and with a smile said to M.: "There! He is delivering himself. That is the characteristic of rajas. It stimulates the desire to 'lecture' and to show off one's scholarship. But sattva makes one introspective. It makes one hide one's virtues. But I must say that Mahima is a grand person. He takes such delight in spiritual talk."

Adhar entered the room, saluted the Master, and sat by M.'s side. He had not come for the past few days.

MASTER: "Hello! Why haven't you come all these days?"

ADHAR: "Sir, I have been busy with so many things. I had to attend a conference of the school committee and various other meetings."

MASTER: "So you completely lost yourself in schools and meetings and forgot everything else?"

ADHAR: "Everything else was hidden away in a corner of my mind. How is your arm?"

MASTER: "Just look. It is not yet healed. I have been taking medicine prescribed by Pratap."

After a time the Master suddenly said to Adhar: "Look here. All these are unreal-meetings, school, office, and everything else. God alone is the Substance, and all else is illusory. One should worship God with one's whole mind."

Adhar sat without speaking a word.

MASTER: "All else is illusory. This moment the body is and the next moment it is not. One must make haste to worship God.

"But you don't have to renounce everything. Live in the world the way the tortoise does. The tortoise roams about in the water but keeps its eggs on land. Its whole mind is on the eggs.

"What a nice state of mind Captain has developed! He looks like a rishi when he is seated to perform worship. He performs the *Ārati* with lighted camphor and recites beautiful hymns. When he rises from his seat after finishing the worship, his eyes are

swollen from emotion, as if bitten by ants. Besides, he always devotes himself to the study of the sacred books, such as the Gitā and the Bhagavata. Once I used one or two English words before him, and that made him angry. He said, 'English-educated people are profane.' "

After a while Adhar said humbly to the Master: "Sir, you haven't been to our place for a long time. The drawing-room smells worldly and everything else appears to be steeped in darkness."

The Master was deeply touched by these words of his devotee. He suddenly stood up and blessed M. and Adhar in an ecstatic mood, touching their heads and hearts. In a voice choked with love the Master said: "I look upon you as Narayana Himself. You are indeed my own."

Mahimacharan entered the room.

MASTER (to Mahima): "What I said about aspirants practising continence is true. Without chastity one cannot assimilate these teachings.

"Once a man said to Chaitanya: 'You give the devotees so much instruction. Why don't they make much progress?' Chaitanya said: 'They dissipate their powers in the company of women. That is why they cannot assimilate spiritual instruction. If one keeps water in a leaky jar, the water escapes little by little through the leak.' "

Mahima and the other devotees remained silent. After a time Mahima said, "Please pray to God for us that we may acquire the necessary strength."

MASTER: "Be on your guard even now. It is difficult, no doubt, to check the torrent in the rainy season. But a great deal of water has gone out. If you build the embankment now it will stand.

Chapter 21

A DAY AT DAKSHINESWAR

Saturday, April 5, 1884

IT WAS ABOUT EIGHT O'CLOCK in the morning when M. arrived at the temple garden and found Sri Ramakrishna seated on the small couch in his room. A few devotees were sitting on the floor. The Master was talking to them. Prankrishna Mukherji was there.

Prankrishna belonged to an aristocratic family and lived in the northern part of Calcutta. He held a high post in an English business firm. He was very much devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and, though a householder, derived great pleasure from the study of Vedānta philosophy. He was a frequent visitor at the temple garden. Once he invited the Master to his house in Calcutta and held a religious festival. Every day, early in the morning, he bathed in the holy water of the Ganges. Whenever it was convenient, he would come to Dakshineswar in a hired country boat.

That morning he had hired a boat and invited M. to accompany him to Dakshineswar. The boat had hardly left shore when the river became choppy. M. had become frightened and begged Prankrishna to put him back on land. In spite of assurances, M. had kept saying: "You must put me ashore. I shall walk to Dakshineswar." And so M. came on foot and found Sri Ramakrishna talking to Prankrishna and the others.

How the Lord Himself is deluded by His own māyā

MASTER (to Prankrishna): "But there is a greater manifestation of God in man. You may ask, 'How is it possible for God to be incarnated as a man who suffers from hunger, thirst, and the other traits of an embodied being, and perhaps also from disease and grief?' The reply is, 'Even Brahman weeps, entrapped in the snare of the five elements.'

"Don't you know how Rāma had to weep, stricken with grief for Sita? Further, it is said that the Lord incarnated Himself as a sow in order to kill the demon Hiranyaksha. Hiranyaksha was eventually killed, but God would not go back to His abode in heaven. He enjoyed His sow's life. He had given birth to several young ones and was rather happy with them. The gods said among themselves: 'What does this mean? The Lord doesn't care to return to heaven!' They all went to Shiva and laid the matter before him. Shiva came down and urged the Lord to leave the sow body and return to heaven. But

the sow only suckled her young ones. (Laughter.) Then Shiva destroyed the sow body with his trident, and the Lord came out laughing aloud and went back to His own abode."

The Anāhata sound

PRANKRISHNA (to the Master): "Sir, what is the *Anāhata* sound?"

MASTER: "It is a spontaneous sound constantly going on by itself. It is the sound of the Pranava, Om. It originates in the Supreme Brahman and is heard by yogis. People immersed in worldliness do not hear it. A yogi alone knows that this sound originates both from his navel and from the Supreme Brahman resting on the Ocean of Milk."

Reincarnation

PRANKRISHNA: "Sir, what is the nature of the life after death?"

MASTER: "Keshab Sen also asked that question. As long as a man remains ignorant, that is to say, as long as he has not realized God, so long will, he be born. But after attaining Knowledge he will not have to come back to this earth or to any other plane of existence.

"The potter puts his pots in the sun to dry. Haven't you noticed that among them there are both baked and unbaked ones? When a cow happens to walk over them, some of the pots get broken to pieces. The broken pots that are already baked, the potter throws away, since they are of no more use to him. But the soft ones, though broken, he gathers up. He makes them into a lump and out of this forms new pots. In the same way, so long as a man has not realized God, he will have to come back to the Potter's hand, that is, he will have to be born again and again.

"What is the use of sowing a boiled paddy grain? It will never bring forth a shoot. Likewise, if a man is boiled in the fire of Knowledge, he will not be used for new creation. He is liberated.

The "ego of Devotion"

"According to the Puranas, the bhakta and the Bhagavan are two separate entities. 'I' am one and 'You' are another. The body is a plate, as it were, containing the water of mind, intelligence, and ego. Brahman is like the sun. It is reflected in the water. Therefore the devotee sees the divine form.

The "ego of Knowledge"

"According to the Vedānta, Brahman alone is real and all else is māyā, dreamlike and unsubstantial. The ego, like a stick, lies across the Ocean of Satchidananda. (To M.) Listen to what I am saying. When this ego is taken away, there remains only one undivided Ocean of Satchidananda. But as long as the stick of ego remains, there is an appearance of two: here is one part of the water and there another part. Attaining the Knowledge of Brahman one is established in *samādhi*. Then the ego is effaced.

"But Sankaracharya retained the 'ego of Knowledge' in order to teach men.

The signs of a Jnāni

(To Prankrishna) But there are signs that distinguish the man of Knowledge. Some people think they have Knowledge. What are the characteristics of Knowledge? A Jnāni cannot injure anybody. He becomes like a child. If a steel sword touches the philosopher's stone, it is transformed into gold. Gold can never cut. It may seem from the outside that a Jnāni also has anger or egotism, but in reality he has no such thing.

The ego of a Jnāni

"From a distance a burnt string lying on the ground may look like a real one; but if you come near and blow at it, it disappears altogether. The anger and egotism of a Jnāni are mere appearances; they are not real.

"A child has no attachment. He makes a play house, and if anyone touches it, he will jump about and cry. The next moment he himself will break it. This moment he may be very attached to his cloth. He says: 'My daddy has given it to me. I won't part with it.' But the next moment you can cajole him away from it with a toy. He will go away with you, leaving the cloth behind.

"These are the characteristics of a Jnāni. Perhaps he has many luxuries at home—couch, chairs, paintings, and equipage. But any day he may leave all these and go off to Benares.

Jnāni looks on the world as illusory

"According to Vedānta the waking state, too, is unreal. Once a wood-cutter lay dreaming, when someone woke him up. Greatly annoyed, he said: 'Why have you disturbed my sleep? I was dreaming that I was a king and the father of seven children. The princes were becoming well versed in letters and military arts. I was secure on my throne and ruled over my subjects. Why have you demolished my world of joy?' 'But that was a mere dream', said the other man. 'Why should that bother you?' 'Fool!' said the wood-cutter. 'You don't understand. My becoming a king in the dream was just as real as is my being a wood-cutter. If being a wood-cutter is real, then being a king in a dream is real also.' "

The state of a vijnāni

Prankrishna always talked about jnāna. Was this why the Master described the state of the Jnāni? Now he proceeded to describe the state of the vijnāni.

MASTER: "Jnāna is the realization of Self through the process of 'Neti, neti', 'Not this, not this'. One goes into *samādhi* through this process of elimination and realizes the Ātman.

"But vijnāna means Knowledge with a greater fullness. Some have heard of milk, some have seen milk, and some have drunk milk. He who has merely heard of it is 'ignorant'. He who has seen it is a Jnāni. But he who has drunk it has vijnāna, that is to say, a fuller knowledge of it. After having the vision of God one talks to Him as if He were an intimate relative. That is vijnāna.

"First of all you must discriminate, following the method of 'Neti, neti': 'He is not the five elements, nor the sense-organs, nor the mind, nor the intelligence, nor the ego. He is beyond all these cosmic principles.' You want to climb to the roof; then you must eliminate and leave behind all the steps one by one. The steps are by no means the roof. But after reaching the roof you find that the steps are made of the same materials—brick, lime, and brick-dust—as the roof. It is the Supreme Brahman that has become the universe and its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. That which is Ātman has become the five elements. You may ask why the earth is so hard, if

it has come out of Ātman? All is possible through the will of God. Don't you see that bone and flesh are made from blood and semen? How hard 'sea-foam' becomes!

"After attaining vijnāna one can live in the world as well. Then one clearly realizes that God Himself has become the universe and all living beings, that He is not outside the world.

(To Prankrishna) "The fact is that one must have the 'spiritual eye'. You will develop that eye as soon as your mind becomes pure. Take for instance the Kumari Puja. I worshipped a virgin. The girl, to be sure, had all her human imperfections; still I regarded her as the Divine Mother Herself.

"On one side is the wife and on the other the son. Love is bestowed on both, but in different ways. Therefore it comes to this, that everything depends upon the mind. The pure mind acquires a new attitude. Through that mind one sees God in this world. Therefore one needs spiritual discipline.

"Yes, spiritual discipline is necessary. You should know that a man becomes easily attached to a woman. A woman naturally loves a man, and a man also naturally loves a woman. Therefore both fall speedily from their spiritual ideal. But it also must be said that there is a great advantage in leading the life of a householder. In case of urgent necessity a man may live with his wife.

(Smiling) "Well, M., why are you smiling?"

M. (to himself): "The Master makes this much allowance for house-holders since they cannot renounce everything. Is complete and absolute continence impossible for a householder?"

The hathayogi who had been living in the Panchavati entered the room. He was in the habit of taking milk and opium. He did not eat rice or other food and had no money to buy the milk and opium. The Master had talked with him in the Panchavati. The

hathayogi had told Rākhāl to ask the Master to make some provision for him, and Sri Ramakrishna had promised to speak about it to the visitors from Calcutta.

HATHAYOGI (to the Master): "What did you say to Rākhāl about me?"

MASTER: "I said that I would ask some rich visitors to help you. But (to Prankrishna) you, perhaps, do not like these yogis?"

Prankrishna remained silent. The hathayogi left the room and the conversation went on.

Master's adherence to truth

MASTER (to Prankrishna and the others): "If a man leads a householder's life he must have unflagging devotion to truth. God can be realized through truth alone. Formerly I was very particular about telling the truth, though now my zeal has abated a little. If I said, 'I shall bathe', then I would get into the water of the Ganges, recite the mantra, and sprinkle a little water over my head. But still there would remain some doubt in me as to whether my bath was complete. Once I went to Ram's house in Calcutta. I happened to say, 'I shall not take any luchi.' When I sat down for the meal I felt hungry. But I had said I would not eat the luchi; so I had to fill my stomach with sweets. (All laugh.)

"But my zeal for truthfulness has abated a little now. Once I said I would go to the pine-grove, but then I felt I had no particular urge to go. What was to be done? I asked Ram about it. He said I didn't have to go. Then I reasoned to myself: 'Well, everyone is Narayana. So Ram, too, is Narayana. Why shouldn't I listen to him? The elephant is Narayana no doubt; but the mahut is Narayana too. Since the mahut asked me not to go near the elephant, then why shouldn't I obey him?' Through reasoning like this my zeal for truthfulness is slightly less strong now than before.

"I find a change, coming over me. Years ago Vaishnavcharan said to me, 'One attains Perfect Knowledge when one sees God in man.' Now I see that it is God alone who is moving about in various forms: as a holy man, as a cheat, as a villain. Therefore I say, 'Narayana in the guise of the *Sādhu*, Narayana in the guise of the cheat, Narayana in the guise of the villain, Narayana in the guise of the lecher.'

"Now my problem is how I can feed all of you. I want to feed everyone. So I keep one at a time with me and feed him."

Prankrishna (looking at M. and smiling): "A fine man, indeed! (To the Master) He would not let us go till we put him ashore."

MASTER (smiling): "Why? What happened?"

PRANKRISHNA: "He was in our boat. Seeing that the river was slightly rough, he insisted on being put ashore. (To M.) 'How did you come?"

M. (smiling): "On foot."

Sri Ramakrishna laughed.

PRANKRISHNA (to the Master): "Sir, I am thinking now of giving up my work. One who is involved in activity cannot accomplish anything. (Pointing to his companion) I am training him to do my work. After I resign, he will relieve me. Work has become intolerable."

MASTER: "Yes, work is very troublesome. It is now good for you to meditate on God for a few days in solitude. No doubt you say that you would like to give up your work. Captain said the same thing. Worldly people talk that way; but they don't succeed in carrying out their intention.

"There are many pundits who speak words of wisdom. But they merely talk; they don't live up to them. They are like vultures, which soar very high but keep their gaze fixed on the charnel-pit. What I mean is that these pundits are attached to the world, to

'woman and gold'. If I hear that pundits are practising discrimination and dispassion, then I fear them. Otherwise I look upon them as mere goats and dogs."

Prankrishna saluted the Master and took his leave. He said to M., "Will you come with us?"

M: "No, sir! Catch me going with you again! Good-bye."

Prankrishna laughed and said, "I see you won't come in the boat."

M. took a little stroll near the Panchavati and bathed in the river. Then he went to the temples of Radhakanta and Kāli and prostrated himself before the images. He said to himself: "I have heard that God has no form. Then why do I bow before these images? Is it because Sri Ramakrishna believes in gods and goddesses with form? I don't know anything about God, nor do I understand Him. The Master believes in images; then why shouldn't I too, who am so insignificant a creature, accept them?"

M. looked at the image of Kāli. He saw that the Divine Mother holds in Her two left hands a man's severed head and a sword. With Her two right hands She offers boons and reassurance to Her devotees. In one aspect She is terrible, and in another She is the ever affectionate Mother of Her devotees. The two ideals are harmonized in Her. She is compassionate and affectionate to Her devotees: to those who are submissive and helpless. It is also true that She is terrible, the "Consort of Death". She alone knows why She assumes two aspects at the same time.

M. remembered this interpretation of Kāli given by the Master. He said to himself, "I have heard that Keshab accepted Kāli in Sri Ramakrishna's presence. Is this, as Keshab used to say, the Goddess, all Spirit and Consciousness; manifesting Herself through a clay image?"

M. returned to the Master's room and sat on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna offered him some fruit and sweets to eat. On account of trouble in the family, M. had recently rented a house in another section of Calcutta near his school, his father and brothers

continuing to live in the ancestral home. But Sri Ramakrishna wanted him to return to his own home, since a joint family affords many advantages to one leading a religious life. Once or twice the Master had spoken to M. to this effect, but unfortunately he had not yet returned to his family. Sri Ramakrishna referred to the matter again.

MASTER: "Tell me that you are going to your ancestral home."

M: "I can never persuade myself to enter that place."

MASTER: "Why? Your father is making over the whole house."

M: "I have suffered too much there. I can by no means make up my mind to go there."

MASTER: "Whom do you fear?"

M: "All of them."

MASTER (seriously): "Isn't that like your being afraid to get into the boat?"

The midday worship and the offering of food in the temples were over. The bells, gongs, and symbals of the *Ārati* were being played, and the temple garden was filled with joyful activity. Beggars, *Sādhus*, and guests hurried to the guest-house for the noonday meal, carrying leaf or metal plates in their hands. M. also took some of the *Prasad* from the Kāli temple.

Sri Ramakrishna had been resting awhile after his meal when several devotees, including Ram and Girindra, arrived. They sat down after saluting the Master. The conversation turned to the New Dispensation Church of Keshab Chandra Sen.

RAM (to the Master): "Sir, I don't think the Navavidhan has done people any good. If Keshab Babu himself was a genuine man, why are his disciples left in such a plight? I don't think there is anything at all in the New Dispensation. It is like rattling some potsherds in a room and then locking it up. People may take it to be the jingling of coins, but inside there is nothing but potsherds. Outsiders don't know what is inside."

MASTER: "There must be some substance in it. Otherwise, why should so many people respect Keshab? Why isn't Shivanath honoured as much as Keshab? Such a thing cannot happen without the will of God.

A teacher must renounce the world

"But a man cannot act as an Āchārya without renouncing the world. People won't respect him. They will say: 'Oh, he is a worldly man. He secretly enjoys "woman and gold" himself but tells us that God alone is real and the world unsubstantial, like a dream. 'Unless a man renounces everything his teachings cannot be accepted by all. Some worldly people may follow him. Keshab led the life of a householder; hence his mind was directed to the world also. He had to safeguard his family interests. That is why he left his affairs in such good order though he delivered so many religious lectures. What an aristocratic man he married his daughter to! Inside Keshab's inner apartments I saw many big bedsteads. All these things gradually come to one who leads a householder's life. The world is indeed a place for enjoyment."

RAM: "Keshab Sen inherited those bedsteads when his ancestral property was divided. And for Keshab to take part in the division of property! Whatever you may say, sir, Vijay Babu told me that Keshab had said to him, 'I am a partial manifestation of Christ and Gaurānga. I suggest that you declare yourself as Advaita.' Do you know what else he said? He said that you too were a follower of the New Dispensation." (All laugh.)

MASTER (laughing): "Who knows? But as for myself, I don't even know what the term 'New Dispensation' means." (Laughter.)

RAM: "Keshab's disciples say that he was the first to harmonize jnāna and bhakti."

Synthesis of jnāna and bhakti

MASTER (in surprise): "How is that? What then of the Adhyātma Rāmāyana? It is written there that, while praying to Rāma, Nārada said: 'O Rāma, Thou art the Supreme Brahman described in the Vedas. Thou dwellest with us as a man; Thou appearest as a man. In reality Thou art not a man; Thou art that Supreme Brahman.' Rāma said: 'Nārada, I am very much pleased with you. Accept a boon from Me.' Nārada replied: 'What boon shall I ask of Thee? Grant me pure love for Thy Lotus Feet, and may I never be deluded by Thy world-bewitching māyā!' The Adhyātma Rāmāyana is full of such statements regarding jnāna and bhakti."

The conversation turned to Amrita, a disciple of Keshab.

RAM: "Amrita Babu seems to be in very bad shape."

MASTER: "Yes, he looked very ill when I saw him the other day."

RAM: "Sir, let me tell you about the lectures of the New Dispensation. While the drum is being played, the members cry out, 'Victory unto Keshab!' You say that 'dal' grows only in a stagnant pool. So Amrita said one day in the course of his sermon: 'The holy man has no doubt said that 'dal' grows in a stagnant pool. But, brothers, we want 'dal', we want a sect. Really and truly, I tell you that we want a sect.' "

MASTER: "What nonsense! Shame on him! What kind of sermon is that?"

The conversation drifted to the desire of some people for praise.

MASTER: "They took me to Keshab's house to see a performance of the Nimai-sannyās. I heard, that day, someone speaking of Keshab and Pratap as Chaitanya and Nityananda. Prasanna asked me, 'Who are you then?' Keshab looked at me to see what I would say. I said to him, 'I am the servant of your servant, the dust of the dust of your feet.' Keshab said with a smile, 'You can't catch him!'"

RAM: "Sometimes Keshab used to say you were John the Baptist."

A DEVOTEE: "But Keshab also said you were the Chaitanya of the nineteenth century [said in English]."

MASTER: "What does that mean?"

DEVOTEE: "That Chaitanya has been incarnated again in the present century of the Christian era, and that you are he."

MASTER (absent-mindedly): "What of it? Can you tell me now how my arm can be cured? This arm is worrying me so much."

They talked about Trailokya's music. Trailokya sang devotional songs in Keshab's Brahmo Samaj.

MASTER: "Ah! How nice his songs are!"

RAM: "Do you think they are genuine?"

MASTER: "Yes, they are. Otherwise, why should I be so drawn to them?"

RAM: "He has composed his songs by borrowing your ideas. While conducting the worship, Keshab Sen described your feelings and realizations, and Trailokya Babu composed songs accordingly. Take this song, for instance:

There is an overflow of Joy in the market-place of Love;
See how the Lord sports with His own in the ecstasy of Bliss!

He saw you enjoying divine bliss in the company of devotees and wrote songs like this."

MASTER (with a smile): "Stop! Don't torment me any more. Why should I be involved in all this?" (All laugh.)

GIRINDRA: "The Brahmos say that the Paramahamsa Deva has no faculty for organization *[said in English].*"

MASTER: "What does that mean?"

M: "That you don't know how to lead a sect; that your intellect is rather dull. They say things like that." (All laugh.)

MASTER (to Ram): "Now tell me why my arm was hurt. Stand up and deliver a lecture on that. (Laughter.)

"The Brahmos insist that God is formless. Suppose they do. It is enough to call on Him with sincerity of heart. If the devotee is sincere, then God, who is the Inner Guide of all, will certainly reveal to the devotee His true nature.

Friction between different religious sects

"But it is not good to say that what we ourselves think of God is the only truth and what others think is false; that because we think of God as formless, therefore He is formless and cannot have any form; that because we think of God as having form, therefore He has form and cannot be formless. Can a man really fathom God's nature?

"This kind of friction exists between the Vaishnavas and the *Shaktas*. The Vaishnava says, 'My Kesava is the only Saviour', whereas the *Shakta* insists, 'My Bhagavati is the only Saviour.'

"Once I took Vaishnavcharan to Mathur Babu. Now, Vaishnavcharan was a very learned Vaishnava and an orthodox devotee of his sect. Mathur, on the other hand, was a devotee of the Divine Mother. They were engaged in a friendly discussion when suddenly Vaishnavcharan said, 'Kesava is the only Saviour.' No sooner did Mathur hear this than his face became red with anger and he blurted out, 'You rascal!' (All laugh.) He was a *Shakta*. Wasn't it natural for him to say that? I gave Vaishnavcharan a nudge.

Harmony of religions

"I see people who talk about religion constantly quarrelling with one another. Hindus, Mussalmans, Brahmos, *Shaktas*, Vaishnavas, Saivas, all quarrel with one another. They haven't the intelligence to understand that He who is called Krishna is also Shiva and the Primal Śakti, and that it is He, again, who is called Jesus and Allah. There is only one Rāma and He has a thousand names.'

"Truth is one; only It is called by different names. All people are seeking the same Truth; the variance is due to climate, temperament, and name. A lake has many ghats. From one *Ghat* the Hindus take water in jars and call it 'jal'. From another *Ghat* the Mussalmans take water in leather bags and call it 'pani'. From a third the Christians take the same thing and call it 'water'. (All laugh.) Suppose someone says that the thing is not 'jal' but 'pani', or that it is not 'pani' but 'water', or that it is not 'water' but 'jal'. It would indeed be ridiculous. But this very thing is at the root of the friction among sects, their misunderstandings and quarrels. This is why people injure and kill one another, and shed blood, in the name of religion. But this is not good. Everyone is going toward God. They will all realize Him if they have sincerity and longing of heart.

(To M.) "This is for you. All scriptures-the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras-seek Him alone and no one else, only that one Satchidananda. That which is called Satchidananda Brahman in the Vedas is called Satchidananda Shiva in the Tantra. Again it is He alone who is called Satchidananda Krishna in the Puranas."

The Master was told that now and then Ram cooked his own food at home.

MASTER (to M.): "Do you too cook your own meals?"

M: "No, sir."

MASTER: "You may try it. With your meals take a little clarified butter made from cow's milk. That will purify your body and mind."

A long conversation ensued about Ram's household affairs. Ram's father was a devout Vaishnava and worshipped Krishna daily at home. He had married a second time when Ram was quite young. Both the father and the stepmother lived with Ram at Ram's house. But Ram was never happy with his stepmother, and this sometimes created a misunderstanding between himself and his father.

They were talking about this when Ram said, "My father has gone to the dogs!"

MASTER (to the devotees): "Did you hear that? The father has gone to the dogs and the son is all right!"

RAM: "There is no peace when my stepmother comes home. There is always some trouble or other. Our family is about to break up. So I say, let her live with her father."

GIRINDRA (to Ram): "Why don't you too keep your wife at her father's home?" (Laughter.)

MASTER (smiling): "Are husband and wife like earthen pots or jars, that you may keep the pot in one place and the lid in another? Shiva in one place and Śakti in another?"

RAM: "Sir, we are quite happy. But when she comes the family is broken up. If such is the case-"

Our duties to father and mother

MASTER: "Then build them a separate home. That will be a different thing. You will defray their monthly expenses. How worthy of worship one's parents are! Rākhāl asked me if he could take the food left on his father's plate. 'What do you mean?' I said. 'What have you become that you cannot?' But it is also true that good people won't give anyone, even a dog, the food from their plates."

GIRINDRA: "Sir, suppose one's parents are guilty of a terrible crime, a heinous sin?"

MASTER: "What if they are? You must not renounce your mother even if she commits adultery. The woman guru of a certain family became corrupt. The members of the family said that they would like to make the son of the guru their spiritual guide. But I said: 'How is that? Will you accept the shoot and give up the yam? Suppose she is corrupt; still you must regard her as your Ishta. ‘Though my guru visits the tavern, still to me he is the holy Nityānanda.’ "

"Are father and mother mere trifles? No spiritual practice will bear fruit unless they are pleased. Chaitanya was intoxicated with the love of God. Still, before taking to the monastic life, for how many days did he try to persuade his mother to give him her permission to become a monk! He said to her: 'Mother, don't worry. I shall visit you every now and then.'

(To M., reproachfully) "And let me say this to you. Your father and mother brought you up. You yourself are the father of several children. Yet you have left home with your wife. You have cheated your parents. You have come away with your wife and children, and you feel you have become a holy man. Your father doesn't need any money from you; otherwise I should have cried, 'Shame on you!'"

Everybody in the room became grave and remained silent.

MASTER: "A man has certain debts to pay: his debts to the gods and rishis, and his debts to mother, father, and wife. He cannot achieve anything without paying the debt he owes to his parents. A man is indebted to his wife as well. Harish has renounced his

wife and is living here. If he had left her unprovided for, then I should have called him an abominable wretch.

"After attaining Knowledge you will regard that very wife as the manifestation of the Divine Mother Herself. It is written in the Chandi, 'The Goddess dwells in all beings as the Mother.' It is She who has become your mother.

"All the women you see are only She, the Divine Mother. That is why I cannot rebuke even Brinde, the maidservant. There are people who spout verses from the scriptures and talk big, but in their conduct they are quite different. Ramprasanna is constantly busy procuring opium and milk for the hathayogi. He says that Manu enjoins it upon man to serve the *Sādhu*. But his old mother hasn't enough to eat. She walks to the market to buy her own groceries. It makes me very angry.

Through divine love man transcends his worldly duties

"But here you have to consider another thing. When a man is intoxicated with ecstatic love of God, then who is his father or mother or wife? His love of God is so intense that he becomes mad with it. Then he has no duty to perform. He is free from all debts. What is this divine intoxication? In this state a man forgets the world. He also forgets his own body, which is so dear to all. Chaitanya had this intoxication. He plunged into the ocean not knowing that it was the ocean. He dashed himself again and again on the ground. He was not aware of hunger, of thirst, or of sleep. He was not at all conscious of any such thing as his body."

All at once Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed, "Ah, Chaitanya!" and stood up.

MASTER (to the devotees): "Chaitanya means 'Undivided Consciousness'.

Vaishnavcharan used to say that Gaurānga was like a bubble in the Ocean of Undivided Consciousness.

(To the elder Gopal) "Do you intend to go on a pilgrimage now?"

GOPAL: "Yes, sir. I should like to wander about a little."

RAM (to Gopal): "He [meaning the Master] says that one becomes a kutichaka after being a vahudaka. The *Sādhu* that visits many holy places is called a vahudaka. He whose craving for travel has been satiated and who sits down in one place is called a kutichaka.

"He also tells us a parable. Once a bird sat on the mast of a ship. When the ship sailed through the mouth of the Ganges into the 'black waters' of the ocean, the bird failed to notice the fact. When it finally became aware of the ocean, it left the mast and flew north in search of land. But it found no limit to the water and so returned. After resting awhile it flew south. There too it found no limit to the water. Panting for breath the bird returned to the mast. Again, after resting awhile, it flew east and then west. Finding no limit to the Water in any direction, at last it settled down on the mast of the ship."

MASTER (to the elder Gopal and the other devotees): "As long as a man feels that God is 'there', he is ignorant. But he attains Knowledge when he feels that God is 'here'.

"A man wanted a smoke. He went to a neighbour's house to light his charcoal. It was the dead of night and the household was asleep. After he had knocked a great deal, someone came down to open the door. At sight of the man he asked, 'Hello! What's the matter?' The man replied: 'Can't you guess? You know how fond I am of smoking. I have come here to light my charcoal.' The neighbour said: 'Ha! Ha! You are a fine man indeed! You took the trouble to come and do all this knocking at the door! Why, you have a lighted lantern in your hand!' (All laugh.)

"What a man seeks is very near him. Still he wanders about from place to place."

RAM: "Sir, I now realize why a guru asks some of his disciples to visit the four principal holy places of the country. Once having wandered about, the disciple discovers that it is the same here as there. Then he returns to the guru. All this wandering is only to create faith in the guru's words."

After this conversation had come to an end, Sri Ramakrishna extolled Ram's virtues.

MASTER (to the devotees): "How many fine qualities Ram possesses! How many devotees he serves and looks after! (To Ram) Adhar told me that you showed him great kindness."

Adhar, a beloved householder devotee of the Master, had recently arranged some religious music at his house. The Master and many devotees had been present. But Adhar had forgotten to invite Ram, who was a very proud man and had complained about it to his friends. So Adhar had gone to Ram's house to express his regret for the mistake.

RAM: "It wasn't really Adhar's mistake. I have come to know that Rākhāl is to blame. Rākhāl was given charge-"

MASTER: "You mustn't find fault with Rākhāl. He's a mere child. Even now you can bring out his mother's milk by squeezing his throat."

RAM: "Sir, why should you speak that way? It was such an occasion!"

MASTER: (interrupting): "Adhar simply didn't remember to invite you. He is absent-minded. The other day he went with me to Jadu Mallick's house. As we took our leave, I said to him, 'You haven't offered anything to the Goddess in the chapel' 'Sir,' he said, 'I didn't know one should.'

(To Ram) "Suppose he didn't invite you to his house. Why such a fuss about going to a place where the name of the Lord was sung? One may go unasked to participate in religious music. One doesn't have to be invited."

Chapter 22

ADVICE TO AN ACTOR

Saturday, May 24, 1884

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting on the small couch in his room. Rākhāl , M., and, several other devotees were present. A special worship of Kāli had been performed in the temple the previous night. In connection with the worship a theatrical performance of the Vidyasundar had been staged in the Natmandir. The Master had watched a part of it that morning. The actors came to his room to pay him their respects. The Master, in a happy mood, became engaged in conversation with a fair complexioned young man who had taken the part of Vidyā and played his part very well.

MASTER (to the actor): "Your acting was very good. If a person excels in singing, music, dancing, or any other art, he can also quickly realize God provided he strives sincerely.

"Just as you practise much in order to sing, dance, and play on instruments, so one should practise the art of fixing the mind on God. One should practise regularly such disciplines as worship, japa, and meditation.

"Are you married? Any children?"

ACTOR: "Yes, sir. I had a girl who died. Another child has been born."

MASTER: "Ah! A death and a birth, and all so quickly! You are so young! There is a saying: 'My husband died just after our marriage. There are so many nights for me to weep!' You are no doubt realizing the nature of worldly happiness. The world is like a hog plum. The hog plum has only pit and skin, and after eating it you suffer from colic.

"You are an actor in the theatre. That's fine. But it is a very painful profession. You are young now; so you have a full, round face. Afterwards there will be hollows in your cheeks. Almost all actors become like that; they get hollow cheeks and big bellies. (Laughter.)

"Why did I stay to watch your performance? I found the rhythm, the music, and the melody all correct. Then the Divine Mother showed me that it was God alone who acted in the performance in the roles of the players."

ACTOR: "Sir, what is the difference between lust and desire?"

MASTER: "Lust is like the root of the tree, and desires are branches and twigs.

Passions should be directed to God

"One cannot completely get rid of the six passions: lust, anger, greed, and the like. Therefore one should direct them to God. If you must have desire and greed, then you

should desire love of God and be greedy to attain Him. If you must be conceited and egotistic, then feel conceited and egotistic thinking that you are the servant of God, the child of God.

"A man cannot see God unless he gives his whole mind to Him. The mind is wasted on 'woman and gold'. Take your own case. You have children and are occupied with the theatre. The mind cannot be united with God on account of these different activities.

"As long as there is bhoga, there will be less of yoga. Furthermore, bhoga begets suffering. It is said in the Bhagavata that the Avadhuta chose a kite as one of his twenty-four gurus. The kite had a fish in its beak; so it was surrounded by a thousand crows. Whichever way it flew with the fish, the crows pursued it crying, 'Caw! Caw!' When all of a sudden the fish dropped from its beak, the crows flew after the fish, leaving the kite alone.

"The 'fish' is the object of enjoyment. The 'crows' are worries and anxiety. Worries and anxiety are inevitable with enjoyment. No sooner does one give up enjoyment than one finds peace.

Money is the source of trouble

"What is more, money itself becomes a source of trouble. Brothers may live happily, but they get into trouble when the property is divided. Dogs lick one another's bodies; they are perfectly friendly. But when the house-holder throws them a little food, they get into a scrap.

"Come here now and then. (Pointing to M. and the others) They come here on Sundays and other holidays."

ACTOR: "We have holidays for three months, during the rainy and harvest seasons. It is our good fortune to be able to visit you. On our way to Dakshineswar we heard of two persons- yourself and Jnanarnava."

MASTER: "Be on friendly terms with your brothers. It looks well. You must have noticed in your theatrical performance that if four singers sing each in a different way, the play is spoiled."

Actor: "Yes, sir. Many birds are trapped in a net; if they all fly together and drag the net in one direction, then many of them may be saved. But that doesn't happen if they try to fly in different directions.

"One also sees in a theatrical performance a person keeping a pitcher of water on his head and at the same time dancing about."

Do your duties and remember God

MASTER: "Live in the world but keep the pitcher steady on your head; that is to say, keep the mind firmly on God.

"I once said to the sephoys from the barracks: 'Do your duty in the world but remember that the "pestle of death" will some time smash your hand. Be alert about it.'

"In Kamarpukur I have seen the women of carpenter families making flattened rice with a husking-machine. One woman kicks the end of the wooden beam, and another woman, while nursing her baby, turns the paddy in the mortar dug in the earth. The second woman is always alert lest the pestle of the machine should fall on her hand. With the other hand she fries the soaked paddy in a pan. Besides, she is talking with customers; she says: 'You owe us so much money. Please pay it before you go.' Likewise, do your different duties in the world, fixing your mind on God. But practice is necessary, and one should also be alert. Only in this way can one safeguard both—God and the world."

MASTER: "Proof? God can be seen. By practising spiritual discipline one sees God, through His grace. The rishis directly realized the Self. One cannot know the truth about God through science. Science gives us information only about things perceived by the senses, as for instance: this material mixed with that material gives such and such a result, and that material mixed with this material gives such and such a result.

"For this reason a man cannot comprehend spiritual things with his ordinary intelligence. To understand them he must live in the company of holy persons. You learn to feel the pulse by living with a physician."

ACTOR: "Yes, sir. Now I understand."

MASTER: "You must practise tapasya. Only then can you attain the goal. It will avail you nothing even if you learn the texts of the scriptures by heart. You cannot become intoxicated by merely saying 'siddhi' over and over. You must swallow some.

"One cannot explain the vision of God to others. One cannot explain conjugal happiness to a child five years old."

ACTOR: "How does One realize the Ātman?"

Just then Rākhāl was about to take his meal in the Master's room. He hesitated at the sight of so many people. During those days the Master looked on Rākhāl as Gopala and on himself as Mother Yaśoda.

MASTER (to Rākhāl): "Why don't you eat? Let the people stand aside if you wish it. (To a devotee) Keep some ice for Rākhāl. (To Rākhāl) Do you intend to go to Vanhooghly? Don't go in this sun."

Rākhāl sat down to his meal. Sri Ramakrishna again spoke to the actor.

MASTER: "Why didn't all of you take your meal from the kitchen of the Kāli temple? That would have been nice."

ACTOR: "All of us don't have the same opinion about food; so our food is cooked separately. All don't like to eat in the guest-house."

While Rākhāl was taking his meal, the Master and the devotees sat on the porch and continued their conversation.

Means of Self-realization

MASTER (to the actor): "You asked me about Self-realization. Longing is the means of realizing Ātman. A man must strive to attain God with all his body, with all his mind, and with all his speech. Because of an excess of bile one gets jaundice. Then one sees everything as yellow; one perceives no colour but yellow. Among you actors, those who take only the roles of women acquire the nature of a woman; by thinking of woman your ways and thoughts become womanly. Just so, by thinking day and night of God one acquires the nature of God.

"The mind is like white linen just returned from the laundry. It takes on the colour you dip it in."

ACTOR: "But it must first be sent to the laundry."

MASTER: "Yes. First is the purification of the mind. Afterwards, if you direct the mind to the contemplation of God, it will be coloured by God-Consciousness. Again, if you direct the mind to worldly duties, such as the acting of a play, it will be coloured by worldliness."

Sri Ramakrishna had rested on his bed only a few minutes when Hari, Narayan, Narendra Bannerji, and other devotees arrived from Calcutta and saluted him. Narendra Bannerji was the son of the professor of Sanskrit at the Presidency College of Calcutta. Because of friction with other members of the family, he had rented a separate house where he lived with his wife and children. Narendra was a very simple and guileless man. He practised spiritual discipline and, at the time of meditation, heard various sounds-the sound of a gong, and so on. He had travelled in different parts of India and he visited the Master now and then.

Narayan was a school boy sixteen or seventeen years old. He often visited the Master, who was very fond of him.

Hari lived with his brothers at their Baghbazar house. He had studied up to the matriculation class in the General Assembly Institution. Then he had given up his studies and devoted his time at home to the contemplation of God, the reading of the scriptures, and the practice of yoga. He also visited the Master now and then.

Sri Ramakrishna often sent for Hari when he went to Balarām's house in Baghbazar.

MASTER (to the devotees): "I have heard a great deal about Buddha. He is one of the ten Incarnations of God.2 Brahman is immovable, immutable, inactive, and of the nature of Consciousness. When a man merges his buddhi, his intelligence, in Bodha,

Consciousness, then he attains the Knowledge of Brahman; he becomes buddha, enlightened.

"Nangta used to say that the mind merges in the buddhi, and the buddhi in Bodha, Consciousness.

"The aspirant does not attain the Knowledge of Brahman as long as he is conscious of his ego. The ego comes under one's control after one has obtained the Knowledge of Brahman and seen God. Otherwise the ego cannot be controlled. It is difficult to catch one's own shadow. But when the sun is overhead, the shadow is within a few inches of the body."

A DEVOTEE: "What is the vision of God like?"

MASTER: "Haven't you seen a theatrical performance? The people are engaged in conversation, when suddenly the curtain goes up. Then the entire mind of the audience is directed to the play. The people don't look at other things any longer. Samādhi is to go within oneself like that. When the curtain is rung down, people look around again. Just so, when the, curtain of māyā falls, the mind becomes externalized.

(To Narendra Bannerji) "You have travelled a great deal. Tell us some thing about the sādhus."

Narendra told the story of two yogis in Bhutan who used to drink daily a pound of the bitter juice of neem-leaves. He had also visited the hermitage of a holy man on the bank of the Narmada. At the sight of the Bengali Babu dressed in European clothes, the sādhu had remarked, "He has a knife hidden under his clothes, next to his belly."

Keeping the pictures of holy persons

MASTER: "One should keep pictures of holy men in one's room. That constantly quickens divine ideas."

BANNERJI: "I have your picture in my room; also the picture of a sādhu living in the mountains, blowing on a piece of lighted charcoal, in a bowl of hemp."

MASTER: "It is true that one's spiritual feelings are awakened by looking at the picture of a sādhu. It is like being reminded of the custard-apple by looking at an imitation one, or like stimulating the desire for enjoyment by looking at a young woman. Therefore I tell you that you should constantly live in the company of holy men.

(To Bannerji) "You know very well the suffering of the world. You suffer whenever you accept enjoyment. As long as the kite kept the fish in its beak, it was tormented by the flock of crows.

"One finds peace of mind in the company of holy men. The alligator remains under water a long time. But every now and then it rises to the surface and breathes with a deep wheezing noise. Then it gives a sigh of relief."

ACTOR: "Revered sir, what you have just said about enjoyment is very true. One ultimately courts disaster if one prays to God for enjoyment. Various desires come to the mind and by no means all of them are good. God is the Kalpataru, the Wish-fulfilling Tree. A man gets whatever he asks of God. Suppose it comes to his mind: 'God is the Kalpataru. Well, let me see if a tiger will appear before me.' Because he thinks of the tiger, it really appears and devours him."

MASTER: "Yes, you must remember that the tiger comes. What more shall I tell you? Keep your mind on God. Don't forget Him. God will certainly reveal Himself to you if you pray to Him with sincerity. Another thing. Sing the name of God at the end of each performance. Then the actors, the singers, and the audience will go home with the thought of God in their minds."

The actors saluted the Master and took their leave.

Two ladies, devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, entered the room and saluted the Master. They had been fasting in preparation for this visit. They were sisters-in-law, the wives of two brothers, and were twenty-two or twenty-three years old. They were mothers of children. Both of them had their faces covered with veils.

MASTER (to the ladies): "Worship Śiva. This worship is described in a book called the Nityakarma. Learn the rituals from it. In order to perform the worship of God you will be preoccupied for a longtime with such religious duties as plucking flowers, making sandal-paste, polishing the utensils of worship, and arranging offerings. As you perform these duties your mind will naturally be directed to God. You will get rid of meanness, anger, jealousy, and so forth. When you two sisters talk to each other, always talk about spiritual matters.

"The thing is somehow to unite the mind with God. You must not forget Him, not even once. Your thought of Him should be like the flow of oil, without any interruption. If you worship with love even a brick or stone as God, then through His grace you can see Him.

"Remember what I have just said to you. One should perform such worship as the Śiva Puja. Once the mind has become mature, one doesn't have to continue formal worship for long. The mind then always remains united with God; meditation and contemplation become a constant habit of mind."

ELDER SISTER-IN-LAW: "Will you please give us some instruction?"

MASTER (affectionately): "I don't give initiation. If a guru gives initiation he must assume responsibility for the disciple's sin and suffering. The Divine Mother has placed me in the state of a child. Perform the Śiva Puja as I told you. Come here now and then. We shall see what happens later on through the will of God. I asked you to chant the name of Hari at home. Are you doing that?"

ELDER SISTER-IN-LAW: "Yes."

MASTER: "Why have you fasted? You should take your meal before you come here. Women are but so many forms of my Divine Mother. I cannot bear to see them suffer; You are all images of the Mother of the Universe. Come here after you have eaten, and you will feel happy."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna asked Ramlal to give the ladies some food. They were given fruit, sweets, drinks, and other offerings from the temple.

The Master said: "You have eaten something. Now my mind is at peace. I cannot bear to see women fast."

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the steps of the Śiva temples. Adhar, Dr. Nitai, M., and several other devotees were with him.

MASTER (to the devotees): "I want to tell you something. A change has been coming over my nature."

The Master came down a step and sat near the devotees. It seemed that he intended to communicate some of his deeper experiences to them.

God in human forms

MASTER: "You are devotees. I have no hesitation in telling you this. Nowadays I don't see the Spirit-form of God. He is revealed to me in human form. It is my nature to see the form of God, to touch and embrace Him. God is saying to me, 'You have assumed a body; therefore enjoy God through His human forms.'

"God no doubt dwells in all, but He manifests Himself more through man than through other beings. Is man an insignificant thing? He can think of God, he can think of the Infinite, while other living beings cannot. God exists in other living beings-animals, plants, nay, in all beings-, but He manifests Himself more through man than through these others. Fire exists in all beings, in all things; but its presence is felt more in wood. Rāma said to Lakshmana: 'Look at the elephant, brother. He is such a big animal, but he cannot think of God.'

Divine Incarnation

"But in the Incarnation there is a greater manifestation of God than in other men. Rāma said to Lakshmana, 'Brother, if you see in a man ecstatic love of God, if he laughs, weeps, and dances in divine ecstasy, then know for certain that I dwell in him."

The Master remained silent. After a few minutes he resumed the conversation.

Master and Keshab

MASTER: "Keshab Sen used to come here frequently. As a result he changed a great deal. Of late he became quite a remarkable man. Many a time he came here with his

party; but he also wanted to come alone. In the earlier years of his life Keshab didn't have much opportunity to live in the company of holy men.

"I visited him at his house in Colootola Street. Hriday was with me. We were shown into the room where Keshab was working. He was writing something. After a long while he put aside his pen, got off his chair, and sat on the floor with us. But he didn't salute us or show us respect in any other way.

"He used to come here now and then. One day in a spiritual mood I said to him: 'One should not sit before a sādhu with one leg over the other. That increases one's rajas.' As soon as he and his friends would arrive, I would salute them before they bowed to me. Thus they gradually learnt to salute a holy man, touching the ground with their foreheads.

"I said to Keshab: 'Chant the name of Hari. In the Kaliyuga one should sing the name and glories of God.' After that they began to sing the name of God with drums and cymbals.
"Do you know how my faith in the name of Hari was all the more strengthened? Holy men, as you know, frequently visit the temple garden. Once a sādhu from Multan arrived. He was waiting for a party going to Gangasagar. (Pointing to M.) The sādhu was of his age. It was he who said to me, 'The way to realize God in the Kaliyuga is the path of bhakti as prescribed by Nārada.'

"One day Keshab came here with his followers. They stayed till ten at night. We were all seated in the Panchavati. Pratap and several others said they would like to spend the night here. Keshab said: 'No, I must go. I have some work to do.' I laughed and said: 'Can't you sleep without the smell of your fish-basket?

Once a fishwife was a guest in the house of a gardener who raised flowers. She came there with her empty basket, after selling fish in the market, and was asked to sleep in a room where flowers were kept. But, because of the fragrance of the flowers, she couldn't get to sleep for a long time. Her hostess saw her condition and said, "Hello! Why are you tossing from side to side so restlessly?" The fishwife said: "I don't know, friend. Perhaps the smell of the flowers has been disturbing my sleep. Can you give me my fish-basket? Perhaps that will put me to sleep."

The basket was brought to her. She sprinkled water on it and set it near her nose. Then she fell sound asleep and snored all night.'

"At this story the followers of Keshab burst into loud laughter.

God, the scripture, and the devotee are identical

"Keshab conducted the prayer that evening at the bathing-ghat on the river. After the worship I said to him: 'It is God who manifests Himself, in one aspect, as the scriptures; therefore one should worship the sacred books, such as the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras. In another aspect He has become the devotee. The heart of the devotee is

God's drawing-room. One can easily find one's master in the drawing-room. Therefore, by worshipping His devotee, one worships God Himself.'

"Keshab and his followers listened to my words with great attention. It was a full-moon night. The sky was flooded with light. We were seated in the open court at the top of the stairs leading to the river. I said, 'Now let us all chant, "Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan." ' All chanted in unison, 'Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan.' Next I said to them, 'Say, "Brahman is verily Śakti; Śakti is verily Brahman." ' Again they chanted in unison. 'Brahman is verily Śakti; Śakti is verily Brahman.' I said to them: 'He whom you address as Brahma is none other than She whom I call Mother. Mother is a very sweet name.'

"Then I said to them, 'Say, "Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava."' At this Keshab said: 'We must not go so far, sir. If we do that, then all will take us for orthodox Vaishnavas.'

Brahman and Śakti

"I used to tell Keshab now and then: 'He whom you address as Brahma is none other than She whom I call Śakti, the Primal Energy. It is called Brahman in the Vedas when it transcends speech and thought and is without attributes and action. I call it Śakti, *Ādyāśakti*, and so forth, when I find it creating, preserving, and destroying the universe.'

Difficulties of householder's life

"I said to Keshab: 'It is extremely difficult to realize God while leading a worldly life. How can a typhoid patient be cured if he is kept in a room where tamarind, pickle, and jars of water are kept? Therefore one should go into solitude now and then to practise spiritual discipline. When the trunk of a tree becomes thick and strong, an elephant can be tied to it; but a young sapling is eaten by cattle.' That is why Keshab would say in his lectures, 'Live in the world after being strengthened in spiritual life.'

(To the devotees) "You see, Keshab was a great scholar. He lectured in English. Many people honoured him. Queen Victoria herself talked to him. But when Keshab came here he would be bare-bodied and bring some fruit, as one should when visiting a holy man. He was totally free from egotism.

(To Adhar) "You are a scholar and a deputy magistrate, but with all that you are hen-pecked. Go forward. Beyond the forest of sandal-wood there are many more valuable things: silver-mines, gold-mines, diamonds, and other gems. The wood-cutter was chopping wood in the forest; the brahmachāri said to him, 'Go forward.' "

Sri Ramakrishna came down from the steps of the Śiva temples and went

to his own room through the courtyard. The devotees were with him. Just then Ram Chatterji came and said that the Holy Mother's attendant had had an attack of cholera.

RAM (to the Master): "I told you about it at ten o'clock this morning, but you didn't pay any attention to me."

MASTER: "What could I do?"

RAM: "Yes, what could you do! But there were Rākhāl, Ramlal, and others. Even they didn't pay any attention."

M: "Kishori has gone to Alambazar to get medicine."

MASTER: "Alone? Where will he get medicine?"

M: "Yes, alone. He will get it at Alambazar."

MASTER (to M.): "Tell the nurse what to do if the illness takes a turn for the worse or if the patient feels better."

M: "Yes, sir."

The ladies mentioned before saluted the Master and were about to take their leave. Sri Ramakrishna again said to them: "Perform the Śiva Puja according to my instruction. And have something to eat before you come here. Otherwise I shall feel unhappy. Come another day."

Sri Ramakrishna sat down on the porch west of his room. Narendra Bannerji, Hari, M., and others sat by his side. The Master knew about Narendra's family difficulties.

MASTER: "You see, all these sufferings are 'because of a piece of loin cloth'. A man takes a wife and begets children; therefore he must secure a job. The sādhu is worried about his loin-cloth, and the householder about his wife. Further, the householder may not live on good terms with his relatives; so he must live separately with his wife. (With a laugh) Chaitanya once said to Nityananda: 'Listen to me, brother. A man entangled in worldliness can never be free.' "

M. (to himself): "Perhaps the Master is referring to the world of avidyā. It is the world of avidyā that entangles a householder."

M. was still living in a separate house with his wife, on account of a misunderstanding with the other members of his family.

MASTER (to Bannerji, pointing to M.): "He also lives in a separate house. You two will get along very well. Once two men happened to meet. One said to the other, 'Who are you?' 'Oh, I am away from my country', was the other's reply. The second man then asked the first, 'And who are you, pray?' 'Oh, I am away from my beloved', was the answer. Both were in the same plight; so they got along very well. (All laugh.)

"But one need not have any fear if one takes refuge in God. God protects His devotee."

HARI: "Well, why does it take many people such a long time to realize Him?"

MASTER: "The truth is that a man doesn't feel restless for God unless he is finished with his enjoyments and duties. The physician says, referring to the patient: 'Let a few days pass first. Then a little medicine will do him good.'

"Nārada said to Rāma: 'Rāma, You are passing Your time in Ayhodhya. How will Ravana be killed? You have taken this human body for that purpose alone.' Rāma replied: 'Nārada, let the right time come. Let Ravana's past actions begin to bear fruit. Then everything will be made ready for his death.' "

HARI: "Why is there so much suffering in the world?"

MASTER: "This world is the līlā of God. It is like a game. In this game there are joy and sorrow, virtue and vice, knowledge and ignorance, good and evil. The game cannot continue if sin and suffering are altogether eliminated from the creation.

"In the game of hide-and-seek one must touch the 'granny' in order to be free. But the 'granny' is never pleased if she is touched at the very outset. It is God's wish that the play should continue for some time. Then-

Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best but one or two break free;
And Thou dost laugh and clap Thy hands, O Mother, watching them!

In other words, after the practice of hard spiritual discipline, one or two have the vision of God, through His grace, and are liberated. Then the Divine Mother claps Her hands in joy and exclaims, 'Bravo! There they go!' "

HARI: "But this play of God is our death."

MASTER (smiling): "Please tell me who you are. God alone has become all this-māyā, the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. 'As the snake I bite, and as the charmer I cure.' It is God Himself who has become both vidyā and avidyā. He remains deluded by the māyā of avidyā, ignorance. Again, with the help of the guru, He is cured by the māyā of vidyā, Knowledge.

"Ignorance, Knowledge, and Perfect Wisdom. The Jnāni sees that God alone exists and is the Doer, that He creates, preserves, and destroys. The vijnāni sees that it is God who has become all this.

"After attaining mahabhava and prema one realizes that nothing exists but God. Bhakti pales before bhava. Bhāva ripens into mahabhava and prema.

(To Bannerji) "Do you still hear that gong-like sound at the time of meditation?"

BANNERJI: "Yes, sir. Every day. Besides, I have visions of God's form. Do such things stop after the mind has once experienced them?"

MASTER: "True. Once the wood catches fire, it cannot be put out. (To the devotees) He knows many things about faith."

BANNERJI: "I have too much faith."

MASTER: "Bring the women of your family with those of Balarām's."

BANNERJI: "Who is Balarām?"

MASTER: "Don't you know Balarām? He lives at Bosepara."

Sri Ramakrishna loved guileless people. Narendra Bannerji was absolutely guileless. The Master loved Niranjan because he, too, was without guile.

MASTER (to M.): "Why do I ask you to see Niranjan? It is to find out if he is truly guileless."

Sunday, May 25, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the cement platform that encircled the trunk of the old banyan-tree in the Panchavati. Vijay, Surendra, Bhavanath, Rākhāl , and other devotees were present, a few of them sitting with the Master on the platform, the rest on the ground below. The devotees had thought of celebrating the Master's birthday, which had had to be put off because of his illness. Since Sri Ramakrishna now felt much better, the devotees wanted to have the celebration that day. A woman musician, a famous singer of kirtan, was going to entertain them with devotional songs.

It was one o'clock in the afternoon. M. had been looking for Sri Ramakrishna in the Master's room. When he did not find him there, he went to the Panchavati and eagerly asked the devotees, "Where is he?" He was standing right in front of the Master but in his excitement did not notice him. The devotees laughed loudly. A moment later M. saw Sri Ramakrishna and felt very much embarrassed. He prostrated himself before the Master, who sat there facing the south and smiling happily. Kedār and Vijay were sitting at his left. These two devotees had had a misunderstanding recently when Kedār had cut off his connexion with the Brahmo Samaj.

MASTER (to M., with a smile): "You see how I have united them?" The Master had brought a mādhavi creeper from Vrindāvan in the year 1868 and had planted it in the Panchavati. The creeper had grown big and strong. Some children were jumping and swinging from it. The Master observed them and laughed. He said: "They are like young monkeys. They will not give up swinging even though they sometimes fall to the ground." Noticing that Surendra was standing before him, the Master said to him affectionately: "Come up and sit with us on the platform. Then you can dangle your feet comfortably." Surendra went up and took his seat. Bhavanath had his coat on. Surendra said to him, "Are you going to England?"

MASTER (smiling): "God is our England. Now and then I used to leave off my clothes and joyfully roam about naked. Once Sambhu said to me: 'It is very comfortable to walk about naked. That is why you do it. Once I did it myself.' "

SURENDRA: "On returning from the office, as I put away my coat and trousers, I say to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, how tightly You have bound me to the world!' "

MASTER: "There are eight fetters with which man is bound: shame; hatred, fear, pride of caste, hesitation, the desire to conceal, and so forth."

Sri Ramakrishna sang:

Mother, this is the grief that sorely grieves my heart,
That even with Thee for Mother, and though I am wide awake,
There should be robbery in my house. . . .

He continued:

In the world's busy market-place, O Syama, Thou art flying kites;
High up they soar on the wind of hope, held fast by māyā's string.
Their frames are human skeletons, their sails of the three gunas made;
But all their curious workmanship is merely for ornament.
Upon the kite-strings Thou hast rubbed the manja-paste of worldliness,
So as to make each straining strand all the more sharp and strong.
Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best but one or two break free;
And Thou dost laugh and clap Thy hands, O Mother, watching them!
On favouring winds, says Ramprasad, the kites set loose will speedily
Be borne away to the Infinite, across the sea of the world.

MASTER: "'Māyā's string' means wife and children.

Upon the kite-strings Thou hast rubbed the manja-paste of worldliness.

'Worldliness' means 'woman and gold'.

The three gunas

"The three gunas—sattva, rajas, and tamas—have men under their control. They are like three brothers: As long as sattva exists, it calls on rajas for help; and rajas can get help from tamas. The three gunas are so many robbers. Tamas kills and rajas binds. Sattva no doubt releases man from his bondage, but it cannot take him to God."

VIJAY (smiling): "It is because sattva, too, is a robber."

MASTER (smiling): "True. Sattva cannot take man to God, but it shows him the way."

BHAVANATH: "These are wonderful words indeed."

MASTER: "Yes, This is a lofty thought."

Listening to these words of the Master, the devotees felt very happy.

The bondage of "woman and gold"

MASTER: "'Woman and gold' is the cause of bondage. 'Woman and gold' alone constitutes samsara, the world. It is 'woman and gold' that keeps one from seeing God. (Holding the towel in front of his face) Do you see my face any more? Of course not. The towel hides it. No sooner is the covering of 'woman and gold' removed than one attains Chidananca, Consciousness and Bliss.

Corrupting influence of lust

"Let me tell you something. He who has renounced the pleasure of a wife has verily renounced the pleasure of the world. God is very near to such a person."

The devotees listened to these words in silence.

MASTER (to Kedār, Vijay, and the other devotees): "He who has renounced the pleasure of a wife has verily renounced the pleasure of the world. It is 'woman and gold' that hides God. You people have such imposing moustaches, and yet you too are involved in 'woman and gold'. Tell me if it isn't true. Search your heart and answer me."

VIJAY: "Yes, it is true."

Kedār remained silent.

MASTER: "I see that all are under the control of woman. One day I went to Captain's house. From there I was to go to Ram's house. So I said to Captain, 'Please give me my carriage hire.' He asked his wife about it. She too held back and said: 'What's the matter? What's the matter?' At last Captain said, 'Ram will take care of it.' You see, the Gitā, the Bhagavata, and the Vedānta all bow before a woman! (All laugh.)

"A man leaves his money, his property, and everything in the hands of his wife. But he says with affected simplicity, 'I have such a nature that I cannot keep even two rupees with me.'

"A man went to an office in search of a job. There were many vacancies, but the manager did not grant his request. A friend said to the applicant, 'Appeal to Golapi, and you will get the job.' Golapi was the manager's mistress.

"Men do not realize how far they are dragged down by women. Once I went to the Fort in a carriage, feeling all the while that I was going along a level road. At last I found that I had gone four storeys down. It was a sloping road.

"A man possessed by a ghost does not know he is under the ghost's control. He thinks he is quite normal."

VIJAY (smiling): "But he can be cured by an exorcist if he finds one."

In answer to Vijay Sri Ramakrishna only said, "That depends on the will of God." Then he went on with his talk about women.

MASTER: "Everyone I talk to says, 'Yes, sir, my wife is good.' Nobody says that his wife is bad. (All laugh.) Those who constantly live with 'woman and gold' are so infatuated with it that they don't see things properly. Chess-players oftentimes cannot see the right move for their pieces on the board. But those who watch the game from a distance can understand the moves more accurately.

"Woman is the embodiment of māyā. In the course of his hymn to Rāma, Nārada said: 'O Rāma, all men are parts of Thee. All women are parts of Sita, the personification of Thy māyā. Please deign to grant that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet and that I may not be deluded by Thy world bewitching māyā. I do not want any other favour than that.' "

Surendra's younger brother and his nephews were present. The brother worked in an office and one of the nephews was studying law.

MASTER (to Surendra's relatives): "My advice to you is not to become attached to the world. You see, Rākhāl now understands what is knowledge and what is ignorance. He can discriminate between the Real and the unreal. So I say to him: 'Go home. You may come here once in a while and spend a day or two with me.'

"Have a friendly relationship with one another. That will be for your good and make you all happy. In a theatre the performance goes well only if the musicians sing with one voice. And that also gladdens the hearts of the audience.

"Do your worldly duties with a part of your mind and direct most of it to God. A sādhu should think of God with three quarters of his mind and with one quarter should do his other duties. He should be very alert about spiritual things. The snake is very sensitive in its tail. Its whole body reacts when it is hurt there. Similarly, the whole life of a sādhu is affected when his spirituality is touched."

Sri Ramakrishna was going to the pine-grove and asked Gopal of Sinthi to take his umbrella to his room. Arrangements had been made in the Panchavati for the kirtan. When the Mister had returned and taken his seat again among the devotees, the musician began her song. Suddenly there came a rain-storm. The Master went back to his room with the devotees, the musician accompanying them to continue her songs there.

MASTER (to Gopal): "Have you brought the umbrella?"

GOPAL: "No, sir. I forgot all about it while listening to the music."

The umbrella had been left in the Panchavati and Gopal hurried to fetch it.

MASTER: "I am generally careless, but not to that extent. Rākhāl also is very careless. Referring to the date of an invitation, he says 'the eleventh' instead of 'the thirteenth'. And Gopal-he belongs in a herd of cows!"

The musician sang a song about the monastic life of Chaitanya. Now and then she improvised lines: *"He will not look upon a woman; for that is against the sannyasi's duty." "Eager to take away men's sorrows, he will not look upon a woman." "For the Lord's birth as Sri Chaitanya otherwise would be in vain."*

The Master stood up, as he heard about Chaitanya's renunciation, and went into samādhi. The devotees put garlands of flowers around his neck. Bhavanath and Rākhāl supported his body lest he should fall on the ground. Vijay, Kedār, Ram, M., Lātu, and the other devotees stood around him in a circle, recalling one of the scenes of Chaitanya's kirtan.

The Master gradually came down to the sense plane. He was talking to Krishna, now and then uttering the word "Krishna". He could not say it very distinctly because of the intensity of his spiritual emotion. He said: "Krishna! Krishna! Krishna! Krishna Satchidananda! Nowadays I do not see Your form. Now I see You both inside me and outside. I see that it is You who have become the universe, all living beings, the twenty-four cosmic principles, and everything else. You alone have become mind, intelligence, everything. It is said in the 'Hymn of Salutation to the Guru': *'I bow down to the Guru by whose grace I have realized Him who pervades the indivisible universe of the animate and the inanimate.'*

"You alone are the Indivisible. Again, it is You who pervade the universe of the animate and the inanimate. You are verily the manifold universe; again, You alone are its basis. O Krishna! You are my life. O Krishna! You are my mind. O Krishna! You are my intelligence. O Krishna! You are my soul. O Govinda! You are my life-breath. You are my life itself."

Vijay was also in an ecstatic mood. The Master asked him, "My dear sir, have you too become unconscious?" "No, sir", said Vijay humbly.

The music went on. The musician was singing about the blinding love of God. As she improvised the lines:

O Beloved of my soul! Within the chamber of my heart
I would have kept You day and night!

The Master again went into samādhi. His injured arm rested on Bhavanath's shoulder.

Sri Ramakrishna partly regained outer consciousness. The musician improvised:

Why should one who, for Thy sake, has given up everything
Endure so much of suffering?

The Master bowed to the musician and sat down to listen to the music. Now and then he became abstracted. When the musician stopped singing, Sri Ramakrishna began to talk to the devotees.

Prema

MASTER (to Vijay and the others): "What is prema? He who feels it, this intense and ecstatic love of God, not only forgets the world but forgets even the body, which is so dear to all. Chaitanya experienced it."

The Master explained this to the devotees by singing a song describing the ecstatic state of prema:

Oh, when will dawn the blessed day
When tears of joy will flow from my eyes
As I repeat Lord Hari's name? . . .

The Master began to dance, and the devotees joined him. He caught M. by the arm and dragged him into the circle. Thus dancing, Sri Ramakrishna again went into samādhi. Standing transfixed, he looked like a picture on canvas.

Kedār repeated the following hymn to bring his mind down from the plane of samādhi:

We worship the Brahman-Consciousness in the Lotus of the Heart,
The Undifferentiated, who is adored by Hari, Hara, and Brahma;
Who is attained by yogis in the depths of their meditation;
The Scatterer of the fear of birth and death,
The Essence of Knowledge and Truth, the Primal Seed of the world.

Sri Ramakrishna gradually came back to the plane of normal consciousness. He took his seat and chanted the names of God: "Om Satchidananda! Govinda! Govinda! Govinda! Yogamaya! Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan!"

The Master took dust from the place where the kirtan had been sung and touched it to his forehead.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the semicircular porch facing the Ganges, the devotees sitting by his side. Now and then the Master would exclaim, "Ah, Krishnachaitanya!"

MASTER (to Vijay and the others): "There has been much chanting of the Lord's name in the room. That is why the atmosphere has become so intense."

BHAVANATH: "Words of renunciation, too."

The Master said, "Ah, how thrilling!" Then he sang about Gaurānga and Nityananda :

Gora bestows the Nectar of prema;
Jar after jar he pours it out,
And still there is no end!
Sweetest Nitai is summoning all;
Beloved Gora bids them come;
Shāntipur is almost drowned,
And Nadia is flooded with prema!

Strict rules for sannyasi's life

MASTER (to Vijay and the others): "The musician sang rightly: 'A sannyasi must not look at a woman.' This is the sannyasi's dharma. What a lofty ideal!"

VIJAY: "Yes indeed, sir."

MASTER: "Others learn from the sannyasi's example. That is why such strict rules are prescribed for him. A sannyasi must not look even at the portrait of a woman. What a strict rule! The slaughtering of a black goat is prescribed for the worship of the Divine Mother; but a goat with even a slight wound cannot be offered. A sannyasi must not only not have intercourse with woman; he must not even talk to her"

VIJAY: "Young Haridas talked with a pious woman. For that reason Chaitanya banished him from his presence."

MASTER: "A sannyasi associated with 'woman and gold' is like a beautiful damsel with a bad odour. The odour makes her beauty useless.

"Once a Mārwāri devotee wanted to give me some money. Mathur wanted to deed me some land. But I couldn't accept either.

"The rules for the life of a sannyasi are very strict indeed. If a man takes the garb of a sannyasi, he must act exactly like one. Haven't you noticed in the theatre that the man who takes the part of the king acts like a king, and the man who takes the part of a minister acts like a minister?

"But on attaining the state of the paramahamsa one becomes like a child. A child five years old doesn't know the difference between a man and a woman. But even a paramahamsa must be careful, so as not to set a bad example to others."

Referring to Keshab's association with "woman and gold", which had hindered his work as a spiritual teacher, Sri Ramakrishna said to Vijay, "He-do you understand?"

VIJAY: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "He couldn't achieve very much because he wanted to satisfy both God and the world."

VIJAY: "Chaitanya said to Nityananda: 'Nitai, I shall not be able to do the people any good unless I renounce the world. All will imitate me and want to lead the life of a householder. No one will try to direct his whole mind to the Lotus Feet of God, renouncing "woman and gold."

MASTER: "Yes. Chaitanyadeva renounced the world to set an example to mankind.

The sannyasi is a world teacher

"The sannyasi must renounce 'woman and gold' for his own welfare. Even if he is unattached, and consequently not in danger, still, in order to set an example to others, he must not keep 'woman and gold' near him. The sannyasi, the man of renunciation, is a world teacher. It is his example that awakens the spiritual consciousness of men."

It was nearly dusk. The devotees saluted the Master and took their leave.

Chapter 23

FESTIVAL AT SURENDRA'S HOUSE

Sunday, June 15, 1884

SRI RAMAKRISHNA arrived in the morning at the garden house of Surendra, one of his beloved householder disciples, in the village of Kankurgachi near Calcutta. Surendra had invited him and a large number of the devotees to a religious festival.

Occasions like this were a source of great happiness and rejoicing to the Master's devotees. He was then seen at his best. He joined with the others in devotional music and in chanting the names of God, frequently going into ecstasy. He poured out his entire soul in inspired talk, explaining the various phases of God-Consciousness. The impressions of such a festival lingered in the minds of all for many days.

The devotees stood in rows inside the big hall of the garden house to hear the music sung by the professional singers. The floor of the room was covered with a carpet over which was spread a white sheet; a few bolsters, pillows, and cushions lay here and there.

Krishna and Gopis at Vrindāvan

The musicians were singing of the episodes in the life of Sri Krishna especially associated with His divine love for the gopis of Vrindāvan. This was a theme which always appealed to the Master and would throw him into ecstatic moods.

Krishna, God Incarnate, lived the years of His boyhood in Vrindāvan as a cowherd. He tended His cows on the green meadows along the bank of the Jamuna and played His flute. The milkmaids could not resist the force of His divine attraction. At the sound of His flute they would leave their household duties and go to the bank of the sacred river. Their love for Krishna destroyed their attachment to worldly things. Neither the threats of their relatives nor the criticism of others could make them desist from seeking the company of Krishna. In the love of the gopis for Krishna there was not the slightest trace of worldliness. It was the innate attraction of God for pure souls, as of the magnet for iron. The author of the Bhagavata has compared this love to the all-consuming love of a woman for her beloved. Before the on rush of that love all barriers between man and God are swept away. The devotee surrenders himself completely to his Divine Beloved and in the end becomes one with Him.

Radha was the foremost of the gopis, and Krishna's chief playmate. She felt an indescribable longing for union with Him. A moment's separation from Krishna would rend her heart and soul.

During many a moonlit night Krishna would dance with Radha and the gopis in the sacred groves of Vrindāvan, and on such occasions the gopis would experience the highest religious ecstasy. At the age of eleven Krishna was called to be the king of

Mathura. He left the gopis, promising them, however, His divine vision whenever they concentrated on Him in their hearts.

For centuries and centuries the lovers of God in 1ndia have been worshipping the Divine by recreating in themselves the yearning of the gopis for Krishna. Many of the folk-songs of India have as their theme this sweet episode of Krishna's life. Sri Chaitanya revived this phase of Hindu religious life by his spiritual practice and his divine visions. In his ecstatic music Chaitanya assumed the role of Radha and manifested the longing to be united with Krishna. For a long period Sri Ramakrishna also worshipped God as his beloved Krishna, looking on himself as one of the gopis or as God's handmaid.

At Surendra's garden house the kirtan had begun early in the morning. The musicians were singing about the love of Krishna and Radha for each other. The Master was frequently in samādhi. The room was crowded with devotees, among them Bhavanath, Niranjan, Rākhāl , Surendra, Ram, and M., and many members of the Brahmo Samaj.

In accordance with the custom, the kirtan had begun with, an introductory song about Gaurānga.

Gaurānga embraces monastic life. He is being consumed with longing for a vision of Krishna. He leaves Navadvip and goes away as a wandering monk to seek out his Beloved. His devotees, unable to bear the pangs of separation, weep bitterly and beg Gaurānga to return.

The musician sang:

O Gaur, come back to Nadia!

Master's ecstasy

Next the musician sang about the anguish of Radha at her separation from Krishna. When Sri Ramakrishna heard the song he suddenly stood up. Assuming the mood of Radha, he sang in a voice laden with sorrow, improvising the words: "O friend, either bring my beloved Krishna here or take me to Him." Thus singing, he completely lost himself in Radha and could not continue the song. He became speechless, his body motionless, his eyes half closed, his mind totally unconscious of the outer world. He was in deep samādhi.

Radha's anguish at separation from Krishna

After a long time he regained normal consciousness and said in the same heart-rending voice: "O friend, take me to my beloved Krishna and make me your bondslave. I shall be your handmaid for ever. O friend, it was you who taught me how to love Krishna. O Krishna! O Beloved of my soul!"

The professional musicians continued their song. They took the part of Radha and sang as if she were talking to her friend: *"O friend, I shall not go again to the Jamuna to draw water. Once I beheld my beloved Friend under the kadamba tree. Whenever I pass it I am overwhelmed."*

The Master again became abstracted. Heaving a deep sigh he said, "Ah me! Ah me!"

The song went on. Radha says:

Even the desire for Krishna's presence
Has cooled and refreshed my feverish body.

Now and then, the musicians improvised lines to the music, continuing in the attitude of Radha:

"O friends, you can wait. Show me Krishna, my Beloved."

Again: *"Do not bother about my ornaments. I have lost my most precious Ornament."*

And again: *"Alas! I have fallen on evil days. My happy days are over."* And finally: *"This unhappy time lingers so long!"*

Sri Ramakrishna improvised a line himself: *"Are not better times yet in sight for me?"* The musicians then improvised: *"Such a long time has passed! Are not better times yet in sight for me?"*

The musicians sang Radha's words to a friend:

O friend, I am dying! Surely I die.
The anguish of being kept apart
From Krishna is more than I can bear.
Alas! to whom then shall I leave.
My priceless Treasure? When I am dead,
I beg you, do not burn my body;
Do not cast it into the river.
See that it is not given to the flames;
Do not cast it into the water.
In this body I played with Krishna.
Bind my lifeless form, I beg you,
To the black tamala's branches;
Tie it to the tamala tree.
Touching tamala it touches black.
Krishna is black, and black is tamala;
Black is the colour that I love.
From earliest childhood I have loved it.
To the black Krishna my body belongs;
Let it not lie apart from black!

Radha reaches her last extremity. She faints away.

Radha has fallen to the ground;
She lies there lost to outward sense,
Repeating her precious Krishna's name,
And straightway doses both her eyes.
Ah, has the drama reached its end?

What ails you, O delight of Krishna?
Only a moment ago you spoke.
Her friends, anointing Radha's form
With cool and soothing sandal-paste,
Attempt to bring her back to earth.
Some of them weep in bitter grief;
They cannot bear to see her die.
Some sprinkle water on her face;
Perhaps she will revive again!
But, oh, can water give back life
To one who dies of Krishna's love?

Radha's friends chant Krishna's sweet name in her ears. This brings her back to partial consciousness. She looks at the black tamala tree and thinks that Krishna stands before her.

Krishna's name restores her life;
Once more her two eyes gaze around,
But Krishna's face she cannot see.
Alas, how bitterly she weeps!
"Where is my Krishna? Where is He
Whose name you chanted in my ears?
Bring Him but once before me here!"
Seeing the black tamala tree,
She stares at it and cries aloud:
"There is His crest! I see it clearly!
There is my "Krishna's lovely crest!"
But only a peacock did she see,
Whose glistening feathers she mistook
For the gay feather on Krishna's crest.

Krishna has gone to Mathura to assume His royal duties. He has discarded His cowherd's dress and flute and put on the royal regalia. Radha's friends, after a hurried consultation, send a gopi to Mathura as messenger. She meets a woman of that city, of her own age, who asks her where she comes from.

Radha's friend says: "I don't have to call Krishna. He Himself will come to me." But none the less, she follows the woman of Mathura and goes to Krishna's palace. In the street she weeps overcome with grief, and prays to Krishna: "O Hari, where are You? O Life of the gopis! O Enchanter of our hearts! O Beloved of Radha! O Hari, Remover of Your devotees' shame! Come to us once more! With great pride I said to the people of Mathura that You Yourself would come to me. Please do not humiliate me."

In scorn says the woman of Mathura:

"Oh, you are only a simple milkmaid!
How can you go to see our King,
Our Krishna, in your beggar's rags?
Behind seven doors His chamber stands.
You cannot enter. How can you go?
I die of shame to see your boldness.
Tell me, how will you manage to enter?"

Says the gopi:

"Krishna! Beloved!
Soul of the gopis! Oh, where are You?
Come to me here and save my life.
Where are You, adorable Soul of the gopis?
Come to me, Lord of Mathura!
And save the life of Your sorrowing handmaid.
Ah, where are You, Beloved of Radha?
Lord of our hearts and Friend of our souls!
O Hari, Destroyer of our shame!
O priceless Treasure of the gopis!
Come to Your handmaid and save her honour."

Thus the messenger weeps and cries out for Krishna.

When the musicians sang, *"Where are You, adorable Soul of the gopis?"* the Master went into samādhi. As the music neared its end the musicians sang louder. Sri Ramakrishna was on his feet, again in deep samādhi. Regaining partial consciousness, he said in a half articulate voice, "Kitna! Kitna!" He was too much overwhelmed to utter Krishna's name distinctly.

The kirtan was coming to a close. At the reunion of Radha and Krishna the Master sang with the musicians, composing the lines himself:

Behold, there Radha stands by Krishna;
On His bosom she reclines.
Behold her standing at His left,
Like a golden creeper twining
Round a black tamala tree!

As the music came to a close the Master led the chorus. All chanted together, to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals: "Victory to Radha and Krishna! Hallowed be the names of Radha and Krishna!" The devotees felt a surge of divine emotion and danced around the Master. He too danced in an ecstasy of joy. The names of God echoed and reechoed in the house and garden.

Master's praise of Niranjan

After the music the Master sat with the devotees. Just then Niranjan arrived and prostrated himself before him. At the very sight of this beloved disciple the Master stood up; with beaming eyes and smiling face, and said: "You have come too! (To M.) You see, this boy is absolutely guileless. One cannot be guileless without a great deal of spiritual discipline in previous births. A hypocritical and calculating mind can never attain God.

"Don't you see that God incarnates Himself only in a family where innocence exists? How guileless Dasaratha was! So was Nanda, Krishna's father. There is a saying: 'Ah, how innocent a man he is!

He is just like Nanda.'

(To Niranjan) "I feel as if a dark veil has covered your face. It is because you have accepted a job in an office. One must keep accounts there. Besides, one must attend to many other things, and that always keeps the mind in a state of worry. You are serving in an office like other worldly people; but there is a slight difference, in that you are earning money for the sake of your mother. One must show the highest respect to one's mother, for she is the very embodiment of the Blissful Mother of the Universe. If you had accepted the job for the sake of wife and children, I should have said: 'Fie upon you! Shame! A thousand shames!'

(To Mani Mallick, pointing to Niranjan) "Look at this boy. He is absolutely guileless. But he has one fault: he is slightly untruthful nowadays. The other day he said that he would visit me again very soon, but he didn't come. (To Niranjan) That is why Rākhāl asked you why you didn't come to see me while you were at Ariadaha, so near Dakshineswar."

NIRANJAN: "I was there only a couple of days."

MASTER (to Niranjan, pointing to M.) "He is the headmaster of a school. At my bidding he went to see you. (To M.) Did you send Baburam to me the other day?"

The Master went to an adjoining room and began to talk with some devotees there.

Be mad for God alone

MASTER (to M.): "Ah! How wonderful was the yearning of the gopis for Krishna! They were seized with divine madness at the very sight of the black tamala tree. Separation from Krishna created such a fire of anguish in Radha's heart that it dried up even the tears in her eyes! Her tears would disappear in steam. There were other times when nobody could notice the depth of her feeling. People do not notice the plunge of an elephant in a big lake."

M: "Yes, sir, that is true. Chaitanya, too, experienced a similar feeling. He mistook a forest for the sacred grove of Vrindāvan, and the dark water of the ocean for the blue Jamuna"

MASTER: "Ah! If anyone has but a particle of such prema! What yearning! What love! Radha possessed not only one hundred per cent of divine love, but one hundred and twenty-five per cent.

This is what it means to be intoxicated with ecstatic love of God. The sum and substance of the whole matter is that a man must love God, must be restless for Him. It doesn't matter whether you believe in God with form or in God without form. You may or may not believe that God incarnates Himself as man. But you will realize Him if you have that yearning. Then He Himself will let you know what He is like. If you must be mad, why should you be mad for the things of the world? If you must be mad, be mad for God alone."

Presently Sri Ramakrishna returned to the main hall of the house. A big pillow was placed near him for his use. Before touching it he said, "Om Tat Sat" Perhaps the pillow had been used by many worldly people, and that was why he purified it in this way. Bhavanath, M., and other devotees sat near him. It was getting late, but there was no indication that the meal was going to be served. The Master became impatient, like a child, and said: "I don't see any sign of food.

What's the matter? Where is Narendra?"

A DEVOTEE (with a smile): "Sir, Ram Babu is the manager of the feast. He is superintending everything."

MASTER (laughing): "Oh, Ram is the manager! Then we know what to expect."

A DEVOTEE: "Things like this always happen when he is the supervisor." (All laugh.)

MASTER (to the devotees): "Where is Surendra? What a nice disposition he has now! He is very outspoken; he isn't afraid to speak the truth. He is unstinting in his liberality. No one that goes to him for help comes away empty-handed. (To M.) You went to Bhagavan Das. What sort of man is he?"

M: "He is very old now. I saw him at Kalna. It was night. He lay on a carpet and a devotee fed him with food that had been offered to God. He can hear only if one speaks loudly into his ear.

Hearing me mention your name he said, 'You have nothing to worry about.'"

BHAVANATH (to M.): "You haven't been to Dakshineswar for a long time. The Master asked me about you and said one day, 'Has M. lost all taste for this place?' "

Bhavanath laughed as he said these words. The Master heard their conversation and said to M. in a loving voice: "Yes, that is true. Why haven't you been to Dakshineswar for such a long time?"

M. could only stammer some lame excuses.

Just then Mahimacharan arrived. He lived at Cossipore near Calcutta. Mahimacharan held the Master in great respect and was a frequent visitor at the temple garden. He was a man of independent means, having inherited some ancestral property. He devoted his time to religious thought and to the study of the scriptures. He was a man of some scholarship, having studied many books, both Sanskrit and English.

MASTER (to Mahima): "What is this? I see a steamship here. (All laugh.) We expect here a small boat at the most, but a real steamship has arrived. But then I know. It's the rainy season!" (Laughter.)

The Master was conversing with Mahimacharan. He asked him: "Isn't feeding people a kind of service to God? God exists in all beings as fire. To feed people is to offer oblations to that Indwelling Spirit. But then one shouldn't feed the wicked, I mean people who are entangled in gross worldliness or who have committed heinous crimes like adultery. Even the ground where such people sit becomes impure to a depth of seven cubits. Once Hriday fed a number of people at his native place. A good many of them were wicked. I said to Hriday: 'Look here. If you feed such people I shall leave your house at once.' (To Mahima) I hear that you used to feed people; but now you don't give any such feasts. Is it because your expenses have gone up?" (Laughter.)

The meal was to be served on the south verandah of the house. Leaf-plates were being placed on the floor. The Master said to Mahimacharan: "Please go there and see what they are doing. You may help them a little in serving the food. But I shouldn't ask you." Mahimacharan said: "Let them bring in the food. I shall see." Hemming and hawing, he went toward the kitchen, but presently he came back.

Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees enjoyed the meal greatly. Afterwards he rested awhile. About two o'clock in the afternoon Pratap Chandra Mazumdar of the Brahmo Samaj arrived. He was a co-worker of Keshab Chandra Sen and had been to Europe and America in connection with the Brahmo missionary work. He greeted Sri Ramakrishna, and the Master, too, bowed before him with his usual modesty.

They were soon engaged in conversation.

PRATAP: "I have been to Darjeeling recently for a change of air."

MASTER: "But your health hasn't much improved. What are you suffering from?"

PRATAP: "The same-illness that Keshab died of."

They began to talk about Keshab. Pratap said: "Even in boyhood he showed non-attachment to worldly things, seldom making merry with other boys. He was a student in the Hindu College. At that time he became friendly with Satyendra and through him made the acquaintance of his father, Devendranath Tagore. Keshab cultivated bhakti and at the same time practised meditation. At times he would be so much overcome with divine love that he would become unconscious. The main purpose of his life was to introduce religion among householders.

The conversation next turned to a certain Marhatta lady.

PRATAP: "Some women of our country have been to England. This Marhatta lady, who is very scholarly, also visited England. Later she embraced Christianity. Have you heard her name, sir?"

Egotism brings calamity

MASTER: "No. But from what you say it seems to me that she has a desire for name and fame. That kind of egotism is not good. The feeling 'I am the doer' is the outcome of ignorance. But the feeling that God does everything is due to knowledge. God alone is the Doer; all others are mere instruments in His hands.

Parable of the calf

"The misfortune that befalls a man on account of his egotism can be realized if you only think of the condition of the calf. The calf says, 'Hamma! Hamma!' that is, 'I! I!' And just look at its misfortune! At times it is yoked to the plough and made to work in the field from sunup to sundown, rain or shine. Again, it may be slaughtered by the butcher. In that case the flesh is eaten and the skin tanned into hide. From the hide shoes are made. People put on these shoes and walk on the rough ground. Still that is not the end of its misfortunes. Drums are made from its skin and mercilessly beaten with sticks. At last its entrails are made into strings for the bow used in carding cotton. When used by the carder the string gives the sound 'Tuhu! Tuhu!','Thou! Thou!'-that is, 'It is Thou, O Lord! It is Thou!' It no longer says, 'Hamma! Hamma!', 'I! I!' Only then does the calf's trouble come to an end, and it is liberated. It doesn't return to the world of action.

"Likewise, when the embodied soul says: 'O God, I am not the doer; Thou art the Doer. I am the machine and Thou art its Operator', only then does its suffering of worldly life come to an end; only then does it obtain liberation. It no longer has to be reborn in this world of action."

A DEVOTEE: "How can a man get rid of his ego?"

MASTER: "You cannot get rid of it until you have realized God. If you find a person free from ego, then know for certain that he has seen God."

Signs of God-vision

DEVOTEE: "What, sir, are the signs of God-vision?"

MASTER: "Yes, there are such signs. It is said in the Bhagavata that a man who has seen God behaves sometimes like a child, sometimes like a ghoul, sometimes like an inert thing, and sometimes like a madman.

"The man who has seen God becomes like a child. He is beyond the three gunas; he is unattached to any of them. He behaves like a ghoul, for he maintains the same attitude toward things holy and unholy. Again, like a madman, he sometimes laughs and sometimes weeps. Now he dresses himself like a dandy and the next moment he goes entirely naked and roams about with his cloth under his arm. Therefore he seems to be a lunatic. Again, at times he sits motionless like an inert thing."

Harmless ego
DEVOTEE: "Does the ego disappear altogether after the realization of God?"

MASTER: "Yes, sometimes God totally effaces the ego of His devotee, as in the state of samādhi.

But in many cases He keeps a trace of ego. But that doesn't injure anybody. It is like the ego of a child. A five-year-old child no doubt says 'I', but that ego doesn't harm anybody. At the touch of the philosopher's stone, steel is turned into gold; the steel sword becomes a sword of gold.

The gold sword has the form of a sword, no doubt, but it cannot injure anybody. One cannot cut anything with a gold sword.

(To Pratap) "You have been to England. Tell us what you saw there."

PRATAP: "The English people worship what you call 'gold'. Of course, there are also some good people in England, those who live an unattached life. But generally one finds there a great display of rajas in everything. I saw the same thing in America."

Secret of work
MASTER (to Pratap): "It is not in England alone that one sees attachment to worldly things. You see it everywhere. But remember that work is only the first step in spiritual life. God cannot be realized without sattva-love, discrimination, kindness, and so on. It is the very nature of rajas to involve a man in many worldly activities. That is why rajas degenerates into tamas. If a man is entangled in too many activities he surely forgets God. He becomes more and more attached to 'woman and gold'.

"But it is not possible for you to give up work altogether. Your very nature will lead you to it whether you like it or not. Therefore the scriptures ask you to work in a detached spirit, that is to say, not to crave the work's results. For example, you may perform devotions and worship, and practise austerities, but your aim is not to earn people's recognition or to increase your merit.

"To work in such a spirit of detachment is known as karmayoga. But it is very difficult. We are living in the Kaliyuga, when one easily becomes attached to one's actions. You may think you are working in a detached spirit, but attachment creeps into the mind from nobody knows where. You may worship in the temple or arrange a grand religious festival or feed many poor and starving people. You may think you have done all this without hankering after the results. But unknown to yourself the desire for name and fame has somehow crept into your mind. Complete detachment from the results of action is possible only for one who has seen God."

The path of bhakti for this age
A DEVOTEE: "Then what is the way for those who have not seen God? Must they give up all the duties of the world?"

MASTER: "The best path for this age is bhaktiyoga, the path of bhakti prescribed by Nārada: to sing the name and glories of God and pray to Him with a longing heart, 'O God, give me knowledge, give me devotion, and reveal Thyself to me!' The path of karma is extremely difficult. Therefore one should pray: 'O God, make my duties fewer and fewer; and may I, through Thy grace, do the few duties that Thou givest me without any attachment to their results! May I have no desire to be involved in many activities!'

"It is not possible to give up work altogether. Even to think or to meditate is a kind of work.

As you develop love for God, your worldly activities become fewer and fewer of themselves. And you lose all interest in them. Can one who has tasted a drink made of sugar candy enjoy a drink made of ordinary molasses?"

First God and then worldly duties

A DEVOTEE: "The English people always exhort us to be active. Isn't action the aim of life then?"

MASTER: "The aim of life is the attainment of God. Work is only a preliminary step; it can never be the end. Even unselfish work is only a means; it is not the end.

"Sambhu Mallick once said to me, 'Please bless me, sir, that I may spend all my money for good purposes, such as building hospitals and dispensaries; making roads, and digging wells.' I said to him: 'It will be good if you can do these things in a spirit of detachment. But that is very difficult. Whatever you may do, you must always remember that the aim of this life of yours is the attainment of God and not the building of hospitals and dispensaries. Suppose God appeared before you and said to you, "Accept a boon from Me." Would you then ask Him, "O God, build me some hospitals and dispensaries"? Or would you not rather pray to Him: "O God, may I have pure love at Your Lotus Feet! May I have Your uninterrupted vision!"? Hospitals, dispensaries, and all such things are unreal. God alone is real and all else unreal. Furthermore, after realizing God one feels that He alone is the Doer and we are but His instruments. Then why should we forget Him and destroy ourselves by being involved in too many activities? After realizing Him, one may, through His grace, become His instrument in building many hospitals and dispensaries.'

"Therefore I say again that work is only the first step. It can never be the goal of life. Devote yourself to spiritual practice and go forward. Through practice you will advance more and more in the path of God. At last you will come to know that God alone is real and all else is illusory, and that the goal of life is the attainment of God.

The story of the wood-cutter

"Once upon a time a wood-cutter went into a forest to chop wood. There suddenly he met a brahmachari. The holy man said to him, 'My good man, go forward.' On returning home the wood-cutter asked himself, 'Why did the brahmachari tell me to go forward?' Some time passed. One day he remembered the brahmachari's words. He said to

himself, 'Today I shall go deeper into the forest.' Going deep into the forest, he discovered innumerable sandal-wood trees. He was very happy and returned with cart-loads of sandal-wood. He sold them in the market and became very rich.

"A few days later he again remembered the words of the holy man to go forward. He went deeper into the forest and discovered a silver-mine near a river. This was even beyond his dreams. He dug out silver from the mine and sold it in the market. He got so much money that he didn't even know how much he had.

"A few more days passed. One day he thought: 'The brahmachari didn't ask me to stop at the silver-mine; he told me to go forward.' This time he went to the other side of the river and found a gold-mine. Then he exclaimed: 'Ah, just see! This is why he asked me to go forward.'

"Again, a few days afterwards, he went still deeper into the forest and found heaps of diamonds and other precious gems. He took these also and became as rich as the god of wealth himself.

Go forward

"Therefore I say that, whatever you may do, you will find better and better things if only you go forward. You may feel a little ecstasy as the result of japa, but don't conclude from this that you have achieved everything in spiritual life. Work is by no means the goal of life. Go forward, and then you will be able to perform unselfish work. But again I say that it is most difficult to perform unselfish work. Therefore with love and longing in your heart pray to God: 'O God, grant me devotion at Thy Lotus Feet and reduce my worldly duties. Please grant me the boon that the few duties I must do may be done in a detached spirit.' If you go still farther you will realize God.

You will see Him. In time you will converse with Him."

Next the conversation turned to the quarrels among the members of the Brahmo Samaj. They had had a misunderstanding about the right to preach in the temple after Keshab's death.

MASTER (to Pratap): "I hear that some members of the Samaj have quarrelled with you about the altar. But they are most insignificant persons-mere nobodies.

(To the devotees): "People like Pratap and Amrita are like good conchshells, which give out a loud sound. And the rest, about whom you hear so much, don't give out any sound at all." (All laugh.)

PRATAP: "Speaking of sounds, even such a worthless thing as a mangostone makes a sound!"

MASTER (to Pratap): "One can very well understand the inner feeling of a teacher of your Brahmo Samaj by hearing his preaching. Once I went to a meeting of a Hari Sabha. The preacher of the day was a pundit named Samadhyayi. And can you imagine what he

said? He said in the course of his sermon: 'God is dry. We must make Him sweet and fresh with our love and devotion.' I was stunned to hear these words. Then I was reminded of a story. A boy once said: 'At my uncle's house there are many horses. Oh, yes! His whole cow-shed is full of them.' Now if it was really a cow-shed, then horses could not be kept there. Possibly he had only cows. What did people think on hearing such an incoherent statement? They believed that there were surely no such animals as horses in the shed." (Laughter.)

A DEVOTEE: "True, sir, there were not only no horses, but possibly there were also no cows!"

(Laughter.)

MASTER: "Just fancy, to describe God, who is of the very nature of Love and Bliss, as dry! It only proves that the man has never experienced what God is like.

Master's advice to Pratap

(To Pratap) "Let me tell you something. You are a learned and intelligent and serious-minded soul. Keshab and you were like the two brothers, Gaur and Nitai. You have had enough of lectures, arguments, quarrels,discussions, and dissensions. Can such things interest you any more? Now gather your whole mind and direct it to God. Plunge deep into God."

PRATAP: "Yes, sir, you are right. That is surely my only duty now. But I am doing all these things only to perpetuate Keshab's name."

MASTER (with a smile): "No doubt you say now that you are doing all this to keep his name alive; but in a few days you won't feel that way. Listen to a story. A man had built a house on a hill.

It was only a mud hut, but he had built it with great labour. A few days after, there came a violent storm and the hut began to rock. The man became very anxious to save it and prayed to the god of the winds,'O god of the winds, please don't wreck the house!' But the god of the winds paid no heed to his prayer. The house was about to crash. Then he thought of a trick. He remembered that Hanuman was the son of the god of the winds. At once he cried out with great earnestness: 'O revered sir, please don't pull down the house. It belongs to Hanuman. I beseech you to protect it.' But still the house continued to shake violently. Nobody seemed to listen to his prayer. He repeated many times, 'Oh, this house belongs to Hanuman!' But the fury of the wind did not abate. Then he remembered that Hanuman was the devoted servant of Rāma, whose younger brother was Lakshmana. Desperately the man prayed, crying aloud, 'Oh, this house belongs to Lakshmana!' But that also failed to help matters. So the man cried out as a last resort: 'This is Rāma's house. Don't break it down, O god of the winds! I beseech you most humbly.' But this too proved futile, and the house began to crash down. Whereupon the man, who now had to save his own life, rushed out of it with the curse: 'Let it go! This is the devil's own hut!'

(To Pratap): "You don't have to perpetuate Keshab's name. Remember that he achieved all his success through the will of God. Through the divine will his work was established, and through the divine will it is disintegrating. What can you do about it? Now it is your bounden duty to give your entire mind to God, to plunge deep into the Ocean of His Love."

Saying these words the Master sang in his sweet voice:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God's Beauty;
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love.

Go seek, O mind, go seek Vrindāvan in your heart,
Where with His loving devotees
Sri Krishna sports eternally.

Light up, O mind, light up true wisdom's shining lamp,
And let it burn with steady flame
Unceasingly within your heart.

Who is it that steers your boat across the solid earth?
It is your guru, says Kubir;
Meditate on his holy feet.

The Master continued, addressing Pratap: "Did you listen to the song? You have had enough of lectures and quarrels. Now dive deep into the Ocean of God. There is no fear of death from plunging into this Ocean, for this is the Ocean of Immortality. Don't think that this will make you lose your head. Never for a moment harbour the idea that by thinking too much of God one becomes insane. Once I said to Narendra"

PRATAP: "Who is Narendra, sir?"

MASTER: "Oh, never mind. There is a young man of that name. I said to Narendra: 'Look here, my boy. God is the Ocean of Bliss; Don't you want to plunge into this Ocean? Suppose there is a cup of syrup and you are a fly. Where will you sit to sip the syrup?' Narendra said, 'I will sit on the edge of the cup and stick my head out to drink it.' 'Why?' said I. 'Why should you sit on the edge?' He replied, 'If I go far into the syrup, I shall be drowned and lose my life.' Then I said to him: 'But, my child, there is no such fear in the Ocean of Satchidananda. It is the Ocean of Immortality. By plunging into it a man does not die; he becomes immortal. Man does not lose his consciousness by being mad about God.

Knowledge and ignorance

(To the devotees) "The feeling of 'I ' and 'mine' is ignorance. People say that Rani Rasmani built the Kāli temple; but nobody says it was the work of God. They say that such and such a person established the Brahmo Samaj; but nobody says it was founded through the will of God. This feeling, 'I am the doer', is ignorance. On the contrary, the

idea, 'O God, Thou art the Doer and I am only an instrument; Thou art the Operator and I am the machine', is Knowledge. After attaining Knowledge a man says: 'O God, nothing belongs to me-neither this house of worship nor this Kāli temple nor this Brahmo Samaj. These are all Thine. Wife, son, and family do not belong to me. They are all Thine.'

"To love these objects, regarding them as one's own, is māyā. But to love all things is daya, compassion. To love only the members of the Brahmo Samaj or of one's own family is māyā; to love one's own countrymen is māyā. But to love the people of all countries, to love the members of all religions, is daya. Such love comes from love of God, from daya.

"Māyā entangles a man and turns him away from God. But through daya one realizes God. Sages like Sukadeva and Nārada always cherished daya in their hearts."

PRATAP: "Revered sir, are those who live with you making progress in spiritual life?"

MASTER: "I tell people that there is nothing wrong in the life of the world. But they must live in the world as a maidservant lives in her master's house.'

Referring to her master's house, she says, 'That is our house.' But her real home is perhaps in a far-away village. Pointing out her master's house to others, she says, no doubt, 'This is our house', but in her heart she knows very well that it doesn't belong to her and that her own house is in a faraway village. She brings up her master's son and says, 'My Hari has grown very naughty', or 'My Hari doesn't like sweets.' Though she repeats, 'My Hari' with her lips, yet she knows in her heart that Hari doesn't belong to her, that he is her master's son.

"Thus I say to those who visit me: 'Why don't you live in the world? There is no harm in that.

But always keep your mind, on God. Know for certain that house, family and property are not yours. They are God's. Your real home is in God.' Also I ask them to pray always with a longing heart for love of God's Lotus Feet."

Again the conversation turned to the English people. A devotee said, "Sir, I understand that nowadays the pundits of England do not believe in the existence of God."

PRATAP: "However they may talk, I don't believe that any of them is a real atheist. Many of them have had to admit that there is a great power behind the activities of the universe."

MASTER: "Well, that is enough. They believe in Śakti, don't they? Then why should they be atheists?"

PRATAP: "They also believe in the moral government of the universe."

Pratap was now about to take leave of the Master.

MASTER (to Pratap): "What more shall I say to you? My only request is that you do not involve yourself in quarrels and dissensions any more. Another thing. It is 'woman and gold' that keeps men away from God. That is the barrier. Don't you find that everyone has nothing but praise for his own wife? (All laugh.) A wife may be good or bad; but if you ask her husband about her he will always say, 'Oh, she is very good-'"

At this point Pratap bade the Master good-bye. He did not wait to hear the end of Sri Ramakrishna's words about the renunciation of "woman and gold". Those burning words touched the hearts of the devotees and were carried away on the wind through the gently rustling leaves in the garden.

A few minutes later Mani Mallick said to Sri Ramakrishna: "Sir, it is time for you to leave for Dakshineswar. Today Keshab's mother and the other ladies of his family are going to the temple garden to visit you. They will be hurt if they do not find you there."

Keshab had passed away only a few months before. His old mother and his other relatives wanted to visit the Master.

MASTER (to Mani Mallick): "Don't hurry me, please. I didn't sleep well. I can't rush. They are going to Dakshineswar. What am I to do about it? They will stroll in the garden and enjoy it thoroughly."

After resting a little the Master was ready to leave for Dakshineswar. He was thinking of Surendra's welfare. He visited the different rooms, softly chanting the holy name of God.

Suddenly he stood still and said: "I didn't eat any luchi at meal time. Bring me a little now."

He ate only a crumb and said: "There is much meaning in my asking for the luchi. If I should remember that I hadn't eaten any at Surendra's house, then I should want to come back for it."

(All laugh.)

MANI MALLICK: "That would have been nice. Then we too should have come with you."

The devotees laughed.

Friday, June 20, 1884

It was dusk. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room, absorbed in contemplation of the Divine Mother. Now and then he was chanting Her name. Rākhāl , Adhar, M., and several other devotees were with him.

After a while the evening worship began in the temples. Adhar left the room to see the worship.

Sri Ramakrishna and M. conversed.

MASTER: "Tell me, does Baburam intend to continue his studies? I said to him, 'Continue your studies to set an example to others.' After Sita had been set free, Bibhishana refused to become king of Ceylon. Rāma said to him: 'You should become king to open the eyes of the ignorant.

Otherwise they will ask you what you have gained as a result of serving Me. They will be pleased to see you acquire the kingdom.'

Baburam's spiritual nature

"I noticed the other day that Baburam, Bhavanath, and Harish have a feminine nature. In a vision I saw Baburam as a goddess with a necklace around her neck and with woman companions about her.

He has received something in a dream. His body is pure. Only a very little effort will awaken his spiritual consciousness.

Concerning Rākhāl

"You see, I am having some difficulty about my physical needs. It will be nice if Baburam lives with me. The nature of these attendants of mine is undergoing a change. Lātu is always tense with spiritual emotion. He is about to merge himself in God. Rākhāl is getting into such a spiritual mood that he can't do anything even for himself. I have to get water for him. He isn't of much service to me.

"Among the youngsters Baburam and Niranjan are rather exceptional. If other boys come in the future, they will, it seems to me, receive instruction and then go away.

"But I don't want Baburam to tear himself away from his family. It may make trouble at home.

(Smiling) When I ask him, 'Why don't you come?' he says, 'Why not make me come?' He looks at Rākhāl and weeps. He says, 'Rākhāl is very happy here.'

"Rākhāl now lives here as one of the family. I know that he will never again be attached to the world. He says that worldly enjoyments have become tasteless to him. His wife came here on her way to Konnagar. She is fourteen. He too was asked to go to Konnagar, but he didn't go. He said, 'I don't like merriment and gaiety.'

"What do you think of Niranjan?" M: "He is very handsome."

Niranjan's guilelessness

MASTER: "No, I am not asking about his looks. He is guileless. One can easily realize God if one is free from guile. Spiritual instruction produces quick results in a guileless heart. Such a heart is like well cultivated land from which all the stones have been removed. No sooner is the seed sown than it germinates. The fruit also appears quickly.

"Niranjan will not marry. It is 'woman and gold' that causes entanglement. Isn't that so?"

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "What will one gain by renouncing betel-leaf and tobacco? The real renunciation is the renunciation of 'woman and gold.'

"I came to know in an ecstatic mood that, though Niranjan had accepted a job in an office, he would not be stained by it. He is earning money for his mother. There is no harm in that.

"The work you are doing won't injure you either. What you are doing

is good. Suppose a clerk is sent to jail; he is shut up there and chained, and at last he is released. Does he cut capers after his release? Of course not. He works again as a clerk. It is not your intention to accumulate money. You only want to support your family. Otherwise, where will they go?"

M: "I shall be relieved if someone takes charge of them."

MASTER: "That is true. But now do 'this' as well as 'that' "

M: "It is great luck to be able to renounce everything."

MASTER: "That is true. But people act according to their inherent tendencies. You have a few more duties to perform. After these are over you will have peace. Then you will be released. A man cannot easily get out of the hospital once his name is registered there. He is discharged only when he is completely cured.

Two classes of Master's devotees

"The devotees who come here may be divided into two groups. One group says, 'O God, give me liberation.' Another group, belonging to the inner circle, doesn't talk that way. They are satisfied if they can know two things: first, who I6 am; second, who they are and what their relationship to me is. You belong to this second group; otherwise. . .

"Bhavanath, Baburam, and a few others have a feminine nature. Harish sleeps in a woman's cloth.

Baburam says that he too likes the womanly attitude. So I am right. Bhavanath also is like that.

But Narendra, Rākhāl, and Niranjan have a masculine nature.

Significance of the Master's injuring his arm

"Please tell me one thing. What is the significance of my having hurt my arm? Once my teeth were broken while I was in a state of ecstasy. It is the arm this time."

Seeing M. silent, the Master himself continued the conversation.

MASTER: "My arm was broken in order to destroy my ego to its very root. Now I cannot find my ego within myself any more. When I search for it I see God alone. One can never attain God without completely getting rid of the ego. You must have noticed that the chatak bird has its nest on the ground but soars up very high.

"Captain says I haven't acquired any occult powers because I eat fish. I tremble with fear lest I should acquire those powers. If I should have them, then this place would be turned into a hospital or a dispensary. People would flock here and ask me to cure their illness. Is it good to have occult powers?"

M: "No, sir. You have said to us that a man cannot realize God if he possesses even one of the eight occult powers."

MASTER: "Right you are. Only the small-minded seek them. If one asks something of a rich man, one no longer receives any favour from him. The rich man doesn't allow such a person to ride in the same carriage with him. Even if he does, he doesn't allow the man to sit near him. Therefore love without any selfish motive is best.

"God with form and the formless God are both equally true. What do you say? One cannot keep one's mind on the formless God a long time. That is why God assumes form for His devotees.

"Captain makes a nice remark in this connexion. He says that when a bird gets tired of soaring very high it perches on a tree and rests. First is the formless God, and then comes God with form.

"I shall have to go to your house once. I saw in a vision that the houses of Adhar, Balarām, and Surendra were so many places for our forgathering. But it makes no difference to me whether they come here or not."

M: "That's right. Why shouldn't it be so? One must feel misery if one feels happiness. But you are beyond both."

MASTER: "Yes. Further, I think of the magician and his magic. The magician alone is real. His magic is illusory, like a dream. I realized this when I heard the Chandi recited. Sumbha and Nisumbha were scarcely born when I learnt that they both were dead."

M: "Yes, sir. Once I was going to Kalna with Gangadhar in a steamer. A country boat struck our ship and sank with twenty or twenty-five passengers. They all disappeared in the water, like foam churned up by the steamer.

"May I ask you one thing? Does a man watching magic really feel compassion when he sees suffering in the performance? Does he feel, at that time, any sense of responsibility? One thinks of compassion only when one feels responsibility. Isn't that so?"

How a Jnāni looks on the illusory world

MASTER: "A Jnāni sees everything at once-God, māyā, the universe, and living beings. He sees that Vidyā-māyā, Avidyā-māyā, the universe, and all living beings exist and at the same time do not exist. As long as he is conscious of 'I', he is conscious of 'others' too. Nothing whatsoever exists after he cuts through the whole thing with the sword of jnāna. Then even his 'I' becomes as unreal as the magic of the magician."

M. was reflecting on these words, when the Master said: "Do you know what it is like? It is as if there were a flower with twenty-five layers of petals, and you cut them all with one stroke.

"The idea of responsibility! Goodness gracious! Men like Sankaracharya and Sukadeva kept the 'ego of Knowledge'. It is not for man to show compassion, but for God. One feels compassion as long as one has the 'ego of Knowledge'. And it is God Himself who has become the 'ego of Knowledge'.

Supreme power of *Ādyāśakti* in the relative world

"You may feel a thousand times that it is all magic; but you are still under the control of the Divine Mother. You cannot escape Her. You are not free. You must do what She makes you do. A man attains Brahmajnana only when it is given to him by the *Ādyāśakti*, the Divine Mother. Then alone does he see the whole thing as magic; otherwise not.

"As long as the slightest trace of ego remains, one lives within the jurisdiction of the *Ādyāśakti*. One is under Her sway. One cannot go beyond Her.

"With the help of the *Ādyāśakti*, God sports as an Incarnation. God, through His Śakti, incarnates Himself as man. Then alone does it become possible for the Incarnation to carry on His work.

Everything is due to the Śakti of the Divine Mother.

"When anyone asked the former manager of the temple garden a great favour, the manager would say, 'Come after two or three days.' He must ask the proprietor's permission.

"God will incarnate Himself as Kalki at the end of the Kaliyuga. He will be born as the son of a brahmin. Suddenly and unexpectedly a sword and horse will come to him. . . ."

Adhar returned to the Master's room after watching the evening worship in the temples.

MASTER (to Adhar and the others): "Bhuvan was here and brought me twenty-five Bombay mangoes and some sweets. She said to me, 'Will you eat a mango?' I said, 'My stomach is heavy today.' And to tell you the truth, I am feeling uncomfortable after eating a few of the sweets."

Bhuvanmohini was a nurse who used to visit Sri Ramakrishna now and then.

The Master could not eat the food offerings of everyone, especially of physicians and nurses. It was because they accepted money from the sick in spite of the suffering of these people.

MASTER: "Keshab Sen's mother, sisters, and other relatives came here; so I had to dance a little.

I had to entertain them. What else could I do? They were so grief-stricken!"

Chapter 24

PUNDIT SHASHADHAR

Wednesday, June 25, 1884

IT WAS THE DAY of the Rathyatra the Car Festival of the Hindus. At Ishan's invitation Sri Ramakrishna went to his house in Calcutta. For some time the Master had had a desire to meet Pundit Shashadhar. Tarkachudamani, who had been staying with one of Ishan's neighbours. So it was decided that he would visit the pundit in the afternoon.

A few devotees, including Hazra, accompanied the Master to Ishan's house. Ishan had invited one or two brahmin scholars and a devotee who followed the Tantrik method of worship. Shrish and Ishan's other sons were also present.

The Master noticed that the Tantrik worshipper had a vermilion mark on his forehead, and smilingly said, "I see he is branded."

After a while M. and Narendra arrived and bowed before Sri Ramakrishna. The Master had previously informed M. that he would be at Ishan's house.

The Master joked about the delay in serving their meal. One of the scholars quoted a Sanskrit verse about the anxiety created in people's minds by the pangs of hunger. Proceeding to explain the verse he said: "The study of philosophy is indeed edifying, but poetry is more fascinating than philosophy. People listening to good poems think of the study of philosophy-Vedānta, Nyaya, Samkhya, and so forth as dry and insipid. Again, music is more attractive than poetry. Music melts even a heart of stone. But a beautiful woman has an even greater attraction for a man's heart than music. Such a woman, passing by, diverts a man's attention from both poetry and music. But when a man feels the pangs of hunger, everything else poetry, music and woman appears as of no consequence. Thus, hunger is the most arresting thing."

The Master remarked with a smile, "The pundit is witty."

Soon Narendra began to sing. A few moments later the Master went upstairs for a little rest. M. and Shrish accompanied him. M. introduced Shrish to the Master, saying: "He is a scholar and a man of peaceful nature. We were fellow students in our boyhood. Now he is a lawyer."

MASTER: "It is a pity that such a man should practise law."

M: "Yes, sir. It was a mistake on his part."

MASTER: "I know a few lawyers. One of them shows me great respect. He is a straightforward man. (To Shrish) What is your idea about the most essential thing in life?"

SHRISH: "God exists and He alone does everything. But the attributes we ascribe to Him are not the right ones. How can a man canceive of Him? His nature is infinite."

MASTER: "What need is there of your counting the number of trees and branches in an orchard? You have come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Do that and be happy. The aim of human birth is to love God. Realize that love and be at peace.

"Suppose you have entered a tavern for a drink. Is it necessary for you to know how many gallons of wine there are in the tavern? One glass is enough for you. What need is there of your knowing the infinite qualities of God? You may discriminate for millions of years about God's attributes and still you will not know them."

The Master remained silent a few minutes. A brahmin pundit came into the room.

Sufferings in the worldly life

MASTER (to M.): "There is no substance whatsoever in the worldly life. The members of Ishan's family are good; so he has some peace here. Suppose his sons had been lewd, disobedient, and addicted to drink and other vices. Then there would have been no end to his troubles. One very seldom comes across such a religious family, in which all the members are devoted to God. I have seen only two or three such families. Generally one finds quarrels, misunderstanding, jealousy, and friction. Besides, there are disease, grief, and poverty in the world. Seeing this condition, I prayed to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, turn my mind at once from the world to God.'

"Look at Narendra's troubles. His father is dead and the members of his family are starving. He has been trying his utmost to secure a position, but he has not yet found one. Just see how unsettled his mind is!

(To M.) "You used to come to Dakshineswar very frequently. But why have you become such a rare visitor? Perhaps you have become particularly friendly with your wife. Is it true? Why should I blame you? The influence of 'woman and gold' is everywhere. Therefore I pray, 'O Divine Mother, please don't make me a worldly man if I am to be born again in a human body.' "

BRĀHMIN SCHOLAR: "Why should you say that, sir? The scriptures extol the life of a householder."

MASTER: "Yes, that is true. But it is very difficult to lead the true life of a householder. (To M.) How wrong of us! They are singing, especially Narendra, and we have left the room."

About four o'clock in the afternoon the Master left in a carriage for the house where Pundit Shashadhar was staying. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna got into the carriage he went into samādhi. His physical frame was very tender as a result of the austerities he had undergone during the long years of his spiritual discipline and his constant absorption in God-Consciousness.

The Master would suffer from the slightest physical discomfort and even from the vibration of worldly thoughts around him. Once Keshab Chandra Sen had said that Sri Ramakrishna, Christ, and Sri Chaitanya belonged to a delicate species of humanity that should be kept in a glass case and protected from the vulgar contact of the world.

It was the rainy season, and a fine drizzle of rain had made the road muddy. The sky was overcast. The devotees followed the carriage on foot. As the carriage stopped in front of the house, the host and his relatives welcomed the Master and took him upstairs to the drawing-room. There the Master met the pundit.

Pundit Shashadhar

Pundit Shashadhar, a man of fair complexion and no longer young, had a string of rudraksha beads around his neck. He was one of the renowned Sanskrit scholars of his time-a pillar of orthodox Hinduism, which had reasserted itself after the first wave of Christianity and Western culture had passed over Hindu society. His clear exposition of the Hindu scriptures, his ringing sincerity, and, his stirring eloquence had brought back a large number of the educated young Hindus of Bengal to the religion of their forefathers.

The pundit saluted the Master with reverence. Narendra, Rākhāl , Ram, Hazra, and M., who had come with the Master, seated themselves in the room as near the Master as they could, anxious not to miss one of his words.

At the sight of the pundit the Master again went into samādhi. After a while, still remaining in that state, he looked at the pundit and said with a smile, "Very well, very well." Then, addressing the pundit, the Master said, "Tell me how you give lectures."

PUNDIT: "Sir, I try to explain the teachings of the Hindu scriptures."

Efficacy of bhakti for modern times

MASTER: "For the Kaliyuga the path of devotion described by Nārada is best. Where can people find time now to perform their duties according to the scriptural injunctions? Nowadays the decoctions of roots and herbs of the orthodox Hindu physicians cannot be given to a fever patient. By the time that kind of medicine begins its slow process of curing, the patient is done for. Therefore only a drastic medicine like the allopathic 'fever mixture' is effective now. You may ask people to practise scriptural rites and rituals; but, when prescribing the rituals, remove the 'head and tail'. I tell people not to bother about the elaborate rituals of the sandhya as enjoined in the scriptures. I say that it will be enough for them to repeat the Gayatri alone. If you must give instruction about scriptural ceremonies, do so only to a very few, like Ishan.

Futility of lecturing

"You may deliver thousands of lectures, but they won't make the slightest impression on worldly people. Can one drive a nail into a stone wall? The point of the nail will sooner break than make a dent in the stone. What will you gain by striking the tough skin of the crocodile with a sword? The sādhu's water-bowl, made from the shell of a bitter gourd, may visit the four principal holy places of India with its owner, but it will still remain as

bitter as ever. Your lectures are not helping worldly people very much; and you will realize this by and by. The calf cannot stand on its legs all at once. Now it drops to the ground and now it stands up. So it learns to stand finally on its legs and walk.

"You cannot distinguish a lover of God from a worldly person. It isn't your fault, of course. When the first onrush of the gale shakes the trees, it is impossible to distinguish one tree from another-the mango from the tamarind, for instance.

Rituals prepare the way for divine love

"Without having realized God one cannot give up rituals altogether. How long should one practise the sandhya and other forms of ritualistic worship? As long as one does not shed tears of joy at the name of God and feel a thrill in one's body. You will know that your ritualistic worship has come to an end when your eyes become filled with tears as you repeat 'Om Rāma'. Then you do not have to continue your sandhya or other rituals.

"When the fruit appears the blossom drops off. Love of God is the fruit, and rituals are the blossom. When the daughter-in-law of the house becomes pregnant, she cannot do much work. Her mother-in-law gradually lessens her duties in the house. When her time arrives she does practically nothing. And after the child is born her only work is to play with it. She doesn't do any household duties at all. The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om, and, Om in samādhi. It is like the sound of a bell: t-a-m. The yogi, by following in the trail of the sound Om, gradually merges himself in the Supreme Brahman. His sandhya and other ritualistic duties disappear in samādhi. Thus the duties of the Jnāni come to an end."

As the Master talked of samādhi, he himself went into that state. His face radiated a heavenly light. Bereft of outer consciousness, he could not utter another word. His gaze was indrawn and transfixed in communion with the Self. After a long time the Master began to recognize the world around him and said, like a child, "I shall have a drink of water." Whenever after samādhi the Master asked for a drink of water, his devotees knew that he was gradually becoming conscious of the outer world.

Still lingering in the state of ecstasy, he said to the Divine Mother: "O Mother, the other day You showed me Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Then I told You that I should like to see another pundit, and so You have brought me here."

Looking at the pundit, he said: "My child, add a little more to your strength. Practise spiritual discipline a few days more. You have hardly set your foot on the tree, yet you expect to lay hold of a big cluster of fruit. But, of course, you are doing all this for the welfare of others." With these words he bowed his head before the pundit.

The Master continued: "When I first heard about you, I inquired whether you were merely erudite or whether you had discrimination and renunciation. A pundit who doesn't know how to discriminate between the Real and the unreal is no pundit at all.

Preacher with God's commission

"There is no harm in teaching others if the preacher has a commission from the Lord. Nobody can confound a preacher who teaches people after having received the command of God. Getting a ray of light from the goddess of learning, a man becomes so powerful that before him big scholars seem mere earthworms.

"When the lamp is lighted the moths come in swarms. They don't have to be invited. In the same way, the preacher who has a commission from God need not invite people to hear him. He doesn't have to announce the time of his lectures. He possesses such irresistible attraction that people come to him of their own accord. People of all classes, even kings and aristocrats, gather around him. They say to him: 'Revered sir, what can we offer you? Here are mangoes, sweets, money, shawls, and other things. What will you be pleased to accept?' In that case I say to them: 'Go away. I don't care, for these. I don't want anything.'

"Does the magnet say to the iron, 'Come near me?' That is not necessary. Because of the attraction of the magnet, the iron rushes to it.

Divine wisdom is inexhaustible

"Such a preacher may not be a scholarly person, but don't conclude from that that he has any lack of wisdom. Does book-learning make one wise? He who has a commission from God never runs short of wisdom. That wisdom comes from God; it is inexhaustible. At Kamarpukur I have seen people measuring grain. It lies in a heap. One man keeps pushing grain from the heap toward another man, who weighs it on a scales. So the man who weighs doesn't run short of grain. It is the same with the preacher who has received a commission from God. As he teaches people, the Divine Mother Herself supplies him with fresh knowledge from behind. That knowledge never comes to an end.

"Can a preacher ever lack knowledge if but once he is favoured with a benign glance from the Divine Mother? Therefore I ask you whether you have received any commission from God."

HAZRA: "Oh yes, he must have it. (To the pundit) Isn't it true, sir?"

PUNDIT: "Commission? No, sir, I am afraid I haven't received any such thing."

HOST: "He may not have received the commission, but he preaches from a sense of duty."

MASTER: "What will a man accomplish by mere lectures without the commission from God? Once a Brahmo preacher said in the course of his sermon, 'Friends, how much I used to drink!' and so on. Hearing this the people began to whisper among themselves: 'What is this fool saying? He used to drink!' Now these words produced a very unfavourable effect. This shows that preaching cannot bring a good result unless it comes from a good man.

"A high government official from Barisal once said to me, 'Sir, if you begin the work of preaching, I too shall gird my loins.' I told him the story of people's dirtying the bank of the Haldārpukur and of its being stopped only when a constable, armed with authority from the government, put up a notice prohibiting it.

"So I say, a worthless man may talk his head off preaching, and yet he will produce no effect. But people will listen to him if he is armed with a badge of authority from God. One cannot teach others without the commission from God. A teacher of men must have great power. There's many a Hanumanpuri in Calcutta. It is with them that you will have to wrestle. (Pointing to the people assembled there) These are mere sheep!

"Chaitanyadeva was an Incarnation of God. How little is left of what he accomplished-not to speak of a lecturer who preaches without authority from God! What good will a lecturer do?

Master exhorts the pundit to cultivate divine love

"Therefore I say to you, dive deep in God-Consciousness."

Saying this, the Master began to sing in an ecstasy of love for God:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God's Beauty;
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love. . . .

The Master continued: "One does not die if one sinks in this Ocean. This is the Ocean of Immortality. Once I said to Narendra: 'God is the Ocean of Bliss. Tell me if you want to plunge into It. Just imagine there is some syrup in a cup and that you have become a fly. Now tell me where you will sit to sip the syrup.' Narendra answered: 'I will, sit on the edge of the cup and stretch out my neck to drink, because I am sure to die if I go far into the cup.' Then I said to him: 'But my child, this is the Ocean of Satchidananda. There is no fear of death in it. This is the Ocean of Immortality. Only ignorant people say that one should not have an excess of devotion and divine love. How foolish! Can there be any excess of divine love?'

(To the pundit) "Therefore I say to you, dive into the Ocean of Satchidananda. Nothing will ever worry you if you but realize God. Then you will get His commission to teach people.

Many paths to realize God

"There are innumerable pathways leading to the Ocean of Immortality. The essential thing is to reach the Ocean. It doesn't matter which path you follow. Imagine that there is a reservoir containing the Elixir of Immortality. You will be immortal if a few drops of the Elixir somehow get into your mouth. You may get into the reservoir either by jumping into it, or by being pushed into it from behind, or by slowly walking down the steps. The effect is one and the same. You will become immortal by tasting a drop of that Elixir.

Three yogas explained by Master

"Innumerable are the ways that lead to God. There are the paths of jnāna, of karma, and of bhakti. If you are sincere, you will attain God in the end, whichever path you follow. Roughly speaking, there are three kinds of yoga: jnanayoga, karma yoga, and bhaktiyoga.

"What is jnanayoga? The Jnāni seeks to realize Brahman. He discriminates, saying, 'Not this, not this'. He discriminates, saying, 'Brahman is real and the universe illusory.' He discriminates between the Real and the unreal. As he comes to the end of discrimination, he goes into samādhi and attains the Knowledge of Brahman.

"What is karmayoga? Its aim is to fix one's mind on God by means of work. That is what you are teaching. It consists of breath-control, concentration, meditation, and so on, done in a spirit of detachment. If a householder performs his duties in the world in a spirit of detachment, surrendering the results to God and with devotion to God in his heart, he too may be said to practise karmayoga. Further, if a person performs worship, japa, and other forms of devotion, surrendering the results to God, he may be said to practise karmayoga. Attainment of God alone is the aim of karmayoga.

"What is bhaktiyoga? It is to keep the mind on God by chanting His name and glories. For the Kaliyuga the path of devotion is easiest. This is indeed the path for this age.

Difficulties of the paths of jnāna and karma

"The path of karma is very difficult. First of all, as I have just said, where will one find the time for it nowadays? Where is the time for a man to perform his duties as enjoined in the scriptures? Man's life is short in this age. Further, it is extremely difficult to perform one's duties in a spirit of detachment, without craving the result. One cannot work in such a spirit without first having realized God. Attachment to the result somehow enters the mind, though you may not be aware of it.

"To follow jnanayoga in this age is also very difficult. First, a man's life depends entirely on food. Second, he has a short span of life. Third, he can by no means get rid of body-consciousness; and the Knowledge of Brahman is impossible without the destruction of body-consciousness. The Jnāni says: 'I am Brahman; I am not the body. I am beyond hunger and thirst, disease and grief, birth and death, pleasure and pain.' How can you be a Jnāni if you are conscious of disease, grief, pain, pleasure, and the like? A thorn enters your flesh, blood flow from the wound, and you suffer very badly from the pain; but nevertheless, if you are a Jnāni you must be able to say: 'Why, there is no thorn in my flesh at all. Nothing is the matter with me'

"Therefore bhaktiyoga is prescribed for this age. By following this path one comes to God more easily than by following the others. One can undoubtedly, reach God by following the paths of jnāna and karma, but they are very difficult paths.

God fulfils all desires of His devotees

"Bhaktiyoga is the religion for this age. But that does not mean that the lover of God will reach one goal and the philosopher and worker another. It means that if a person seeks

the Knowledge of Brahman he can attain It by following the path of bhakti, too. God, who loves His devotee, can give him the Knowledge of Brahman if He so desires.

"But the bhakta wants to realize the Personal God endowed with form and talk to Him. He seldom seeks the Knowledge of Brahman. But God, who does everything at His pleasure, can make His devotee the heir to His infinite glories if it pleases Him. He gives His devotee both the Love of God and the Knowledge of Brahman. If one is able somehow to reach Calcutta, one can see the Maidan and the museum and other places too. The thing is how to reach Calcutta.

"By realizing the Divine Mother of the Universe, you will get Knowledge as well as Devotion. You will get both. In bhava samādhi you will see the form of God, and in nirvikalpa samādhi you will realize Brahman, the Absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. In nirvikalpa samādhi ego, name, and form do not exist.

Devotee's prayer to God

"A lover of God prays to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother, I am very much afraid of selfish actions. Such actions have desires behind them, and if I perform them I shall have to reap their fruit. But it is very difficult to work in a detached spirit. I shall certainly forget Thee, O Mother, if I involve myself in selfish actions. Therefore I have no use for them. May my actions, O Divine Mother, be fewer every day till I attain Thee. May I perform, without attachment to the results, only what action is absolutely necessary for me. May I have great love for Thee as I go on with my few duties. May I not entangle myself in new work so long as I do not realize Thee. But I shall perform it if I receive Thy command. Otherwise not.' "

About pilgrimage

PUNDIT: "How far did you go in visiting the sacred places?"

MASTER: "Oh, I visited a few places. (With a smile) But Hazra went farther and also climbed higher. He visited Hrishikesh, but I didn't go so far or so high.

"You must pave noticed kites and vultures soaring very high in the sky; but their eyes are always fixed on the charnel-pits. Do you know the meaning of 'charnel-pits'? It is 'woman and gold'.

"What is the use of making pilgrimages if you can attain love of God remaining where you are? I have been to Benares and noticed the same trees there as here. The same green tamarind-leaves!

"Pilgrimage becomes futile if it does not enable you to attain love of God. Love of God is the one essential and necessary thing. Do you know the meaning of 'kites and vultures'? There are many people who talk big and who say that they have performed most of the duties enjoined in the scriptures. But with all that their minds are engrossed in worldliness and deeply preoccupied with money, riches, name, fame, creature comforts, and such things."

PUNDIT: "It is true, sir. Going on a pilgrimage is like seeking diamonds and gems, while discarding the precious stone that is worn by Narayana Himself on His breast."

MASTER: "I want you to remember this. You may impart thousands of instructions to people, but they will not bear fruit except in proper time. On going to bed, a child said to his mother, 'Mother, please wake me up when I feel the call of nature.' The mother said: 'Don't worry about it, my child. That call will wake you up itself.' (All laugh.) One feels yearning for God at the proper time.

Three kinds of teachers

"There are three classes of physicians. The physicians of one class feel the patient's pulse and go away, merely prescribing medicine. As they leave the room they simply ask the patient to take the medicine. They are the poorest class of physicians. Likewise, there are teachers who only give instruction, but do not stop to see whether their teachings have produced a good or bad effect. They do not think at all about the disciple.

"There are physicians of another class, who prescribe medicine and ask the patient to take it. If the patient is unwilling to follow their directions, they reason with him. They are the mediocre physicians. Likewise, there are mediocre teachers. They give instruction to the student and, further, try to persuade him in various ways to follow the instruction.

"Lastly, there are the physicians of the highest class. If the patient does

not respond to their gentle persuasion, they even exert force upon him. If necessary, they press their knees on the patient's chest and force the medicine down his throat. Likewise, there are teachers of the highest class, who even exert force to direct the mind of the pupil toward God."

PUNDIT: Sir, if there are such superior teachers as you have described, then why should you say that one does not get the Knowledge of God until the right time comes?"

MASTER: "You are right. But what will the physician do if the medicine runs out of the patient's mouth and doesn't reach his stomach? In such a case even the best physician can't do anything.

"The teacher should judge the fitness of the student before giving him instruction. But you don't discriminate in your instruction. When a young man comes to me for instruction, first of all I ask him about his relatives at home. Suppose he has lost his father; suppose his father has left some debts for him. How can such a person direct his mind to God? Are you listening to me?"

PUNDIT: "Yes, sir. I am paying attention to every word."

MASTER: "One day some Sikh soldiers came to the temple garden at Dakshineswar. I met them in front of the Kāli temple. One of them referred to God as very compassionate. 'Indeed!' I said. 'Is that true? But how do you know?' He answered,

'Because, sir, God gives us food and takes every care of us.' I said: 'Why should that surprise you? God is the Father of us all. Who will look after the child if the father doesn't? Do you mean to say that the people of the neighbouring village should look after the child?"

NARENDRA: "Then shouldn't we call God kind?"

MASTER: "Have I forbidden you to? What I mean is that God is our very own. He is not a stranger to us."

PUNDIT: "Priceless words!"

MASTER (to Narendra): "I listened to your singing, but I didn't enjoy it. So I left the room. Your mind is now set on seeking a job, and therefore your song sounded dull."

Narendra flushed. He felt ashamed of himself and remained silent.

The Master asked for a drink of water. A glass of water had been placed near him, but he could not take it. He asked for some fresh water. Later it was found that a man of immoral character had touched the first glass.

PUNDIT (to Hazra): "You live in his company day and night. You must be very happy."

MASTER (with a smile): "This is indeed a great occasion for me. Today I have seen the crescent moon of the second day of the bright fortnight. (All laugh.) Do you know why I referred to the moon of the second day? Sita once said to Ravana, 'You are the full moon and Rāma is the crescent moon of the second day of the bright fortnight.' Ravana did not understand the meaning of these words. He thought Sita was flattering him and became exceedingly happy. But Sita meant that Ravana had reached the fullest limit of his power and prosperity, and that thenceforth he would wane like the full moon. Rāma, on the other hand, was like the moon of the second day. He would wax day by day."

The Master was about to take his leave. The pundit and his friends bowed low before him.

It was not yet dusk, and Sri Ramakrishna returned to Ishan's house with the devotees. The Master took his seat in the drawing-room with Ishan and his sons, a pundit, and a few devotees.

MASTER (smiling to Ishan): "I said to Pundit Shashadhar: 'You have hardly set your foot on the tree, and yet you aspire to lay hold of a big bunch of fruit. First of all practise some spiritual discipline. Then you may teach others.' "

ISHAN: "Every preacher thinks that he enlightens others. The glowworm also may think that it illumines the world. Imagining this to be the glow–worm's feeling, someone said to it: 'O glow–worm, how can you bring light to the world? You only reveal the intensity of the darkness.' "

MASTER (with a smile): "But Shashadhar is not just a scholar. He also has a little discrimination and dispassion."

A pundit who was present said to Sri Ramakrishna, "You are indeed a great soul."

MASTER: "You may say that about sages like Nārada, Prahlada, or Sukadeva. I am like your son.

"Of course, in one sense your words are true. It is said that in one respect the devotee of God is greater than God Himself, because he carries God in his heart. (All rejoice.) It is said in the Vaishnava books: 'A devotee regards himself as a higher, and God as a lower, being.' Yaśoda, the mother of Krishna, was about to fetter Krishna, who was God Incarnate, with chains. She believed that no one but herself could take care of Krishna.

"Sometimes God acts as the magnet and the devotee as the needle. God attracts the devotee to Himself. Again, sometimes the devotee acts as the magnet and God as the needle. Such is the attraction of the devotee that God comes to him, unable to resist his love."

The Master was about to leave for Dakshineswar. Ishan and the other devotees stood around him while he gave Ishan various words of advice.

Advice to householders

MASTER: "A devotee who can call on God while living a householder's life is a hero indeed. God thinks: 'He who has renounced the world for My sake will surely pray to Me. He must serve Me. Is there anything very remarkable about it? People will cry shame on him if he fails to do so. But he is blessed indeed who prays to Me in the midst of his worldly duties. He is trying to find Me, overcoming a great obstacle-pushing away, as it were, a huge block of stone weighing a ton. Such a man is a real hero.' "

PUNDIT: "You are right, sir. The scripture says the same thing. There is in the Mahabharata the story of the 'pious hunter' and the 'chaste woman'. Once a hermit was disturbed in his meditation by a crow. When he cast an angry glance at the bird, it was reduced to ashes. The hermit said to himself: 'I have destroyed the crow by a mere glance. I must have made great progress in spiritual life.' One day he went to a woman's house to beg his food. She was devoted to her husband and served him day and night; she provided him with water to wash his feet and even dried them with her hair. When the hermit knocked at her door for alms, she was serving her husband and could not open the door at once. The hermit, in a fit of anger, began to curse her. The chaste woman answered from the inner apartments: 'I am not your crow. Wait a few minutes, sir. After finishing my service to my husband I shall give you my attention.' The hermit was very much surprised to find that this simple woman was aware of his having burnt the crow to ashes. He wanted her to give him spiritual instruction. At her bidding he went to the 'pious hunter' at Benares. This hunter sold meat, but he also served his parents day and night as embodiments of God. The hermit said to himself in utter amazement: 'Why, he is a butcher and a worldly man! How can he give me the

Knowledge of Brahman?' But the hunter was a knower of Brahman and had acquired divine knowledge through the performance of his worldly duties. The hermit was illumined by the instruction of the 'pious hunter'."

The Master was about to take his leave. He was standing at the door of the next house, where Ishan's father-in-law lived. Ishan and the other devotees stood by the Master. They were waiting to bid him good-bye. Sri Ramakrishna said to Ishan: "Live in the world like an ant. The world contains a mixture of truth and untruth, sugar and sand. Be an ant and take the sugar.

"Again, the world is a mixture of milk and water, the bliss of God-Consciousness and the pleasure of sense-enjoyment. Be a swan and drink the milk, leaving the water aside.

"Live in the world like a waterfowl. The water clings to the bird, but the bird shakes it off. Live in the world like a mudfish. The fish lives in the mud, but its skin is always bright and shiny.

"The world is indeed a mixture of truth and make-believe. Discard the make-believe and take the truth."

Sri Ramakrishna got into the carriage and left for Dakshineswar.

Chapter 25

ADVICE TO PUNDIT SHASHADHAR

Monday, June 30, 1884

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was in his room, sitting on a mat spread on the floor. Pundit Shashadhar and a few devotees were with him on the mat, and the rest sat on the bare floor. Surendra, Baburam, M., Harish, Lātu, Hazra, and others were present. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

Sri Ramakrishna had met Pundit Shashadhar six days before in Calcutta, and now the pundit had come to Dakshineswar to visit the Master. Bhudar Chattopadhyaya and his elder brother, the pundit's hosts, were with him.

Nature of Brahman

The pundit was a follower of the path of jnāna. The Master was explaining this path to him. He said: "Nityā and Lila are the two aspects of one and the same Reality. He who is the Indivisible Satchidananda has assumed different forms for the sake of His Lila." As he described the nature of the Ultimate Reality the Master every now and then became unconscious in samādhi. While he talked he was intoxicated with spiritual fervour. He said to the pundit: "My dear sir, Brahman is immutalble and immovable, like Mount Sumeru. But He who is 'immovable' can also 'move'."

Glories of Kāli

The Master was in ecstasy. He began to sing in his melodious voice:

Who is there that can understand what Mother Kāli is?
Even the six darsanas are powerless to reveal Her. . . .

He went on:

Is Mother merely a simple woman, born as others are born?
Only by chanting Her holy name
Does Śiva survive the deadly poison.

She it is who creates the worlds, She who preserves and destroys,
With a mere wink of Her wondrous eyes;
She holds the universe in Her womb.

Seeking a shelter at Her feet, the gods themselves feel safe;
And Mahadeva, God of Gods,
Lies prostrate underneath Her feet.

Again he sang:

Is Mother only Śiva's wife? To Her must needs bow down
The all-destroying King of Death!

Naked She roams about the world, slaying Her demon foes,
Or stands erect on Śiva's breast.
Her feet upon Her Husband's form! What a strange wife She makes!
My Mother's play, declares Prasad, shatters all rules and laws:
Strive hard for purity, O mind,
And understand my Mother's ways.

And again:

I drink no ordinary wine, but Wine of Everlasting Bliss,
As I repeat my Mother Kāli's name;
It so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk! . . .

And again:

Can everyone have the vision of Syama? Is Kāli's treasure for everyone?
Oh, what a pity my foolish mind will not see what is true!
Even with all His penances, rarely does Śiva Himself behold
The mind-bewitching sight of Mother Syama's crimson feet.
To him who meditates on Her the riches of heaven are poor indeed;
If Syama casts Her glance on him, he swims in Eternal Bliss.
The prince of yogis, the king of the gods, meditate on Her feet in vain
Yet worthless kamalakanta yearns for the Mother's blessed feet!

The Master's ecstatic mood gradually relaxed. He stopped singing and sat in silence. After a while he got up and sat on the small couch.

Pundit Shashadhar was charmed with his singing. Very humbly he said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Are you going to sing anymore?"

A little later the Master sang again:

High in the heaven of the Mother's feet, my mind was soaring like a kite,
When came a blast of sin's rough wind that drove it swiftly toward the earth. . . .

Then he sang:

Once for all, this time, I have thoroughly understood;
From One who knows it well, I have learnt the secret of bhava.
A man has come to me from a country where there is no night,
And now I cannot distinguish day from night any longer;
Rituals and devotions have all grown profitless for me.
My sleep is broken; how can I slumber any more?
For now I am wide awake in the sleeplessness of yoga.
O Divine Mother, made one with Thee in yoga-sleep at last,
My slumber I have lulled asleep for evermore.

I bow my head, says Prasad, before desire and liberation;
Knowing the secret that Kāli is one with the highest Brahman,
I have discarded, once for all, both righteousness and sin.

Sri Ramakrishna continued:

I have surrendered my soul at the fearless feet of the Mother;
Am I afraid of Death any more?
Unto the tuft of hair on my head.
Is tied the almighty mantra, Mother Kāli's name.
My body I have sold in the market-place of the world
And with it have bought Sri Durga's name.

As Sri Ramakrishna sang the line, "And with it have bought Sri Durga's name", the tears flowed from Pundit Shashadhar's eyes. The Master went on with the song:

Deep within my heart I have planted the name of Kāli,
The Wish-fulfilling Tree of heaven;
When Yama, King of Death, appears,
To him I shall open my heart and show it growing there.
I have cast out from me my six unflagging foes;4
Ready am I to sail life's sea,
Crying, "To Durga, victory!"

Again he sang:

Dwell, O mind, within yourself;
Enter no other's home.
If you but seek there, you will find
All you are searching for. . . .

And again:

Though I am never loath to grant salvation,
I hesitate indeed to grant pure love.
Whoever wins pure love surpasses all;
He is adored by men;
He triumphs over the three worlds. . . .

Mere study of scriptures is futile

The pundit had studied the Vedas and the other scriptures. He loved to discuss philosophy. The Master, seated on the couch, cast his benign look on the pundit and gave him counsel through parables.

MASTER (to the pundit): "There are many scriptures like the Vedas. But one cannot realize God without austerity and spiritual discipline. 'God cannot be found in the six systems, the Vedas, or the Tantra.'

"But one should learn the contents of the scriptures and then act according to their injunctions. A man lost a letter. He couldn't remember where he had left it. He began to

search for it with a lamp. After two or three people had searched, the letter was at last found. The message in the letter was: 'Please send us five seers of sandesh and a piece of wearing-cloth.' The man read it and then threw the letter away. There was no further need of it; now all he had to do was to buy the five seers of sandesh and the piece of cloth.

Reading, hearing, and seeing

"Better than reading is hearing, and better than hearing is seeing. One understands the scriptures better by hearing them from the lips of the guru or of a holy man. Then one doesn't have to think about their non-essential part.

Hanuman said: 'Brother, I don't know much about the phase of the moon or the position of the stars. I just contemplate Rāma.'

"But seeing is far better than hearing. Then all doubts disappear. It is true that many things are recorded in the scriptures; but all these are useless without the direct realization of God, without devotion to His Lotus Feet, without purity of heart. The almanac forecasts the rainfall of the year. But not a drop of water will you get by squeezing the almanac. No, not even one drop.

"How long should one reason about the texts of the scriptures? So long as one does not have direct realization of God. How long does the bee buzz about? As long as it is not sitting on a flower. No sooner does it light on a flower and begin to sip honey than it keeps quiet.

"But you must remember another thing. One may talk even after the realization of God. But then one talks only of God and of Divine Bliss. It is like a drunkard's crying, 'Victory to the Divine Mother!' He can hardly say anything else on account of his drunkenness. You can notice, too, that a bee makes an indistinct humming sound after having sipped the honey from a flower.

The nature of jnanis and vijnanis

"The Jnāni reasons about the world through the process of 'Neti, neti', 'Not this, not this'. Reasoning in this way, he at last comes to a state of Bliss, and that is Brahman. What is the nature of a Jnāni? He behaves according to scriptural injunctions.

"Once I was taken to Chanak and saw some sādhus there. Several of them were sewing. (All laugh.) At the sight of us they threw aside their sewing. They sat straight, crossing their legs, and conversed with us. (All laugh.)

"But jnanis will not talk about spiritual things without being asked. They will inquire, at first, about such things as your health and your family.

"But the nature of the vijnāni is different. He is unconcerned about anything. Perhaps he carries his wearing-cloth loose under his arm, like a child; or perhaps the cloth has dropped from his body altogether.

"The man who knows that God exists is called a Jnāni. A Jnāni is like one who knows beyond a doubt that a log of wood contains fire. But a vijnāni is he who lights the log, cooks over the fire, and is nourished by the food. The eight fetters have fallen from the vijnāni. He may keep merely the appearance of lust, anger, and the rest."

PUNDIT: "The knots of his heart are cut asunder; all his doubts are destroyed."

MASTER: "Yes. Once a ship sailed into the ocean. Suddenly its iron joints, nails, and screws fell out. The ship was passing a magnetic hill, and so all its iron was loosened.

"I used to go to Krishnakishore's house. Once, when I was there, he said to me, 'Why do you chew betel-leaf?' I said: 'It is my sweet pleasure. I shall chew betel-leaf, look at my face in the mirror, and dance naked among a thousand girls.' Krishnakishore's wife scolded him and said: 'What have you said to Ramakrishna? You don't know how to talk to people.'

"In this state, passions like lust and anger are burnt up, though nothing happens to the physical body. It looks just like any other body; but the inside is all hollow and pure."

A DEVOTEE: "Does the body remain even after the realization of God?"

MASTER: "The body survives with some so that they may work out their prarabdha karma or work for the welfare of others. By bathing in the Ganges a man gets rid of his sin and attains liberation. But if he happens to be blind, he doesn't get rid of his blindness. Of course, he escapes future births, which would otherwise be necessary for reaping the results of his past sinful karma. His present body remains alive as long as its momentum7 is not exhausted; but future births are no longer possible. The wheel moves as long as the impulse that has set it in motion lasts. Then it comes to a stop. In the case of such a person, passions like lust and anger are burnt up. Only the body remains alive to perform a few actions."

PUNDIT: "That is called samskara."

The nature of jnanis and vijnanis

MASTER: "The vijnāni always sees God. That is why he is so indifferent about the world. He sees God even with his eyes open. Sometimes he comes down to the Lila from the Nitya, and sometimes he goes up to the Nitya from the Lila."

PUNDIT: "I don't understand that."

MASTER: "The Jnāni reasons about the world through the process of 'Neti, neti', and at last reaches the Eternal and Indivisible Satchidananda. He reasons in this manner: 'Brahman is not the living beings; It is neither the universe nor the twenty-four cosmic principles.' As a result of such reasoning he attains the Absolute. Then he realizes that it is the Absolute that has become all this-the universe, its living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles.

"Milk sets into curd, and the curd is churned into butter. After extracting the butter one realizes that butter is not essentially different from buttermilk and buttermilk not essentially different from butter. The bark of a tree goes with the pith and the pith goes with the bark."

PUNDIT (smiling, to Bhudar): "Did you understand that? It is very difficult."

All-embracing realization of the vijnāni

MASTER: "If there is butter, there must be buttermilk also. If you think of butter, you must also think of buttermilk along with it; for there cannot be any butter without buttermilk. Just so, if you accept the Nitya, you must also accept the Lila. It is the process of negation and affirmation. You realize the Nitya by negating the Lila. Then you affirm the Lila, seeing in it the manifestation of the Nitya. One attains this state after realizing Reality in both aspects: Personal and Impersonal. The Personal is the embodiment of Chit, Consciousness; and the Impersonal is the Indivisible Satchidananda.

"Brahman alone has become everything. Therefore to be vijnāni this world is a 'mansion of myrth'. But to the Jnāni it is a 'framework of illusion'. Ramprasad described the world as a 'framework of illusion'. Another man said to him by way of retort:

This very world is a mansion of myrth;
Here I can eat, here drink and make merry.
O physician, you are a fool!
You see only the surface of things.
Janaka's might was unsurpassed;
What did he lack of the world or the Spirit?
Holding to one as well as the other,
He drank his milk from a brimming cup!

"The vijnāni enjoys the bliss of God in a richer way. Some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and some have drunk it. The vijnāni has drunk milk, enjoyed it, and been nourished by it."

The Master remained silent a few moments and then asked Pundit Shashadhar to have a smoke. The Pundit went to the south east verandah to smoke. Soon he came back to the room and sat on the floor with the devotees. Seated on the small couch, the Master continued the conversation.

MASTER (to the Pundit): "Let me tell you something. There are three kinds of Ānanda, joy: the joy of worldly enjoyment, the joy of worship, and the Joy of Brahman. The joy of worldly enjoyment is the joy of 'woman and gold', which people always enjoy. The joy of worship one enjoys while chanting the name and glories of God. And the Joy of Brahman is the joy of God-vision. After experiencing the joy of God-vision the rishis of olden times went beyond all rules and conventions.

Three states of God-Consciousness

"Chaitanyadeva used to experience three spiritual states: the inmost, the semi-conscious, and the conscious. In the inmost state he would see God and go into samādhi. He would be in the state of jada samādhi. In the semi-conscious state he would be partially conscious of the outer world. In the conscious state he could sing the name and glories of God."

HAZRA (to the Pundit): "So your doubts are now solved."

Samādhi described

MASTER (to the Pundit): "What is samādhi? It is the complete merging of the mind in God-Consciousness. The Jnāni experiences jada samādhi, in which no trace of 'I' is left. The samādhi attained through the path of bhakti is called 'chetana samādhi'. In this samādhi there remains the conciousness of 'I' — the 'I' of the servant-and-Master relationship, of the lover-and-Beloved relationship, of the enjoyer-and-Food relationship. God is the Master; the devotee is the servant. God is the beloved; the devotee is the lover. God is the Food, and the devotee is the enjoyer. 'I don't want to be sugar. I want to eat it.' "

PUNDIT: "What will happen if God dissolves all of the 'I', if He changes the enjoyer himself into sugar?"

MASTER (smiling): "Come, come! Tell me what is in your mind. But don't the scriptures mention Nārada, Sanaka, Sanatana, Sananda, and Sanatkumara?"

PUNDIT: "Yes, sir. They do."

MASTER: "Though they were jnanis, yet they kept the 'I' of the bhakta. Haven't you read the Bhagavata?"

PUNDIT: "I have read only part of it, not the whole."

MASTER: "Pray to God. He is full of compassion. Will He not listen to the words of His devotee? He is the Kalpataru. You will get whatever you desire from Him."

PUNDIT: "I haven't thought deeply about these things before. But now I understand."

MASTER: "God keeps a little of 'I' in His devotee even after giving him the Knowledge of Brahman. That 'I' is the 'I of the devotee', the 'I of the Jnāni'. Through that 'I' the devotee enjoys the infinite play of God.

"The pestle was almost worn out with rubbing. Only a little was left. That fell into the underbrush and brought about the destruction of the lunar race, the race of the Yadus. The vijnāni retains the 'I of the devotee', the 'I of the Jnāni', in order to taste the Bliss of God and teach people.

"The rishis of old had timid natures. They were easily frightened. Do you know their attitude? It was this: 'Let me somehow get my own salvation; who cares for others?' A hollow piece of drift-wood somehow manages to float; but it sinks if even a bird sits on it. But Nārada and sages of his kind are like a huge log that not only can float across to the other shore but can carry many animals and other creatures as well. A steamship itself crosses the ocean and also carries people across.

The vijnāni is fearless and joyous

"Teachers like Nārada belong to the class of the vijnāni. They were much more courageous than the other rishis. They are like an expert satrancha-player. You must have noticed how he shouts, as he throws the dice: 'What do I want? Six? No, five! Here is five!' And every time he throws the dice he gets the number he wants. He is such a clever player! And while playing he even twirls his moustaches.

"A mere Jnāni trembles with fear. He is like an amateur satrancha-player. He is anxious to move his pieces somehow to the safety zone, where they won't be overtaken by his opponent. But a vijnāni isn't afraid of anything. He has realized both aspects of God: Personal and Impersonal. He has talked with God. He has enjoyed the Bliss of God.

"It is a joy to merge the mind in the Indivisible Brahman through contemplation. And it is also a joy to keep the mind on the Lila, the Relative, without dissolving it in the Absolute.

"A mere Jnāni is a monotonous person. He always analyses, saying: 'It is not this, not this. The world is like a dream.' But I have 'raised both my hands'. Therefore I accept everything.

Parable of the weaver woman

"Listen to a story. Once a woman went to see her weaver friend. The weaver, who had been spinning different kinds of silk thread, was very happy to see her friend and said to her: 'Friend, I can't tell you how happy I am to see you. Let me get you some refreshments.' She left the room. The woman looked at the threads of different colours and was tempted. She hid a bundle of thread under one arm. The weaver returned presently with the refreshments and began to feed her guest with great enthusiasm. But, looking at the thread, she realized that her friend had taken a bundle. Hitting upon a plan to get it back, she said: 'Friend, it is so long since I have seen you. This is a day of great joy for me. I feel very much like asking you to dance with me.' The friend said, 'Sister, I am feeling very happy too.' So the two friends began to dance together. When the weaver saw that her friend danced without raising her hands, she said: 'Friend, let us dance with both hands raised. This is a day of great joy.' But the guest pressed one arm to her side and danced raising only the other. The weaver said: 'How is this, friend? Why should you dance with only one hand raised? Dance with me raising both hands. Look at me. See how I dance with both hands raised.' But the guest still pressed one arm to her side. She danced with the other hand raised and said with a smile, 'This is all I know of dancing.' "

The Master continued: "I don't press my arm to my side. Both my hands are free. I am not afraid of anything. I accept both the Nitya and the Lila, both the Absolute and the Relative.

The two kinds of ego

"I said to Keshab Sen that he would not be able to realize God without renouncing the ego. He said, 'Sir, in that case I should not be able to keep my organization together.' Thereupon I said to him: 'I am asking you to give up the "unripe ego", the "wicked ego". But there is no harm in the "ripe ego", the "child ego", the "servant ego", the "ego of Knowledge".'

"The worldly man's ego, the 'ignorant ego', the 'unripe ego', is like a thick stick. It divides, as it were, the water of the Ocean of Satchidananda. But the 'servant ego', the 'child ego', the 'ego of Knowledge', is like a line on the water. One clearly sees that there is only one expanse of water. The dividing line makes it appear that the water has two parts, but one clearly sees that in reality there is only one expanse of water.

"Sankaracharya kept the 'ego of Knowledge' in order to teach people. God keeps in many people the 'ego of a Jnāni' or the 'ego of a bhakta' even after they have attained Brahmajnana. Hanuman, after realizing God in both His Personal and His Impersonal aspect, cherished toward God the attitude of a servant, a devotee. He said to Rāma: 'O Rāma, sometimes I think that You are the whole and I am a part of You. Sometimes I think that You are the Master and I am Your servant. And sometimes, Rāma, when I contemplate the Absolute, I see that I am You and You are I.'

"Yaśoda became grief-stricken at being separated from Krishna, and called on Radha. Radha saw Yaśoda's suffering and revealed herself to her as the divine Śakti, which was her real nature. She said to Yaśoda: 'Krishna is Chidatma, Absolute Consciousness, and I am ChitŚakti, the Primal Power. Ask a boon of Me: Yaśoda said: 'I don't want Brahmajnana. Please grant me only this: that I may see the form of Gopala in my meditation; that I may always have the company of Krishna's devotees; that I may always serve the devotees of God; that I may always chant God's name and glories.'

"Once the gopis felt a great desire to see the forms of the Lord. So Krishna asked them to dive into the water of the Jamuna. No sooner did they dive into the water than they all arrived at Vaikuntha. There they saw the form of the Lord endowed with His six celestial splendours. But they did not like it. They said to Krishna: 'We want to see Gopala and serve Him. Please grant us that boon alone. We don't want anything else.'

"Before His departure for Mathura, Krishna wanted to give the Knowledge of Brahman to the gopis. He said to them: 'I dwell both inside and outside all beings. Why should you see only one form of Mine?' The gopis cried in chorus: 'O Krishna, do You want to go away from us? Is that why You are instructing us in Brahmajnana?'

"Do you know the attitude of the gopis? It is this: 'We are Radha's and Radha is ours.' "

A DEVOTEE: "Does this 'I' of the devotee never disappear altogether?"

MASTER: "Yes, it disappears at times. Then one attains the Knowledge of Brahman and goes into samādhi. I too lose it, but not for all the time. In the musical scale there are seven notes: sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, and ni. But one cannot keep one's voice on 'ni' a long time. One must bring it down again to the lower notes. I pray to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, do not give me Brahmajnana.' Formerly believers in God with form used to visit me a great deal. Then the modern Brahmajnanis began to arrive. During that period I used to remain unconscious in samādhi most of the time. Whenever I regained consciousness, I would say to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, please don't give me Brahmajnana.'"

God listens to our prayer

PUNDIT: "Does God listen to our prayers?"

MASTER: "God is the Kalpataru, the Wish-fulfilling Tree. You will certainly get whatever you ask of Him. But you must pray standing near the Kalpataru. Only then will your prayer be fulfilled. But you must remember another thing. God knows our inner feeling. A man gets the fulfillment of the desire he cherishes while practising sadhana. As one thinks, so one receives. A magician was showing his tricks before a king. Now and then he exclaimed: 'Come confusion! Come delusion! O King, give me money! Give me clothes!' Suddenly his tongue turned upward and clove to the roof of his mouth. He experienced kumbhaka. He could utter neither word nor sound, and became motionless. People thought he was dead. They built a vault of bricks and buried him there in that posture. After a thousand years someone dug into the vault. Inside it people found a man seated in samādhi. They took him for a holy man and worshipped him. When they shook him his tongue was loosened and regained its normal position. The magician became conscious of the outer world and cried, as he had a thousand years before: 'Come confusion! Come delusion! O King, give me money! Give me clothes!'

"I used to weep, praying to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, destroy with Thy thunderbolt my inclination to reason.' "

PUNDIT: "Then you too had an inclination to reason?"

MASTER :"Yes, once."

PUNDIT: "Then please assure us that we shall get rid of that inclination too. How did you get rid of yours?"

MASTER: "Oh, somehow or other."

Sri Ramakrishna was silent awhile. Then he went on with his conversation.

MASTER: "God is the Kalpataru. One should pray standing near It. Then one will get whatever one desires.

"How many things God has created! Infinite is His universe. But what need have I to know about His infinite splendours? If I must know these, let me first realize Him. Then

God Himself will tell me all about them. What need have I to know how many houses and how many government securities Jadu Mallick possesses? All that I need is somehow to converse with Jadu Mallick. I may succeed in seeing him by jumping over a ditch or through a petition or after being pushed about by his gate-keeper. Once I get a chance to talk to him, then he himself will tell me all about his possessions if I ask him. If one becomes acquainted with the master, then one is respected by his officers too. (All laugh.)

"There are some who do not care to know the splendours of God. What do I care about knowing how many gallons of wine there are in the tavern? One bottle is enough for me. Why should I desire the knowledge of God's splendours? I am intoxicated with the little wine I have swallowed.

"Both bhaktiyoga and jnanayoga are paths by which you can realize God. Whatever path you may follow, you will certainly realize Him. The path of bhakti is an easy one. The path of knowledge and discrimination is very difficult. Why should one reason so much to know which path is the best? I talked about this with Vijay for many days. Once I told him about a man who used to pray, 'O God, reveal to me who and what You are.'

"The path of knowledge and discrimination is difficult indeed. Parvati, the Divine Mother, revealed Her various forms to Her father and said, 'Father, if you want Brahmajnana, then live in the company of holy men.'

"Brahman cannot be described in words. It is said in the Rāma Gitā that Brahman has only been indirectly hinted at by the scriptures. When one speaks about the 'cowherd village on the Ganges', one indirectly states that the village is situated on the bank of the Ganges.

"Why shouldn't a man be able to realize the formless Brahman? But it is extremely difficult. He cannot if he has even the slightest trace of worldliness. He can be directly aware of Brahman in his inmost consciousness only when he renounces all sense-objects—form, taste, smell, touch, and sound and only when his mind completely stops functioning. And then too, he knows only this much of Brahman—that It exists."

Quoting from an Upanishad, the pundit said, "It is to be experienced only as Existence."

MASTER: "In order to realize God a devotee should make use of a particular attitude-the attitude of a 'hero' or a friend or a handmaid or a child."

MANI MALLICK: "Only then can one feel attached to God."

MASTER: "For many days I cherished the feeling that I was a companion of the Divine Mother. I used to say: 'I am the handmaid of Brahmamayi, the Blissful Mother. O companions of the Divine Mother, make me the Mother's handmaid! I shall go about proudly, saying, "I am Brahmamayi's handmaid!"

Different classes of perfect souls

"Some souls realize God without practising any spiritual discipline. They are called nityasiddha, eternally perfect. Those who have realized God through austerity, japa, and the like, are called sadhanasiddha, perfect through spiritual discipline. Again, there are those called kripasiddha, perfect through divine grace. These last may be compared to a room kept dark a thousand years, which becomes light the moment a lamp is brought in.

"There is also a class of devotees, the hathatsiddha, that is to say, those who have suddenly attained God-vision. Their case is like that of a poor boy who has suddenly found favour with a rich man. The rich man marries his daughter to the boy and along with her gives him land, house, carriage, servants, and so forth.

"There is still another class of devotees, the svapnasiddha, who have had the vision of God in a dream."

SURENDRA (smiling): "Let us go to sleep then. We shall wake and find ourselves babus, aristocrats."

MASTER (tenderly): "You are already a babu. When the letter 'a' is joined to the letter 'ka', 'ka' becomes 'kaa'. It is futile to add another 'a'. If you add it, you will still have the same 'kaa'. (All laugh.)

Description of the nitya-siddha

"The nityasiddha is in a class apart. He is like arani wood. A little rubbing produces fire. You can get fire from it even without rubbing. The nityasiddha realizes God by practising slight spiritual discipline and sometimes without practising any at all. But he does practise spiritual discipline after realizing God. He is like the gourd or pumpkin vine—first fruit, then flower."

The pundit smiled at this illustration.

MASTER: "There is the instance of Prahlada. He was a nityasiddha. While writing the letter 'ka' he shed a stream of tears."

The Master was pleased with the pundit's humility. He praised him to the devotees.

MASTER: "He has such a nice nature. You find no difficulty in driving a nail into a mud wall. But its point breaks if you try to drive it against a stone; and still it will not pierce it. There are people whose spiritual consciousness is not at all awakened even though they hear about God a thousand times. They are like a crocodile, on whose hide you cannot make any impression with a sword "

PUNDIT: "But one can hurt a crocodile by throwing a spear into its belly." (All laugh.)

MASTER (smiling): "What good is there in reading a whole lot of scriptures? What good is there in the study of philosophy? What is the use of talking big? In order to learn

archery one should first aim at a banana tree, then at a reed, then at a wick, and last at a flying bird. At the beginning one should concentrate on God with form.

"Then there are devotees who are beyond the three gunas. They are eternally devoted to God, like Nārada. These devotees behold Krishna as Chinmaya, all Spirit, His Abode as Chinmaya, His devotee as Chinmaya. To them God is eternal, His Abode is eternal, His devotee is eternal.

"Those who reason and speculate following the process of 'Neti, neti' do not accept the Incarnation of God. Hazra says well that Divine Incarnation is only for the bhakta, and not for the Jnāni, because the Jnāni is quite contented with his ideal, 'I am He'."

Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees remained silent awhile. The pundit resumed the conversation.

PUNDIT: "Sir, how does one get rid of callousness? Laughter makes me think of muscles and nerves. Grief makes me think of the nervous system."

MASTER (smiling): "That is why Narayan Shastri used to say, The harmful effect of the study of the scriptures is that it encourages reasoning and arguing.'"

PUNDIT: "Is there no way for us then?"

MASTER: "Yes, there is the path of discrimination. In a song occurs the line: 'Ask her son Discrimination about the Truth.'

"The way lies through discrimination, renunciation, and passionate yearning for God. Unless a man practises discrimination, he cannot utter the right words. One time, after expounding religion at great length, Pundit Samadhyayi said, 'God is dry.' He reminded me of the man who once said, 'My uncle's cow-shed is full of horses.' Now, does anyone keep horses in a cowshed? (With a smile) You have become like a chānābarā fried in butter. Now it will be good for you and for others as well, if you are soaked in syrup a few days. Just a few days."

PUNDIT (smiling): "The sweetmeat is over-fried. It has become charred."

MASTER (with a laugh): "No! No! It is brown as a cockroach. Just the right colour."

HAZRA: "The sweetmeat is well cooked. It has become spongy. Now it will soak up the syrup nicely."

MASTER: "You see, there is no need to read too much of the scriptures. If you read too much you will be inclined to reason and argue. Nangta used to teach me thus: What you get by repeating the word 'Gitā' tell times is the essence of the book. In other words, if you repeat 'Gitā' ten times it is reversed into 'tagi', which indicates renunciation.

"Yes, the way to realize God is through discrimination, renunciation, and yearning for Him. What kind of yearning? One should yearn for God as the cow, with yearning heart, runs after its calf."

PUNDIT: "The same thing is said in the Vedas: 'O God, we call on Thee as the cow lows for the calf.'"

MASTER: "Add your tears to your yearning. And if you can renounce everything through discrimination and dispassion, then you will be able to see God. That yearning brings about God-intoxication, whether you follow the path of knowledge or the path of devotion. The sage Durvasa was mad with the Knowledge of God.

"There is a great deal of difference between the knowledge of a householder and that of an all-renouncing sannyasi. The householder's knowledge is like the light of a lamp, which illumines only the inside of a room. He cannot see anything, with the help of such knowledge, except his own body and his immediate family. But the knowledge of the all-renouncing monk is like the light of the sun. Through that light he can see both, inside and outside the room. Chaitanyadeva's knowledge had the brilliance of the sun-the sun of Knowledge. Further, he radiated the soothing light of the moon of Devotion. He was endowed with both-the Knowledge of Brahman and ecstatic love of God.

(To the pundit) "One can attain spiritual consciousness through both affirmation and negation. There is the positive path of love and devotion, and there is the negative path of knowledge and discrimination. You are preaching the path of knowledge. But that creates a very difficult situation: there the guru and the disciple do not see each other. Sukadeva went to Janaka for instruction about the Knowledge of Brahman. Janaka said to him: 'You must pay me the guru's fee beforehand. When you attain the knowledge of Brahman you won't pay me the fee, because the knower of Brahman sees no difference between the guru and the disciple.'

Different stages of divine love

"Both negation and affirmation are ways to realize one and the same goal. Infinite are the opinions and infinite are the ways. But you must remember one thing. The injunction is that the path of devotion described by Nārada is best suited to the Kaliyuga. According to this path, first comes bhakti; then bhava, when bhakti is mature. Higher than bhava are mahabhava and prema. An ordinary mortal does not attain mahabhava and prema. He who has achieved these has realized the goal, that is to say, has attained God."

PUNDIT: "In expounding religion one has to use a great many words."

MASTER: "While preaching, eliminate the 'head and tail', that is to say, emphasize only the essentials."

The pundit and Mani Mallick became engaged in conversation. Mani was a member of the Brahmo Samaj. The pundit argued vehemently about the good and bad sides of the Samaj. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the small couch and looked on, smiling. Presently he remarked: "This is the tamasic aspect of sattva, the attitude of a hero. This is

necessary. One should not hold one's tongue at the sight of injustice and untruth. Suppose a bad woman wants to drag you from the path of righteousness. You must then assume the heroic attitude and say: 'What? You witch! You dare injure my spiritual life? I shall cut your body in two right now.' "

With a smile Sri Ramakrishna said to the pundit: "Mani Mallick has been following the tenets of the Brahmo Samaj a long time. You can't convert him to your views. Is it an easy thing to destroy old tendencies? Once there lived a very pious Hindu who always worshipped the Divine Mother and chanted Her name. When the Mussalmans conquered the country, they forced him embrace Islam. They said to him: 'You are now a Mussalman. Say "Allah". From now on you must repeat only the name of Allah.' With great difficulty he repeated the word 'Allah', but every now and then blurted out 'Jagadamba'. At that the Mussalmans were about to beat him. Thereupon he said to them: 'I beseech you! Please do not kill me. I have been trying my utmost to repeat the name of Allah, but our Jagadamba has filled me up to the throat. She pushes out your Allah.' (All laugh.)

Different paths to suit different tastes

(To the pundit) "Please don't say anything to Mani Mallick. You must know that there are different tastes. There are also different powers of digestion. God has made different religions and creeds to suit different aspirants. By no means all are fit for the Knowledge of Brahman. Therefore the worship of God with form has been provided.

"The mother brings home a fish for her children. She curries part of the fish, part she fries, and with another part she makes pilau. By no means all can digest the pilau. So she makes fish soup for those who have weak stomachs. Further, some want pickled or fried fish. There are different temperaments. There are differences in the capacity to comprehend."

All sat in silence. Sri Ramakrishna said to the pundit, "Go and visit the temples and take a stroll in the garden." It was about half past five in the afternoon. The pundit left the room with his friends and several of the devotees.

After a while the Master went with M. toward the bathing-ghat on the Ganges. He said to M., "Baburam now says, 'What shall I gain by study?' "On the bank of the river he met the pundit and said to him, "Aren't you going to the Kāli temple?" The pundit said: "Yes, sir. Let us go together." With a smiling face Sri Ramakrishna proceeded to the temple through the courtyard. He said to the pundit, "Listen to a song."

He sang:

Is Kāli, my Mother, really black?
The Naked One, of blackest hue,
Lights the Lotus of the Heart. . . .

As he was going through the courtyard, he quoted to the pundit from a song:

Lighting the lamp of Knowledge in the chamber of your heart,
Behold the face of the Mother, Brahman's Embodiment.

They came to the temple. Sri Ramakrishna saluted the Divine Mother, touching the ground with his forehead.

Red hibiscus flowers and vilwa-leaves adorned the Mother's feet. Her three eyes radiated love for Her devotees. Two of Her hands were raised as if to give them boons and reassurance; the other two hands held symbols of death. She was clothed in a sari of Benares silk and was decked with ornaments.

Image of Kāli

Referring to the image, one of the party remarked, "I heard it was made by the sculptor Nabin." The Master answered: "Yes, I know. But to me She is the Embodiment of Spirit."

As Sri Ramakrishna was coming back to his room with the devotees, he said to Baburam, "Come with us." M. also joined them.

It was dusk. The Master was sitting on the semicircular porch west of his room. Baburam and M. sat near him. He was in a mood of partial ecstasy.

Rākhāl was not then living with Sri Ramakrishna, and therefore the Master was having difficulties about his personal service. Several devotees lived with him, but he could not bear the touch of everyone during his spiritual moods. He hinted to Baburam: "Do stay with me. It will be very nice. In this mood I cannot allow others to touch me."

The pundit entered the Master's room after visiting the temples. The Master said to him from the porch, "Take some refreshments." The pundit said that he had not yet performed his evening devotions. At once Sri Ramakrishna stood up and sang in an exalted mood:

Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,
So long as I can breathe my last with Kāli's name upon my lips?
What need of rituals has a man, what need of devotions any more,
If he repeats the Mother's name at the three holy hours? . . .

Intoxicated With ecstatic love, the Master said: "How long should one perform devotions? So long as one's mind does not merge in God while repeating Om."

PUNDIT: "Then let me eat the refreshments. I shall perform the devotions later on."

MASTER: "No, I don't want to obstruct the current of your life. It is not good to renounce anything before the proper time arrives. When the fruit ripens, the flower drops off of

itself. One shouldn't forcibly tear off the green branch of a coconut tree. That injures the tree."

Surendra was about to leave. He invited his friends into his carriage. The Master, still in an ecstatic mood, said, "Don't take more people than your horse can draw." Suredra took leave of Sri Ramakrishna. The pundit left the room to perform his worship. M. and Baburam saluted the Master. They were about to leave for Calcutta. Sri Ramakrishna was still in an ecstatic mood.

MASTER (to M.): "I cannot utter a word now. Stay a few minutes."

M. again took his seat and waited for the Master's command. Sri Ramakrishna motioned to Baburam to take a seat and asked him to fan him a little. M. also took part in rendering this personal service to the Master.

MASTER (to M., tenderly): "Why don't you come here so frequently now?"

M: "Not for any special reason. I have been rather busy at home."

MASTER: "Yesterday I came to know Baburam's inner nature. That is why I have been trying so hard to persuade him to live with me. The mother bird hatches the egg in proper time. Boys like Baburam are pure in heart. They have not yet fallen into the clutches of 'woman and gold'. Isn't that so?"

M: "It is true, sir. They are still stainless."

MASTER: "They are like a new pot. Milk kept in it will not turn sour."

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "I need Baburam here. I pass through certain spiritual states when I need someone like him. He says he must not, all at once, live with me permanently, for it will create difficulties. His relatives will make trouble. I am asking him to come here Saturdays and Sundays."

Master's advice to householders

The pundit entered the room with his friends. He had finished his devotions and was ready to eat the refreshments. One of his companions asked the Master: "Shall we succeed in spiritual life? Please tell us what our way is."

MASTER: "You all have the yearning for liberation. If an aspirant has yearning, that is enough for him to realize God. Don't eat any food of the sraaddha ceremony. Live in the world like an unchaste woman. She performs her household duties with great attention, but her mind dwells day and night on her paramour. Perform your duties in the world but keep your mind always fixed on God.

The pundit finished eating his refreshments.

MASTER (to the pundit): "You have read the Gitā, no doubt. It says that there is a special power of God in the man who is honoured and respected by all."

The pundit quoted the verse from the Gitā.

MASTER: "You surely possess divine power."

PUNDIT: "Shall I labour with perseverance to finish the task that I have accepted?"

Sri Ramakrishna forced himself, as it were, to say, "Yes." He soon changed the conversation.

MASTER: "One cannot but admit the manifestation of power. Vidyasagar once asked me, 'Has God given more power to some than to others?' I said to him: 'Certainly. Otherwise, how can one man kill a hundred? If there is no special manifestation of power, then why is Queen Victoria so much honoured and respected? Don't you admit it?' He agreed with me."

The pundit and his friends saluted the Master and were about to take their leave. Sri Ramakrishna said to the pundit: "Come again. One hemp-smoker rejoices in the company of another hemp-smoker. They even embrace each other. But they hide at the sight of people not of their own kind. A cow licks the body of her calf; but she threatens a strange cow with her horns." (All laugh.)

The pundit left the room. With a smile the Master said: "He has become 'diluted' even in one day. Did you notice how modest he was? And he accepted everything I said."

Moonlight flooded the semicircular porch. Sri Ramakrishna was still seated there. M. was about to leave.

MASTER (tenderly): "Must you go now?"

M.: "Yes, sir. Let me say good-bye."

MASTER: "I have been thinking of visiting the houses of the devotees. I want to visit yours also. What do you say?"

M.: "That will be very fine."

Thursday, July 3, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in Balarām Bose's house in Calcutta. It was the day of the "Return Car Festival". The Lord of the Universe was worshipped in Balarām's house as Jagannath. There was a small car in the house for use during the Car Festival.

Balarām's father

Balarām's father was a pious Vaishnava who devoted most of his time to prayer and meditation in his garden house at Vrindāvan. He also studied devotional books and

enjoyed the company of devotees. Balarām had brought his father to Calcutta to meet the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna was in a very happy mood. Seated near him were Ram, Balarām, Balarām's father, M., Manomohan, and several young devotees. He was conversing with them.

Dogmatism in religion

MASTER (to Balarām's father and the others): "The Bhaktamala is one of the Vaishnava books. It is a fine book. It describes the lives of the various Vaishnava devotees. But it is one-sided. At one place the author found peace of mind only after compelling Bhagavati, the Divine Mother, to take Her initiation according to the Vaishnava discipline.

"Once I spoke highly of Vaishnavcharan to Mathur and persuaded him to invite Vaishnavcharan to his house. Mathur welcomed him with great courtesy. He fed his guest from silver plates. Then do you know what happened? Vaishnav said in front of Mathur, 'You will achieve nothing whatsoever in spiritual life unless you accept Krishna as your Ideal.' Mathur was a follower of the Sakta cult and a worshipper of the Divine Mother. At once his face became crimson. I nudged Vaishnavcharan.

"I understand that the Bhagavata also contains some statements like that. I hear that it is said there that trying to cross the ocean of the world without accepting Krishna as the Ideal Deity is like trying to cross a great sea by holding the tail of a dog. Each sect magnifies its own view.

"The Saktas, too, try to belittle the Vaishnavas. The Vaishnavas say that Krishna alone is the Helmsman to take one across the ocean of the world. The Saktas retort: 'Oh, yes! We agree to that. Our Divine Mother is the Empress of the Universe. Why should She bother about a ferry-boat? Therefore She has engaged that fellow Krishna for the purpose.' (All laugh.)

"Besides, how vain people are about their own sects! There are weavers in the villages near Kamarpukur. Many of them are Vaishnavas and like to talk big. They say: 'Which Vishnu does he worship? The Preserver? Oh, we wouldn't touch him!' Or: 'Which Śiva are you talking about? We accept the Atmaramasiva.' Or again, 'Please explain to us which Hari you worship'. They spin their yarn and indulge in talk like that.

"Rati's mother, Rani Katyayani's favourite confidante, is a follower of Vaishnavcharan. She is a bigoted Vaishnava. She used to visit me very frequently, and none could outdo her in devotion. One day she noticed me eating the prasad from the Kāli temple. Since then I haven't seen even her shadow.

Master's harmony of religions

"He is indeed a real man who has harmonized everything. Most people are one-sided. But I find that all opinions point to the One. All views-the Sakta, the Vaishnava, the Vedānta-have that One for their centre. He who is formless is, again, endowed with

form. It is He who appears in different forms: The attributeless Brahman is my Father. God with attributes is my Mother. Whom shall I blame? Whom shall I praise? The two pans of the scales are equally heavy.'

"He who is described in the Vedas is also described in the Tantras and the Puranas. All of them speak about the one Satchidananda. The Nitya and the Lila are the two aspects of the one Reality. It is described in the Vedas as 'Om Satchidananda Brahman', in the Tantras as 'Om Satchidananda Śiva', the ever-pure Śiva, and in the Puranas as 'Om Satchidananda Krishna'. All the scriptures, the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras, speak only of one Satchidananda. It is stated in the Vaishnava scripture that it is Krishna Himself who has become Kāli."

Sri Ramakrishna went to the porch for a few minutes and then returned. As he was going out, Vishvamvhar's daughter, six or seven years old, saluted him. On returning to the room, the Master began talking to the little girl and her companions, who were of the same age.

THE CHILD (to the Master): "I saluted you and you didn't even notice it."

MASTER (smiling): "Did you? I really didn't notice."

CHILD: "Then wait. I want to salute you again-the other foot too."

Sri Ramakrishna laughed and sat down. He returned the salute and bowed to the child, touching the ground with his forehead. He asked her to sing. The child said, "I swear I don't sing." When the Master pressed her again, she said, "Should you press me when I said 'I swear'?" The Master was very happy with the children and sang light and frivolous songs to entertain them. He sang:

Come, let me braid your hair,
Lest your husband should scold you
When he beholds you!

The children and the devotees laughed.

Childlike nature of a Paramahamsa

MASTER (to the devotees): "The paramahamsa is like a five-year-old child. He sees everything filled with Consciousness. At one time I was staying at Kamarpukur when Shivaram was four or five years old. One day he was trying to catch grasshoppers near the pond. The leaves were moving. To stop their rustling he said to the leaves: 'Hush! Hush! I want to catch a grasshopper.' Another day it was stormy. It rained hard. Shivaram was with me inside the house. There were flashes of lightning. He wanted to open the door and go out. I scolded him and stopped him, but still he peeped out now and then. When he saw the lightning he exclaimed, 'There, uncle! They are striking matches again!'

"The paramahamsa is like a child. He cannot distinguish between a stranger and a relative. He isn't particular about worldly relationships. One day Shivaram said to me, 'Uncle, are you my father's brother or his brother-in-law?'

"The paramahamsa is like a child. He doesn't keep any track of his whereabouts. He sees everything as Brahman. He is indifferent to his own movements. Shivaram went to Hriday's house to see the Durga Puja. He slipped out of the house and wandered away. A passer-by saw the child, who was then only four years old, and asked, 'Where do you come from?' He couldn't say much. He only said the word 'hut'. He was speaking of the big hut in which the image of the Divine Mother was being worshipped. The stranger asked him further, 'Whom are you living with?' He only said the word 'brother'.

Other traits of a Paramahamsa

"Sometimes the paramahamsa behaves like a madman. When I experienced that divine madness I used to worship my own sexual organ as the Śiva-phallus. But I can't do that now. A few days after the dedication of the temple at Dakshineswar, a madman came there who was really a sage endowed with the Knowledge of Brahman. He had a bamboo twig in one hand and a potted mango-plant in the other, and was wearing torn shoes. He didn't follow any social conventions. After bathing in the Ganges he didn't perform any religious rites. He ate something that he carried in a corner of his wearing-cloth. Then he entered the Kāli temple and chanted hymns to the Deity. The temple trembled. Haladhāri was then in the shrine. The madman wasn't allowed to eat at the guest-house, but he paid no attention to this slight. He searched for food in the rubbish heap where the dogs were eating crumbs from the discarded leaf-plates. Now and then he pushed the dogs aside to get his crumbs. The dogs didn't mind either. Haladhāri followed him and asked: 'Who are you? Are you a purnajnani?' The madman whispered, 'Sh! Yes, I am a purnajnani.' My heart began to palpitate as Haladhāri told me about it. I clung to Hriday. I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, shall I too have to pass through such a state?' We all went to see the man. He spoke words of great wisdom to us but behaved like a madman before others. Haladhāri followed him a great way when he left the garden. After passing the gate he said to Haladhāri: 'What else shall I say to you? When you no longer make any distinction between the water of this pool and the water of the Ganges, then you will know that you have Perfect Knowledge.' Saying this he walked rapidly away."

Sri Ramakrishna began to talk with M. Other devotees, too, were present.

MASTER (to M.): "How do you feel about Shashadhar?"

M: "He is very nice."

MASTER: "He is very intelligent, isn't he?"

M: "Yes, sir. He is very erudite."

MASTER: "According to the Gitā there is a power of God in one who is respected and honoured by many. But Shashadhar has still a few things to do.

What will he accomplish with mere scholarship? He needs to practise some austerity. It is necessary to practise some spiritual discipline.

"Gauri Pundit practised austerity. When he chanted a hymn to the Divine Mother, the other pundits would seem no more than earthworms.

"Narayan Shastri was not merely a scholar, either. He practised sadhana as well. He studied for twenty-five years without a break. Nyaya alone, he studied for seven years. Still he would go into ecstasy while repeating the name of Śiva. The King of Jaipur wanted to make him his court pundit, but Narayan refused. He used to spend much time here. He had a great desire to go to the Vasishtha Āśrama to practise tapasya. He often spoke to me about it, but I forbade him to go there. At that he said: 'Who knows when I shall die? When shall I practise sadhana? Any day I may crack.' After much insistence on his part I let him go. Some say that he is dead, that he died while practising austerity. Others say that he is still alive and that they saw him off on a railway train.

Master and Keshab

"Before meeting Keshab, I asked Narayan Shastri to visit him and tell me what he thought of him. Narayan reported that Keshab was an adept in japa. He knew astrology and remarked that Keshab had been born under a good star. Then I went to visit Keshab in the garden house at Belgharia. Hriday was with me. The moment I saw Keshab, I said: 'Of all the people I see here, he alone has dropped his tail. He can now live on land as well as in water, like a frog.'

"Keshab sent three members of the Brahmo Samaj to the temple garden at Dakshineswar to test me. Prasanna was one of them. They were commissioned to watch me day and night, and to report to Keshab. They were in my room and intended to spend the night there. They constantly uttered the word 'Dayamaya' and said to me: 'Follow Keshab Babu. That will do you good.' I said, 'I believe in God with form.' Still they went on with their exclamations of 'Dayamaya!' Then a strange mood came over me. I said to them, 'Get out of here!' I didn't allow them to spend the night in my room. So they slept on the verandah. Captain also spent the night in the temple garden the first time he visited me.

"Michael visited the temple garden when Narayan Shastri was living with me. Dwarika Babu, Mathur's eldest son, brought him here. The owners of the temple garden were about to get into a lawsuit with the English proprietors of the neighbouring powder magazine; so they wanted Michael's advice. I met him in the big room next to the manager's office. Narayan Shastri was with me. I asked Narayan to talk to him. Michael couldn't talk very well in Sanskrit. He made mistakes. Then they talked in the popular dialect. Narayan Shastri asked him his reason for giving up the Hindu religion. Pointing to his stomach, Michael said, 'It was for this.' Narayan said, 'What shall I say to a man who gives up his religion for his belly's sake?' Thereupon Michael asked me to say something. I said: 'I don't know why, but I don't feel like saying anything. Someone seems to be pressing my tongue.' "

MANOMOHAN: "Mr. Choudhury will not come. He said: 'That fellow Shashadhar from Faridpur will be there. I shall not go.' "

Mr. Choudhury had obtained his Master's degree from Calcutta University. He drew a salary of three or four hundred rupees. After the death of his first wife he had felt intense dispassion for the world, but after some time he had married again. He frequently visited the Master at the temple garden.

MASTER: "How mean of him! He is vain of his scholarship. Besides, he has married a second time. He looks on the world as a mere mud-puddle.

(To the devotees) "This attachment to 'woman and gold' makes a man small-minded. When I first saw Haramohan he had many good traits. I longed to see him. He was then seventeen or eighteen years old. I used to send for him every now and then, but he wouldn't come. He is now living away from the family with his wife. He had been living with his uncle before. That was very good. He had no worldly troubles. Now he has a separate home and does the marketing for his wife daily. The other day he came to Dakshineswar. I said to him: 'Go away. Leave this place. I don't even feel like touching you.' "

Sri Ramakrishna went to the inner apartments to see the Deity. He offered some flowers. The ladies of Balarām's family were pleased to see him.

The Master came back to the drawing-room and said: "The worldly minded practise devotions, japa, and austerity only by fits and starts. But those who know nothing else but God repeat His name with every breath. Some always repeat mentally, 'Om Rāma'. Even the followers of the path of knowledge repeat, 'Soham', 'I am He'. There are others whose tongues are always moving, repeating the name of God. One should remember and think of God constantly."

Pundit Shashadhar entered the room with one or two friends and saluted the Master.

MASTER (smiling): "We are like the bridesmaids waiting near the bed for the arrival of the groom."

The pundit laughed. The room was filled with devotees, among them Dr.Pratap and Balarām's father. The Master continued his talk.

MASTER (to Shashadhar): "The first sign of knowledge is a peaceful nature, and the second is absence of egotism. You have both. There are other indications of a Jnāni. He shows intense dispassion in the presence of a sādhu, is a lion when at work, for instance, when he lectures, and is full of wit before his wife. (All laugh.)

"But the nature of the vijnāni is quite different, as was the case with Chaitanyadeva. He acts like a child or a madman or an inert thing or a ghoul. While in the mood of a child, he sometimes shows childlike guilelessness, sometimes the frivolity of adolescence, and sometimes, while instructing others, the strength of a young man."

Three kinds of bhakti

PUNDIT: "By what kind of bhakti does one realize God?"

MASTER: "Three kinds of bhakti are found, according to the nature of the man: sattvic bhakti, rajasic bhakti, and tamasic bhakti.

"Sattvic bhakti is known to God alone. It makes no outward display. A man with such devotion loves privacy. Perhaps he meditates inside the mosquito net, where nobody sees him. When this kind of devotion is awakened, one hasn't long to wait for the vision of God. The appearance of the dawn in the east shows that the sun will rise before long.

"A man with rajasic bhakti feels like making a display of his devotion before others. He worships the Deity with 'sixteen ingredients', enters the temple wearing a silk cloth, and puts around his neck a string of rudrāksha beads interspersed here and there with beads of gold and ruby.

"A man with tamasic bhakti shows the courage and boisterousness of a highway robber. A highway robber goes on his expedition openly, shouting, 'Kill! Plunder!' He isn't afraid even of eight police inspectors. The devotee with tamasic bhakti also shouts like a madman:'Hara! Hara! Vyom! Vyom! Victory to Kāli!' He has great strength of mind and burning faith.

"A Sakta has such faith. He says: 'What? I have uttered once the name of Kāli and of Durga! I have uttered once the name of Rāma! Can there be any sin in me?'

"The Vaishnavas have a very humble and lowly attitude. (Looking at Balarām's father) They tell their rosary and whine and whimper: 'O Krishna, be gracious to us! We are wretched! We are sinners!'

Faith in God's name

"A man should have such fiery faith as to be able to say, 'I have uttered the name of God; how can I be a sinner?' Imagine a man repeating the name of Hari day and night and at the same time saying that he is a sinner!"

So saying, Sri Ramakrishna became overwhelmed with divine ecstasy and sang:

If only I can pass away repeating Durga's name,
How canst Thou then, O Blessed One,
Withhold from me deliverance,
Wretched though I may be?
I may have stolen a drink of wine, or killed a child unborn,
Or slain a woman or a cow,
Or even caused a brahmin's death;
But, though it all be true,
Nothing of this can make me feel the least uneasiness;
For through the power of Thy sweet name

My wretched soul may still aspire
Even to Brahmanhood.

He sang again:

Behold my Mother playing with Śiva, lost in an ecstasy of joy!
Drunk with a draught of celestial wine, She reels, and yet She does not fall.
Erect She stands on Śiva's bosom, and the earth trembles under Her tread;
She and Her Lord are mad with frenzy, casting aside all fear and shame!

Pundit Shashadhar was weeping. Vaishnavcharan, the musician, sang:

O tongue, always repeat the name of Mother Durga!
Who but your Mother Durga will save you in distress?
Thou art the heavens and the earth, and Thou the nether world;
From Thee have the twelve Gopalas and Hari and Śiva sprung.
The ten Embodiments of Divine Śakti art Thou,
And Thou the ten Avatars: this time, save me Thou must!
The moving and the unmoving, the gross and the subtle, art Thou;
Creation and preservation art Thou, and the last dissolution.
Thou art the Primal Root of this manifold universe;
The Mother of the three worlds, their only Saviour, art Thou;
Thou art the Śakti of all, and Thou Thine own Śakti, too.

As the Master listened to the last few lines, he went into an ecstatic mood. The Master himself sang:

O Mother, for Yaśoda Thou wouldst dance, when she called Thee her precious "Blue Jewel";
Where hast Thou hidden that lovely form, O terrible Syama?
Dance that way once for me, O Mother! Throw down Thy sword and take the flute;
Cast off Thy garland of heads, and wear Thy wild-flower garland.
If without Śiva Thou canst not dance, then let Balarama be Thy Śiva.
Dance, O Syama, as Thou didst dance when Thou wert Krishna!
Mother, play on Thy flute again, once so full of delight for the gopis;
Play again on Thy magic flute, which called the cattle in from the pasture,
Stopping the Jamuna's murmuring flow and turning it

backward.
Hot in the sky the sun would burn, when Yaśoda, restless for her Krishna,
Fondly would call: "Here, my Gopala! Cream and butter-eat them, my Darling!"
And she would comb His long black hair and carefully braid it.
Bending Thy supple body, Mother, both at the neck, the waist, and the knee,
Thou didst dance with Thy friend Sridāmā, while Thy two anklets played the music:
Ta-thaia! Ta-thaia! Ta-ta! Thaia-thaia!
Hearing their captivating sound, the gopis would rush there.

Again Pundit Shashadhar shed tears of love.

Sri Ramakrishna came down to consciousness of the world. Pointing to Shashadhar, he said to M., "Why don't you prod him?" He wanted M. or some other devotee to ask Shashadhar a question.

RAMDAYAL (to Shashadhar): "The scriptures speak of Brahman's form as a projection of mind. Who is it that projects?"

SHASHADHAR: "It is Brahman Itself that does so. It is no projection of a man's mind."

PRATAP: "Why does Brahman project the form?"

MASTER: "You ask why? Brahman doesn't act in consultation with others. It is Brahman's pleasure. Brahman is self-willed. Why should we try to know the reason for Brahman's acting this way or that? You have come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Eat the mangoes. What is the good of calculating how many trees there are in the orchard, how many thousands of branches, and how many millions of leaves? One cannot realize Truth by futile arguments and reasoning."

PRATAP: "Shouldn't we reason any more then?"

MASTER: "I am asking you not to indulge in futile reasoning. But reason, by all means, about the Real and the unreal, about what is permanent and what is transitory. You must reason when you are overcome by lust, anger, or grief."

SHASHADHAR: "That is different. It is called reasoning based on discrimination."

MASTER: "Yes, discrimination between the Real and the unreal."

All sat in silence. Again the Master spoke, addressing the pundit.

MASTER: "Formerly many great men used to come here."

SHASHADHAR: "You mean rich people?"

MASTER: "No. Great scholars."

In the mean time the small car of Jagannath had been brought to the verandah. Inside the car were the images of Krishna, Balarama, and Subhadra. They were adorned with flowers, garlands, jewelry, and yellow apparel. Balarām was a sattvic worshipper: there was no outward grandeur in his worship. Outsiders did not even know of this Car Festival at his house. The Master and the devotees went to the verandah. Sri Ramakrishna pulled the car by the rope. Then he began to sing:

See how all Nadia is shaking
Under the waves of Gaurānga's love. . . .

He sang again:

Behold, the two brothers have come, who weep while chanting Hari's name,
The brothers who, in return for blows, offer to sinners Hari's love. . . .

Sri Ramakrishna danced with the devotees. The musician and his party joined the Master in the music and dancing. Soon the whole verandah was filled with people. The ladies witnessed this scene of joy from an adjoining room. It appeared as if Chaitanya himself were dancing with his devotees, intoxicated with divine love.

It was not yet dusk. Sri Ramakrishna returned to the drawing-room with the devotees.

MASTER (to Shashadhar): "This is called bhajanananda, the bliss of devotees in the worship of God. Worldly people keep themselves engrossed in the joy of sensuous objects, of 'woman and gold'. Through worship devotees receive the grace of God, and then His vision. Then they enjoy Brahmananda, the Bliss of Brahman."

Shashadhar and the devotees listened to these words with rapt attention.

SHASHADHAR (humbly): "Sir, please tell us what kind of yearning gives one this blissful state of mind."

MASTER: "One feels restless for God when one's soul longs for His vision. The guru said to the disciple: 'Come with me. I shall show you what kind of longing will enable you to see God.' Saying this, he took the disciple to a pond and pressed his head under the water. After a few moments he released the disciple and asked, 'How did you feel?' The disciple answered: 'Oh, I felt as if I were dying! I was longing for a breath of air.' "

SHASHADHAR: "Yes! Yes! That's it. I understand it now."

MASTER: "To love God is the essence of the whole thing. Bhakti alone is the essence. Nārada said to Rāma, 'May I always have pure love for Your Lotus Feet; and may I not

be deluded by Your world-bewitching māyā!' Rāma said to him, 'Ask for some other boon.' 'No,' said Nārada, 'I don't want anything else. May I have love for Your Lotus Feet. This is my only prayer.' "

Pundit Shashadhar was ready to leave. Sri Ramakrishna asked a devotee to bring a carriage for the pundit.

SHASHADHAR: "Don't trouble yourself. I shall walk."

MASTER (smiling): "Oh, how can that be? 'You are beyond the reach of even Brahma's meditation.' "

SHASHADHAR: "There is no particular need of my going just now. The only thing is that I shall have to perform my sandhya."

MASTER: "The Divine Mother has taken away my sandhya and other devotions. The purpose of the sandhya is to purify body and mind. I am no longer in that state."

The Master sang the following lines of a song:

When will you learn to lie, O mind, in the abode of Blessedness,
With Cleanliness and Defilement on either side of you?
Only when you have found the way
To keep these wives contentedly under a single roof,
Will you behold the matchless form of Mother Syama.

Pundit Shashadhar saluted the Master and went away.

RAM: "I visited Shashadhar yesterday. You asked me to."

MASTER: "Did I? I don't remember. But it is nice that you went."

RAM: "The editor of a newspaper was abusing you."

MASTER: "Suppose he was. What does it matter?"

RAM: "Please listen. Then I began to talk to the editor about you. He wanted to hear more and wouldn't let me go."

It was dusk. Sri Ramakrishna began to chant the names of the Divine Mother, Krishna, Rāma, and Hari. The devotees sat in silence. The Master chanted the names in such sweet tones that the hearts of the devotees were deeply touched. That day Balarām's house was like Navadvip when Chaitanya lived there. On the verandah it was like Navadvip, and in the parlour it was like Vrindāvan.

That same night Sri Ramakrishna was to go to Dakshineswar. Balarām took him into the inner apartments and served him with refreshments. The ladies of the family saluted the Master.

The devotees were singing kirtan in the drawing-room, awaiting the Master's coming. Presently Sri Ramakrishna came and joined the singers.

The kirtan went on:

Behold, my Gora is dancing! With the devotees
He dances in Srivas's courtyard, singing the kirtan.
Gora says to all, "Repeat the name of Hari!"
He looks at Gadadhar, and from his red eyes
Are flowing tears of love over his golden body.

The Master improvised the lines:

Gora is dancing in the kirtan:
There he dances, Sachi's darling!
There he dances, my Gaurānga!
There he dances, my soul's beloved!

Chapter 26

FESTIVAL AT ADHAR'S HOUSE

Sunday, August 3, 1884

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting in his room in the temple garden at Dakshineswar after his midday meal. A party of Bauls from Shibpur, several devotees from Bhawanipur, Balarām, and M. were in the room. Rākhāl, Lātu, and Harish were then living with the Master. They too were present.

The Master began the conversation by addressing the Baul musicians from Shibpur.

Yoga and the six centres

MASTER: "Yoga is not possible if the mind dwells on 'woman and gold'. The mind of a worldly man generally moves among the three lower centres: those at the navel, at the sexual organ, and at the organ of evacuation. After great effort and spiritual practice the Kundalini is awakened. According to the yogis there are three nerves in the spinal column: Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. Along the Sushumna are six lotuses, or centres, the lowest being known as the Muladhara. Then come successively Svadhisthana, Manipura, Anāhata, Visuddha, and Ājnā. These are the six centres. The Kundalini, when awakened, passes through the lower centres and comes to the Anāhata, which is at the heart. It stays there. At that time the mind of the aspirant is withdrawn from the three lower centres. He feels the awakening of Divine Consciousness and sees Light. In mute wonder he sees that radiance and cries out: 'What is this? What is this?'

"After passing through the six centres, the Kundalini reaches the thousand petalled lotus known as the Sahasrara, and the aspirant goes into *samādhi*.

"According to the Vedas these centres are called 'bhumi', 'planes'. There are seven such planes. The centre at the heart corresponds to the fourth plane of the Vedas. According to the Tantra there is in this centre a lotus called Anāhata, with twelve petals.

"The centre known as Visuddha is the fifth plane. This centre is at the throat and has a lotus with sixteen petals. When the Kundalini reaches this plane, the devotee longs to talk and hear only about God. Conversation on worldly subjects, on 'woman and gold', causes him great pain. He leaves a place where people talk of these matters.

"Then comes the sixth plane, corresponding to the centre known as Ājnā. This centre is located between the eyebrows and it has a lotus with two petals. When the Kundalini reaches it, the aspirant sees the form of God. But still there remains a slight barrier between the devotee and God. It is like a light inside a lantern. You may think you have touched the light, but in reality you cannot because of the barrier of glass.

"And last of all is the seventh plane, which, according to Tantra, is the centre of the thousand-petalled lotus. When the Kundalini arrives there, the aspirant goes into

samādhi. In that lotus dwells Satchidananda Shiva, the Absolute. There Kundalini, the awakened Power, unites with Shiva. This is known as the union of Shiva and Śakti.

The state of *samādhi*

"When the Kundalini rises to the Sahasrara and the mind goes into *samādhi*, the aspirant loses all consciousness of the outer world. He can no longer retain his physical body. If milk is poured into his mouth, it runs out again. In that state the life-breath lingers for twenty-one days and then passes out. Entering the 'black waters' of the ocean, the ship never comes back. But the Isvarakotis, such as the Incarnations of God, can come down from this state of *samādhi*. They can descend from this exalted state because they like to live in the company of devotees and enjoy the love of God. God retains in them the 'ego of Knowledge' or the 'ego of Devotion' so that they may teach men. Their minds move between the sixth and the seventh planes. They run a boat-race back and forth, as it were, between these two planes.

Keeping individuality after *samādhi*

"After attaining *samādhi* some souls of their own accord keep the 'ego of Knowledge'. But that ego does not create any attachment. It is like a line drawn on the water.

"Hanuman kept the 'servant ego' after realizing God in both His Personal and His Impersonal aspects. He thought of himself as the servant of God. The great sages, such as Nārada, Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatana, and Sanatkumāra, after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, kept the 'servant ego' and the 'ego of Devotion'. They are like big steamships, which not only cross the ocean themselves but carry many passengers to the other shore.

Two classes of Paramahamsas

"There are two classes of paramahamsas, one affirming the formless Reality and the other affirming God with form. Trailanga Swami believed in the formless Reality. Paramahamsas like him care for their own good alone; they feel satisfied if they themselves attain the goal.

Paramahamsas as teachers of men

"But those paramahamsas who believe in God with form keep the love of God even after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, so that they may teach spiritual truth to others. They are like a pitcher brimful of water. Part of the water may be poured into another pitcher. These perfected souls describe to others the various spiritual disciplines by which they have realized God. They do this only to teach others and to help them in spiritual life. With great effort men dig a well for drinking water, using spades and baskets for the purpose. After the digging is over, some throw the spades and other implements into the well, not needing them any more. But some put them away near the well, so that others may use them.

"Some eat mangoes secretly and remove all trace of them by wiping their mouths with a towel. But some share the fruit with others. There are sages who, even after attaining

Knowledge, work to help others and also to enjoy the Bliss of God in the company of devotees. 'I want to eat sugar. I don't want to be sugar.'

"The Gopis of Vrindāvan, too, attained the Knowledge of Brahman; but they were not seeking It. They wanted to enjoy God, looking on themselves as His mother, His friend, His handmaid, or His lover."

The Bauls from Shibpur began to sing to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. A line in the first song was:

We are sinners: redeem us, O merciful Lord!

MASTER (to the devotees): "It is the attitude of a beginner to worship God out of fear. Please sing about God-realization-songs expressing divine joy.

(To Rākhāl) "How well they sang that song the other day at Nabin Niyogi's house: 'Be drunk, O mind, be drunk with the Wine of Heavenly Bliss'! While singing religious songs one should not constantly refer to one's worries. One should rather feel joyous and ecstatic as one chants God's name.

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, won't you sing?"

MASTER: "What shall I sing? Well, I may sing when the spirit moves me."

Master sings of divine joy

After a few minutes the Master began to sing. His eyes were turned upward.

He sang:

Behold the waves of Gora's ecstatic love;
Under them all the universe lies submerged!
And in his love I, too, long to be drowned.
O friend, Gaurānga's love has swallowed me;
Who else feels for our misery like Gaurānga,
Dragging us from the mire of worldliness?

He sang again:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God's Beauty;
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love. . . .

Then he sang about the Divine Mother:

Can everyone have the vision of Syama?
Is Kāli's treasure for everyone?
Oh, what a pity my foolish mind will not see what is true! . . .

He continued:

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight
To the blue lotus flower of Mother Syama's feet. . . .

And again:

O Mother, what a machine is this that Thou hast made!
What pranks Thou playest with this toy
Three and a half cubits high! . . .

As Sri Ramakrishna sang the last song he went into *samādhi*. The devotees sat speechless, gazing at his radiant figure. After some time he regained partial consciousness of the world and began to talk to the Divine Mother.

The Master said, "Mother, please come down from up there." Did he feel his mind still lingering in the seventh plane of consciousness, the thousand petalled lotus of the Sahasrara? "Please do come down", he said. "Don't torment me that way. Be still, Mother, and sit down.

"O Mother, everybody's future is determined by the tendencies of his previous births. What shall I say to these people? Nothing can be achieved without discrimination and renunciation."

Renunciation, true and false

Sri Ramakrishna had now regained full consciousness of the world, and he continued: "There are many kinds of renunciation. One of them may be called 'Markata Vairāgya', 'Monkey Renunciation'. It is a false renunciation stimulated by the afflictions of the world. That renunciation doesn't last long. Then there is real renunciation. A man with everything in the world, lacking nothing, feels all to be unreal.

"It is not possible to acquire renunciation all at once. The time factor must be taken into account. But it is also true that a man should hear about it. When the right time comes, he will say to himself, 'Oh yes, I heard about this.'

"You must also remember another thing. By constantly hearing about renunciation one's desire for worldly objects gradually wears away. One should take rice-water in small doses to get rid of the intoxication of liquor. Then one gradually becomes normal.

"An aspirant entitled to the Knowledge of God is very rare. It is said in the Gitā that one in thousands desires to know God, and again, that among thousands who have such a desire, only one is able to know Him."

A devotee quoted the text from the Gitā.

MASTER: "As your attachment to the world diminishes, your spiritual knowledge will increase. Attachment to the world means attachment to 'woman and gold'.

Prema, the rarest love of God

"It is not given to everybody to feel prema, ecstatic love of God. Chaitanya experienced it. An ordinary man can at the most experience bhava. Only the Isvarakotis, such as

Divine Incarnations, experience prema. When prema is awakened the devotee not only feels the world to be unreal, but forgets even the body, which everyone loves so intensely.

"In a Persian book it is said that inside the skin is the flesh, inside the flesh the bone, inside the bone the marrow, and so on, but that prema is the innermost of all. One becomes soft and tender through prema. On account of this prema, Krishna became tribhanga.

"Prema is the rope by which you can tether God, as it were. Whenever you want to see Him you have merely to pull the rope. Whenever you call Him, He will appear before you.

"The mature stage of bhakti is bhava. When one attains it one remains speechless, thinking of Satchidananda. The feeling of an ordinary man can go only that far. When bhava ripens it becomes mahabhava. Prema is the last. You know the difference between a green mango and a ripe one. Unalloyed love of God is the essential thing. All else is unreal.

"Once Rāma was pleased with the prayer of Nārada and told him to ask for a boon. Nārada prayed for pure love and said further, 'O Rāma, please grant that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching māyā.' Rāma said: 'That is all right. But ask for something else.' Nārada replied: 'I don't want anything else. I pray only for pure love.'

How to attain pure love of God

"How can a devotee attain such love? First, the company of holy men. That awakens śraddhā, faith in God. Then comes nishtha, single-minded devotion to the Ideal. In that stage the devotee does not like to hear anything but talk about God. He performs only those acts that please God. After nishtha comes bhakti, devotion to God; then comes bhava. Next mahabhava, then prema, and last of all the attainment of God Himself. Only for Isvarakotis, such as the Incarnations, is it possible to have mahabhava or prema.

How to attain pure love of God

"The knowledge of a worldly person, the knowledge of a devotee, and the Knowledge of an Incarnation are by no means of the same degree. The knowledge of a worldly person is like the light of an oil lamp, which shows only the inside of a room. Through such knowledge he eats and drinks, attends to household duties, protects his body, brings up his children, and so on.

"The knowledge of a devotee is like the light of the moon, which illumines objects both inside and outside a room. But such light does not enable him to see a distant or a very minute object.

"The Knowledge of an Incarnation of God is like the light of the sun. Through that light the Incarnation sees everything, inside and outside, big and small.

"The mind of a worldly person is, no doubt, like muddy water; but it can be made clear by a purifying agent. Discrimination and renunciation are the purifying agent."

The Master spoke to the devotees from Shibpur.

MASTER: "Have you any questions to ask?"

A DEVOTEE: "We have listened to your words."

The time factor in spiritual progress

MASTER: "Yes, it is good to listen to these things. But nothing will happen except at the right time. What can quinine do for a fever patient when he runs a high temperature? Only when his temperature comes down through the use of 'fever mixture' or a purgative should quinine be prescribed. There are patients who get rid of their fever even without quinine. A child said to his mother, when he was put to bed, 'Mother, please wake me up when I feel the call of nature.' The mother said: 'My child, I shall not have to wake you. The urge itself will wake you.'

"Different kinds of people come here. 'Some come by boat with the devotees. But they do not enjoy spiritual talk. They keep nudging their friends and whispering: 'When shall we leave here? When are we going?' If the friends show no sign of getting up, they say, 'We would rather wait for you in the boat.'

"Those who have a human body for the first time need the experience of sense enjoyments. Spiritual consciousness is not awakened unless certain duties have been performed."

The Master was going to the pine-grove. With a smile he said to M., on the semicircular porch, "Well, what do you think of my state of mind?"

M. (smiling): "On the surface you are very simple, but inwardly very deep. It is extremely difficult to understand you."

MASTER (smiling): "True. It is like the cement floor of a house. People see only the outer surface and do not know how many materials there are under it."

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. Balarām and several other devotees got into a country boat to return to Calcutta. It was ebb-tide in the Ganges. A gentle breeze was blowing from the south, covering the bosom of the sacred river with ripples. M. looked at the scene a long time. As the boat disappeared in the direction of Calcutta, he came back to the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna was going to the pine-grove. A beautiful, dark rain-cloud was to be seen in the northwest. The Master asked M.: "Do you think it will rain? Please bring my umbrella." M. brought the umbrella. Reaching the Panchavati, the Master said to Lātu, who also accompanied him, "Why do you look so sickly?"

LĀTU: "I can hardly eat anything."

MASTER: "Is that the only reason? It is also a bad time of the year. Are you meditating too much? (To M.) I have a request to make of you. Please tell Baburam to stay with me a day or two during Rākhāl 's absence. Otherwise I shall feel very unhappy."

M: "Yes, sir. I shall tell him."

Sri Ramakrishna asked M. whether he thought that Baburam was guileless.

Presently the Master left them, going in the direction of the pine-trees. After a few minutes M. and Lātu, standing in the Panchavati, saw the Master coming back toward them. Behind him the sky was black with the rain-cloud. Its reflection in the Ganges made the water darker. The disciples felt that the Master was God Incarnate, a Divine Child five years old, radiant with the smile of innocence and purity. Around him were the sacred trees of the Panchavati under which he had practised spiritual discipline and had beheld visions of God. At his feet flowed the sacred river Ganges, the destroyer of man's sins. The presence of this God-man charged the trees, shrubs, flowers, plants, and temples with spiritual fervour and divine joy.

Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room and sat on the small couch. He began to praise a medicine that a certain brahmachari had prepared for him. Referring to this man, Hazra said: "He is now entangled in many worldly anxieties. What a shame! Look at Nabai Chaitanya of Konnagar. Though a householder, he has put on a red cloth."

MASTER: "What shall I say? I clearly see that it is God Himself who has assumed all these human forms. Therefore I cannot take anybody to task."

HAZRA: "Narendra is again involved in a lawsuit."

MASTER: "He doesn't believe in Śakti, the Divine Mother. If one assumes a human body, one must recognize Her."

HAZRA: "Narendra says: 'If I believed in Śakti, all would follow me. Therefore I cannot.'"

MASTER: "But it is not good for him to go to the extreme of denying the Divine Mother. He is now under Śakti's jurisdiction. Even a judge, while giving evidence in a case, comes down and stands in the witness-box.

(To M.) "Have you seen Narendra lately?"

M: "Not during the last few days."

MASTER: "See him and bring him here in a carriage.

(To Hazra) "Well, what is his relation to this [meaning himself]?"

HAZRA: "He expects help from you."

MASTER: "And what about Bhavanath? Would he come here so frequently if he didn't have good tendencies? What about Harish and Lātu? They always meditate. Why is that?"

HAZRA: "That's right. Why should they devote all their time to meditation? It is quite a different thing for them to stay here to attend to your personal needs."

MASTER: "Possibly you are right. Perhaps others may take their place now."

Hazra left the room, leaving the Master alone with M.

MASTER: "Does what I say in the state of ecstasy attract people?"

M: "Oh, yes. Very much."

MASTER: "What do people think of me? Do they think anything in particular about me when they see me in that condition?"

M: "We feel in you a wonderful synthesis of knowledge, love, and renunciation, and on the surface a natural spontaneity. Many divine experiences have passed, like huge steamboats, through the deep of your inner consciousness; still you maintain outwardly this utter simplicity. Many cannot understand it, but a few are attracted by this state alone."

MASTER: "There is a sect of Vaishriavas known as the Ghoshpara, who describe God as the 'Sahaja', the 'Simple One'. They say further that a man cannot recognize this 'Simple One' unless he too is simple. (To M.) Have I any ego?"

M: "Yes, sir. A little. You have kept it to preserve your body, and to enjoy divine love in the company of the devotees and impart spiritual knowledge to them. Further, you have kept this trace of ego by praying to the Divine Mother for it."

MASTER: "No. I have not kept it. It is God Himself who has left it in me. Can you tell me how I appear in the state of *samādhi*?"

M: "As you said a little while ago, you see the form of God when your mind rises to the 'sixth plane'. When you speak after that, your mind comes down to the 'fifth plane'."

MASTER: "It is God who does all these things. I do not know anything."

M: "That is why you attract people so much. Sir, I have a question to ask. There are two opinions in the scriptures. According to one, Purana, Krishna is Chidatma, the Absolute, and *Radha* is ChitŚakti, Its Divine Power; but according to another, Krishna Himself is Kāli; the Primordial Energy."

MASTER: "This second view is held in the Devi Purana. According to it, Kāli Herself has become Krishna; But what difference does it make? God is infinite, and infinite are the ways to reach Him."

M. remained speechless with wonder for a few moments and then said: "Oh, now I understand. As you say, the important thing is to climb to the roof. Our goal will be achieved if we can accomplish it by following any of the means-a rope or a pole."

MASTER: "It is through the grace of God that you have understood that. Without His grace doubt is never cleared up.

Master teaches M

*"T*he important thing is somehow to cultivate devotion to God and love for Him. What is the use of knowing many things? It is enough to cultivate love of God by following any of the paths. When you have this love, you are sure to attain God. Afterwards, if it is necessary, God will explain everything to you and tell you about the other paths as well. It is enough for you to develop love of God. You have no need of many opinions and discussions. You have come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Enjoy them to your heart's content. You don't need to count the branches and leaves on the trees. It is wise to follow the attitude of Hanuman: 'I do not know the day of the week, the phase of the moon, or the position of the stars; I only contemplate Rāma.' "

M: "I now desire that my activities may be much reduced and that I may devote myself greatly to God."

MASTER: "Ah! Certainly your desire will be fulfilled. But a Jnāni can live unattached in the world."

M: "True, sir. But one needs special power to lead an unattached life."

MASTER: "That is also true. But perhaps you wanted the worldly life. Krishna had been enshrined in Radha's heart; but *Radha* wanted to sport with Him in human form. Hence all the episodes of Vrindāvan. Now you should pray to God that your worldly duties may be reduced. And you will achieve the goal if you renounce mentally."

M: "But mental renunciation is prescribed for those who cannot give up the world outwardly. For superior devotees total renunciation is enjoined-both outer and inner."

Sri Ramakrishna was silent a few minutes and then resumed the conversation.

MASTER: "How did you like what I said about renunciation a little while ago?"

M: "Very much, sir."

MASTER: "Tell me, what is the meaning of renunciation?"

M: "Renunciation does not mean simply dispassion for the world. It means dispassion for the world and also longing for God."

MASTER: "You are right. You no doubt need money for your worldly life; but don't worry too much about it. The wise course is to accept what comes of its own accord. Don't take too much trouble to save money. Those who surrender their hearts and souls to God, those who are devoted to Him and have taken refuge in Him, do not worry much about money. As they earn, so they spend. The money comes in one way and goes out the other. This is what the Gitā describes as 'accepting what comes of its own accord'."

The Master referred to Haripada and said, "He came here the other day."

M: "He knows how to sing the stories of the Purana. He sings melodiously about the life of Prahlada and the nativity of Sri Krishna."

MASTER: "Is that so? That day I looked into his eyes. They had an inward look. I asked him whether he meditated a great deal, but he sat with his eyes cast down and didn't answer. Then I said to him, 'Look here, don't strain yourself too much.' "

It was now dusk. Sri Ramakrishna, as was usual with him during this part of the day, chanted the names of God and turned his mind to contemplation. Soon the moon rose in the sky. The temples, courtyards, and trees were bathed in its silvery light, and millions of broken moons played on the rippling surface of the Ganges. Rākhāl and M. were with the Master in his room.

MASTER (to M.): "Baburam says, 'Oh, the worldly life! God forbid!' "

M: "His opinion is based on mere hearsay. What does he know of the world? He is a mere child."

MASTER: "Yes, that is true. Have you noticed Niranjan? He is utterly artless."

M: "Yes, sir. His very appearance attracts people. How expressive his eyes are!"

MASTER: "Not only his eyes, but his entire person. His relatives proposed that he marry. At this he said, 'Why are you going to drown me?' (With a smile) Tell me this. People say that a man finds great pleasure in the company of his wife after the hard work of the day."

M: "That is no doubt true of those who think that way. (To Rākhāl, with a smile) We are now being examined. This is a leading question."

Both Rākhāl and M. were married.

MASTER (with a smile): "A mother says, 'I shall heave a sigh of relief if I can procure a "shade-tree" for my son. He will rest in its shade when scorched by the heat of the world.' "

M: "True, sir. But there are parents and parents. A father who is spiritually illumined doesn't give his children in marriage. If he does, his is a fine spirituality!"

Adhar Sen arrived from Calcutta and saluted the Master. After a few minutes, he went to the temple of Kāli, where M. followed him.

A little later M. was sitting at the *Bathing-Ghat* on the Ganges. The flood tide had just set in. As he listened to the waters lapping against the bank, many pictures of Sri Ramakrishna's divine life flitted before his mind: the Master's deep *samādhi*, his constant ecstasy, his joy in the love of God, his untiring discourse on spiritual life, his genuine love for the devotees, and, above all, his childlike simplicity. Who was this man? Was it God who had embodied Himself on earth for the sake of His devotees?

Adhar and M. returned to the Master's room. Adhar had been to Chittagong, in East Bengal, on official duty. He was telling the Master about his visit to the Chandranath Hills and Sitakunda, sacred places of Chittagong.

ADHAR: "Near Sitakunda I visited a well where I saw fire in the water. It is always burning on the water with leaping tongues."

MASTER: "How is that possible?"

ADHAR: "The water contains phosphorus."

Presently Ram Chatterji entered the room. The Master said some kind words about him to Adhar.

MASTER: "Ram's presence in the temple garden has relieved us of many anxieties. He searches out Harish, Lātu, and the others at meal-time. Very often they are absorbed in meditation in some corner of the temple garden. It is Ram who sees that they eat at the proper time."

Saturday, September 6, 1884
Master at Adhar's house

About three o'clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was seated in Adhar's parlour on the second floor. Narendra, the Mukherji brothers, Bhavanath, M., Hazra, and other devotees were with the Master.

Arrangements were being made for Narendra to sing: While he was tuning the Tānpura, one of the strings snapped, and the Master exclaimed, "Oh! What have you done?" Narendra then tuned the drums. The Master said to him, "You are beating that drum, and I feel as if someone were slapping my cheek."

Referring to the *Kirtan*, Narendra said: 'There is not much rhythm in the *Kirtan*. That's why it is so popular and people love it so much."

MASTER: "How silly! People like it because it is so tender and full of pathos."

Narendra's music

Narendra sang:

Sweet is Thy name, a Refuge of the humble!
It falls like sweetest nectar on our ears
And comforts us, Beloved of our souls! . . .

He sang again:

O Lord, must all my days pass by so utterly in vain?
Down the path of hope I gaze with longing, day and night.
Thou art the Lord of all the worlds, and I but a beggar here;
How can I ask of Thee to come and dwell within my heart?
My poor heart's humble cottage door is standing open wide;
Be gracious, Lord, and enter there but once, and quench its thirst!

MASTER (to Hazra, smiling): "That was the first song he sang for me."

Narendra sang one or two more songs. Then Vaishnavcharan sang, describing the grief of the gopis at the sight of Krishna as king of Mathura:

O Hari, how shall we know You now?
In Mathura's royal splendour You have forgotten us. . . .

MASTER: "Won't you sing that one-*'O Vina, sing Lord Hari's name?"*

Vaishnavcharan sang:

O Vina, sing Lord Hari's name!
Without the blessing of His feet
You cannot know the final Truth.
The name of Hari slays all grief:
Sing Hari's name! Sing Krishna's name!
If only Hari shows His grace,
Then I shall never be distressed.
O Vina, sing His name but once;
No earthly gem is half so rare.
Govinda says: In vain my days
Have passed. No longer may I float
Here in life's trackless ocean waste!

While listening to the song, the Master became abstracted. Saying "Ah me! Ah me!" he went into *samādhi*. The devotees were sitting around him, their eyes riveted on him. The room was filled with people.

Master in ecstasy

The musician sang again. As he improvised new lines describing ecstatic love of God, the Master stood up and danced. He himself improvised lines and sang them with outstretched arms. Soon he went into *samādhi* and sat down, with his head resting on the bolster in front of him. The musician was also carried away with emotion and sang

new songs. Sri Ramakrishna again stood up and began to dance. The devotees could not control themselves. They too danced with the Master. While dancing, Sri Ramakrishna every now and then went into deep *samādhi*. When he was in the deepest *samādhi* he could not utter a word and his whole body remained transfixed. The devotees danced encircling him. After a while, regaining partial consciousness, he danced with the strength of a lion, intoxicated with ecstatic love. But even then he could not utter a word. Finally, regaining more of the consciousness of the world, he sang again, improvising the lines. An intense spiritual atmosphere was created in Adhar's parlour. At the sound of the loud music a large crowd had gathered in the street.

Sri Ramakrishna danced a long time in the company of the devotees. When he resumed his seat, still tinged with the lingering glow of divine fervour, he asked Narendra to sing "O Mother, make me mad with Thy love".

Narendra sang:

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
What need have I of knowledge or reason? . . .

MASTER: "And that one— *'Upon the Sea of Blissful Awareness'."*

Narendra sang:

Upon the Sea of Blissful Awareness waves of ecstatic love arise:
Rapture divine! Play of God's Bliss!
Oh, how enthralling! . . .

MASTER: "And that one too—*'In Wisdom's firmament'.* Perhaps it is too long. Do you think so? All right, sing it slowly."

Narendra sang:

In Wisdom's firmament the moon of Love is rising full,
And Love's flood-tide, in surging waves, is flowing everywhere.
O Lord, how full of bliss Thou art! Victory unto Thee! . . .

MASTER: "And won't you sing that one—□*The Wine of Heavenly Bliss'*?"

Narendra sang:

Be drunk, O mind, be drunk with the Wine of Heavenly Bliss!
Roll on the ground and weep, chanting Hari's sweet name!
Fill the arching heavens with your deep lion roar,
Singing Hari's sweet name! With both your arms upraised,
Dance in the name of Hari and give His name to all.
Swim by day and by night in the b1iss of Hari's love;
Slay desire with His name, and blessed be your life!

The Master improvised, *"Be drunk with prema and weep, chanting Hari's sweet name."* And, *"Be mad with divine fervour and weep, chanting His name."*

Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees rested awhile. Narendra said to the Master in a low voice, "Will you kindly sing that one?"

MASTER: "My voice has become a little hoarse."

After a few minutes he asked Narendra, "Which one?"

NARENDRA: *"Gaur, whose beauty delights the world."*

Sri Ramakrishna sang, describing the beauty of Sri Chaitanya:

Who has brought Gaur to Nadia
Gaur, whose beauty delights the world?
His face, covered with ringlets of hair,
Shines like lightning against a dark cloud. . . .

Again he sang, this time about the grief of a Gopi at her separation from Sri Krishna:

I have not found my Krishna, O friend! How cheerless my home without Him!
Ah, if Krishna could only be the hair upon my head,
Carefully I should braid it then, and deck it with bakul-flowers;
Carefully I should fashion the braids out of my Krishna-hair.
Krishna is black, and black is my hair; black would be one with black.
Ah, if Krishna could only be the ring I wear in my nose,
Always from my nose He would hang, and my two lips could touch Him.
But it can never be, alas! Why should I idly dream?
Why should Krishna care at all to be the ring in my nose?
Ah, if Krishna could only be the bracelets on my arms,
Always He would cling to my wrists, and proudly I should walk,
Shaking my bracelets to make them sound, shaking my arms to show them;
Down the king's highway I should walk, wearing my Krishna bracelets.

The music was over. The Master began to talk with the devotees.

MASTER (smiling): "Hazra danced."

NARENDRA: "Yes, a little."

MASTER: "A little?"

NARENDRA: "Yes. His belly danced too." (All laugh.)

Pundit Shashadhar's host had been thinking of inviting the Master for dinner.

MASTER: "I have heard that his host is not an honest man. He is immoral."

NARENDRA: "That is why you didn't drink the water he touched. It happened the first day you met Shashadhar at his house. How did you come to know he was immoral?"

MASTER (smiling): "Hazra knows of another instance. It happened at Sihore in Hriday's house."

HAZRA: "The man was a Vaishnava. He came with me to see you [meaning Sri Ramakrishna]. As soon as he sat in front of you, you turned your back on him."

MASTER: "We learnt later that he led an immoral life. (To Narendra) You used to say, at first, that these were all hallucinations."

NARENDRA: "How was I to know? Now I see that you are always right."

Adhar had prepared a feast for the Master and the devotees, and now he invited them to the meal. The Master said to the Mukherji brothers: "What? Won't you eat?" They said humbly, "Please excuse us."

MASTER: "But why? You are doing everything else. Why this hesitation only about eating the meal?"

Adhar was a low-caste Hindu. Therefore some of the Master's brahmin devotees hesitated to eat at his house. They came to their senses at last when they saw Sri Ramakrishna himself eating.

It was about nine o'clock. The Master was resting in the drawing-room with the devotees. He would soon leave for Dakshineswar.

The Mukherji brothers had arranged with a singer of *Kirtan* to entertain the Master the following day. Ram was taking singing lessons from this musician. Sri Ramakrishna asked Narendra to come to Dakshineswar to hear the *Kirtan*.

MASTER (to Narendra): "Come tomorrow, won't you?"

NARENDRA: "I shall try, sir."

MASTER: "You can bathe there and also take your meal. (Pointing to M.) He may dine there too. (To M.) Are you quite well now? I hope you are not on a diet."

M: "No, sir. I shall come."

Nityagopal was living at Vrindāvan. Chunilal had returned from Vrindāvan only a few days before, and the Master inquired about Nityagopal.

As Sri Ramakrishna was about to leave, M. saluted him, touching the Master's feet with his forehead. The Master said to him tenderly: "Then I shall see you tomorrow. Narendra! Bhavanath! Please come tomorrow." Then with several devotees he set out for Dakshineswar.

The other devotees returned home in the moonlit night, cherishing in their hearts the Master's ecstatic music and dancing.

Chapter 27

AT DAKSHINESWAR

Sunday, September 7, 1884

IT WAS ABOUT ELEVEN O'CLOCK. The Master was sitting in his room at Dakshineswar. He had not yet taken his midday meal.

Arrangements had been made with the musician Shyamdas to entertain the Master and the devotees with his kirtan. Baburam, M., Manomohan, Bhavanath, Kishori, Chunilal, Haripada, the Mukherji brothers, Ram, Surendra, Tārak, Niranjan, and others arrived at the temple garden. Lātu, Harish, and Hazra were staying with the Master.

When M. saluted Sri Ramakrishna, the Master asked: "Where is Narendra? Isn't he coming?" M. told him that Narendra could not come.

A brahmin devotee was reading to the Master from a book of devotional songs by Ramprasad. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to continue. The brahmin read a song, the first line of which was: "O Mother, put on Thy clothes."

MASTER: "Stop, please! These ideas are outlandish and bizarre. Read something that will awaken bhakti."

The brahmin read:

Who is there that can understand what Mother Kāli is?
Even the six darsanas are powerless to reveal Her. . . .

MASTER (to M.): "I got a pain because I lay too long on one side while in samādhi yesterday at Adhar's house; so now I'll take Baburam with me when I visit the houses of the devotees. He is a sympathetic soul"

With these words the Master sang:

How shall I open my heart,O friend?
It is forbidden me to speak.
I am about to die, for lack of a kindred soul
To understand my misery.
Simply by looking in his eyes,
I find the beloved of my heart;
But rare is such a soul, who swims in ecstatic bliss
On the high tide of heavenly love.

MASTER: "The Bauls sing songs like that. They also sing another kind of song:

Stay your steps, O wandering monk!
Stand there with begging-bowl in hand,
And let me behold your radiant face.

Signs of a perfect soul

"According to the Śakti cult the siddha is called a koul, and according to the Vedānta, a paramahamsa. The Bauls call him a sai. They say, 'No one is greater than a sai.' The sai is a man of supreme perfection. He doesn't see any differentiation in the world. He wears a necklace, one half made of cow bones and the other of the sacred tulsi-plant. He calls the Ultimate Truth 'Ālekh', the 'Incomprehensible One'. The Vedas call It 'Brahman'. About the jivas the Bauls say, 'They come from Ālekh and they go unto Ālekh.'

That is to say, the individual soul has come from the Unmanifest and goes back to the Unmanifest. The Bauls will ask you, 'Do you know about the wind?' The 'wind' means the great currrent that one feels in the subtle nerves, Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna, when the Kundalini is awakened. They will ask you further, 'In which station are you dwelling?' According to them there are six 'stations', corresponding to the six psychic centres of Yoga. If they say that a man dwells in the 'fifth station', it means that his mind has climbed to the fifth centre, known as the Viśuddha chakra. (To M.) At that time he sees the Formless."

Saying this the Master sang:

Within the petals of this flower there lies concealed a subtle space,
Transcending which, one sees at length the universe in Space dissolve.

Description of the Bauls

"Once a Baul came here. I asked him, 'Have you finished the task of "refining the syrup"? Have you taken the pot off the stove?' The more you boil the juice of sugar-cane, the more it is refined. In the first stage of boiling it is simply the juice of the sugar-cane. Next it is molasses, then sugar, then sugar candy, and so on. As it goes on boiling, the substances you get are more and more refined.

"When does a man take the pot off the stove? That is, when does a man come to the end of his sadhana? He comes to the end when he has acquired complete mastery over his sense-organs. His sense-organs become loosened and powerless, as the leech is loosened from the body when you put lime on its mouth. In that state a man may live with a woman, but he does not feel any lust for her.

"Many of the Bauls follow a 'dirty' method of spiritual discipline. It is like entering a house through the back door by which the scavengers come.

"One day I was taking my meal when a Bāul devotee arrived. He asked me, 'Are you yourself eating, or are you feeding someone else?' The meaning of his words was that

the siddha sees God dwelling within a man. The siddhas among the Bauls will not talk to persons of another sect; they call them 'strangers'.

"The Bauls designate the state of perfection as the 'sahaja', the 'natural' state. There are two signs of this state. First, a perfect man will not 'smell of Krishna'. Second, he is like the bee that lights on the lotus but does not sip the honey. The first means, that he keeps all his spiritual feelings within himself. He doesn't show outwardly any sign of spirituality. He doesn't even utter the name of Hari. The second means that he is not attached to woman. He has completely mastered his senses.

"The Bauls do not like the worship of an image. They want a living man. That is why one of their sects is called the Kartabhaja. They worship the karta, that is to say, the guru, as God.

Different paths leading to God

"You see how many opinions there are about God. Each opinion is a path. There are innumerable opinions and innumerable paths leading to God."

BHAVANATH: "Then what should we do?"

Devotion to one's own path and respect for others'

MASTER: "You must stick to one path with all your strength. A man can reach the roof of a house by stone stairs or a ladder or a rope-ladder or a rope or even by a bamboo pole. But he cannot reach the roof if he sets foot now on one and now on another. He should firmly follow one path. Likewise, in order to realize God a man must follow one path with all his strength.

"But you must regard other views as so many paths leading to God. You should not feel that your path is the only right path and that other paths are wrong. You mustn't bear malice toward others.

"Well, to what path do I belong? Keshab Sen used to say to me: 'You belong to our path. You are gradually accepting the ideal of the formless God.' Shashadhar says that I belong to his path. Vijay, too, says that I belong to his—Vijay's— path."

The tides in the Ganges

Sri Ramakrishna walked toward the Panchavati with M. and a few other devotees. It was midday and time for the flood-tide in the Ganges.

They waited in the Panchavati to see the bore of the tide.

MASTER (to the devotees): "The ebb-tide and flood-tide are indeed amazing. But notice one thing. Near the sea you see ebb-tide and flood-tide in a river, but far away from the sea the river flows in one direction only. What does this mean? Try to apply its significance to your spiritual life. Those who live very near God feel within them the

currents of bhakti, bhava, and the like. In the case of a few—the Isvarakotis, for instance—one sees even mahabhava and prema.

(To M.) "What is the explanation of the ebb-tide and flood-tide?"

M: "According to Western astronomy, they are due to the attraction of the sun and the moon."

In order to explain it, M. drew figures on the earth and began to show the Master the movement of the earth, the sun, and the moon.

The Master looked at the figures for a minute and said: "Stop, please! It gives me a headache."

Presently the tide came up the Ganges. They heard the sound of the rushing water. The tide struck the bank of the river and flowed toward the north. Sri Ramakrishna looked at it intently and exclaimed like a child: "Look at that boat! I wonder what is going to happen to it."

The Master and M. sat down for a while in the Panchavati, Sri Ramakrishna placing his umbrella on the cement platform. The conversation turned to Narayan. The boy was a student. Sri Ramakrishna looked upon him as Narayana, God Himself, and was very fond of him.

MASTER: "Have you noticed Naran's nature? He can mix with all, old and young. One cannot do this without a special power.

Besides, all love him. Is he really artless?"

M: "I think so."

MASTER: "I understand that he goes to your place. Is that so?"

M: "Yes, sir. He has visited me once or twice."

MASTER: "Will you give him a rupee? Or shall I ask Kāli about it?"

M: "Very well, sir. I shall give him the money."

MASTER: "That's fine. It is good to help those who yearn for God. Thus one makes good use of one's money. What will you gain by spending everything on your family?"

Kishori had several children. His salary was too small to support his family. Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "Naran said he would get a job for Kishori. Please remind him of it."

The Master walked away in the direction of the pine-grove. Returning to the Panchavati, he said to M.: "Please ask someone to spread a mat outside my room. I shall lie down a few minutes. I am coming presently."

When the Master returned to his room, he could not find his umbrella and exclaimed: "You have all forgotten the umbrella! The busybody doesn't see a thing even when it is very near him. A man went to a friend's house to light the charcoal for his smoke, though all the time he had a lighted lantern in his hand. Another man looked everywhere for his towel. Finally he discovered that it had been on his shoulder all the time."

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon. The Master ate the prasad from the Kāli temple. Then he wanted to rest awhile, but the devotees were still sitting in his room. They were asked to go out, and then the Master lay down. He said to Baburam, "Come here; sit near me." Baburam answered, "I am preparing betel-leaf." The Master said,"Put your betel-leaf aside"

The devotees sat under the bakul-tree in the Panchavati. Tārak, who had just returned from Vrindāvan, told them stories of his visit.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna was seated again on his couch, the devotees sitting on the floor. Shyamdas was singing with his party.

He sang of the gopis' grief at their separation from Sri Krishna:

Dry as a desert seemed the happy lake to them:
The chatak died of thirst, gazing toward the clouds.

The Master became somewhat abstracted, but the musician could not create a spiritual atmosphere. Sri Ramakrishna asked Nabai of Konnagar to sing a kirtan. Nabai was Manomohan's uncle. He lived on the bank of the Ganges, devoting his time to prayer and meditation, and was a frequent visitor of Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar.

Master in ecstasy

Nabai began the kirtan in a loud voice. The Master left the couch and began to dance. Immediately Nabai and other devotees began to dance around him. The atmosphere became intense with spiritual fervour.

After the kirtan, Sri Ramakrishna resumed his seat. With great feeling he began to sing of the Divine Mother, his eyes turned upward:

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,
Do not deprive Thy worthless child of bliss!
My mind knows nothing but Thy Lotus Feet.
The King of Death scowls at me terribly;
Tell me, Mother, what shall I say to him? . . .

He sang again:

As is a man's meditation, so is his feeling of love;
As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain;
And faith is the root of all. . . .

He continued:

This world, O Mother, is Thy madhouse!
What can I say of all Thy virtues?
Setting aside Thine elephant, Thou roamest about on foot;
Putting off Thy gems and pearls, O Self-willed Mother,
Thou dost adorn Thy comely neck with a garland of human heads.
Now Thou must rescue Ramprasad out of the forest of this world.

Again he sang:

Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,
So long as I can breathe my last with Kāli's name upon my lips? . ..

And again:

Dwell, O mind, within yourself; Enter no other's home.
If you but seek there, you will find All you are searching for. . . .

And then:

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight
To the blue lotus flower of Mother Syama's feet. . . .

And then:

Cherish my precious Mother Syama
Tenderly within, O mind;
May you and I alone behold Her,
Letting no one else intrude. . . .

As the Master sang this last song he stood up. He was almost intoxicated with divine love. Again and again he said to the devotees,

"*Cherish my precious Mother Syama tenderly within."*

Then he danced and sang:

Is Kāli, my Mother, really black?
The Naked One, of blackest hue,
Lights the Lotus of the Heart. . . .

The Master reeled as he sang. Niranjan came forward to hold him. The Master said to him softly, "Don't touch me, you rascal!"

Seeing the Master dance, the devotees stood up. He caught hold of M.'s hand and said: "Don't be foolish! Dance!"

Sri Ramakrishna resumed his seat, still charged with divine ecstasy. Coming down a little to the normal state, he said: "Om! Om! Om!

Om! Om! Om Kāli!" Again he said, "Let me have a smoke." Many of the devotees stood around. Mahimacharan was fanning him. The Master asked him to sit down and recite from the scriptures. Mahimacharan recited from the Mahanirvana Tantra:

Om; I bow to Thee, the Everlasting Cause of the world;
I bow to Thee, Pure Consciousness, the Soul that sustains the whole universe.
I bow to Thee, who art One without duality, who dost bestow liberation;
I bow to Thee, Brahman, the all-pervading Attributeless Reality.
Thou alone art the Refuge, the only Object of adoration;
Thou art the only Cause of the universe, the Soul of everything that is;
Thou alone art the world's Creator, Thou its Preserver and Destroyer;
Thou art the immutable Supreme Lord, the Absolute; Thou art unchanging Consciousness.
Dread of the dreadful! Terror of the terrible!
Refuge of all beings! Purity of purifiers!
Thou alone dost rule over those in the high places,
Supreme over the supreme, the Protector of protectors.
Almighty Lord, who art made manifest as the Form of all, yet art Thyself unmanifest and indestructible;
Thou who art imperceptible to the senses, yet art the very Truth;
Incomprehensible, imperishable, all-pervading, hidden, and without form;
O Lord! O Light of the Universe! Protect us from harm.
On that One alone we meditate; that One is the sole object of our worship;
To That alone, the non-dual Witness of the Universe, we bow.
In that One who alone exists and who is our sole eternal Support, we seek, refuge,
The self-dependent Lord, the Vessel of Safety in the ocean of existence.

Sri Ramakrishna listened to the hymn with folded hands. After it was sung he saluted Brahman; the devotees did likewise.

Adhar arrived from Calcutta and bowed down before the Master.

MASTER (to M.): "We have had such joy today! How much joy Hari's name creates! Is it not so?"

M: "Yes, sir."

Mahimacharan was a student of philosophy. That day he too had chanted the name of Hari and danced during the kirtan. This made the Master very happy.

It was about dusk. Many of the devotees took their leave. A lamp was lighted in Sri Ramakrishna's room and incense was burnt.

After some time the moon came out, flooding the sky with its light.

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on his couch. He was in a spiritual mood, absorbed in contemplation of the Divine Mother. Now and then he chanted Her hallowed name. Adhar was sitting on the floor. M. and Niranjan, too, were there. Sri Ramakrishna began to talk to Adhar.

MASTER: "What! You have come just now! We have had so much kirtan and dancing. Shyamdas began the kirtan. He is Ram's music teacher. But I didn't enjoy his singing very much; I didn't feel like dancing. Later I heard about his character. I was told that he had as many mistresses as there are hairs on a man's head.

"Didn't you get the job?"

Adhar held the post of deputy magistrate, a government post that carried with it great prestige. He earned three hundred rupees a month. He had applied for the office of vice-chairman of the Calcutta Municipality. The salary attached to this office was one thousand rupees. In order to secure it, Adhar had interviewed many influential people in Calcutta.

MASTER (to M. and Niranjan): "Hazra said to me, 'Please pray to the Divine Mother for Adhar, that he may secure the job.' Adhar made the same request to me. I said to the Mother: 'O Mother, Adhar has been visiting You. May he get the job if it pleases You.' But at the same time I said to Her: 'How small-minded he is! He is praying to You for things like that and not for Knowledge and Devotion.'

(To Adhar) "Why did you dance attendance on all those small-minded people? You have seen so much; you have heard so much!

After reading the entire Ramayana, to ask whose wife Sita is!' "

ADHAR: "A man cannot but do these things if he wants to lead a householder's life. You haven't forbidden us to, have you?"

Advice to Adhar about renunciation

MASTER: "Nivritti alone is good, and not pravritti. Once, when I was in a God-intoxicated state, I was asked to go to the manager of the Kāli temple to sign the receipt for my salary. They all do it here. But I said to the manager: 'I cannot do that. I am not asking for any salary. You may give it to someone else if you want.' I am the servant of God alone. Whom else shall I serve? Mallick noticed the late hours of my meals and arranged for a cook. He gave me one rupee for a month's expenses. That embarrassed me. I had to run to him whenever he sent for me. It would have been quite a different thing if I had gone to him of my own accord.

"In leading the worldly life one has to humour mean-minded people and do many such things. After the attainment of my exalted state, I noticed how things were around me and said to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother! Please change the direction of my mind right now, so that I may not have to flatter rich people.'

(To Adhar) "Be satisfied with the job you have. People hanker after a post paying fifty or a hundred rupees, and you are earning three hundred rupees! You are a deputy magistrate. I saw a deputy magistrate at Kamarpukur. His name was Ishwar Ghosha! He had a turban on his head. Men's very bones trembled before him. I remember having seen him during my boyhood. Is a deputy magistrate a person to be trifled with?

"Serve him whom you are already serving. The mind becomes soiled by serving but one master. And to serve five masters!

"Once a woman became attached to a Mussalman and invited him to her room. But he was a righteous person; he said to her that he wanted to use the toilet and must go home to get his water-jar for water. The woman offered him her own, but he said: 'No, that will not do. I shall use the jar to which I have already exposed myself. I cannot expose myself before a new one.' With these words he went away. That brought the woman to her senses. She understood that a new water-jar, in her case, signified a paramour."

Narendra was in straitened circumstances on account of his father's unexpected death. He had been seeking a job to maintain his mother, brothers, and sisters. He had served a few days as headmaster of the Vidyasagar School at Bowbazar.

ADHAR: "May I ask if Narendra would accept a job?"

MASTER: "Yes, he would. He has his mother, brothers, and sisters to support."

ADHAR: "Well, Narendra can support his family with fifty or with a hundred rupees. Will he try for a hundred?"

MASTER: "Worldly people think highly of their wealth. They feel that there is nothing like it. Sambhu said, 'It is my desire to leave all my property at the Lotus Feet of God.' But does God care for money? He wants from His devotees knowledge, devotion, discrimination, and renunciation.

"After the theft of the jewelry from the temple of Radhakanta, Mathur Babu said: 'O God, You could not protect Your own jewelry! What a shame!' Once he wanted to give me an estate and consulted Hriday about it. I overheard the whole thing from the Kāli temple and said to him: 'Please don't harbour any such thought. It will injure me greatly.' "

ADHAR: "I can tell you truthfully, sir, that not more than six or seven persons like you have been born since the creation of the world."

MASTER: "How so? There certainly are people who have given up everything for God. As soon as a man gives up his wealth, people come to know about him. But it is also true that there are others unknown to people. Are there not such holy men in upper India?"

ADHAR: "I know of at least one such person in Calcutta. He is Devendranath Tagore."

MASTER: "What did you say? Who has enjoyed the world as much as he? Once I visited him at his house with Mathur Babu. I saw that he had many young children. The family physician was there writing out prescriptions.

If, after having eight children, a man doesn't think of God, then who will? If, after, enjoying so much wealth, Devendranath hadn't thought of God, then people would have cried shame upon him."

NIRANJAN: "But he paid off all his father's debts."

MASTER: "Keep quiet! Don't torment me any more. Do you call anyone a man who doesn't payoff his father's debts if he is able to?

But I admit that Devendranath is infinitely greater than other worldly men, who are sunk in their worldliness. They can learn much from him.

Signs of a real devotee

There is an ocean of difference between a real all-renouncing devotee of God and a householder devotee. A real sannyāsi, a real devotee who has renounced the world, is like a bee. The bee will not light on anything but a flower. It will not drink anything but honey.

But a devotee leading the worldly life is like a fly. The fly sits on a festering sore as well as on a sweetmeat. One moment he enjoys a spiritual mood, and the next moment he is beside himself with the pleasure of 'woman and gold'.

"A devotee who has really and truly renounced all for God is like the chatak bird. It will drink only the rain-water that falls when the star Svati is in the ascendant. It will rather die of thirst than touch any other water, though all around there may lie seven oceans and rivers full to the brim with water. An all-renouncing devotee will not touch 'woman and gold'. He will not keep 'woman and gold' near him lest he should feel attached."

ADHAR: "But Chaitanya, too, enjoyed the world."

MASTER (amazed): "What? What did he enjoy in the world?"

ADHAR: "Scholarship! Honour!"

MASTER: "It was honour in the sight of others, but nothing to him. Whether you—a deputy magistrate—or this youngster Niranjan honours me, it is all the same to me. And I tell you this truthfully: the idea of controlling a wealthy man never enters my mind. Surendra once said, rather condescendingly, that Rākhāl's father could sue me for letting Rākhāl stay with me. When I heard this from Manomohan, I said: 'Who is this Surendra? How does he dare make a remark like that? He keeps a carpet and pillow here and gives me some money. Is that his excuse for daring to make such an impudent remark?' "

ADHAR: "I understand that he gives ten rupees a month. Isn't that so?"

MASTER: "That covers two months expenses. The devotees stay here and he gives the money for their service. It is he who earns the merit. What is that to me? Is it for my personal gain that I love Narendra, Rākhāl, and the others?"

M: "Your love for them is like a mother's for her children."

Master's genuine love for his disciples

MASTER: "But even behind the mother's love lies her hope that the children will support her later on. But I love these youngsters because I see in them Narayana Himself. These are not mere words.

God takes charge of His devotees

(To Adhar) "Listen. There is no scarcity of moths when the lamp is lighted. When God is realized, He Himself provides everything for His devotees. He sees that they do not lack anything. When God is enshrined in the heart, many people come forward to offer their services.

"Once a young sannyasi went to a householder to beg his food. He had lived as a monk from his very birth; he knew nothing of worldly matters. A young daughter of the householder came out to give him alms; He turned to her mother and said, 'Mother, has this girl abscesses on her chest?' The mother said: 'No, my child. God has given her breasts to nurse her child when she becomes a mother.' Thereupon the sannyasi said: 'Then why should I worry about myself? Why should I beg my food? He who has created me will certainly feed me.'

"Listen. If a woman renounces everything for her paramour, she can say to him, if need be, 'You wretch! I shall sit on your chest and devour you.'

"Nangta told me of a certain king who gave a feast to the sādhus, using plates and tumblers of gold. I noticed in the monasteries at Benares with what great respect the abbots were treated. Many wealthy up-country people stood before them with folded hands, ready to obey their commands. But a true sādhu, a man who has really renounced everything, seeks neither a gold plate nor honour.

God sees that he lacks nothing. God gives the devotee everything that is needed for realizing Him.

(To Adhar) "You are an executive officer. What shall I say to you? Do whatever you think best. I am an illiterate person."

ADHAR (smiling, to the devotees): "Now he is examining me."

MASTER (smiling) : "Dispassion alone is good. Don't you see, I didn't sign the receipt for my salary? God alone is real and all else is illusory."

Hazra entered the room and sat with the devotees on the floor. Hazra repeated now and then, "Soham! Soham!" "I am He! I am He!"

To Lātu and other devotees he often said: "What does one gain by worshipping God with offerings? That is merely giving Him things that are His already." He had said this once to Narendra.

The Master spoke to him.

MASTER: "I explained to Lātu who the object of the devotee's worship is."

HAZRA: "The devotee really prays to his own Self."

MASTER: "What you say is a very lofty thought. The aim of spiritual discipline, of chanting God's name and glories, is to realize just that. A man attains everything when he discovers his true Self in himself. The object of sādhanā is to realize that. That also is the purpose of assuming a human body. One needs the clay mould as long as the gold image has not been cast; but when the image is made, the mould is thrown away. The body may be given up after the realization of God.

"God is not only inside us; He is both inside and outside. The Divine Mother showed me in the Kāli temple that everything is Chinmaya, the Embodiment of Spirit; that it is She who has become all this—the image, myself, the utensils of worship, the door-sill, the marble floor. Everything is indeed Chinmaya.

"The aim of prayer, of spiritual discipline, of chanting the name and glories of God, is to realize just that. For that alone a devotee loves God. These youngsters are on a lower level; they haven't yet reached a high spiritual state. They are following the path of bhakti. Please don't tell them such things as 'I am He'."

Like the mother bird brooding over her chicks, Sri Ramakrishna was alert to protect his devotees.

Adhar and Niranjan went out on the porch to take refreshments. Presently they returned to the room.

ADHAR (smiling): "We talked about so many things. (Pointing to M.) But he didn't utter a word."

MASTER: "In Keshab's organization there was a young man with four university degrees. He laughed when he saw people arguing with me. He said: 'To argue with him! How silly!' I saw him again, later on, at one of Keshab's meetings. But then he did not have the same bright complexion."

Sri Ramakrishna sat on the floor for his supper. It was a light meal of a little farina pudding and one or two luchis that had been offered in the Kāli temple. M. and Lātu were in the room. The devotees had brought various sweets for the Master. He touched a sandesh and asked Lātu, "Who is the rascal that brought this?" He took it out of the cup and left it on the ground. He said to Lātu and M.: "I know all about him. He is immoral"

LĀTU: "Shall I give you this sweet?"

MASTER: "Kishori brought it."

LĀTU: "Will it suit you?"

MASTER (smiling): "Yes."

M. had received an English education. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "It is not possible for me to eat things offered by anyone and everyone. Do you believe this?"

M: "Gradually I shall have to believe all these things."

MASTER: "Yes, that is so."

After finishing the meal Sri Ramakrishna washed his mouth. He said to M., "Then will you give the rupee to Naran?" "Yes," said M., "certainly I will."

The moon rose in the clear autumn sky and was reflected in the river. It was ebb-tide in the Ganges and the river flowed south toward the sea.

Sunday, September 14, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room with Narendra, Bhavanath, the Mukherji brothers, and other devotees. Rākhāl was staying with Balarām at Vrindāvan and was laid up with an attack of fever. Narendra was preparing himself for his coming law examination.

About eleven o'clock Jnan Babu arrived. He was a government official and had received four university degrees.

MASTER (at the sight of Jnan Babu): "Well! Well! This sudden awakening of 'knowledge'!"

JNAN (smiling): "You must admit, sir, that one sees the awakening of knowledge as a result of very good fortune."

MASTER (smiling): "You are Jnan. Then why should you have ajnan, ignorance? Oh, I understand. Where there is knowledge there is also ignorance. The sage Vasishtha was endowed with great knowledge and still he wept at the death of his sons. Therefore I ask you to go beyond both knowledge and ignorance. The thorn of ignorance has pierced the sole of a man's foot. He needs the thorn of knowledge to take it out. Afterwards he throws away both thorns. The Jnāni says, 'This world is a "framework of illusion".' But he who is beyond both knowledge and ignorance describes it as a 'mansion of mirth'. He sees that it is God Himself who has become the universe, all living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles.

Living in the world after realization of God

"A man can live in the world after attaining God. Then he can lead the life of detachment. In the country I have seen the women of the carpenter families making flattened rice with a husking-machine. With one hand one of them turns the paddy in the hole and with the other she holds a nursing child. At the same time she talks with the buyer. She says to him: 'You owe me two *ānnās*. Pay it before you go.' But seventy-five per cent of the woman's mind is on her hand lest it should be crushed by the pestle of the husking machine.

"A man should do his worldly duties with only twenty-five percent of his mind, devoting the rest to God."

Referring to Pundit Shashadhar, the Master said to the devotees, "I found him monotonous—engaged in the dry discussion of philosophy.

"He alone who, after reaching the Nitya, the Absolute, can dwell in the Lila, the Relative, and again climb from the Lila to the Nitya, has ripe knowledge and devotion. Sages like Nārada cherished love of God after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman. This is called vijnāna.

"Mere dry knowledge is like an ordinary rocket: it bursts into a few sparks and then dies out. But the Knowledge of sages like Nārada and Sukadeva is like a good rocket: for a while it showers balls of different colours, and then it stops; again it throws out new balls, and again it stops; and thus it goes on. Those sages had prema for God. Prema is the rope by which one can reach Satchidananda."

The Master finished his midday meal and rested a few minutes. Bhavanath, M., the Mukherji brothers, Hazra, and several other devotees sat down under the bakul-tree and began to converse. The Master stopped there awhile on his way to the pine-grove.

HAZRA (to the younger Gopal): "Please prepare a smoke for him [meaning the Master]."

MASTER (smiling): "Why don't you admit that you want it?" (All laugh.)

MUKHERJI (to Hazra): "You must have learnt much wisdom from him [meaning the Master]."

MASTER (smiling): "No, he has been wise like this from his boyhood." (All laugh.)

Presently Sri Ramakrishna returned from the pine-grove. The devotees noticed that he was in an ecstatic mood and was reeling like a drunkard. After reaching his room he regained the normal state.

Many devotees gathered in the room. Among them was a new-comer, a sadhaka from Konnagar, who looked over fifty years of age and seemed to have great vanity of scholarship.

The Master stood in the middle of the room and suddenly said to M., "He came here—Naran."

Narendra was engaged in a discussion with Hazra and a few others on the verandah. They could be heard from the room.

MASTER (referring to Narendra): "The chatterbox! But he is now much worried about his family."

M.: "Yes, sir, it is true."

MASTER: "Once he said that he would look upon adversity as his good fortune. Isn't that so?"

M: "He has great strength of mind."

A DEVOTEE: "Does he lack strength in anything?"

Pointing to the sadhaka from Konnagar, a devotee said to the Master: "Sir, he has come to visit you. He has some questions to ask."

The sadhaka was seated erect, his chin up.

SADHAKA: "Sir, what is the way?"

MASTER: "Faith in the guru's words. One attains God by following the guru's instructions step by step. It is like reaching an object by following the trail of a thread."

SADHAKA: "Is it possible to see God?"

MASTER: "He is unknowable by the mind engrossed in worldliness. One cannot attain God if one has even a trace of attachment to 'woman and gold'. But He is knowable by the pure mind and the pure intelligence—the mind and intelligence that have not the slightest trace of attachment. Pure Mind, Pure Intelligence, Pure Ātman are one and the same thing."

SADHAKA: "But the scriptures say, 'From Him words and mind return baffled.' He is unknowable by mind and words."

MASTER: "Oh, stop! One cannot understand the meaning of the scriptures without practising spiritual discipline. What will you gain by merely uttering the word 'siddhi'? The pundits glibly quote the scriptures; but what will that accomplish? A man does not become intoxicated even by rubbing siddhi on his body; he must swallow it. What is the use of merely repeating, 'There is butter in the milk'?

Turn the milk into curd and churn it. Only then will you get butter."

SADHAKA: "You talk about churning butter. But you too are quoting the scriptures."

MASTER: "What will one gain by merely quoting or hearing the scriptures? One must assimilate them. The almanac makes a forecast of the rainfall for the year, but you won't get a drop by squeezing its pages."

SADHAKA: "You talk about churning butter. Have you done it yourself?"

MASTER: "You don't have to bother about what I have or haven't done. Besides, it is very difficult to explain these things to others.

Suppose someone asks you, 'What does ghee taste like?' Your answer will be, 'Ghee tastes like ghee.'

"To understand these things one needs to live with holy men, just as to understand the pulse of bile, of phlegm, and so on, one needs to live with a physician."

SADHAKA: "There are some people who are irritated by others' company."

MASTER: "That happens only after the attainment of Knowledge, after the realization of God. Shouldn't a beginner live in the company of holy men?"

The sadhaka sat in silence a few moments. Then he said with some irritation: "Please tell me whether you have realized God either directly or intuitively. You may answer me if you are able, or you may keep silent if you wish." The Master said with a smile: "What shall I say? One can only give a hint."

SADHAKA: "Then tell us that much."

Narendra was going to sing. He said, "No one has brought a pakhoaj."

THE YOUNGER GOPAL: "Mahimacharan has one."

MASTER (interrupting): "No, we don't want anything of his here."

A devotee from Konnagar sang a song. Every now and then Sri Ramakrishna glanced at the sadhaka. The singer and Narendra became engaged in a furious discussion about musical technique. The sadhaka said to the singer, "What is the use of such discussions?" Referring to another man who had joined in the discussion, Sri Ramakrishna said to the sadhaka, "Why didn't you scold him, too?" It could be seen that the sadhaka was not on friendly terms with his companions from Konnagar.

Narendra sang:
O Lord, must all my days pass by so utterly in vain?
Down the path of hope I gaze with longing, day and night. . . .

The sadhaka closed his eyes in meditation as he listened to the song. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. The rays of the setting sun fell on his body. Sri Ramakrishna quickly opened an umbrella and placed it near the door so that the sun might not disturb the sadhaka.

Narendra sang again:

How shall I call on Thee, O Lord, with such a stained and worldly mind?
Can a straw remain unharmed, cast in a pit of Raming coals?
Thou, all goodness, art the fire, and I, all sin, am but a straw:
How shall I ever worship Thee?
The glory of Thy name, they say, redeems those even past redeeming;
Yet, when I chant Thy sacred name, alas! my poor heart quakes with fright.
I spend my life a slave to sin; how can I find a refuge, then,
O Lord, within Thy holy way?
In Thine abounding kindliness, rescue Thou this sinful wretch;
Drag me off by the hair of my head and give me shelter at Thy feet.

Again he sang:

Sweet is Thy name, O Refuge of the humble!
It falls like sweetest nectar on our ears
And comforts us, Beloved of our souls!
The priceless treasure of Thy name alone
Is the abode of Immortality,
And he who chants Thy name becomes immortal.
Falling upon our ears, Thy holy name
Instantly slays the anguish of our hearts,
Thou Soul of our souls, and fills our hearts with bliss!

As Narendra sang the line, "And he who chants Thy name becomes immortal", the Master went into samādhi. At first his fingers, especially the thumbs, began to tremble. The devotees from Kannagar had never seen the Master in samādhi. Seeing him silent, they were about to leave the room. Bhavanath said to them: "Why are you going away? This is his samādhi." The devotees resumed their places.

Narendra sang:

I have laboured day and night
To make Thy seat within my heart;
Wilt Thou not be kind to me,
O Lord of the World, and enter there?

Sri Ramakrishna, still in the ecstatic mood, came dawn from his couch to the floor and sat by Narendra. The beloved disciple sang again:

In Wisdom's firmament the moon of Love is rising full,
And Love's flood-tide, in surging waves, is flowing everywhere.
O Lord, how full of bliss Thou art! Victory unto Thee! . . .

As Narendra sang the last line, Sri Ramakrishna stood up, still absorbed in samādhi.

Futility of mere study of scriptures

After a long time the Master regained partial consciousness of the world and sat down on the mat. Narendra finished his singing, and the Tānpura was put back in its place. The Master was still in a spiritual mood and said: "Mother, tell me what this is. They want someone to extract the butter for them and hold it to their mouths. They won't throw the spiced bait into the lake. They won't even hold the fishing-rod. Someone must catch the fish and put it into their hands! How troublesome! Mother, I won't listen to any more argument.

The rogues force it on me. What a bother! I shall shake it off. God is beyond the Vedas and their injunctions. Can one realize Him by studying the scriptures, the Vedas, and the Vedānta? (To Narendra) Do you understand this? The Vedas give only a hint"

Narendra wanted the Tānpura again. The Master said, "I want to sing." He was still in an ecstatic mood and sang:

Mother, this is the grief that sorely grieves my heart,
That even with Thee for Mother, and though I am wide awake,
There should be robbery in my house. . .

The Master said, "Mother, why do You make me argue?" He sang again:

Once for all, this time, I have thoroughly understood;
From One who knows it well, I have learnt the secret of bhava…

The Master said, "I am quite conscious." But he was still groggy with divine fervour. He sang once more:

I drink no ordinary wine, but Wine of Everlasting Bliss,
As I repeat my Mother Kāli's name;
It so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk!...

Futility of reasoning

Sri Ramakrishna had said, "Mother, I won't listen to any more argument."

Narendra sang:

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
What need have I of knowledge or reason? . . .

Sri Ramakrishna said with a smile: "O Mother, make me mad! God cannot be realized through knowledge and reasoning, through the arguments in the scriptures." He had been pleased with the singing of the musician from Konnagar and said to him humbly: "Please sing about the Divine Mother. Please - one song."

MUSICIAN: "You must excuse me, sir."

MASTER (bowing with folded hands): "No, sir. I can enforce this demand."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sang a few lines from a kirtan, assuming the attitude of a gopi:

Radha has every right to say it;
She has kept awake for Krishna.
She has stayed awake all night,
And she has every right to be piqued.

Then he said to the musician: "My dear sir, you are a child of the Divine Mother. She dwells in all beings. Therefore I have every right to enforce my demand. A farmer said to his guru, 'I shall get my mantra from you by beating you, if I have to.' "

MUSICIAN (smiling): "By a shoe-beating?"

MASTER (smiling): "No! I won't go that far."

Again in an abstracted mood Sri Ramakrishna said: "The beginner, the struggling, the perfect, and the supremely perfect. Which are you—perfect or supremely perfect? Come along! Sing for us."

The musician complied. He sang just a melody.

MASTER: "My dear sir, that too makes me happy."

The musician then sang a song. When the music was over, the devotees from Konnagar saluted the Master and took their leave.

The sadhaka bowed before him with folded hands and said, "Holy man, let me say good-bye."

Sri Ramakrishna, still in an ecstatic mood, was talking to the Divine Mother.

MASTER: "Mother, is it You or I? Do I do anything? No. no! It is You.

Was it You who heard the arguments all this time, or was it I? No, not I. It was You.".

Sri Ramakrishna became conscious of the outer world and began to converse with Narendra, Bhavanath, and the other devotees.

They were talking about the sadhaka.

BHAVANATH (smiling): "What kind of man is he?"

MASTER: "He is a tamasic devotee."

BHAVANATH: "He can certainly recite Sanskrit verses."

MASTER: "Once I said to a man about a sādhu: 'He is a rajasic sādhu. Why should one give him food and other presents?' At this another sādhu taught me a lesson by saying to me: 'Don't say that. There are three classes of holy men: sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic.' Since that day I have respected holy men of all classes."

NARENDRA (smiling): "What? Is it like the 'elephant God'? All, indeed, are God."

MASTER (smiling): "It is God Himself who sports in the world as both vidyā and avidyā. Therefore I salute both. It is written in the Chandi: 'The Divine Mother is the good fortune of the blessed and the ill fortune of the unlucky.' (To Bhavanath) Is that mentioned in the Vishnu Purana?"

BHAVANATH (smiling): "I don't know, sir. The devotees from Konnagar did not understand your samādhi and were about to leave the room."

MASTER: "Who was it that asked them to remain?"

BHAVANATH (smiling): "It was I."

MASTER: "My child, you are equally good in bringing people here and in driving them away."

The conversation turned to the argument that Narendra had had with the musician from Konnagar.

MUKHERJI: "Narendra didn't spare him."

MASTER: "That's right. One needs such grit. This is called the influence of tamas on sattva. Must a man listen to everything another man says? Should one say to a prostitute, 'All right, you may do whatever you like'? Must one listen to her? At one time Radha was piqued. A friend said, 'Her ego has been roused.' Brinde, another friend, said: 'Whose is this' ego? Her ego belongs to Krishna alone. She is proud in the pride of Krishna.' "

Glory of God's name

The conversation turned to the glory of God's name.

BHAVANATH: "I feel such relief while chanting the name of Hari."

MASTER: "He who relieves us of sin is Hari. He relieves us of our three afflictions in the world. Chaitanya preached the glory of Hari's name; so it must be good. You see, he was such a great scholar, and an Incarnation too. Since he preached that name, it must be good. (Smiling) Once some peasants were invited to a feast. They were asked if they would eat a preparation of hog plum. They answered: 'You may give it to us if the gentlemen have eaten it. If they enjoyed it, then it must be good.' (All laugh.)

(To the Mukherji brothers) "I should like to visit Shivanath; I won't have to hire a carriage if you take me in yours."

MUKHERJI: "All right, sir, we shall set a day."

MASTER (to the devotees): "Do you think the Brahmos will like me? They criticize those who believe in God with form."

Mahendra Mukherji wanted to go on a pilgrimage. He told Sri Ramakrishna so.

MASTER (smiling): "How is that? Do you want to go when the sprout of divine love has hardly corne up? First comes the sprout, then the tree, then the fruit. We are so happy to have you here to talk to."

MAHENDRA: "I feel like visiting the holy places a little. I shall return soon."

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna left his room. The devotees were walking in the garden. Many of them were about to leave.

The Master was conversing with Hazra on the north verandah. They were talking of Narendra's frequent visits to Annada, the eldest son of the Guhas.

HAZRA: "I hear that Annada is now practising austerity. He lives on very little food and eats rice once every four days."

MASTER: "Is that so? 'Who knows? One may realize God even by means of a religious garb.'"

HAZRA: "Narendra sang the *Āgamani*."

MASTER (eagerly): "How did he sing it?"

Kishori stood close by. The Master said to him, "Are you well?"

A little later the Master was standing on the west porch. Since it was autumn, he had put on a flannel shirt dyed with ochre. He asked Narendra, "Is it true that you sang the *Āgamani*?"

Accompanied by Narendra and M., Sri Ramakrishna walked to the embankment of the Ganges.

Narendra sang the *Āgamani*:

Tell me, my Uma, how have you fared, alone in the Stranger's house?
People speak so much ill of us! Alas, I die of shame!
My Son-in-law smears His body with ashes from the funeral pyre
And roams about in great delight;
You too, along with Him, cover with ash your golden skin.
He begs the food that He eats! How can I bear it, being your mother?
This time, when He returns to claim you, I shall say to Him,
"My daughter Umā is not at home."

Sri Ramakrishna stood listening to the song and went into samādhi. The sun was still above the horizon as the Master stood on the embankment in the ecstatic mood. On one side of him was the Ganges, flowing north with the flood-tide. Behind him was the flower garden. To his right one could see the nahabat and the Panchavati. Narendra stood by his side and sang. Gradually the darkness of evening fell upon the earth.

After Narendra and several other devotees had saluted the Master and left for Calcutta, Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room. He was absorbed in meditation on the Divine Mother and was chanting Her holy name.

Master at Jadu's garden

Jadu Mallick had arrived at his garden house next to the Kāli temple. He sent for the Master. Adhar, too, had arrived from Calcutta, and he saluted Sri Ramakrishna. The Master asked Lātu to light the lantern and accompany him to Jadu's garden.

MASTER (to M.): "Why didn't you bring Naran with you?"

M: "Shall I come with you?"

MASTER: "Do you want to come? Adhar and the others are here. All right, you may come. Will the Mukherjis also come with us? (To the Mukherjis) Come along. Then we can leave Jadu-Mallick quickly."

The Master went to Jadu's drawing-room. It was a well furnished room, with everything spick and span. The lamps were lighted. Jadu was sitting with his friends and was playing with the children. Servants were in attendance. Smiling, Jadu welcomed Sri Ramakrishna, but he did not get up. He treated the Master as a friend of long acquaintance.

Jadu was a devotee of Gaurānga. He had just seen a performance of Gaurānga's life at the Star Theatre and told the Master about it. The Master listened to his account joyfully and played with the children. M. and the Mukherji brothers sat near him. In the course of the conversation Sri Ramakrishna told Jadu that Adhar had not been able to secure the

post of vice-chairman of the Calcutta Municipality. Jadu said that Adhar was still young and could try for it again. At his request the Master sang a few songs about Gaurānga.

After the music was over, the Mukherjis were about to take their leave. The Master, too, was ready to go, but he was in an ecstatic mood. On coming to the porch he went into samādhi. The gate-keeper of the garden house was a pious man. Now and then he invited the Master to his house and fed him. Sri Ramakrishna stood there in samādhi and the gate-keeper fanned him with a large fan. Ratan, the manager of the garden house, saluted the Master, and Sri Ramakrishna, returning to the consciousness of the relative world, greeted the manager and the gate-keeper, saying, "Narayana". Then, accompanied by the devotees, he went back to the temple- garden through the main gate.

MASTER (to the Mukherjis, pointing to M.): "Please visit him often."

MUKHERJI (smiling): "Yes, henceforth he will be our teacher."

MASTER: "It is the nature of the hemp-smoker to make merry in the company of another hemp-smoker. He will not talk even to an amir, but he will embrace a wretched hemp-smoker if he happens to meet one." (All laugh.)

It was about nine o'clock. The Mukherji brothers saluted the Master and went away. Adhar and M. sat on the floor in the Master's room while he talked to Adhar about Rākhāl .

His worry over Rākhāl 's illness

Rākhāl was staying in Vrindāvan with Balarām. The Master had learnt from a letter about Rākhāl 's illness. He was so worried about him that two or three days earlier he had wept before Hazra like a child. Adhar had sent a registered letter to Rākhāl but had received no reply.

MASTER (to Adhar): "Naran has received a letter from Vrindāvan. Why haven't you received a reply to yours?"

ADHAR: "I haven't yet heard from Vrindāvan."

MASTER: "M. has also received a letter from Vrindāvan."

They began to talk of Sri Ramakrishna's seeing a play, at the Star Theatre, about the life of Cauranga.

MASTER (smiling): "Jadu told me that one could see the play very well from a one-rupee seat. Very cheap! Once we were talking about going to Panihati. Jadu wanted me to go in a country boat with a whole crowd of passengers. (All laugh.)

"Formerly he liked to hear a little about God. But I don't see Jadu much nowadays. He is always surrounded by flatterers. They have spoiled him. He is a man of a very

calculating nature. I would no sooner set foot in his house than he would ask me,. 'How much is the carriage hire?' I would say: 'You don't have to bother about it. You may give two and a half rupees.' That would keep him quiet." (All laugh.)

It was late. Adhar was about to depart. The Master asked M. to bring Naran with him.

Chapter 28

AT THE STAR THEATRE

Friday, September 19, 1884

IT WAS MAHALAYA, a sacred day of the Hindus, and the day of the new moon. At two o'clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room with Mahendra Mukherji, Priya Mukherji, M., Baburam, Harish, Kishori, and Lātu. Some were sitting on the floor, some standing, and others moving about. Hazra was sitting on the porch. Rākhāl was still at Vrindāvan with Balarām.

Master praises Captain's devotion

MASTER (to the devotees): "I was at Captain's house in Calcutta. It was very late when I returned. What a sweet nature Captain has! What devotion! He performs the *Ārati* before the image. First he waves a lamp with three lights, then a lamp with one light, and last of all he waves burning camphor. When performing the worship he does not speak. Once he motioned to me to take my seat. During the worship his eyes become swollen from spiritual emotion. They look as if they have been stung by wasps. He cannot sing, but he chants hymns beautifully. In his mother's presence he sits on a lower level; she sits on a high stool.

"His father was a havildar in the English army. He would hold a gun with one hand and with the other worship Śiva. His servant made a clay image of Śiva for him. He wouldn't even touch water before performing the worship. He earned six thousand rupees a year.

"Captain sends his mother to Benares now and then. Twelve or thirteen servants attend her there; it is very expensive. Captain knows the Vedānta, the Gitā, and the Bhagavata by heart. He says that the educated gentlemen of Calcutta follow the ways of the mlechchhas.

"In his earlier years he practised hathayoga. That is why he strokes my head gently when I am in samādhi. His wife worships the Deity in another form-that of Gopala. This time I didn't find her so miserly. She too knows the Gitā and other scriptures. What devotion they have!

"They cooked a goat curry. Captain said they could eat it for fifteen days, but she said, 'No, no! Only seven days.' But I liked the taste of it. They serve a very small quantity of each dish, but nowadays they give me good portions since I eat more than they do. After the meal either Captain or his wife fans me.

"They are very pious souls and show great respect to holy men. The people of upper India are greatly devoted to sādhus. The sons and nephews of the Jung Bahadur of Nepal once visited the temple garden; before me they showed great respect and humility. Once a young girl of Nepal came to see me with Captain. She was a great

devotee, and unmarried; she knew the whole of the Gitagovinda by heart. Dwarika Babu and the others wanted to hear her music. When she sang the Gitagovinda, Dwarika Babu was profoundly moved and wiped the tears from his eyes with his handkerchief. She was asked why she was not married. She said: 'I am the handmaid of God. Whom else shall I serve?' Her people respect her as a goddess, as the scriptures enjoin.

(To Mahendra Mukherji and the others) "I shall feel very happy to know that you are being benefited by your visits here. (To M.) Why do people come here? I don't know much of reading and writing."

M.: "God's power is in you. That is why there is such power of attraction. It is the Divine Spirit that attracts."

MASTER: "Yes, this is the attraction of Yogamaya, the Divine Śakti. She casts the spell. God performs all His lila through the help of Yogamaya.

Nature of gopis' love for Krishna

"The love of the gopis was like the attachment of a woman to her paramour. They were intoxicated with ecstatic love for Sri Krishna. A woman cherishing illicit love is not very keen about her own husband. If she is told that her husband has come, she will say: 'What if he has? There is food in the kitchen. He can help himself.' But if she is told of the arrival of a stranger-jovial, handsome, and witty-she will run to see him and peep at him from behind a screen.

"You may raise an objection and say: 'We have not seen God. How can we feel attracted to Him as the gopis felt attracted to Krishna?' But it is possible. 'I do not know Him. I have only heard His name, and that has fixed my mind upon Him.' "

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, what is the significance of Sri Krishna's stealing the gopis' clothes?"

MASTER: "There are eight fetters that bind a person to the world. The gopis were free from all but one: shame. Therefore Krishna freed them from that one, too, by taking away their clothes. On attaining God one gets rid of all fetters. (To Mahendra Mukherji and the others) By no means all people feel attracted to God. There are special souls who feel so. To love God one must be born with good tendencies. Otherwise, why should you alone of all the people of Baghbazar come here? You can't expect anything good in a dunghill. The touch of the Malaya breeze turns all trees into sandal-wood, no doubt. But there are a few exceptions-the banyan, the cotton-tree, and the Aśwattha, for example.

(To the Mukherji brothers) "You are well off. If a man slips from the path of yoga, then he is reborn in a prosperous family and starts again his spiritual practice for the realization of God."

Unfulfilled desires make one deviate from yoga

MAHENDRA: "Why does one slip from the path of yoga?"

MASTER: "While thinking of God the aspirant may feel a craving for material enjoyment. It is this craving that makes him slip from the path. In his next life he will be born with the spiritual tendencies that he failed to translate into action in his present life."

MAHENDRA: "Then what is the way?"

MASTER: "No salvation is possible for a man as long as he has desire, as long as he hankers for worldly things. Therefore fulfil all your desires regarding food, clothes, and sex. (Smiling) What do you say about the last one? Legitimate or illegitimate? (M. and Mahendra laugh.)

"It is not good to cherish desires and hankerings. For that reason I used to fulfil whatever desires came to my mind. Once I saw some coloured sweetmeats at Burrabazar and wanted to eat them. They brought me the sweets and I ate a great many. The result was that I fell ill.

"In my boyhood days, while bathing in the Ganges, I saw a boy with a gold ornament around his waist. During my state of divine intoxication I felt a desire to have a similar ornament myself. I was given one, but I couldn't keep it on very long. When I put it on, I felt within my body the painful uprush of a current of air. It was because I had touched gold to my skin. I wore the ornament a few moments and then had to put it aside. Otherwise I should have had to tear it off.

"I once felt a desire to eat the famous sweetmeats of different cities. (All laugh.) I had a desire to hear Sambhu's musical recital of the Chandi. After fulfilling that desire I wanted to hear the same thing by Rajnarayan. That desire also was satisfied.

"At that time many holy men used to visit the temple garden. A desire arose in my mind that there should be a separate store-room to supply them with their provisions. Mathur Babu arranged for one. The sādhus were given food-stuffs, fuel, and the like from that store-room.

"Once the idea came to me to put on a very expensive robe embroidered with gold and to smoke a silver hubble-bubble. Mathur Babu sent me the new robe and the hubble-bubble. I put on the robe. I also smoked the hubble-bubble in various fashions. Sometimes I smoked it reclining this way, and sometimes that way, sometimes with head up, and sometimes with head down. Then I said to myself, 'O mind, this is what they call smoking a silver hubble-bubble.' Immediately I renounced it. I kept the robe on my body a few minutes longer and then took it off. I began to trample it underfoot and spit on it, saying: 'So this is an expensive robe! But it only increases man's rajas.'"

About Rākhāl

Rākhāl had been staying at Vrindāvan with Balarām. At first he had written excited letters praising the holy place. He had written to M.: "It is the best of all places. Please come here. The peacocks dance around, and one always hears and sees religious music and dancing. There is an unending flow of divine bliss." But then Rākhāl had been laid up

with an attack of fever. Sri Ramakrishna was very much worried about him and vowed to worship the Divine Mother for his recovery. So he began to talk about Rākhāl.

MASTER: "Rākhāl had his first religious ecstasy while sitting here massaging my feet. A Bhagavata scholar had been expounding the sacred book in the room. As Rākhāl listened to his words, he shuddered every now and then. Then he became altogether still.

"His second ecstasy was at Balarām Bose's house. In that state he could not keep himself sitting upright; he lay flat on the floor. Rākhāl belongs to the realm of the Personal God. He leaves the place if one talks about the Impersonal.

"I have taken a vow to worship the Divine Mother when he recovers. You see, he has renounced his home and relatives and completely surrendered himself to me. It was I who sent him to his wife now and then. He still had a little desire for enjoyment.

(Pointing to M,) "Rākhāl has written him from Vrindāvan that it is a grand place-the peacocks dance around. Now let the peacock's take care of him. He has really put me in a fix.

Balarām's devotion

"Rākhāl has been staying with Balarām at Vrindāvan. Ah, what a nice nature Balarām has! It is only for my sake that he doesn't go to Orissa, where his family owns an estate. His brother stopped his monthly allowance and wrote to him: 'Come and stay with us here. Why should you waste so much money in Calcutta?' But he didn't listen. He has been living in Calcutta because he wants to see me.

What devotion to God! He is busy day and night with his worship. His gardener is always making garlands of flowers for the Deity, He has decided to spend four months a year at Vrindāvan to reduce his expenses. He gets a monthly allowance of two hundred rupees.

"Why am I so fond of the youngsters? They are still untouched by 'woman arid gold'. I find that they belong to the class of the nityasiddhas, the everperfect."

Narendra's first visit

"When Narendra first came here he was dressed in dirty clothes; but his eyes and face betokened some inner stuff. At that time he did not know many songs. He sang one or two: 'Let us go back once more, O mind, to our own abode!' and 'O Lord, must all my days pass by so utterly in vain?'

"Whenever he came here, I would talk only with him, though the room was filled with people. He would say to me, 'Please talk to them', and then I would talk with the others.

"I became mad for the sight of him and wept for him in Jadu Mallick's garden house: 'I wept here, too, holding Bholanath's hand.' Bholanath said, 'Sir, you shouldn't behave that way for a mere kayastha boy.' One day the 'fat brahmin' said to me about Narendra, with folded hands, 'Sir, he has very little education; why should you be so restless for him?'

"Bhavanath and Narendra are a pair. They are like man and woman. So I asked Bhavanath to rent a house near Narendra's. Both of them belong to the realm of the formless Reality.

Master warns the devotees about women

"I forbid the youngsters to spend a long time with women or visit them too frequently. Haripada has fallen into the clutches of a woman of the Ghoshpara sect. She shows maternal feeling for him; but Haripada is a child and doesn't understand its real meaning. The women of that sect act that way when they see young boys. I understand that Haripada lies on her lap and that she feeds him with her own hands. I shall tell him that this is not good. This very maternal feeling leads to a downfall. The women of that sect practise spiritual discipline in the company of men; they regard men as Krishna. A teacher of that sect asks a woman devotee, 'Have you found your Krishna?' and she says, 'Yes, I have found my Krishna.'

"The other day that woman came here. I watched the way she looked around and I didn't approve of it. I said to her, 'You may treat Haripada any way you like, but don't have any wrong feeling for him.'

"The youngsters are now in the stage of sadhana. They are aspirants. For them the only thing now is renunciation. A sannyasi must not look even at the portrait of a woman. I say to them: 'Don't sit beside a woman and talk to her, even if she is a devotee. You may say a word or two to her, standing.' Even a perfect soul must follow this precept for his own protection and also to set an example to others. When women, come to me, I too say to them after a few minutes, 'Go and visit the temples.' If they don't get up, I myself leave the room. Others will learn from my example.

Master's attraction for people

"Can you tell me why all these youngsters, and you people, too, visit me? There must be something in me; or why should you all feel such a pull, such attraction?

His own reminiscences

"Once I visited Hriday's house at Sihore. From there I was taken to Syambazar. I had a vision of Cauranga before I entered the village, and I realized that I should meet Cauranga's devotees there. For seven days and nights I was surrounded by a huge crowd of people. Such attraction! Nothing but kirtan and dancing day and night. People stood in rows on the walls and even were in the trees.

"I stayed at Natavar Goswami's house. It was crowded day and night. In the morning I would run away to the house of a weaver for a little rest. There too I found that people would gather after a few minutes. They carried drums and cymbals with them, and the drum constantly played:'Takuti! Takuti!' We would have our meal at three in the afternoon.

"The rumour spread everywhere that a man had arrived who died seven times and came back to life again. Hriday would drag me away from the crowd to a paddy-field for fear I

might have an attack of heat apoplexy. The crowd would follow us there like a line of ants. Again the cymbals and the never-ending Takuti! Takuti!' of the drums. Hriday scolded them and said: 'Why do you bother us like this? Have we never heard kirtan?'

"The Vaishnava priests of the village came and almost started a quarrel. They thought I would take their share of the fees from the devotees. But soon they discovered that I didn't touch a piece of cloth or even a thread. Someone remarked that I was a Brahmajnani. So the Vaishnava pundits wanted to test me. One said, 'Why hasn't he beads, and a mark on his forehead?' Another of them replied, They have dropped from him, as the dry branch from a coconut tree. It was there that I learnt this illustration of the dry branch of a coconut tree. The upadhis, limitations, drop when one attains Knowledge.

"People came thronging from distant villages. They even spent the night there. At Syambazar I learnt the meaning of divine attraction. When God incarnates Himself on earth He attracts people through the help of Yogamaya, His Divine Power. People become spellbound."

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. The Master had been conversing with the Mukherji brothers and the other devotees, when Radhika Goswami, a Vaishnava scholar, arrived and bowed before him. This was his first visit to the Master. Radhika Goswami took a seat.

MASTER: "Are you a descendant of Advaita?"

GOSWAMI: "Yes, sir."

At this the Master saluted him with folded hands.

MASTER: "You are descended from Advaita Goswami. You must have inherited some of his traits. A sweet-mango tree produces only sweet mangoes arid not sour ones. Of course, it happens that some trees produce large mangoes and some small; that depends on the soil. Isn't that true?"

GOSWAMI (humbly): "Sir, what do I know?"

MASTER: "Whatever you may say, others will not let you off so easily. Brahmans, however imperfect they-may be, are worshipped by all on account of their having been born in the lines of great sages. (To M.) Tell us the story of the samkhachila."

M. sat in silence.

MASTER: "If one of your ancestors was a great soul, he will certainly pull you up, however unworthy you may be. When King Duryodhana and his brothers were taken captive by the gandharvas, Yudhisthira released them in spite of the fact that King Duryodhana was his enemy and had banished him to the forest.

"Besides, one must show respect to the religious garb. Even the mere garb recalls to mind the real object. Chaitanya once dressed an ass in a religious garb and then prostrated himself before it.

"Why do people bow before a samkhachila? When Kamsa was about to kill the Divine Mother, She Hew away taking the form of a samkhachila. So even now people salute the bird.

"An Englishman arrived at the cantonment of Chanak. The sepoys saluted him. Koar Singh explained to me: 'India is under the rule of the English. Therefore one should salute an Englishman.

"The Saktas follow the Tantra, and the Vaishnavas the Purana. There is no harm for the Vaishnavas in speaking publicly of their spiritual practices. But the Saktas maintain secrecy about theirs. For this reason it is difficult to understand a Sakta.

(To Goswami) "You are all good people. How much japa you practise! How much you chant the name of Hari!"

GOSWAMI (humbly): "Oh, no! We do very little. I am a great sinner."

MASTER (smiling): "You have humility. That is good. But there is also another way: 'I chant the name of Hari. How can I be a sinner?' He who constantly repeats: 'I am a sinner! I am a wretch!' verily becomes a sinner. What lack of faith! A man chants the name of God so much, and still he talks of sin!"

Radhika Goswami listened to these words in amazement.

Master's following of different paths

MASTER: "At Vrindāvan I myself put on the garb of the Vaishnavas and wore it for fifteen days. (To the devotees) I have practised the disciplines of all the paths, each for a few days. Otherwise I should have found no peace of mind. (Smiling) I have practised all the disciplines; I accept all paths. I respect the Saktas, the Vaishnavas, and also the Vedantists. Therefore people of all sects come here. And everyone of them thinks that I belong to his school. I also respect the modern Brahmajnanis.

"A man had a tub of dye. Such was its wonderful property that people could dye their clothes any colour they wanted by merely dipping them in it. A clever man said to the owner of the tub, 'Dye my cloth the colour of your dye-stuff.' (All laugh.)

"Why should I be one-sided? The idea that the people of a particular sect will not come to me does not frighten me. I don't care a bit whether people come to me or not. The thought of keeping anyone under my control never crosses my mind. Adhar Sen asked me to ask the Divine Mother for a big position for him, but he didn't get it. If that makes him think differently about me, what do I care?

"Once at Keshab's house I found myself in a new mood. The Brahmos always speak of the Impersonal; therefore I said to the Divine Mother in an ecstatic mood: 'Mother, please don't come here. They don't believe in Your forms.'"

Radhika Goswami listened to these words of the Master against sectarianism and remained silent.

Master's praise of Vijay Goswami

ASTER (smiling): "Vijay is in a wonderful state of mind nowadays. He falls to the ground while chanting the name of Hari. He devotes himself to kirtan, meditation, and other spiritual practices till four in the morning. He now puts on an ochre robe and prostrates himself before the images of God. Once he accompanied me to Gadadhar's schoolhouse. I pointed out the place where Gadadhar

used to meditate. At once Vijay prostrated himself there. Again he fell prostrate before the picture of Chaitanyadeva."

GOSWAMI: "What about the image of Radha-Krishna?"

MASTER: "He prostrated himself there too. Vijay also follows all the conventions of religious life."

GOSWAMI: "He can now be accepted in Vaishnava society."

MASTER: "People's opinions don't count for much with him."

GOSWAMI: "I don't mean that. By accepting him Vaishnava society will honour itself."

MASTER: "He respects me very much. But it is difficult to reach him. One day he is called to Dāccā, the next day to some other place. He is always busy. His presence has created great trouble in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj."

GOSWAMI: "Why so, sir?"

MASTER: The Brahmos tell him: 'You mix with people who worship God with form. You are an idolater.' Vijay is liberal and straightforward. Unless a man is guileless, he doesn't receive the grace of God. Sri Ramakrishna talked to the Mukherji brothers. Mahendra, the elder, had his own business. Priyanath, the younger, had been an engineer. After making some provision for himself, he had given up his job. Mahendra was thirty-five or thirty-six years old. The brothers had homes both in the country and in Calcutta.

MASTER (smiling): "Don't sit idle simply because your spiritual consciousness has been awakened a little. Go forward. Beyond the forest of sandalwood there are other and more valuable things-silver-mines, gold-mines, and so on."

Bondage and freedom are of the mind

PRIYA (smiling): "Sir, our legs are in chains. We cannot go forward."

MASTER: "What if the legs are chained? The important thing is the mind. Bondage is of the mind, and freedom also is of the mind.

"Listen to a story. There were two friends. One went into a house of prostitution and the other to hear a recital of the Bhagavata. 'What a shame!' thought the first. 'My friend is hearing spiritual discourse, but just see what I have slipped down to!' The second friend said to himself: 'Shame on me! My friend is having a good time, but how stupid I am!' After death the soul of the first was taken to Vaikuntha by the messenger of Vishnu, while that of the second was taken to the nether world of Yama."

PRIYA: "But the mind is not under my control."

MASTER: "How is that? There is such a thing as abhyiisayoga, yoga through practice. Keep up the practice and you will find that your mind will follow in whatever direction you lead it. The mind is like a white cloth just returned from the laundry. It will be red if you dip it in red dye and blue if you dip it in blue. It will have whatever colour you dip it in.

(To Goswami) "Have you anything to ask?"

GOSWAMI: "No, sir. I am satisfied that I have seen you and have been I listening to your words."

MASTER: "Go and visit the temples."

GOSWAMI (very humbly): "Won't you please sing something about Sri Chaitanya?"

The Master complied. He sang:

Why has My body turned so golden?It is not time for this to be:
Many the ages that must pass, before as Gaurānga I appear! . .

Again:

Gora gazes at Vrindāvan and tears stream from his eyes;
In an exuberance of joy, he laughs and weeps and dances and sings.
He takes a wood for Vrindāvan, the ocean for the blue Jamuna;
He rolls on the ground for love of Hari.

After singing, the Master went on with the conversation.

MASTER (to Goswami): "I have sung these songs to suit your Vaishnava temperament. But I must sing differently when the Saktas or others come.

"Herepeople of all sects come-Vaishnavas, Saktas, Kartabhajas,Vedantists, and also members of the modern Brahmo Samaj. Therefore one finds here all ideals and attitudes. It is by the will of God that different religions and opinions have come into existence. God gives to different people what they can digest. The mother does not give fish pilau to all her children. All cannot digest it; so she prepares simple fish soup for some. Everyone cherishes his own special ideal and follows his own nature.

"They provide various images for the Baroari because people of different sects assemble at it. You see there images of Radha-Krishna, Śiva-Durga, and Sita-Rāma-different images in different places. A crowd gathers before each image. The Vaishnavas spend most of their time before the image of Radha-Krishna, the Saktas before Śiva-Durga, and the devotees of Rāma before Sita-Rāma.

"But it is quite different with those who are not spiritually minded at all. In the Baroari one sees another image also-a prostitute beating her paramour with a broomstick. Those people stand there with gaping mouths and cry to their friends: 'What are you looking at over there? Come here! Look at this!' " (All laugh.)

Radhika Goswami saluted the Master and took his leave.

It was about five o'clock. The Master was on the semicircular west porch. Baburam, Lātu, the Mukherji brothers, M., and some other devotees were with him.

MASTER (to M. and the others): "Why should I be one-sided? The goswamis belong to the Vaishnava school and are very bigoted. They think that their opinion alone is right and all other opinions are wrong. My words have hit him hard. (Smiling) One must strike the elephant on the head with the goad; that is the elephant's most sensitive spot."

Then Sri Ramakrishna told a few naughty jokes for the young men.

MASTER (to the devotees): "I don't give the youngsters a pure vegetarian diet: now and then I give them a little water smelling of fish. Otherwise, why should they come?"

The Mukherji brothers left the porch. They went to the garden for a stroll.

MASTER (to M.): "I wonder whether the Mukherjis have taken offence at my jokes?"

M: "Why should they? Captain said that you are like a child. After realizing God a man becomes childlike."

MASTER: "Yes, and sometimes he behaves like a boy, and sometimes like a young man. As a boy he is very light-hearted. He may use frivolous language. As a young man he is like a roaring lion while teaching others. You had better explain my state of mind to the Mukherjis."

M: "I don't have to do that. Haven't they the sense to see it?"

Again the Master became light-hearted with the boys. Then he said to one of the devotees: "Today is the new moon. Go to the Kāli temple in the evening."

It was dusk. They heard the sound of gongs, cymbals, and other instruments used in the evening service in. the temples. The Master said to Baburam, "Come with me to the Kāli temple." He and Baburam went toward the temple, accompanied by M. At the sight of Harish sitting on the porch, the Master said: "What is this? Is he in ecstasy?"

Going through the courtyard, the Master and the devotees stopped a minute in front of the Radhakanta temple to watch the worship. Then they proceeded to the shrine of Kāli. With folded hands the Master prayed to the Divine Mother: "O Mother! O Divine Mother! O Brahmamayi!"

Reaching the raised platform in front of the shrine, he bowed low before the image. The *Ārati* was going on. He entered the shrine and fanned the image.

The evening worship was over. The devotees bowed before the Deity. It was the night of the new moon. The Master was in a spiritual mood. Gradually his mood deepened into intense ecstasy. He returned to his room, reeling like a drunkard and holding to Baburam's hand.

Master's prayer to Divine Mother

A lamp was lighted on the west porch. The Master sat there a few minutes, chanting: "Hari Om! Hari Om! Hari Om!" and other mystic syllables of the Tantra. Presently he returned to his room and sat on the small couch, facing the east. He was still completely. absorbed in divine fervour. He said to the Divine Mother: "Mother, that I should first speak and You then act-oh, that's nonsense! What is the meaning of talk? It is nothing but a sign. One man says, 'I shall eat.' Again, another says, 'No! I won't hear of it.' Well, Mother, suppose I had said I would not eat; wouldn't I still feel hungry? Is it ever possible that You should listen only when one prays aloud and not when one feels an inner longing? You are what You are. Then why do I speak? Why do I pray? I do as You make me do. Oh, what confusion! Why do You make me reason?"

As Sri Ramakrishna was thus talking to God, the devotees listened wonder-struck to his words. The Master's eyes fell upon them.

MASTER (to the devotees): "One must inherit good tendencies to realize God, One must have done something, some form of tapasya, either in this life or in another.

"When Draupadi's clothes were being taken off, she cried earnestly, praying to God. God revealed Himself to her and said: 'Try to remember whether you have ever made a gift of a cloth to anyone. Then your modesty will be preserved.' Draupadi replied: 'Yes, I remember now. Once a rishi was taking his bath when his loin-cloth was carried away by the current. I tore off half my cloth and gave it to him.' Thereupon the Lord said, 'Then you have nothing to fear.' "

M. was sitting on the small foot-rug.

MASTER (to M.): "You have understood what I said."

M: "Yes, sir. You spoke about inherent tendencies."

MASTER: "Repeat what I said."

M. repeated the story of Draupadi.

Hazra entered the room. He had been living with Sri Ramakrishna in the temple garden for the past two years and had first met the Master in 1880 at Sihore in the house of Hriday, the Master's nephew. Hazra's native village was near Sihore, and he owned some property there. He had a wife and children and also some debts. From youth he had felt a spirit of renunciation and sought the company of holy men and devotees. The Master had asked him to live with him at Dakshineswar and looked after his necessities. Hazra's mind was a jumble of undigested religious moods. He professed the path of knowledge and disapproved of Sri Ramakrishna's attitude of bhakti and his longing for the young devotees. Now and then he thought of the Master as a great soul, but again he slighted him as an ordinary human being. He spent much of his time in telling his beads, and he criticized Rākhāl and the other young men for their indifference to the practice. He was a strong advocate of religious conventions and rules of conduct, and made a fad of them. He was about thirty-eight years old.

As Hazra came in, the Master became a little abstracted and in that mood began to talk.

MASTER (to Hazra): "What you are doing is right in principle, but the application is not quite correct. Don't find fault with anyone, not even with an insect. As you pray to God for devotion, so also pray that you may not find fault with anyone."

HAZRA: "Does God listen to our prayer for bhakti?"

MASTER: "Surely. I can assure you of that a hundred times. But the prayer must be genuine and earnest. Do worldly-minded people weep for God as they do for wife and children? At Kamarpukur the wife of a certain man fell ill. The man thought she would not recover; he began to tremble and was about to faint. Who feels that way for God?"

Hazra was about to take the dust of the Master's feet.

MASTER (shrinking): "What is this?"

HAZRA: "Why should I not take the dust of his feet who has so kindly kept me with him?"

MASTER: "Satisfy God and everyone will be satisfied.'If He is pleased the world is pleased.' Once the Lord ate a few greens from Draupadi's cooking-pot and said, 'Ah, I am satisfied.' Immediately the whole world and all its living beings were satisfied; they felt as if they had eaten their fill. But was the world satisfied or did it feel that way when the rishis ate their food?

(To Hazra) "A perfect soul, even after attaining Knowledge, practises devotions or observes religious ceremonies to set an example to others. I go to the Kāli temple and I bow before the holy pictures in my room; therefore others do the same. Further, if a man has become habituated to such ceremonies, he feels restless if he does not observe them.

"One day I saw a sannyasi under the banyan-tree. He had put the salagram on the same carpet with his guru's sandals. He was worshipping them. I said to him, 'If you have attained Knowledge to that extent, then why such formal worship at all?' He replied: 'What difference does it make? Since I do everything else, why not this too? Sometimes I offer the flowers at the guru's feet and sometimes to God.'

"One cannot renounce work as long as one has a body. As long as there is mud at the bottom of the lake, bubbles will be produced.

Advice to Hazra - Scriptures and sadhana

(To Hazra) "If there is knowledge of one, there is also knowledge of many. What will you achieve by mere study of the scriptures? The scriptures contain a mixture of sand and sugar, as it were. It is extremely difficult to separate the sugar from the sand. Therefore one should learn the essence of the scriptures from the teacher or from a sādhu. Afterwards what does one care for books?

(To the devotees) "Gather all the information and then plunge in. Suppose a pot has dropped in a certain part of a lake. Locate the spot and dive there.

"One should learn the essence of the scriptures from the guru and then practise sadhana. If one rightly follows spiritual discipline, then one directly sees God. The discipline is said to be rightly followed only when one plunges in. What will a man gain by merely reasoning about the words of the scriptures? Ah, the fools! They reason themselves to death over information about the path. They never take the plunge. What a pity!

"You may say, even though you dive deep you are still in danger of sharks and crocodiles, of lust and anger. But dive after rubbing your body with turmeric powder; then sharks and crocodiles will not come near you. The turmeric is discrimination and renunciation.

Master's spiritual practice

(To the devotees) "God made me pass through the disciplines of various paths. First according to the Purana, then according to the Tantra. I also followed the disciplines of the Vedas. At first I practised sadhana in the Panchavati. I made a grove of tulsi-plants and used to sit inside it and meditate. Sometimes I cried with a longing Heart, 'Mother! Mother!' Or I again, 'Rāma! Rāma!'

"While repeating the name of Rāma, I sometimes assumed the attitude of Hanuman and fixed a tail to the lower end of my backbone. I was in a God-intoxicated state. At that

time I used to put on a silk robe and worship the Deity. What joy I experienced in that worship!

"I practised the discipline of the Tantra under the bel-tree. At that time I could see no distinction between the sacred tulsi and any other plant. In that state I sometimes ate the leavings from a jackal's meal, food that had been exposed the whole night, part of which might have been eaten by snakes or other creatures. Yes, I ate that stuff. "Sometimes I rode on a dog and fed him with luchi, also eating part of the bread myself. I realized that the whole world was filled with God alone. One cannot have spiritual realization without destroying ignorance; so I would assume the attitude of a tiger and devour ignorance.

"While practising the disciplines of the Vedas, I became a sannyasi. I used to lie down in the chandni and say to Hriday: 'I am a sannyasi. I shall take my meals here.'

"I vowed to the Divine Mother that I would kill myself if I did not see God. I said to Her: 'O Mother, I am a fool. Please teach me what is contained in the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and the other scriptures.' The Mother said to me, 'The essence of the Vedānta is that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory.'The Satchidananda Brahman described in the Vedas is the Satchidananda Śiva of the Tantra and the Satchidananda Krishna of the Purana. The essence of the Gitā is what you get by repeating the word ten times. It is reversed into 'tagi', which indicates renunciation.

"After the realization of God, how far below lie the Vedas, the Vedānta, the Purana, the Tantra! (To Hazra) I cannot utter the word 'Om' in samādhi. Why is that? I cannot say 'Om' unless I come down very far from the state of samādhi.

"I had all the experiences that one should have, according to the scriptures, after one's direct perception of God. I behaved like a child, like a madman, like a ghoul, and like an inert thing.

"I saw the visions described in the scriptures. Sometimes I saw the universe filled with sparks of fire. Sometimes I saw all the quarters glittering with light, as if the world were a lake of mercury. Sometimes I saw the world as if made of liquid silver. Sometimes, again, I saw all the quarters illumined as if with the light of Raman candles. So you see my experiences tally with those described in the scriptures.

"It was revealed to me further that God Himself has become the universe and all its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. It is like the process of evolution and involution.

"Oh, what a state God kept me in at that time! One experience would hardly be over before another overcame me. It was like the movement of the husking-machine: no sooner is one end down than the other goes up.

"I would see God in meditation, in the state of samādhi, and I would see the same God when my mind came back to the outer world. When looking at this side of the mirror I would see Him alone, and when looking on the reverse side I saw the same God."

The devotees listened to these words with rapt attention.

(To the Mukherji brothers) "Captain is now really in the state of the sadhaka. That the mere possession of wealth should create, attachment is by no means true. Sambhu Mallick used to say to Hriday, 'Hridu, I have packed my things and am ready for the journey.' I said to him: 'God forbid! Why do you say such ominous words?' 'No', replied Sambhu. 'Please bless me that I may cast aside all these possessions and go to God.'

"God's devotees have nothing to fear. They are His own He always stands by them. Once Duryodhana and his brothers were imprisoned by the gandharvas. It was Yudhisthira who freed them. Yudhisthira said, 'If our relatives are placed in such a plight, then it is our disgrace.' "

It was about nine o'clock in the evening. The Mukherji brothers were ready to return to Calcutta. The Master left his seat and began to pace the room and the porch. He could hear the kirtan sung in the Vishnu temple. A devotee said that Harish and Lātu were in the singing party.

Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees went to the Vishnu temple and saluted the Deity. The brahmins belonging to the staff of the temple garden, and also the priests, the cooks, and the servants, were singing the kirtan. He stood there a few minutes and encouraged the singers. On the way back to his room he remarked to the devotees, "You see, some of them polish the metal utensils and some go to houses of prostitution."

The Master returned to his room and took his seat. Presently the singers came and bowed low before him. The Master said to them: "One should perspire, dancing and singing the name of God, as people do earning money. I had thought of joining you in the dancing; but I found that you did everything very well. You had flavoured the curry with all the seasoning. What could I add? It will be nice if you sing devotional songs that way now and then."

The Mukherji brothers saluted the Master. Their carriage was ready near the verandah north of the room. The Master stood facing the north. On his left was the Ganges; in front of him were the nahabat, the garden, and the kuthi; and to his right was the road leading to the gate. The night was dark, and a devotee had brought a lantern to show the visitors their way. One by one the devotees bowed and took the dust of the Master's feet. The carriage seemed too heavily loaded for the horses. The Master said, "Aren't there too many people in the carriage?"

Sri Ramakrishna remained standing. As the carriage rolled away, the devotees looked back at the Master's face beaming with compassion and love.

Sunday, September 21, 1884

A large number of devotees were in Sri Ramakrishna's room, among them Ram, Mahendra Mukherji, M., and Chunilal. Chunilal had just returned from Vrindāvan, where he had gone with Rākhāl and Balarām. The two latter were still there. Nityagopal also was staying there. The Master began to talk with Chunilal about Vrindāvan.

MASTER: "How is Rākhāl?"

CHUNI: "He is quite well now, sir."

MASTER: "Isn't Nityagopal coming back?"

CHUNI: "He was still there when I left."

MASTER: "Who will bring your family back?"

CHUNI: "Balarām Babu told me he would arrange it with some reliable person. He didn't mention any name."

Master praises Narayan

Sri Ramakrishna then spoke to Mahendra Mukherji about Narayan, a school-boy sixteen or seventeen years old, who often visited the Master and was very dear to him.

MASTER: "He is quite guileless, isn't he?"

The very uttering of the word "guileless" filled the Master with great joy.

MAHENDRA: "Yes, sir. Completely guileless."

MASTER: "His mother came here the other day. I was a little frightened to see that she was a proud woman. That day she found that Captain, you, and many others, too, visited me. Then she must have realized that she and her son were not the only people to come here. (All laugh.) There was some sugar candy in the room and she remarked that it was good. That made her feel there was no scarcity of food here. I happened to tell Baburam, in front of her, to keep some sweets for himself and Naran. Ganu's mother said that Naran always bothered his mother for the boat hire to come here. His mother said to me, 'Please ask Naran to consent to marry.' I replied, 'All that depends on one's fate.' Why should I interfere? (All laugh.) Naran is indifferent to his studies. His mother said, 'Please ask him to pay a little more attention.' So I said to Naran, 'Attend to your studies.' Then his mother said, 'Please tell him seriously.' (All laugh.)

(To Chunilal) "Why doesn't Gopal come here?"

CHUNILAL: "He has been suffering from dysentery."

MASTER: "Is he taking any medicine?"

Sri Ramakrishna was planning to go to a performance of the Chaitanyalila at the Star Theatre. Mahendra Mukherji was to take him to Calcutta in his carriage. They were talking about choosing good seats. Some suggested that one could see the performance well from the one-rupee gallery. Ram said, "Oh, no! I shall engage a box for him." The Master laughed. Some of the devotees said that public women took part in the play. They took the parts of Nimai, Nitai, and others.

MASTER (to the devotees): "I shall look upon them as the Blissful Mother Herself. What if one of them acts the part of Chaitanya? An imitation custard-apple reminds one of the real fruit. Once, while going along a road, a devotee of Krishna noticed some babla-trees. Instantly his mind was thrown into ecstasy. He remembered that the wood of babla-trees was used for the handles of the spades that the garden of the temple of Syamasundar was dug with. The trees instantly reminded him of Krishna. I was once taken to the Maidan in Calcutta to see a balloon go up. There I noticed a young English boy leaning against a tree, with his body bent in three places. It at once brought before me the vision of Krishna and I went into samādhi.

"Once Chaitanyadeva was passing through a village. Someone told him that the body of the drum used in the kirtan was made from the earth of that village, and at once he went into ecstasy.

"Radha could not control herself at the sight of a cloud or the blue throat of a peacock. It would at once awaken in her mind the thought of Krishna, and she would go into ecstasy."

The Master was silent a few moments and then resumed the conversation.

MASTER: "Radha had attained mahabhava. There was no desire behind the ecstatic love of the gopis. A true lover does not seek anything from God. He prays only for pure love. He doesn't want any powers or miracles.

Occult powers

"It is very troublesome to possess occult powers. Nangta taught me this by a story. A man who had acquired occult powers was sitting on the seashore when a storm arose. It caused him great discomfort; so he said, 'Let the storm stop.' His words could not remain unfulfilled. At that moment a ship was going full sail before the wind. When the storm ceased abruptly the ship capsized and sank. The passengers perished and the sin of causing their death fell to the man. And because of that sin he lost his occult powers and went to hell.

"Once upon a time a sādhu acquired great occult powers. He was vain about them. But he was a good man and had some austerities to his credit. One day the Lord, disguised as a holy man, came to him and said, 'Revered sir, I have heard that you have great occult powers.' The sādhu received the Lord cordially and offered him a seat. Just then an elephant passed by. The Lord, in the disguise of the holy man, said to the sādhu, 'Revered sir, can you kill this elephant if you like?' The sādhu said, 'Yes, it is possible.'

So saying, he took a pinch of dust, muttered some mantras over it, and threw it at the elephant. The beast struggled awhile in pain and then dropped dead. The Lord said: 'What power you have! You have killed the elephant!' The sādhu laughed. Again the Lord spoke: 'Now can you revive the elephant?' 'That too is possible', replied the sādhu. He threw another pinch of charmed dust at the beast. The elephant writhed about a litle and came back to life. Then the Lord said: 'Wonderful is your power. But may I ask you one thing? You have killed the elephant and you have revived it. But what has that done for you? Do you feel uplifted by it? Has it enabled you to realize God?' Saying this the Lord vanished.

"Subtle are the ways of dharma. One cannot realize God if one has even the least trace of desire. A thread cannot pass through the eye of a needle if it has the smallest fibre sticking out.

"Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Friend, if you want to realize Me, you will not succeed if you have even one of the eight occult powers.' This is the truth. Occult power is sure to beget pride, and pride makes one forget God.

"Once a cross-eyed rich man came here. He said to me: 'You are a paramahamsa. That is good. You must perform a swastyayana ceremony for me.' What a small-minded person he was! He called me a paramahamsa and yet wanted me to perform that ceremony. To secure welfare by means of the swastyayana is to exercise occult power.

"An egotistic person cannot realize God. Do you know what egotism is like? It is like a high mound, where rain-water cannot collect: the water runs off. Water collects in low land. There seeds sprout and grow into trees. Then the trees bear fruit.

"Therefore I say to Hazra, 'Never think that you alone have true understanding and that others are fools.' One must love all. No one is a stranger. It is Hari alone who dwells in all beings. Nothing exists without Him.

"The Lord said to Prahlada, 'Ask a boon of Me.' 'I have seen You', replied Prahlada. 'That is enough. I don't need anything else.' But the Lord insisted. Thereupon Prahlada said, 'If You must give me a boon, let it be that those who have tortured me may not have to suffer punishment.' The meaning of those words is that it was God who tortured Prahlada in the form of his persecutors, and, if they suffered punishment, it would really be God who suffered.

Divine madness

"Radha was mad with prema, ecstatic love of God. But there is also the madness of bhakti. Hanuman's was such. When he saw Sita entering the fire he was going to kill Rāma. Then, too, there is the madness of Knowledge. I once saw a Jnāni behaving like a madman. He came here very soon after the temple garden was dedicated. People said he belonged to the Brahmo Sabha of Rammohan Roy. He had a torn shoe on one foot, a stick in one hand, and a potted mango-plant in the other. After a dip in the Ganges he went to the Kāli temple where Haladhāri was seated. With great fervour he began to

chant a hymn to the Divine Mother. Then he went up to a dog, held it by the ear, and ate some of its food. The dog didn't mind. Just at that time I too was about to experience the state of divine madness. I threw my arm around Hriday's neck and said, 'Oh, Hride! Shall I too fall into that plight?'

Master's God-intoxicated condition

"I became mad. Narayan Shastri came here and saw me roaming about with a bamboo pole on my shoulder. He said to the people, 'Ah, he is mad!' In that state I could not observe any caste restrictions. The wife of a low caste man used to send me cooked greens, and I ate them.

"I touched my head and lips with the leaf-plates from which the beggars ate their food in the guest-house of the Kāli temple. Thereupon Haladhāri said to me: 'What have you done? You have taken the food left by beggars. How will you marry off your children?' These words aroused my anger. Haladhāri was my cousin, older than myself. But could that restrain me? I said to him: 'You wretch! Isn't it you who take pride in the study of the Gitā and the Vedānta? Isn't it you who teach people that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory? And yet you imagine that I shall beget children! May your mouth that recites from the Gitā be blighted!'

(To M.) "You see, mere study of books avails nothing. One may recite the written part for the drum glibly from memory, but to play the drum is exceedingly difficult."

The Master continued with the description of his divine madness:

"Once, for a few days, I was out on an excursion with Mathur Babu in his house-boat. We took the trip for a change of air. During that trip we visited Navadvip. One day I saw the boatmen cooking their meal and stood and watched them. Mathur said to me, 'What are you doing there?' I replied with a smile, 'The boatmen are cooking, and their food looks very good.' Mathur felt that I might ask the boatmen to give me a portion of their food; so he said: 'Come away! Come away!'

"But I cannot do such a thing now. I am no longer in that mood. Now the food must be cooked by a brahmin observing ceremonial purity, and be offered to the Deity; then only can I eat it.

"Oh, what moods I passed through! At Kamarpukur I said to Chine Sankhari and the other chums of my boyhood days, 'Oh, I fall at your feet and beg of you to utter the name of Hari.' I was about to prostrate myself before them all. Thereupon Chine said, 'This is the first outburst of your divine love; so you don't see any distinction between one man and another.' When the storm breaks and raises the dust, then mango and tamarind trees look the same. One cannot distinguish the one from the other."

A DEVOTEE: "How can a householder keep on with his worldly duties if he is overwhelmed by such bhakti-madness or Love-madness or Knowledge madness?"

Two kinds of yogis

MASTER (looking at him): "There are two kinds of yogis, the 'revealed' and the 'hidden'. The householder may be a 'hidden' yogi. None recognizes him. The householder should renounce mentally, not outwardly."

RAM: "You talk as if you were consoling children. A householder may be a Jnāni but never a vijnāni."

MASTER: "He may become a vijnāni in the end. But it is not good to force oneself into renunciation."

RAM: "Keshab Sen used to say: 'Why do people go to him so much? One day he will sting them and they will flee from him.' "

MASTER: "Why should I sting people? I say to people: 'Do this as well as that. Do your worldly duties and call on God as well.' I don't ask them to renounce everything. (With a smile) One day Keshab was delivering a lecture. He said, 'O Lord, grant us that we may dive into the river of divine love and go straight to the Ocean of Satchidananda.' The ladies were seated behind the screen. I said to Keshab, 'How can you all dive once for all?' Pointing to the ladies, I said: 'Then what would happen to them? Every now and then you must return to dry land. You must dive and rise alternately.' Keshab and the others laughed.

"Hazra says to me, 'You love most those endowed with rajas, those who have great wealth and name and fame.' If that is so, then why do I love people like Harish and Loto? Why do I love Narendra? He can't even afford salt to season his roast banana!"

Sri Ramakrishna left his from and went toward the pine-grove talking with M. A devotee followed them with water and towel. The Master was talking about his intended visit to the Star Theatre. He said to M.: "What Ram says applies to rajasic people. What is the use of reserving an expensive seat?"

About five o'clock that afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was on his way to Calcutta. M., Mahendra Mukherji, and a few other devotees accompanied him in Mahendra's carriage. Thinking of God, the Master soon went into an ecstatic mood. After a long time he regained consciousness of the world. He observed: "That fellow Hazra dares teach me! The rascal!" After a short pause he said, "shall drink some water." He often made such remarks in order to bring his mind down to the sense plane.

MAHENDRA (to M.): "May I get some refreshments for him?"

M: "No, he won't eat anything now."

MASTER (still in ecstatic mood): "I shall eat."

Mahendra took the Master to his flour-mill located at Hathibagan. After a little rest Sri Ramakrishna was to go to the theatre. Mahendra did not care to take him to his own house, for the Master was not well acquainted with his father. Priyanath, Mahendra's second brother, was also a devotee of the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on a cot over which a carpet had been spread, and was engaged in spiritual talk.

MASTER (to M. and the others): "Once, while listening to the various incidents of the life of Chaitanya, Hazra said that these were manifestations of Śakti, and that Brahman, the All-pervasive Spirit, had nothing to do with them. But can there be Śakti without Brahman? Hazra wants to nullify the teachings of this place.

Identity of Brahman and Śakti

"I have realized that Brahman and Śakti are identical, like water and its wetness, like fire and its power to burn. Brahman dwells in all beings as the Bibhu, the All-pervasive Consciousness, though Its manifestation is greater in some places than in others. Hazra says, further, that anyone who realizes God must also acquire God's supernatural powers; that he possesses these powers, though he may or may not use them."

M: "Yes, one must have control over these supernatural powers!" (All laugh)

MASTER (smiling): "Yes, one must have them in one's grasp! How mean! He who has never enjoyed power and riches becomes impatient for them. But a true devotee never prays to God for them."

Sri Ramakrishna washed his face. A smoke was prepared for him. He said to M.: "Is. it dusk now? If it is, I won't smoke. During the twilight hour of the dusk you should give up all other activities and remember God." Saying this he looked at the hairs on his arm. He wanted to see whether he could count them. If he could not, it would be dusk.

Master at Star Theatre

About half past eight in the evening the carriage with the Master and the devotees drew up in front of the Star Theatre on Beadon Street. He was accompanied by M., Baburam, Mahendra and two or three others. They were talking about engaging seats, when Girish Chandra Ghosh, the manager of the theatre, accompanied by several officials, came out to the carriage, greeted the Master, and took him and the party upstairs. Girish had heard of the Master and was very glad to see him at the theatre. The Master was conducted to one of the boxes. M. sat next to him; Baburam and one or two devotees sat behind.

The hall was brilliantly lighted. The Master looked down at the pit and saw that it was crowded. The boxes also were full. For every box there was a man to fan those who occupied it. Sri Ramakrishna was filled with joy and said to M., with his childlike smile: "Ah, it is very nice here! I am glad to have come. I feel inspired when I see so many people together. Then I clearly perceive that God Himself has become everything."

M: "It is true, sir."

MASTER: "How much will they charge us here?"

M: "They won't take anything. They are very happy that you have come to the theatre."

MASTER: "It is all due to the grace of the Divine Mother."

The Chaitanyalila was about to be performed. It was a play about the early life of Sri Chaitanya, who was also known as Nimai, Gaur, Gora, and Gaurānga. The curtain rose; the attention of the audience was fixed on the stage.

The first scene depicts a council of Sin and the Six Passions. On a forest path behind them walk Viveka, Vairāgya, and Bhakti, engaged in conversation.

Bhakti says to her companions: "Gaurānga is born in Nadia. Therefore the vidyadharis, the munis, and the rishis have come down to earth in disguise to pay their respects to him."

She sings:

Blest indeed is the earth! Gora is born in Nadia!
Behold the vidyadharis, coming in chariots toadore him;
Behold the munis and rishis, who come, allured by the spell of Love.
The vidyadharis, munis, and rishis sing a hymn to Gaurānga and adore him as an Incarnation of God.

Sri Ramakrishna watched the scene and was overpowered with divine ecstasy. He said to M.: "Look at it! Ah! Ah!"

Sages: *O Kesava, bestow Thy grace*
Upon Thy luckless servants here!
O Kesava, who dost delight
To roam Vrindāvan's glades and groves!

Goddesses: *O Madhava, our mind's Bewitcher!*
Sweet One, who dost steal our hearts,
Sweetly playing On Thy flute!

Chorus: *Chant, O mind, the name of Hari,*
Sing aloud the name of Hari,
Praise Lord Hari's name!

Sages:*O Thou Eternal Youth of Braja,*
Tamer of fierce Kaliya,
Slayer of the afflicted's fear!

Goddesses: *Beloved with the arching eyes*
And crest with arching peacock feather,
Charmer of Sri Radha's heart!

Sages:*Govardhan's mighty Lifter, Thou,*
All garlanded with sylvan flowers!
O Damodara, Kamsa's Scourge!

Goddesses:*O Dark One, who dost sport in bliss*
With sweet Vrindāvan's gopi maids.

Chorus: *Chant, O mind, the name of Hari,*
Sing aloud the name of Hari,
Praise Lord Hari's name!

As the vidyadharis sang the lines, *Beloved with the arching eyes; And crest with arching peacock feather!,* the Master went into deep samādhi. The orchestra played on, but he was not aware of the outer world.

Another scene: A guest has arrived at the house of Jagannath Misra, Nimai's father. The boy Nimai plays about, singing with his friends, in a happy mood:

Tell Me, where is My blessed Vrindāvan?
Where is Mother Yaśoda?
Where Father Nanda and Brother Balai?
Where My twin cows, black and white?
Tell Me, where is My magic flute?
My friends Sudāmā and Sridāmā?
Where My Jamuna's bank, My banyan?
Where My beloved gopi maids?
Where is Radha, queen of My heart?

The guest closes his eyes while offering food to the Lord. Nimai runs to him. and eats the food from the plate. The guest recognizes Nimai as an Incarnation of God and seeks to please him with the Hymn of the Ten Incarnations. Before taking leave of Gaurānga's parents he sings:

Glory to Gora, the Source of Bliss!
Hail Gaurānga, Redeemer of earth!
Help of the helpless, Life of the living,
Slayer of fear in the hearts of the fearful!
Age after age we see Thy play
New sports unfolding, moods ever new;
New waves rolling, new tales to be told.
Thou who bearest the whole world's burden,
Shower on us the nectar of Love!
Take away our grief and affliction:

Thou in Love's pleasure-cave dost dwell.
Hope of the suffering! Chastiser of sin!
Scourge of the wicked! Victory to Thee!

Listening to the hymn, the Master was thrilled with ecstasy.

The next scene is at Navadvip on the bank of the Ganges. After bathing in the holy water, the brahmin men and women engage in worship by the riverside. As they close their eyes, Nimai steals their food offerings and begins to eat them. A brahmin loses his temper and says: "You scapegrace! You rascal! You are taking away my offering for Vishnu. Ruin will seize you." Nimai holds on to the offering and is about to run away. Many of the women love him dearly and cannot bear to have him go away. They call to him: "Return, O Nimai! Come back, O Nimai!" Nimai turns a deaf ear to them.

One of the women, however, knows the irresistible charm that will bring him back. She loudly chants the name of Hari. Immediately he repeats the name of Hari and comes back.

M. was seated beside the Master. Sri Ramakrishna could not control himself. He cried out, "Ah!" and shed tears of love. He said to Baburam and M.: "Don't make a fuss if I fall into an ecstatic mood or go into samādhi. Then the worldly people will take me for a cheat."

Another scene: Nimai is invested with the sacred thread of the brahmins. He puts on the traditional ochre robe of the sannyasi. Mother Sachi and the women of the neighbourhood stand about while he begs for alms, singing:

Drop a morsel of food, I pray, into my begging bowl;
Alone I roam, a new-made yogi, on the highways of the world.
People of Braja, you I love, and so, time and again,
I come to you; at hunger's call I beg my food from door to door.
The sun is low, and I must seek my home on the Jamuna's bank;
Into its waters fall my tears, as onward murmuring it flows.

The onlookers leave the stage. Nimai stands alone. The gods, in the guise of brahmin men and women, sing his praises.

Men: *Thy body gleams like liquid moonlight;*
Thou hast put on man's dwarfish form.
O Lord, Thee we salute!

Women: *Bewitcher of the gopis' hearts,*
Thou roamest in the shady groves
About Vrindāvan's vale.

Nimai: *Hail Sri Radha! Glory to Radha!*
The youths of Braja are Thy friends;
Thou curbest haughty Madan's pride.

Women: *Thy love has made the gopis mad;*
In ecstasy the Jamuna thrills.

Men: *Narayana, Deluder of demons!*
Refuge of the fear-stricken gods!

Women: *O Lover of Braja, Thou dost beg*
The love of Braja's comely maidens!

Nimai: *Hail Sri Radha! Glory to Radha!*

Listening to the music, the Master went into samādhi. The curtain fell and the orchestra played on.

A new scene: Srivas and other devotees are engaged in conversation in front of Advaita's house. Mukunda sings:

Sleep no more! How long will you lie
In māyā's slumber locked, O mind?
Who are you? Why have you been born?
Forgotten is your own true Self.
O mind, unclose your eyes at last
And wake yourself from evil dreams;
A fool you are to bind yourself
So to the passing shows of life,
When in you lives Eternal Bliss.
Come out of the gloom, O foolish mind!
Come out and hail the rising Sun!

Sri Ramakrishna praised the voice of the singer highly.

Another scene: Nimai is staying at home. Srivas comes to visit him. First he meets Sachi. The mother weeps and says: "My son doesn't attend to his household duties. My eldest son, Viswarupa, has renounced the world, and my heart has ached ever since. Now I fear that Nimai will follow in his steps."

Nimai arrives. Sachi says to Srivas: "Look at him. Tears run down his cheeks and breast. Tell, tell me how I can free him from these notions."

At the sight of Srivas, Nimai clings to his feet and says, with eyes full of tears: "Ah me! Revered sir, I have not yet attained devotion to Krishna. Futile is this wretched life! Tell me, sir, where is Krishna? Where shall I find Krishna? Give me the dust of your feet with

your blessing, that I may realize the Blue One with the garland of wild-flowers hanging about His neck."

Sri Ramakrishna looked at M. He was eager to say something but he could not. His voice was choked with emotion; the tears ran down his cheeks; with unmoving eyes he watched Nimai clinging to Srivas's feet and saying, "Sir, I have not yet attained devotion to Krishna."

Nimai has opened a school, but he cannot teach the students any longer. Gangadas, his former teacher, comes to persuade him to direct his attention to his worldly duties. He says to Srivas: "Listen, Srivas! We are brahmins, too, and devoted to the worship of Vishnu. But you people are ruining Nimai's worldly prospects."

MASTER (to M.): "That is the advice of the worldly-wise: Do 'this' as well as 'that'. When the worldly man teaches spirituality he always advises a compromise between the world and God."

M: "Yes, sir. That is true."

Gangadas continues his argument with Nimai. He says: "Nimai, undoubtedly you are versed in the scriptures. Reason with me. Explain to me if any other duty is superior to worldly duties. You are a householder. Why disregard the duties of a householder and follow others' duties?"

MASTER (to M.): "Did you notice? He's trying to persuade Nimai to make a compromise."

M: "Yes, sir."

Nimai says to Gangadas: "I am not wilfully indifferent to a householder's duties. On the contrary, it is my desire to hold to all sides. But, revered sir, I don't know what it is that draws me on. I don't know what to do. I want to cling to the shore but I cannot. My soul wanders away. I am helpless. My soul constantly wants to plunge headlong into the boundless Ocean."

MASTER: "Ah me!"

The scene changes: Nityananda has arrived at Navadvip. After a search he meets Nimai, who, in turn, has been seeking him. When they meet, Nimai says to him: "Blessed is my life! Fulfilled is my dream! You visited me in a dream and then disappeared."

The Master said in a voice choked with emotion, "Nimai said he had seen him in a dream."

Nimai is in an ecstatic mood and becomes engaged in conversation with Advaita, Srivas, Haridas, and other devotees. Nitai sings a song suited to Nimai's mood:

Where is Krishna? Where is my Krishna?
He is not in the grove, dear friends.
Give me Krishna! Bring me my Krishna!
Radha's heart knows naught but Him.

At this song Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi. He remained in that state a long time. The orchestra played on. Gradually his mind came down to the relative plane. In the mean time a young man of Khardaha, born in the holy family of Nityananda, had entered the box. He was standing behind the Master's chair. Sri Ramakrishna was filled with delight at the sight of him. He held his hand and talked to him affectionately. Every now and then he said: "Please sit down here. Your very presence awakens my spiritual feeling." He played tenderly with the young man's hands and lovingly stroked his face.

After he had left, Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "He is a great scholar. His father is a great devotee of God. When I go to Khardaha to visit Syamasundar, the father entertains me with sacred offerings such as one cannot buy even for a hundred rupees. This young man has good traits. A little shaking will awaken his inner spirit. At the sight of him my spiritual mood is aroused. I should have been overwhelmed with ecstasy if he had stayed here a little longer."

The curtain rises: Nityananda is walking in a procession on the public road with his companions, chanting the name of Hari. He meets two ruffians, Jagai and Madhai, who are sworn enemies of all religious people. Madhai strikes Nitai with a piece of broken pottery. Nitai is hurt and bleeds profusely, but he pays no heed, inebriated as he is with the love of God.

Sri Ramakrishna was in an ecstatic mood.

Nitai embraces both Jagai and Madhai, and sings a song to the two ruffians:

Jagai! Madhai! Oh, come and dance,
Chanting Hari's name with fervour!
What does it matter that you struck me?
Dance, dear friends, in Hari's name!
Sing the name of our Beloved:
He will embrace you in love's rapture!
Let the heavens resound with His name!
You have not tasted true emotion:
Weep as you chant the name of Hari,
And you will see the Moon of your soul.
Hari's name would I lovingly give you;
Nitai calls you to share His love.

Nimai speaks to Sachi of his desire to enter the monastic life. His mother faints and falls to the ground.

At this point many in the audience burst into tears. Sri Ramakrishna remained still and looked intently at the stage. A single tear appeared in the corner of each eye. The performance was over.

Sri Ramakrishna was about to enter a carriage. A devotee asked him how he had enjoyed the play. The Master said with a smile, "I found the representation the same as the real."

The carriage proceeded toward Mahendra's mill. Suddenly, Sri Ramakrishna went into an ecstatic mood and murmured to himself in loving tones: "O Krishna! O Krishna! Krishna is knowledge! Krishna is soul! Krishna is mind! Krishna is life! Krishna is body!" He continued: "O Govinda, Thou art my life! Thou art my soul!"

The carriage reached the mill. Mahendra fed the Master tenderly with various dishes. M. sat by his side. Affectionately he said to M., "Here, eat a little." He put some sweets in his hands.

With Mahendra and a few other devotees, Sri Ramakrishna left in the carriage for the Dakshineswar temple garden. The Master was in a happy mood. He sang a song about Gaurānga and Nitai. M. sang with him:

Gaur and Nitai, ye blessed brothers!
I have heard how kind you are,
And therefore I have come to you. . .

The Master and Mahendra talked about the latter's intended pilgrimage.

MASTER (smiling): "The divine love in you is barely a sprout now. Why should you let it wither? But come back very soon. Many a time I have thought of visiting your place. At last I have done it. I am so happy."

MAHENDRA: "My life is indeed blessed, sir."

MASTER: "You were already blessed. Your father is also a good man. I saw him the other day. He has faith in the Adhyātma Rāmāyana."

MAHENDRA: "Please bless me that I may have love for God."

MASTER: "You are generous and artless. One cannot realize God without sincerity and simplicity. God is far, far away from the crooked heart."

Near Syambazar, Mahendra bade the Master good-bye, and the carriage continued on its way.

Chapter 29

THE DURGA PUJA FESTIVAL

Friday, September 26, 1884

SRI RAMAKRISHNA had come to Calcutta. It was the first day of the Durga Puja, the great religious festival, and the Hindus of the metropolis were celebrating it. The Master intended to visit the image of the Divine Mother at Adhar's house. He also wanted to see Shivanath, the Brahmo devotee.

It was about midday. Umbrella in hand, M. was pacing the foot-path in front of the Brahmo Samaj temple. Two hours had passed but the Master had not yet appeared. Now and then M. sat down on the steps of Dr. Mahalnavish's dispensary and watched the joy and mirth of the people, young and old, who were celebrating the Puja.

A little after three the Master's carriage drove up. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna stepped out he saluted the temple of the Brahmo Samaj with folded hands. Hazra and a few other devotees were with him. M. bowed before the Master and took the dust of his feet. The Master told him that he was going to Shivanath's house. A few minutes later several members of the Brahmo Samaj came and took him to Shivanath's. But Shivanath was not at home. Shortly afterwards Vijay Goswami, Mahalnavish, and several other Brahmo leaders greeted the Master and took him inside the Brahmo temple.

Sri Ramakrishna was in a happy mood. He was given a seat below the altar. There the Brahmo devotees sang their devotional music. Vijay and the Brahmo devotees sat in front of the Master.

MASTER (to Vijay, with a smile): "I was told that you had put up a 'signboard' here that people belonging to other faiths are not allowed to come in. Narendra, too, said to me: 'You shouldn't go to the Brahmo Samiij. You had better visit Shivanath's house.'

Master's catholicity

"But I say that we are all calling on the same God. Jealousy and malice need not be. Some say that God is formless,and some that God has form. I say, let one man meditate on God with form if he believes in form, and let another meditate on the formless Deity if he does not believe in form. What I mean is that dogmatism is not good. It is not good to feel that my religion alone is true and other religions are false. The correct attitude is this: My religion is right, but I do not know whether other religions are right or wrong, true or false. I say this because one cannot know the true nature of God unless one realizes Him. Kabir used to say: 'God with form is my Mother, the Formless is my Father. Which shall I blame? Which shall I praise? The two pans of the scales are equally heavy.'

Different paths for different temperaments

"Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Saktas, Saivas, Vaishnavas, the Brahmajnanis of the time of the rishis, and you, the Brahmajnanis of modern times, all seek the same object. A mother prepares dishes to suit the stomachs of her children. Suppose a mother has

five children and a fish is bought for the family. She doesn't cook pilau or kalia for all of them. All have not the same power of digestion; so she prepares a simple stew for some. But she loves all her children equally.

"Do you know my attitude? I love all the preparations of fish. I have a womanly nature (all laugh). I feel myself at home with every dish-fried fish, fish cooked with turmeric powder, pickled fish. And further, I equally relish rich preparations like fish-head, kalia, and pilau. (all laugh)

"Do you know what the truth is? God has made different religions to suit different aspirants, times, and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself. Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole-hearted devotion. Suppose there are errors in the religion that one has accepted; if one is sincere and earnest, then God Himself will correct those errors. Suppose a man has set out with a sincere desire to visit Jagannath at Puri and by mistake has gone north instead of south; then certainly someone meeting him on the way will tell him: 'My good fellow, don't go that way. Go to the south.' And the man will reach Jagannath sooner or later.

"If there are errors in other religions, that is none of our business. God, to whom the world belongs, takes care of that. Our duty is somehow to visit Jagannath. (To the Brahmos) The view you hold is good indeed. You describe God as formless. That is fine. One may eat a cake with icing, either straight or sidewise. It will taste sweet either way.

Dogmatism condemned

"But dogmatism is not good. You have no doubt heard the story of the chameleon. A man entered a wood and saw a chameleon on a tree. He reported to his friends, 'I have seen a red lizard.' He was firmly convinced that it was nothing but red. Another person, after visiting the tree, said, 'I have seen a green lizard.' He was firmly convinced that it was nothing but green. But the man who lived under the tree said: 'What both of you have said is true. But the fact is that the creature is sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow, and sometimes has no colour at all.'

"God has been described in the Vedas as both with attributes and without. You describe Him as without form only. That is one-sided. But never mind. If you know one of His aspects truly, you will be able to know His other aspects too. God Himself will tell you all about them. (Pointing to two or three Brahmo devotees) Those who come to your Samaj know both this gentleman and that."

Encouragement to Vijay

Vijay still belonged to the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. He was a salaried preacher of that organization but could not obey all its rules and regulations. He mixed with those who believed in God with form. This was creating a misunderstanding between him and the Brahmo authorities. Many Brahmos disapproved of his conduct. The Master suddenly looked at Vijay and began to talk to him.

MASTER (to Vijay, smiling): "I understand that they have been finding fault with you for mixing with those who believe in God with form. Is that true? He who is a devotee of

God must have an understanding that cannot be shaken under any conditions. He must be like the anvil in a blacksmith's shop. It is constantly being struck by the hammer; still it is unshaken. Bad people may abuse you very much and speak ill of you; but you must bear with them all if you sincerely seek God. Isn't it possible to think of God in the midst of the wicked? Just think of the rishis of ancient times. They used to meditate on God in the forest, surrounded on all sides by tigers, bears, and other ferocious beasts. Wicked men have the nature of tigers and bears. They will pursue you to do you an injury.

How to deal with wicked people

"One must be careful about these few things. First, an influential man who has much money and many men under his control. He can injure you if he wants; you must be careful while talking to him; perhaps you may have to approve what he says. Second, a dog. When it chases you or barks at you, you must stand still, talk to it gently, and pacify it. Third, a bull. If it runs after you with lowered horns, you must calm it with a gentle voice. Fourth, a drunkard. If you arouse his anger, he will abuse you, naming fourteen generations of your family. You should say to him: 'Hello uncle! How are you?' Then he will be mightily pleased and sit by you and smoke.

"In the presence of a wicked person I become alert. If such a man asks me whether I have a pipe for smoking, I say, 'Yes, I have.' Some people have the nature of a snake: they will bite you without warning. You have to discriminate a great deal in order to avoid the bite; otherwise your passion will be stirred up to such an extent that you will feel like doing injury in return. The companionship of a holy man is greatly needed now and then. It enables one to discriminate between the Real and the unreal."

VIJAY: "I have no time, sir. I am entangled in my duties here."

MASTER: "You are a religious teacher. Others have holidays, but not so a religious teacher. When the manager of an estate brings order to one part of it, the landlord sends him to another part. So you have no leisure." (all laugh)

VIJAY (with folded hands): "Sir, please give me your blessing."

MASTER: "Now you are talking like an ignorant person. It is God alone who blesses."

VIJAY: "Revered sir, please give us some instruction."

The Master glanced around the Brahmo temple and said with a smile, "This is nice too-a mixture of crystals and syrup. There are crystals, and there is syrup too.

"I have scored too many points and am therefore out of the game (all laugh). Do you know the game called 'nax'? It is a game of cards, and anyone scoring above seventeen is out of the game. Those who score fewer points-say five, seven, or ten-are clever. I have scored too many and am out of the game.

"Once Keshab Sen gave a lecture at his house. I was present. Many people were there. The ladies were seated behind the screen. Keshab, in the course of his talk, said, 'O God,

please bless us that we may dive and disappear altogether in the river of bhakti.' I said to Keshab with a smile: 'If you disappear altogether in the river of bhakti, then what will be the fate of those behind the screen? By all means dive into the river, but you had better come back to dry land now and then: Don't disappear in the river altogether.' At these words Keshab and the others burst out laughing.

"Never mind. One can realize God in the world, too, if only one is sincere. 'I' and 'mine'-that is ignorance. But, 'O God! Thou and Thine'-that is knowledge.

Advice to householders

"Live in the world like a maidservant in a rich man's house. She performs all the household duties, brings up her master's child, and speaks of him as 'my Hari'. But in her heart she knows quite well that neither the house nor the child belongs to her. She performs all her duties, but just the same her mind dwells on her native place. Likewise, do your worldly duties but fix your mind on God. And know that house, family, and son do not belong to you; they are God's. You are only His servant.

"I ask people to renounce mentally. I do not ask them to give up the world. If one lives in the world unattached and seeks God with sincerity, then one is able to attain Him.

(To Vijay) "There was a time when I too would meditate on God with my eyes closed. Then I said to myself: 'Does God exist only when I think of Him with my eyes closed? Doesn't He exist when I look around with my eyes open?' Now, when I look around with my eyes open, I see that God dwells in all beings. He is the Indwelling Spirit of all-men, animals and other living beings, trees and plants, sun and moon, land and water.

"Why do I seek Shivanath? He who meditates on God for many days has substance in him, has divine power in him. Further, he who sings well, plays well on a musical instrument, or has mastered anyone art, has in him real substance and the power of God. This is the view of the Gitā. It is said in the Chandi that he who is endowed with physical beauty has in him substance and the power of God. (To Vijay) Ah, what a beautiful nature Kedār has! No sooner does he come to me than he bursts into tears. His eyes are always red and swim in tears, like a chanabara in syrup."

VIJAY: "At Dāccā he is constantly talking about you. He is always eager to see you."

Sri Ramakrishna was about to depart. The Brahmo devotees bowed low before him and he returned their salute. Then, getting into the carriage, he set out for Adhar's house to see the image of the Divine Mother.

Sunday, September 28, 1884

It was the day of the Mahāshtami, the most auspicious day of the worship of Durga, the Divine Mother. At Adhar's invitation Sri Ramakrishna had come to Calcutta to see the holy image at his house. Before going there he went to Ram's. Many devotees, including Narendra, Baburam, M., Niranjan, Vijay, Kedār, Ram, and Surendra, were present. Balarām and Rākhāl were still at Vrindāvan.

MASTER (looking at Vijay and Kedār, with a smile): "This is a nice reunion today. You two have the same spiritual mood. (To Vijay) Well, what about Shivanath? Did you-?"

VIJAY: "Yes, sir, he heard that you had been to his house. I haven't seen him, but I sent him word. He knows about it."

MASTER (to Vijay and the others); "Four desires have come into my mind. I shall eat fish curry cooked with egg-plant. I shall visit Shivanath. The devotees will repeat the name of Hari over their beads, and I shall watch them. And the Tantrik devotees will drink consecrated wine, eight *ānnās* worth, on the ashtami day, and I shall watch them and salute them."

Narendra was seated in front of the Master. He was about twenty-two years old. While Sri Ramakrishna was talking thus his eyes fell upon his beloved disciple. At once the Master stood up and went into samādhi. He placed one foot on Narendra's knee. He was in a deep spiritual mood, his eyes unblinking, his mind completely unconscious of the outer world. After a long time he came down to the relative plane of consciousness; but he still appeared dazed, for the intoxication of divine bliss had not altogether left him. Speaking to himself in that ecstatic state, he repeated the name of God. He said: "Satchidananda! Satchidananda! Satchidananda! Shall I repeat that? No, it is the day of the Divine Mother, the Giver of the bliss of divine inebriation. O Mother, full of the bliss of divine inebriation! Sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni. It is not good to keep the voice on 'ni'. It is not possible to keep it there very long. I shall keep it on the next lower note.

Difference between ordinary men and Incarnations

"There are different planes of consciousness: the gross, the subtle, the causal, and the Great Cause. Entering the Mahakarana, the Great Cause, one becomes silent; one cannot utter a word.

"But an Isvarakoti, after attaining the Great Cause, can come down again to the lower planes. Incarnations of God, and others like them, belong to the class of the Isvarakotis. They climb up, and they can also come down. They climb to the roof, and they can come down again by the stairs and move about on a lower floor. It is a case of negation and affirmation. There is, for instance, the seven-storey palace of a king. Strangers have access only to the lower apartments; but the prince, who knows the palace to be his own, can move up and down from floor to floor. There is a kind of rocket that throws out sparks in one pattern and then seems to go out. After a moment it makes another pattern, and then still another. There is no end to the patterns it can make. But there is another kind of rocket that, when it is lighted, makes only a dull sound, throws out a few sparks, and then goes out altogether. Like this second kind, an ordinary jiva, after much spiritual effort, can go to a higher plane; but he cannot come down to tell others his experiences. After much effort he may go into samādhi; but he cannot climb down from that state or tell others what he has seen there.

Nature of the ever-perfect

"There is a class of devotees, the nityasiddhas, the ever-perfect. From their very birth they seek God. They do not enjoy anything of the world.

Illustration of homa bird

The Vedas speak of the homa bird. It lives very high in the sky. There the mother bird lays her egg. She lives so high that the egg falls for many days. While falling it is hatched. The chick continues to fall. That also goes on for many days. In the mean time the chick develops eyes. Coming near the earth, it becomes conscious of the world. It realizes it will meet certain death if it hits the ground. Then it gives a shrill cry and shoots up toward its mother. The earth means death, and it frightens the young bird; it then seeks its mother. She dwells high up in the sky, and the young bird shoots straight up in that direction. It doesn't look anywhere else.

"Those who are born as the companions of an Incarnation of God are eternally perfect. For some of them that birth is the last.

(To Vijay) "You have both-yoga and bhoga. King Janaka also had yoga and bhoga. Therefore he is called a rajarshi, both king and seer. Nārada was a devarshi, and Sukadeva a brahmarshi. Yes, Sukadeva was a brahmarshi. He was not a mere Jnāni; he was the very embodiment of Jnāna, Divine Knowledge. Whom do I call a Jnāni? A man who has attained Knowledge and has done so after much effort. Sukadeva was the very image of Knowledge, in other words, a form of concentrated Knowledge. He attained Knowledge spontaneously, without any labour."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna came down to the normal mood. Then he talked freely with the devotees. The Master asked Kedār to sing.

Kedār sang:

How shall I open my heart, O friend?
It is forbidden me to speak.
I am about to die, for lack of a kindred soul
To understand my misery. . . .

Kedār sang several other songs. After the music the Master again talked to the devotees. Nandalal, Keshab's nephew, was also present with a few brahmo friends. They were sitting near the Master.

MASTER (to Vijay and the other devotees): "A man brought a bottle of consecrated wine for me; but I couldn't even touch it."

VIJAY: "Ah!"

MASTER: "I become intoxicated at the mere thought of God. I don't have to take any wine. I feel drunk at the very sight of the charanamrita. I feel as if I had drunk five bottles of liquor. When a person attains such a state he cannot help discriminating about food."

NARENDRA: "As regards food, one should take whatever comes."

MASTER: "What you say applies only to a particular state of the aspirant's mind. No food can harm a Jnāni.

According to the Gitā, the Jnāni himself does not eat; his eating is an offering to the Kundalini. But that does not apply to a bhakta. The present state of my mind is such that I cannot eat any food unless it is first offered to God by a brahmin priest. Formerly my state of mind was such that I would enjoy inhaling the smell of burning corpses, carried by the wind from the other side of the Ganges. It tasted very sweet to me. But nowadays I cannot eat food touched by anybody and everybody. No, I cannot. But once in a while I do. One day I was taken to see a performance of a play at Keshab's house. They gave me luchi and curries to eat. I didn't know whether the food was handed to me by a washerman or a barber; but I ate quite a little (all laugh). Rākhāl had asked me to eat.

(To Narendra) "With you it is all right. You are in 'this' as well as in 'that'. You can eat everything now. (To the devotees) Blessed is he who feels longing for God, though he eats pork. But shame on him whose mind dwells on 'woman and gold', though he eats the purest food-boiled vegetables, rice, and ghee.

"Once I had a desire to eat dal cooked in a blacksmith's house. From my childhood I had heard the blacksmiths say, 'Do the brahmins know how to cook?' I ate the dal, but it smelt of the blacksmith. (all laugh)

"I received the Allah mantra from Govinda Rai. Rice was cooked for me with onions in the kuthi. I ate some. I ate curry in Mani Mallick's garden house, but I felt a kind of repulsion to it.

"When I went to Kamarpukur, Ramlal's father was frightened. He thought I might eat at any and every house. He was frightened to think I might be expelled from the caste; so I couldn't stay long. I came away.

"Both the Vedas and the Puranas describe pure food and conduct. But what the Vedas and the Puranas ask people to shun as impure is extolled by the Tantra as good.

Master's divine madness

"Oh, what a state of mind I passed through! I would open my mouth, touching, as it were, heaven and the nether world with my jaws, and utter the word 'Ma'. I felt that I had seized the Mother, like a fisherman dragging fish in his net. Let me recite a song:

This time I shall devour Thee utterly, Mother Kāli!
For I was born under an evil star,
And one so born becomes, they say, the eater of his mother.
Thou must devour me first, or I myself shall eat Thee up;
One or the other it must be.

I shall besmear my hands with black, and with black my face;

With black I shall besmear the whole of my body
And when Death seizes me, with black I shall besmear his face.
O Mother, I shall eat Thee up but not digest Thee;
I shall install Thee in my heart
And make Thee offerings with my mind.

You may say that by eating Kāli I shall embroil myself
With Kala, Her Husband, but I am not afraid;
Braving His anger, I shall chant my Mother's name.
To show the world that Ramprasad is Kāli's rightful son,
Come what may, I shall eat Thee up-Thee and Thy retinue-
Or lose my life attempting it.

"I almost became mad-such was my longing for God."

Narendra began to sing:

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
What need have I of knowledge or reason? . . .

Listening to the song, the Master again went into samādhi. Coming down to the normal plane, he assumed the attitude of Girirani and sang the *Āgamani*. He sang, intoxicated with divine love:

Tell me, my Uma, how have you fared, alone in the Stranger's house? . . .

He said to the devotees, "Today is the Mahashtami. The Mother has come; that is why I feel such an awakening of spiritual emotion."

KEDĀR: "Lord, you are here. Are you different from the Divine Mother?"

Sri Ramakrishna looked in another direction and sang in an absent-minded mood:

Ah, friend! I have not found Him yet, whose love has driven me mad....

Again he became ecstatic and sang of the Divine Mother. As he sang, Vijay suddenly stood up crying the name of Hari. Sri Ramakrishna, full of divine love, began to dance with Vijay and the other devotees.

The music was over. The Master, Vijay, Narendra, and the other devotees sat down. All eyes were fixed on Sri Ramakrishna, who began conversing with the devotees. He asked about their health. Kedār spoke to him humbly in a soft, sweet voice. Narendra, Chunilal, Ram, M., and Harish were sitting by the Master.

KEDĀR (humbly): "How can I get rid of my dizziness?"

MASTER (tenderly): "One gets that. I have had it myself.

Use a little almond oil. I have heard that it cures dizziness."

KEDĀR: "I shall, sir."

MASTER (to Chunilal): "Hello! How is everything?"

CHUNILAL: "Everything is all right with us now. Balarām Babu and Rākhāl are well at Vrindāvan."

MASTER: "Why have you sent so many sweetmeats? (To Harish) Wait a day or two before coming to Dakshineswar. You are not well. You may fall ill again there. (To Narayan, tenderly) Sit here. Sit by me. Come to Dakshineswar tomorrow and have your meal there. (Pointing to M.) Come with him. (To M.) What do you say?"

M. wanted to accompany Sri Ramakrishna to Dakshineswar that very day. He became thoughtful.

Surendra stood near Sri Ramakrishna. He was in the habit of drinking and often went to excess. This had worried the Master greatly, but he had not asked Surendra to give up drinking altogether. He had said to him: "Look here, Surendra! Whenever you drink wine, offer it beforehand to the Divine Mother. See that your brain doesnt become clouded and that you don't reel The more you think of the Divine Mother, the less you will like to drink The Mother is the Giver of the bliss of divine inebriation. Realizing Her, one feels a natural bliss."

The Master looked at Surendra and said, "You have had a drink." With these words he went into samādhi. It was dusk. Regaining partial consciousness, the Master sang:

Behold my Mother playing with Śiva, lost in an ecstasy of joy!
Drunk with a draught of celestial wine, She reels, and yet She does not fall. . .

Then he chanted the name of Hari, clapping his hands occasionally. In a sweet voice he said: "Hari! Hari! O mind, chant the name of Hari! Sing the name of Hari!" Then he chanted: "Rāma! Rāma Rāma! Rāma!"

Now the Master began to pray: "O Rāma! O Rāma! I am without devotion and austerity, without knowledge and love; I have not performed any religious rites. O Rāma, I have taken refuge in Thee; I have taken shelter at Thy feet. I do not want creature comforts; I do not seek name and fame. O Rāma, I do not crave the eight occult powers; I do not care for a hundred occult powers! I am Thy servant. I have taken refuge in Thee. Grant, O Rāma, that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet; that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching māyā! O Rāma, I have taken refuge it Thee."

As the Master prayed all eyes were turned toward him. Hearing his piteous voice, few could restrain their tears.

Ramchandra Dutta came in and stood near him.

MASTER: "Where have you been, Ram?"

RAM: "I was upstairs, sir."

Ram had been making arrangements for feeding the devotees on the roof of the house.

MASTER (to Ram, with a smile): "Isn't it better to stay down below that to be high up? Water accumulates in low land but flows down from a high mound."

RAM (with a smile): "That is true, sir."

Supper was ready on the roof. Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees were taken there and sumptuously fed. Later the Master went to Adhar's house with M., Niranjan, and others. The Divine Mother was being worshipped there, It had been Adhar's earnest prayer that on this sacred day Sri Ramakrishna might bless his house with his presence.

Monday, September 29, 1884

It was the third day of the Durga Puja. The Master had been awake in his room at Dakshineswar since early morning. The morning worship in the Kāli temple was over and the orchestra had played the morning melodies in the nahabat. Brahmans and gardeners, basket in hand, were plucking flowers for the worship of the Divine Mother. Bhavanath, Baburam, Niranjan, and M. had spent the night at Dakshineswar, sleeping on the porch of the Master's room. As soon as they awoke they saw Sri Ramakrishna dancing in an ecstatic mood. He was chanting: "Victory to Mother Durga! Hallowed be the name of Durga!" He was naked and looked like a child as he chanted the name of the Blissful Mother. After a few moments he said: "Oh, the bliss of divine ecstasy! Oh, the bliss of divine drunkenness!" Then he repeatedly chanted the name of Govinda: "O Govinda! My life! My soul!"

The devotees sat on their beds and with unwinking eyes watched Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual mood. Hazra was living at the temple garden. Lātu was also living there to render the Master personal service. Rākhāl was still at Vrindāvan. Narendra visited Sri Ramakrishna now and then. He was expected that day.

The devotees washed their faces. The Master took his seat on a mat on the north verandah. Bhavanath and M. sat beside him. Other devotees were coming in and out of the room.

MASTER (to Bhavanath): "The truth is that ordinary men cannot easily have faith. But an Isvarakoti's faith is spontaneous. Prahlada burst into tears while writing the letter 'ka'. It reminded him of Krishna. It is the nature of jivas to doubt. They say yes, no doubt, but-

Oneness of Śakti and Brahman

"Hazra can never be persuaded to believe that Brahman and Śakti, that Śakti and the Being endowed with Śakti, are one and the same. When the Reality appears as Creator,

Preserver, and Destroyer, we call It Śakti; when It is inactive, we call It Brahman. But really It is one and the same thing-indivisible. Fire naturally brings to mind its power to burn; and the idea of burning naturally brings to mind the idea of fire. It is impossible to think of the one without the other.

"So I prayed to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother! Hazra is trying to upset the views of this place. Either give him right understanding or take him from here.' The next day he carne to me and said, 'Yes, I agree with you.' He said that God exists everywhere as All-pervading Consciousness."

BHAVANATH (smiling): "Did what Hazra said really make you suffer so much?"

MASTER: "You see, I am now in a different mood. I can't shout and carry on heated discussions with people. I am not in a mood now to argue and quarrel with Hazra. Hriday said to me at Jadu Mallick's garden house, 'Uncle, don't you want to keep me with you?' 'No,' I said, 'I am no longer in a mood to get into heated arguments with you.'

Knowledge and ignorance

"What is knowledge and what is ignorance? A man is ignorant so long as he feels that God is far away. He has knowledge when he knows that God is here and everywhere.

Childlike faith

"When a man has true knowledge he feels that everything is filled with Consciousness. At Kamarpukur I used to talk to Shibu, who was then a lad four or five years old. When the clouds rumbled and lightning flashed, Shibu would say to me: 'There, uncle! They are striking matches again!' (all laugh) One day I noticed him chasing grasshoppers by himself. The leaves rustled in the near-by trees. 'Hush! Hush!' he said to the leaves. 'I want to catch the grasshoppers.' He was a child and saw everything throbbing with consciousness. One cannot realize God without the faith that knows no guile, the simple faith of a child.

"Ah, what a state of mind I passed through! One day something bit me while I was sitting in the grass. I was afraid it might have been a snake, and I didn't know what to do. I had heard that if a snake bites you again immediately after its first bite, it takes back. its own venom. At once I set out to discover the hole so that I might let the snake bite me again. While I was searching, a man said to me, 'What are you doing?' After listening to my story, he said, 'But the snake must bite in the very same place it has bitten before.' Thereupon I went away. Perhaps I had been bitten by a scorpion or some other insect.

"I had heard from Ramlal that the autumn chill was good for one's health. Ramlal had quoted a verse to support it. One day, as I was returning from Calcutta in a carriage, I stuck my head out of the window so that I might get all the chill. Then I fell ill." (all laugh)

Sri Ramakrishna entered his room and sat down. His legs were a little swollen. He asked the devotees to feel his legs and see whether or not the pressure of their fingers made dimples. Dimples did appear with the pressure, but the devotees said that it was nothing.

MASTER (to Bhavanath): "Please ask Mahendra of Sinthi to see me. I shall feel better if he reassures me."

BHAVANATH (with a smile): "You have great faith in medicine. But we haven't so much."

MASTER: "It is God who, as the doctor, prescribes the medicine. It is He who, in one form, has become the physician. Dr. Gangaprasad asked me not to drink water at night. I regarded his statement as the words of the Vedas. I look upon him as the physician of heaven."

Hazra entered the room and sat down. The Master talked awhile about different things and then said to Hazra: "You see, many people were at Ram's house yesterday. Vijay, Kedār, and others were there. But why did I feel so deeply stirred at the sight of Narendra? I found that Kedār belonged to the realm of Divine Inebriation."

Presently Narendra arrived, and Sri Ramakrishna was exceedingly happy. Narendra saluted the Master and began to talk with Bhavanath and others in the room. M. was seated near by. A long mat was spread on the floor. While talking, Narendra lay on it flat on his stomach. The Master looked at him and suddenly went into samādhi. He sat on Narendra's back in an ecstatic mood.

Bhavanath sang:

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,
Do not deprive Thy worthless child of bliss! . . .

Sri Ramakrishna came down from the plane of samādhi. He sang:

Repeat, O mind, my Mother Durga's hallowed name!
O Gauri! O Narayani! to Thee I bow.
Thou art the day, O Mother! Thou art the dusk and the night.
As Rāma Thou drawest the bow, as Krishna Thou playest the flute;
As Kāli all-terrible, Thou hast silenced Śiva, Thy Lord.
The ten Embodiments of Divine Śakti art Thou,
And Thou the ten Avatars; this time save me Thou must!
With flowers and vilwa-leaves did Yaśoda worship Thee,
And Thou didst bless her by placing Krishna, the Child, in her arms.
Wherever I chance to live, O Mother, in forest or grove,
May my mind, day and night, dwell at Thy Lotus Feet;
Whether at last I die a natural or sudden death,
Oh, may my tongue repeat Durga's name at the end!

Thou mayest send me away, O Mother, but where shall I go?
Tell me, Mother, where else shall I hear so sweet a name?
Thou mayest even say to me: "Step aside! Go away!"
Yet I shall cling to Thee, O Durga! Unto Thy feet
As Thine anklets I shall cling, making their tinkling sound.
When, O Mother, Thou sittest at mighty Śiva's side,
Then I shall cry from Thy feet, "Victory unto Śiva!"
Mother, when as the Kite, Thou soarest in the sky,
There, in the water beneath, as a minnow I shall be swimming;
Upon me Thou wilt pounce, and pierce me through with Thy claws.
Thus, when the breath of life forsakes me in Thy grip,
Do not deny me the shelter of Thy Lotus Feet!
From the world's bondage free me, 0 Spouse of the Absolute!
Thy two feet are my boat to cross this world's dark sea.
Thou art the heavens and the earth, and Thou the nether world;
From Thee have the twelve Gopalas and Hari and Brahma sprung.
Whoever treads the path, repeating "Durga! Durga!"
Śiva Himself protects with His almighty trident.

Hazra was sitting on the northeast verandah counting the beads of his rosary. The Master went and sat in front of him, taking the rosary in his own hands.

MASTER (to Hazra): "You see, I cannot use the rosary. No, perhaps I can. Yes, I can with my left hand. But I cannot repeat the name of God with it."

With these words Sri Ramakrishna tried to perform a little japa. But hardly had he begun when he went into samādhi. He sat in that state a long time, still holding the rosary in his hand. The devotees looked at him with wonder in their eyes. Hazra also watched the Master without uttering a word. After a long time Sri Ramakrishna regained consciousness of the outer world and said that he was hungry. He often said such things to bring his mind down to the normal plane. M. was going to bring something for him to eat. The Master said, "No, I shall first go to the Kāli temple."

He went across the cement courtyard toward the Kāli temple. On the way he bowed with folded hands to the twelve Śiva temples. On the left was the temple of Radhakanta. He went there first and bowed before the image. Then he entered the Kāli temple and saluted the Mother. Sitting on a carpet, he offered flowers at the Mother's holy feet. He also placed a flower on his own head. While returning from the temple he asked Bhavanath to carry the green coconut offered at the temple, and the charanamrita. Coming back to his room, accompanied by M. and Bhavanath, he saluted Hazra, who cried out in dismay: "What are you doing, sir? What is this?" The Master said, "Why should you say it is wrong?" Hazra often argued with the Master, declaring that God dwelt in all beings and that everybody could attain Brahmajnana through sadhana. He had an exaggerated idea of his own spiritual progress.

It was about noon. The gong and the bells announced the worship and offering in the various temples. The brahmins, the Vaishnavas, and the beggars went to the guest-house to have their midday meal. The devotees of the Master were also to partake of the sacred offerings. He asked them to go to the guest-house. To Narendra he said: "Won't you take your meal in my room? All right. Narendra and I will eat here." Bhavanath, Baburam, M., and the other devotees went to the guest-house.

After his meal Sri Ramakrishna rested a few minutes. The devotees were on the verandah engaged in light conversation. He soon joined them and was happy in their company. It was about two o'clock. All were, still sitting on the verandah, when suddenly Bhavanath appeared in the garb of a brahmachari, dressed in an ochre cloth, kamandalu in hand, his face beaming with smiles.

MASTER (with a smile): "That is his inner feeling. Therefore he has dressed himself as a brahmachari"

NARENDRA: "He has put on the garb of a brahmachari; let me put on the garb of' a Tantrik worshipper."

HAZRA: "Then you will have to follow the Tantrik rituals, with women, wine, and so on."

Sri Ramakrishna did not encourage the conversation. Indeed, he made fun of it.

Suddenly the Master began to dance in an ecstatic mood. He sang:

Mother, Thou canst not trick me any more,
For I have seen Thy crimson Lotus Feet. . . .

The Master said: "Ah, how wonderfully Rajnarayan sings about the Divine Mother! He sings and dances that way. The music of Nakur Āchārya at Kamarpukur is also wonderful. Ah, how beautiful his singing and dancing are!"

A sādhu was staying at the Panchavati. But he was a hot-tempered man; he scolded and cursed everyone. He came to the Master's room wearing wooden sandals and asked the Master, "Can I get fire here?" Sri Ramakrishna saluted him and stood with folded hands as long as he remained in the room.

When he had left, Bhavanath said to the Master with a laugh, "What great respect you showed the sādhu!"

MASTER (smiling): "You see, he too is Narayana, though full of tamas. This is the way one should please people who have an excess of tamas. Besides, he is a sādhu."

The devotees were engaged in a game of golokdham. Hazra joined them. The Master stood by, watching them play. M. and Kishori reached "heaven". Sri Ramakrishna bowed before them and said, "Blessed are you two brothers." He said to M., aside, "Don't play any more." Hazra fell into "hell". The Master said: "What's the matter with Hazra?

Again!" No sooner had Hazra got out of "hell" than he fell into it again. All burst into laughter. Lātu, at the first throw of the dice, went to "heaven" from "earth". He began to cut capers of joy. "See Lātu's joy!" said the Master. "He would have been terribly sad if he hadn't achieved this. (Aside to the devotees) This too has a meaning. Hazra is so vain that he thinks he will triumph over all even in this game. This is the law of God, that He never humiliates a righteous person. Such a man is victorious everywhere."

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch in his room. Narendra, Baburam, Bhavanath, and M. were sitting on the floor. Narendra referred to various religious sects-the Ghoshpara, Panchanami, and others. Sri Ramakrishna described their views and condemned their immoral practices. He said that they could not follow the right course of spiritual discipline, but enjoyed sensuous pleasures in the name of religion.

Danger of Tantrik discipline

MASTER (to Narendra): "You need not listen to these things. The bhairavas and the bhairavis of the Tantrik sect also follow this kind of discipline. While in Benares I was taken to one of their mystic circles. Each bhairava had a bhairavi with him. I was asked to drink the consecrated wine, but I said I couldn't touch wine. They drank it. I thought perhaps they would then practise meditation and japa. But nothing of the sort. They began to dance. I was afraid they might fall into the Ganges: the circle had been made on its bank. It is very honourable for husband and wife to assume the roles of bhairava and bhairavi.

(To Narendra and the others) "Let me tell you this. I regard woman as my mother; I regard myself as her son. This is a very pure attitude. There is no danger in it. To look on woman as a sister is also not bad. But to assume the attitude of a 'hero', to look on woman as one's mistress, is the most difficult discipline. Tārak's father followed this discipline. It is very difficult. In this form of sadhana one cannot always maintain the right attitude.

"There are various paths to reach God. Each view is a path. It is like reaching the Kāli temple by different roads. But it must be said that some paths are clean and some dirty. It is good to travel on a clean path.

"Many views, many paths-and I have seen them all. But I don't enjoy them any more; they all quarrel.

Master's inner experiences

"No one else is here, and you are my own people. Let me tell you something. I have come to the final realization that God is the Whole and I am a part of Him, that God is the Master and I am His servant. Furthermore, I think every now and then that He is I and I am He."

The devotees listened to these words in deep silence.

BHAVANATH (humbly): "I feel disturbed if I have a misunderstanding with someone. I feel that in that case I am not able to love all"

MASTER: "Try at the outset to talk to him and establish a friendly relationship with him. If you fail in spite of your efforts, then don't give it another thought. Take refuge in God. Meditate on Him. There is no use in giving up God and feeling depressed from thinking about others."

BHAVANATH: "Great souls, such as Christ and Chaitanya, have admonished us to love all beings."

MASTER: "Love you must, because God dwells in all beings. But salute a wicked person from a distance. You speak of Chaitanya? He also used to restrain his spiritual feeling in the presence of unsympathetic people. At Srivas's house he put Srivas's mother-in-law out of the room, dragging her out by the hair."

BHAVANATH: "It was not he but others who did it."

MASTER: "Could the other have done it without his approval? What can be done? Suppose a man cannot make another love him; must he worry about it day and night? Must I waste my mind, which should be given to God, on useless things? I say: 'O Mother, I don't want Narendra, Bhavanath, Rākhāl, or anybody. I seek Thee alone. What shall I do with man?'

When the Blissful Mother comes to my house, how much of the Chandi I shall hear!

How many monks will come here, and how many yogis with matted locks!

"When I attain God I shall attain everything. I renounced gold and silver, saying, 'Rupee is clay and clay is rupee; gold is clay and clay is gold.' With these words I threw gold, silver, and clay into the Ganges. Then I was afraid at the thought that Mother Lakshmi might be angry with me because I had treated Her wealth with contempt; that She might even stop my meals. So I prayed to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, I want Thee and nothing else.' I knew that by realizing Her I should get everything."

BHAVANATH (smiling): "This is the shrewd calculation of a business man."

MASTER (smiling): "Yes, that is so. Once the Lord was pleased with a certain devotee. He appeared before him and said: 'I am very much pleased with your austerities. Ask a boon of Me.' The devotee said, 'O Lord, if You are gracious enough to give me a boon, then please grant that I may eat from gold plates with my grandchildren.' One boon covered many things-wealth, children, and grandchildren." (all laugh)

Hazra was sitting on the verandah.

MASTER: "Do you know what Hazra wants? He wants money. His family is in distress; he has debts. He thinks that God will give him money because he devotes himself to japa and meditation."

A DEVOTEE: "Can't God fulfil a devotee's desire?"

MASTER: "If it is His sweet will. But God doesn't take entire responsibility for a devotee unless the devotee is completely intoxicated with ecstatic love for Him. At a feast it is only a child whom one takes by the hand and seats at his place. Who does that with older people? Not until a man thinks so much of God that he cannot look after himself does God take on his responsibilities. Hazra doesn't inquire about his family. His son said to Ramlal: 'Please ask father to come home. We shall not ask anything of him.' These words almost brought tears to my eyes. Hazra's mother said to Ramlal: 'Please ask Pratap to come home just once. Also ask your uncle to request him to come home.' I told him about it, but he didn't listen to me.

Duty toward mother

"Is a mother to be trifled .with? Before becoming a sannyasi Chaitanyadeva worked hard to persuade his mother to let him renounce home. Mother Sachi said that she would kill Keshab Bharati. Chaitanyadeva did his utmost to persuade her. He said: 'Mother, I shall not renounce home if you won't let me. But if you compel me to lead a householder's life, I shall die. And, mother, even if I go away as a sannyasi, you will be able to see me whenever you desire. I shall stay near you. I shall see you every now and then.' Only when Chaitanya explained it to her thus did she give her permission. Nārada could not go to the forest to practise austerity as long as his mother was alive. He had to take care of her. After her death he went away to realize God.

"When I went to Vrindāvan I felt no desire to return to Calcutta. It was arranged that I should live with Gangama. Everything was settled. My bed was to be on one side and Gangama's on the other. I resolved not to go back to Calcutta. I said to myself, 'How long must I eat a kaivarta's food?' 'No,' said Hriday to me, 'let us go to Calcutta.' He pulled me by one hand and Gangama pulled me by the other. I felt an intense desire to live at Vrindāvan. But just then I remembered my mother. That completely changed everything. She was old. I said to myself: 'My devotion to God will take to its wings if I have to worry about my mother. I would rather live with her. Then I shall have peace of mind and be able to meditate on God.'

(To Narendra) "Why don't you say a few words to Hazra about going home? The other day he said to me, 'Yes, I shall go home and stay there three days.' But now he has forgotten all about it.

(To the devotees) "We have talked about filthy things-Ghoshpara and things like that. Govinda! Govinda! Govinda! Now chant the name of Hari. Let there be a dish of rice pudding and sweets after the ordinary lentils."

Narendra began to sing:

Fasten your mind, O man, on the Primal Purusha,
Who is the Cause of all causes,
The Stainless One, the Beginningless Truth.
As Prana He pervades the infinite universe;
The man of faith beholds Him,
Living, resplendent, the Root of all.
Beyond the senses, eternal, the Essence of Consciousness,
He shines in the cave of the heart,
Adorned with Holiness, Wisdom, and Love;
By meditating on Him, man is delivered from grief.
Of countenance ever serene,
An inexhaustible Ocean of Virtue,
None can fathom His depths; yet freely, of His own grace,
Does He reveal Himself
To those who come to His feet for shelter,
Merciful since they are helpless and He is the Ever-forgiving,
The Giver of happiness,
The Ready Help in the sea of our woe.
Unswervingly just, bestowing the fruits of our deeds, good and ill,
Yet is He the Fount of Compassion,
The Ocean of Mercy brimming with Love;
Even to hear of His glory suffuses the eyes with tears.
Gaze on His face and be blest:
Your heart is hungry for Him, O man!
Bright with unspeakable beauty, peerless and without stain,
No words can ever describe Him;
Be as a beggar before His gate
And worship Him day and night, beseeching Him for His grace.

He sang again:

In Wisdom's firmament the moon of Love is rising full,
And Love's Hood-tide, in surging waves, is flowing everywhere.
O Lord, how full of bliss Thou art! Victory unto Thee!

On every side shine devotees, like stars around the moon;
Their Friend, the Lord All-merciful, joyously plays with them.
Behold! the gates of paradise today are open wide. . . .

Sri Ramakrishna was dancing in a circle. The devotees joined him. They all sang and danced. Their bliss was indescribable. The Master sang about the Divine Mother:

Behold my Mother playing with Śiva, lost in an ecstasy of joy!...

Sri Ramakrishna was highly pleased because M. had joined in the music. He said to M., with a smile, "The atmosphere would have been more intense with divine fervour if a drum had accompanied the music and played: *'Tak tak ta dhina! Dak dak da dhina!' "*

It was dusk when the kirtan was finished.

Wednesday, October 1, 1884

Master at Adhar's house

Sri Ramakrishna had set out from Dakshineswar for Adhar's house in Calcutta. Narayan and Gangadhar were with him. In the carriage, in an ecstatic mood, he said: "Shall I count the beads? How shameful that would be! This emblem of Śiva has sprung from the bowels of the earth; it is self created and not set up by man's hands."

They arrived at Adhar's house, where many devotees, including Kedār, Baburam, and Vijay, had assembled. Vaishnavcharan, the musician, was present. At the Master's behest, Adhar heard Vaishnavcharan's music daily after his return from the office.

When the Master entered Adhar's drawing-room the devotees stood up to receive him. Kedār and Vijay saluted him, and the Master asked Narayan and Baburam to salute Kedār and Vijay. He asked Kedār and Vijay to bless Narayan and Baburam that they might have devotion to God. Pointing to Narayan he said, "He is utterly guileless." The eyes of the devotees were fixed on the two boys.

MASTER (to Kedār and the other devotees): "It is good that I have met you all here; otherwise perhaps you would have come to the Kāli temple to see me. Through the will of God, however, we have met here."

KEDĀR (with folded hands): "The will of God! It is all your will."

Sri Ramakrishna smiled. Vaishnavcharan began a kirtan about Radha and Krishna. When the music was nearing its end, with the union of Radha and Krishna, the Master began to dance with ecstatic fervour. The devotees danced and sang around him. After the music they all sat down. The Master said to Vijay, referring to Vaishnavcharan, "He sings very well." He asked the musician to sing the song about Sri Chaitanya, beginning with the line, "The beautiful Gaurānga, the youthful dancer, fair as molten gold."

When the song was over, the Master asked Vijay, "How did you like it?"

VIJAY: "Wonderful."

Sri Ramakrishna also sang a song about Sri Chaitanya, M. joining him. Then Vaishnavcharan sang another song:

O my flute, sing Hari's name!
You cannot know the highest Truth
Without Lord Hari's grace.

His name removes our bitter grief:
Repeat the name of Hari, then,
Repeat Sri Krishna's holy name!
If He bestows His grace on me,
No longer shall be afraid
Of this unfriendly world;
Sing then Lord Hari's name, my flute!
Our only treasure is His name.
Govinda says: Behold, my days
Are passing by in vain:
In the world's deep and shoreless sea,
Oh, let me not be drowned!

Vaishnavcharan sang again, this time about Mother Durga:

O tongue, always repeat the name of Mother Durga;
Who but your Mother Durga will save you in distress? . . .

The Master and the musician sang again and again the following lines from the song:

The moving and the unmoving, the gross and the subtle, art Thou:
Creation and preservation art Thou, and the last dissolution.
Thou art the Primal Root of this manifold universe:
The Mother of the three worlds, their only Saviour, art Thou;
Thou art the Śakti of all, and Thou Thine own Śakti, too.

Kedār and several devotees stood up. They were about to return home. Kedār saluted the Master and bade him good-bye.

MASTER: "Should you go away without bidding Adhar good-bye? Wouldn't that be an act of discourtesy?"

KEDĀR: "'When God is pleased, the world is pleased.' You are staying; so in a sense we are all staying. I am not feeling well. Besides, I am a little nervous about my social conventions. Once before I had trouble with our community."

VIJAY: (pointing to the Master): "Should we go away and leave him here?"

Just then Adhar came in to take the Master to the dining-room, for the meal was ready. Sri Ramakrishna stood up and said, addressing Kedār and Vijay: "Come. Come with me." They followed him and partook of the dinner together with the other devotees.

After dinner they all returned to the drawing-room, where the devotees sat around the Master. Kedār said to him with folded hands, 'Please forgive me for hesitating to eat here.' Perhaps the thought had come to his mind that he should not have hesitated, since the Master himself had no scruples about eating at Adhar's house.

Kedār worked at Dāccā. Many devotees brought offerings of sweets and other food for him. Referring to this, Kedār said to the Master: "People want to give me food. What should I do? Lord, what is your command in this matter?"

MASTER: "One can eat food even from an untouchable if the untouchable is a devotee of God. After spending seven years in a God-intoxicated state at Dakshineswar, I visited Kamarpukur. Oh, what a state of mind I was in at that time! Even a prostitute fed me with her own hands. But I cannot allow that now."

Kedār was about to take his leave.

KEDĀR (in a low voice): "Lord, please transmit power to me. Many people come to me. What do I know?"

MASTER: "Everything will be all right. One gets along well if one is sincerely devoted to God."

Yogendra, the editor of a Bengali paper, the Bangavasi, entered the room. The conversation turned to the Personal God and God without form.

MASTER: "God has form; again, He is formless. How many aspects He has! We cannot comprehend Him. Why should we say that God is formless only?"

YOGENDRA: "That is the one amazing thing about the Brahmo Samaj. There even a boy twelve years old sees God as formless. The members of the Adi Samaj do not object very much to God with form. They are allowed to attend ritualistic worship if it takes place in respectable families."

MASTER (smiling): "How nicely he has put it! Even a boy sees the formless God!"

ADHAR: "Shivanath Babu does not believe in God's forms."

VIJAY: "That is his mistake. (Pointing to the Master) As he says, the chameleon assumes different colours-now this colour, now that. Only the man who lives under the tree knows the animal's true colour.

"While meditating I saw images of gods painted on a canvas. How many gods! How many different things they said! I said to myself: 'I shall go to the Master. He will explain it all to me.' "

MASTER: "You saw correctly."

KEDĀR: "God assumes forms for the sake of His devotees. Through ecstatic love a devotee sees God with form. Dhruva had a vision of the Lord. He said: 'Why don't your ear-rings move?' The Lord said, 'They will move if you move them.' "

MASTER: "One must accept everything: God with form and God without form. While meditating in the Kāli temple I noticed Ramani, a prostitute. I said, 'Mother, I see that Thou art in that form too.' Therefore I say one must accept everything. One does not know when or how God will reveal Himself."

The Master sang:

A mendicant has come to us, ever absorbed in divine moods. . .

VIJAY: "God has infinite power. Can He not reveal Himself in any form He chooses? Man is a speck of dust, and he dares come to a conclusion about God. How amazing!"

MASTER: "A man reads a little of the Gitā, the Bhagavata, or the Vedānta and thinks he has understood everything. Once an ant went to a hill of sugar. One grain of sugar filled its stomach, and it was returning home with another grain in its mouth. On the way it said to itself, 'The next time I go, I shall bring home the whole hill.' "(All laugh)

Chapter 30

THE MASTER IN VARIOUS MOODS

Thursday, October 2, 1884

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting in his room at Dakshineswar. Lātu, Ramlal, Harish, and Hazra were living with him at the temple garden. Baburam spent a day or two with him now and then.

Manilal Mallick, Priya Mukherji and his relative Hari, a bearded Brahmo devotee from Shibpur, and several Mārwāri devotees from Calcutta were in the Master's room. Manilal was an old member of the Brahmo Samaj.

MASTER (to Manilal and the others): "It is wise to salute a person mentally. What need is there of touching his feet? Mental salutation doesn't embarrass anybody.

"The attitude that my religion alone is right and all other religions are false is not good. I see that God Himself has become all these: men; images, and salagram. I see one alone in all these; I do not see two. I see only one.

"Many people think that their opinion alone is right and others' opinions are wrong; that they alone have won and others have lost. But a person who has gone forward may be detained by some slight obstacle, and someone who has been lagging behind may then steal a march on him. In the game of golokdham one may advance a great deal, but still somehow one's piece may fail to reach the goal.

Inscrutability of God's ways

"Triumph or defeat is in the hands of God. We cannot understand His ways. You must have noticed that the green coconut remains high in the tree and is exposed to the sun, but still its milk is cool. On the other hand the paniphal remains in the water, but when eaten it heats the body.
"Look at the body of man. The head is the root, and it is at the top."

Two ways of Yoga

MANILAL: "What then is our duty?"

MASTER: "To remain somehow united with God. There are two ways: karmayoga and manoyoga. Householders practise yoga through karma, the performance of duty.

There are four stages of life: brahmacharya, garhasthya, vanaprastha, and sannyās. Sannyāsis must renounce those karmas which are performed with special ends in view; but they should perform the daily obligatory karmas, giving up all desire for results. Sannyāsis are united with God by such karmas as the acceptance of the staff, the receiving of alms, going on pilgrimage, and the performance of worship and japa.

"It doesn't matter what kind of action you are engaged in. You can be united with God through any action provided that, performing it, you give up all desire for its result.

"There is the other path: manoyoga. A yogi practising this discipline doesn't show any outward sign. He is inwardly united with God. Take Jadabharata and Sukadeva, for instance. There are many other yogis of this class, but these two are well known. They shave neither hair nor beard.

"All actions drop away when a man reaches the stage of the paramahamsa. He always remembers the ideal and meditates on it. He is always united with God in his mind. If he ever performs an action it is to teach men.

"A man may be united with God either through action or through inwardness of thought, but he can know everything through bhakti. Through bhakti one spontaneously experiences kumbhaka. The nerve currents and breathing calm down when the mind is concentrated. Again, the mind is concentrated when the nerve currents and breathing calm down. Then the buddhi, the discriminating power, becomes steady. The man who achieves this state is not himself aware of it.

Efficacy of bhakti-yoga

"One can attain everything through bhakti yoga. I wept before the Mother and prayed, 'O Mother, please tell me, please reveal to me, what the yogis have realized through yoga and the jnanis through discrimination.' And the Mother has revealed everything to me. She reveals everything if the devotee cries to Her with a yearning heart. She has shown me everything that is in the Vedas, the Vedānta, the Puranas, and the Tantra."

MANILAL: "And what about hathayoga?"

MASTER: "The hathayogis identify themselves with their bodies. They practise internal washing and similar disciplines, and devote themselves only to the care of the body. Their ideal is to increase longevity. They serve the body day and night. That is not good.

Householder's duty

"What is your duty? You should renounce 'woman and gold' mentally. You cannot look on the world as crow-droppings.

"The goswamis are householders. Therefore I said to them: 'You have your duties in the temple; how can you renounce the world? You cannot explain away the world as māyā.'

"Chaitanyadeva said that the duties of householders were kindness to living beings, service to the Vaishnavas, and the chanting of God's holy name.

"Keshab Sen once said about me: 'Now he asks us to hold to both-God and the world. But one day he will sting us.' No, that is not true. Why should I sting?"

MANI MALLICK: "But, sir, you do."

MASTER (smiling): "How so? You are a householder. Why should you renounce?

Complete renunciation for religious teachers

"But the renunciation of the world is needful for those whom God wants to be teachers of men. One who is an Āchārya should give up 'woman and gold'; otherwise people will not take his advice. It is not enough for him to renounce only mentally; he should also renounce outwardly. Only then will his teaching bear fruit. Otherwise people will think, 'Though he asks us to give up "woman and gold," he enjoys them himself in secret.'

"A physician prescribed medicine for a patient. and said to him, 'Come another day and I'll give you directions about diet.' The physician had several jars of molasses in his room that day. The patient lived very far away. He visited the physician later and the physician said to him: 'Be careful about your food. It is not good for you to eat molasses.' After the patient left, another person who was there said to the physician: 'Why did you give him all the trouble of coming here again? You could very well have given him the instructions the first day.' The physician replied with a smile: There is a reason. I had several jars of molasses in my room that day. If I had asked the patient then to give up molasses, he would not have had faith in my words. He would have thought: "He has so many jars of molasses in his room, he must eat some of it. Then molasses can't be so bad." Today I have hidden the jars. Now he will have faith in my words.

"I have seen the Āchārya of the Adi Brahmo Samaj. I understand that he has married for the second or third time. He has grown-up children. And such men are teachers! If they say, 'God is real and all else illusory', who will believe them? You can very well understand who will be their disciples.

Hard rules for a sannyāsi

"Like teacher, like disciple. Even if a sannyāsi renounces 'woman and gold' mentally, but lives with them outwardly, he cannot be a teacher of men. People will say that he enjoys 'molasses' secretly.

"Once Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi gave five rupees to Ramlal. I didn't know about it. When Ramlal told me about the money, I asked him, 'For whom was the money given?' He said it was for me. At first I thought that I should use it to pay what I owed for my milk, But will you believe me? I had slept only a little while when I suddenly woke up writhing with pain, as if a cat were scratching my chest. I went to Ramlal and asked him again, 'Was the money given for your aunt?' 'No', Ramlal answered. Thereupon I said to him, 'Go at once and return the money.' Ramlal gave it back the next day.

"Do you know how it looks for a sannyāsi to accept money or to be attached to an object of temptation? It is as if a brahmin widow who had practised continence and lived on simple boiled rice and vegetables and milk for many years, were suddenly to accept an untouchable as her paramour. (All look stunned.)

"There was a low-caste woman named Bhagi Teli in our part of the country. She had many disciples and devotees. Finding that she, a sudra, was being saluted by people, the

landlord became jealous and engaged a wicked man to tempt her. He succeeded in corrupting her and all her spiritual practice came to nothing. A fallen sannyāsi is like that.

"You are leading householders' lives. It is necessary for you to live in the company of holy men. First of all, the company of holy men; then sraddha, faith in God.

"How can people have reverence and faith in God if the holy men do not sing His name and glories? People respect a man if they know that in his family there have been royal ministers for three generations.

(To M.) "Even if one has attained Knowledge, one must still constantly practise God-Consciousness. Nangta used to say: 'What is the use of polishing the outside of a metal pot one day only? If you don't polish it regularly it will get tarnished again.' I shall have to go to your house some time. If I know your house I can meet other devotees there. Please go to see Ishan some time.

(To Manilal) "Keshab Sen's mother came here the other day. The young boys of her family sang the name of Hari. She went around them clapping her hands. I noticed she was not very much stricken with grief over Keshab's death. She observed the fast of ekadasi here and counted her beads. I was pleased to see her devotion to God."

About Keshab and Vijay

MANILAL: "Ramkamal Sen, Keshab Babu's grandfather, was a devotee of God. He used to sit in a tulsi-grove and repeat God's holy name. Pyarimohan, Keshab's father, was also a Vaishnava devotee."

MASTER: "The son could not have been so devoted to God if the father had not been like that. Look at Vijay. His father would become unconscious of the world in divine ecstasy while reading the Bhagavata. Vijay can hardly control his emotion: while uttering Hari's name, he sometimes stands up from his seat. The forms of God that Vijay sees nowadays are all real. Speaking about the different aspects of God, formless and with form, Vijay said that God sometimes appears with attributes and sometimes without attributes. He gave the example of the chameleon, which sometimes turns red, sometimes blue, sometimes green, and sometimes remains colourless.

Praise of guilelessness and purity

"Vijay is really guileless. One cannot realize God without being guileless and liberal-minded. Yesterday Vijay was at Adhar Sen's house. He behaved as if it were his own place and those who lived there his own people. One cannot be guileless and liberal-minded unless one is free from worldliness."

Then the Master sang:

You will attain that priceless Treasure when your mind is free from stain. . . .

He continued: "You cannot make a pot without first carefully preparing the clay. The pot will crack if the clay contains particles of sand or stone. That is why the potter first prepares the clay by removing the sand and stones.

"If a mirror is covered with dirt, it won't reflect one's face. A man cannot realize his true Self unless his heart is pure. You will find guilelessness wherever God incarnates Himself as man. Nandaghosh, Daśaratha, Vasudeva -all of them were guileless.

"The Vedānta says that a man does not even desire to know God unless he has a pure mind. One cannot be guileless and liberal-minded without much *tapasya* or unless it is one's last birth."

Master's guilelessness

Sri Ramakrishna was worrying, like a child, because he thought his legs were slightly swollen. Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi entered the room and. saluted the Master.

MASTER (to the devotees): "Yesterday I said to Naran, 'Just press your leg and see if there is any dimple.' He pressed it and there was one. Then I

gave a sigh of relief. (To Mukherji) Will you please press your leg? Is there any dimple?"

MUKHERJI: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "Ah, what a relief!"

MANI MALLICK: "Why should you worry about it, sir? Please take your bath in the river. Why should you take medicine?"

MASTER: "No, sir. You have strong blood. Your case is different. The Divine Mother has placed me in the state of a child. One day I was bitten by something in the jungle. I had heard people say that, in case of snakebite, the poison would come out if the snake bit again. So I put my hand in a hole and waited. A man passing by said to me: 'What are you doing? You will get rid of the poison only if the snake bites again in the same place. You will not be cured if the snake bites another part of your body.'

"I was told that the autumn dew was good. One day, while coming from Calcutta, I stuck my head out of the carriage and exposed it to the damp air. (All laugh.)

(To Mahendra of Sinthi) "That pundit from Sinthi is very good. He holds a title for this scholarship. He respects me. I said to him, 'You have read a great deal; but give up the vanity that you are a scholar.' That made him very happy. I discussed Vedānta with him.

Nature of Brahman

(To M.): "That which is Pure Ātman is unattached. Māyā, or avidyā, is in It. In māyā there are three *Gunās*: sattva, rajas, and tamas. These three *Gunās* also exist in the Pure Ātman. But Ātman Itself is unattached. If you throw a blue pill into the fire, you will

see a blue flame. If you throw a red pill, you will see a red flame. But fire itself has no colour of its own.

"If you put a blue pill in water, the water will turn blue. Again, if you put alum in that water, it will regain its natural colour.

"A butcher was carrying a load of meat when he touched Sankara. Sankara exclaimed: 'What! You have touched me!' The butcher replied: 'Venerable sir, neither have you touched me nor have I touched you. You are pure Ātman, unattached.' Jadabharata said the same thing to King Rahugana.

"The Pure Ātman is unattached, and one cannot see It. If salt is mixed with water, one cannot see the salt with the eyes.

"That which is the Pure Ātman is the Great Cause, the Cause of the cause. The gross, the subtle, the causal, and the Great Cause. The five elements are gross. Mind, buddhi, and ego are subtle. Prakriti, the Primal Energy, is the cause of all these. Brahman, Pure Ātman, is the Cause of the cause.

This Pure Ātman alone is our real nature. What is jnāna? It is to know one's own Self and keep the mind in It. It is to know the Pure Ātman.

"How long should a man perform his duties? As long as he identifies himself with the body, in other words, as long as he thinks he is the body. That is what the Gitā says. To think of the body as the Ātman is ajnāna, ignorance.

(To the bearded Brahmo devotee from Shibpur) "Are you a Brahmo?"

DEVOTEE: "Yes, sir."

MASTER (smiling): "I can recognize a worshipper of the Formless by looking at his face and eyes. Please dive a little deeper. One doesn't get the gem by floating on the surface. As for myself, I accept all-the formless God and God with form."

The Mārwāri devotees from Burrabazar entered the room and saluted the Master. He began to praise them.

MASTER (to the devotees):"Ah! They are real devotees of God. They visit temples, sing hymns to God, and eat prasad. And the gentleman whom they have made their priest this year is learned in the Bhagavata."

MĀRWĀRI DEVOTEE: "Who is this 'I' that says, 'O Lord, I am Thy servant?' "

MASTER: "This is the lingasarira, or embodied soul. It consists of manas, buddhi, chitta, and Ahamkāra."

DEVOTEE: "Who is the embodied soul?"

MASTER: "It is the Ātman bound by the eight fetters. And what is the chitta? It is the 'I-consciousness' that says, 'Aha!'"

What happens after death

DEVOTEE: "Revered sir, what happens after death?"

MASTER: "According to the Gitā, one becomes afterwards what one thinks of at the time of death. King Bharata thought of his deer and became a deer in his next life. Therefore one must practise *sādhanā* in order to realize God. If a man thinks of God day and night, he will have the same thought in the hour of death."

Māyā hides Knowledge

DEVOTEE: "Why don't we feel dispassion toward worldly objects?"

MASTER: "Because of māyā. Through māyā one feels the Real to be the unreal and the unreal to be the Real. The Real means That which is eternal, the Supreme Brahman; and the unreal means that which is non- eternal, that is to say, the world."

DEVOTEE: "We read the scriptures. Why is it that we can't assimilate them?"

MASTER: "What will one accomplish by mere reading? One needs spiritual practice-austerity. Call on God. What is the use of merely repeating the word 'siddhi'? One must eat a little of it.

'The hand bleeds when it touches a thorny plant. Suppose you bring such a plant and repeat, sitting near it: 'There! The plant is burning.' Will that burn the plant? This world is like the thorny plant. Light the fire of Knowledge and with it set the plant ablaze. Only then will it be burnt up.

"One must labour a little while at the stage of *sādhanā*. Then the path becomes easy. Steer the boat around the curves of the river and then let it go with the favourable wind.

"As long as you live inside the house of māyā, as long as there exists the cloud of māyā, you do not see the effect of the Sun of Knowledge. Come outside the house of māyā, give up 'woman and gold', and then the Sun of Knowledge will destroy ignorance. A lens cannot burn paper inside the house. If you stand outside, then the rays of the sun fall on the lens and the paper burns. Again, the lens cannot burn the paper if there is a cloud. The paper burns when the cloud disappears.

"The darkness of the mind is destroyed only when a man stands little apart from. 'woman and gold' and, thus standing apart, practises a little austerity and spiritual discipline. Then only does the cloud of his ego and ignorance vanish. Then only does he attain the Knowledge of God. This 'woman and gold' is the only cloud that hides the Sun of Knowledge.

Master's renunciation

(To the Mārwāri devotee) "The rules for a sannyāsi are extremely hard. He cannot have the slightest contact with 'woman and gold'. He must not accept money with his own hands, and he must not even allow it to be left near him.

"Lakshminarayan Mārwāri, a Vedantist, used to come here very often. One day he saw a dirty sheet on my bed and said: 'I shall invest ten thousand rupees in your name. The interest will enable you to pay your expenses.' The moment he uttered these words, I fell unconscious, as if struck by a stick. Regaining consciousness I said to him: 'If you utter such words again, you had better not come here. It is impossible for me to touch money. It is also impossible for me to keep it near me.' He was a very clever fellow. He said: 'Then you too have the idea of acceptance and rejection. In that case you haven't attained Perfect Knowledge.' 'My dear sir, I said, 'I haven't yet gone that far.' (All laugh.) Lakshminarayan then wanted to leave the money with Hriday. I said to him: 'That will not do. If you leave it with Hriday, then I shall instruct him to spend it as I wish. If he does not comply, I shall be angry. The very contact of money is bad. No, you can't leave it with Hriday.' Won't an object kept near a mirror be reflected in it?"

Liberation

DEVOTEE: "Revered sir, is a man liberated only when he dies on the bank of the Ganges?"

MASTER: "It is the Knowledge of God alone that gives liberation. The Jnāni will certainly attain liberation wherever he may die, whether in the charnel-pit or on the bank of the ,Ganges. But the bank of the Ganges is prescribed for a bound soul."

DEVOTEE: "Revered sir, why does a man dying in Benares become liberated?"

MASTER: "A person dying in Benares sees the vision of Śiva. Śiva says to him: 'This is My aspect with form, My embodiment in māyā. I assume this form for the sake of the devotees. Now look. I am merging in the indivisible Satchidananda!' Uttering these words, Śiva withdraws His form and enables the dying person to see Brahman. "The Puranas say that even a chandala endowed with love of God achieves liberation. According to this school the name of God is enough to liberate a soul. There is no need of such things as worship, sacrifice, the discipline of Tantra, and the recitation of mantras.

Path of devotion for Kaliyuga

"But the teachings of the Vedas are different. According to the Vedas none but a brahmin can be liberated. Further, the worship is not accepted by the gods unless the mantras are recited correctly. One must perform sacrifice, worship, and so on, according to scriptural injunction. But where is the time in the Kaliyuga to perform the Vedic rituals? Therefore in the Kaliyuga the path of devotion prescribed by Nārada is best. The path of karma is very difficult. Karma becomes a cause of bondage unless it is performed in a spirit of detachment. Further, the life of man nowadays depends on food. He has no time to observe the rituals enjoined by the scriptures. The patient dies if he tries to cure

his fever by taking the decoction of herbs prescribed by the orthodox native physicians. Therefore he should take a modern 'fever mixture'.

"According to Nārada the devotee should sing the name and glories of God. The path of karma is not the right one for the Kaliyuga. Bhaktiyoga is the right path. Do your duties in the world as long as you need them to reap the fruit of the actions of your past lives. But you must develop love for God and be passionately attached to Him. The singing of the name and glories of God destroys the effect of past action.

"You don't have to perform duties all your life. As you develop unalloyed love and longing for God, your duties become fewer and fewer. After the realization of God they completely drop away. When the young daughter-in-law is pregnant, her mother-in-law lessens her duties. After the birth of the child she doesn't have to do any household work."

Several young men from the village of Dakshineswar entered the room and saluted Sri Ramakrishna. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. They sat down and began to talk with the Master.

YOUNG MAN: "Sir, what is Knowledge?"

MASTER: "It is to know that God is the only Reality and that all else is unreal. That which is the Real is also called Brahman. It has another name: Kala, Time. There is a saying, 'O brother, how many things come into being in Time and disappear in Time!'

"That whieh sports with Kala is called Kāli. She is the Primal Energy. Kala and Kāli, Brahman and Śakti, are indivisible.

"That Brahman, of the nature of Reality, is eternal. It exists in past, present, and future. It is without beginning or end. It cannot be described in words. The utmost that can be said of Brahman is that It is of the very nature of Intelligence and Bliss.

"The world is illusory; Brahman alone is real. The world is of the nature of magic. The magician is real but his magic is unreal"

Power of inborn tendencies

YOUNG MAN: "If the world is of the nature of illusion-magic-then why doesn't one get rid of it?"

MASTER: "It is due to the samskaras, inborn tendencies. Repeated births in this world of māyā make one believe that māyā is real.

"Let me tell you how powerful inborn tendencies are. A prince had, in a previous birth, been the son of a washerman. While playing with his chums in his incarnation as the prince, he said to them: 'Stop those games. I will show you a new one. I shall lie on my belly, and you will beat the clothes on my back as the washerman does, making a swishing sound.'

"Many youngsters come here. But only a few long for God. These few are born with a spiritual tendency. They shudder at the talk of marriage. Niranjan has said from boyhood that he will not marry.

"More than twenty years ago two young men used to come here from Baranagore. One was named Govinda Pal and the other Gopal Sen. They had been devoted to God since boyhood. The very mention of marriage would frighten them. Gopal used to have bhava samādhi. He would shrink from worldly people, as a mouse from a cat. One day he saw the boys of the Tagore family strolling in the garden. He shut himself in the kuthi lest he should have to talk with them.

"Gopal went into samādhi in the Panchavati. In that state he said to me, touching my feet: 'Let me go. I cannot live in this world any more. You have a long time to wait. Let me go.' I said to him, in an ecstatic mood, 'You must come again.' 'Very well, I will', he said. A few days later Govinda came to me. 'Where is Gopal?' I asked him. He said, 'He has passed away.'

"What are the other youngsters about? Money, house, carriage, clothes, and finally marriage. These are the things that keep them busy. If they want to marry, at the outset they make inquiries about the girl. They want to find out for themselves whether she is beautiful.

"There is a person who speaks much ill of me. He is always criticizing me for loving the youngsters. I love only those who are born with good tendencies, pure souls with longing for God, who do not pay any attention to money, creature comforts, and such things.

"If married people develop love for God, they will not be attached to the world. Hirananda is married. What if he is? He will not be much attached to the world."

Hirananda, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, was a native of Sindh. He had met the Master in Calcutta and become devoted to him.

Manilal, the Mārwāri devotees, the Brahmo devotees from Shibpur, and the young men from Dakshineswar saluted Sri Ramakrishna and took their leave.

It was evening. Lamps were lighted on the south and west verandahs. A lamp was lighted in the Master's room also, and incense was burnt. He was repeating the name of the Divine Mother, absorbed in contemplation of Her. After a while he talked again to the devotees. There was still some time before the evening worship in the temples.

MASTER (to M.): "What need of the sandhya has a man who thinks of God day and night?

What need of rituals has a man, what need of devotions any more,
If he repeats the Mother's name at the three holy hours?
Rituals may pursue him close, but never can they overtake him.

Charity, vows, and giving of gifts do not appeal to Madan's mind;
The Blissful Mother's Lotus Feet are his whole prayer and sacrifice.

"The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om. A man is firmly established in spiritual life when he goes into samādhi on uttering 'Om' only once.

"There is a sādhu in Hrishikesh who gets up early in the morning and stands near a great waterfall. He looks at it the whole day and says to God: 'Ah, You have done well! Well done! How amazing! He doesn't practise any other form of japa or austerity. At night he returns to his hut.

"What need is there even to bother one's head about whether God is formless or has a form? It is enough for a man to pray to Him, alone in solitude, weeping, 'O God, reveal Yourself to me as You are.'

"God is both inside and outside. It is He who dwells inside us. Therefore the Vedas say, 'Tattvamasi-That thou art.' God is also outside us. He appears manifold through māyā; but in reality He alone exists. Therefore before describing the various names and forms of God, one should say, 'Om Tat Sat.'

"It is one thing to learn about God from the scriptures, and quite another to see Him. The scriptures only give hints. Therefore to read a great many scriptures is not necessary. It is much better to pray to God in solitude.

"It isn't necessary to read all of the Gitā. One can get the essence of the Gitā by repeating the word ten times. It becomes reversed and is then 'tagi'. The essence of the book is: 'O man, renounce everything and worship God.'"

The Master went into an ecstatic mood while watching the evening worship of Kāli in the company of the devotees. He was in no condition even to salute the image. Very carefully he returned to his room with the devotees and sat down; he was still in an ecstatic mood. He spoke to them while in that state.

In the room was Hari, a young man about twenty years of age, who was a relative of the Mukherjis and very much devoted to the Master. He was married. At that time he was living with the Mukherjis and looking for a job.

MASTER (to Hari, in an ecstatic mood): "Take your initiation after getting your mother's permission. (To Priya, referring to Hari) I couldn't give him the mantra though I said I would initiate him. I don't initiate people. Continue with your own meditation and japa as you have been doing."

PRIYA: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "And I am saying this to you in this state of my mind. Believe my words. You see, there is no show or deceit here. I just said to the Divine Mother in my ecstatic mood, 'O Mother, may those who come here [referring to himself] through sincere attraction obtain perfection!' "

Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi was seated on the verandah conversing with Ramlal, Hazra, and others. The Master called to him from his room. M. went out quickly and brought Mahendra in.

MASTER (to Mahendra): "Sit down and listen to my words."

Mahendra was a little embarrassed. He sat down.

Various forms of divine love

MASTER (to the devotees): "God can be served in different ways. An ecstatic lover of God enjoys Him in different ways. Sometimes he says, 'O God, You are the lotus and I am the bee', and sometimes, 'You are the Ocean of Satchidananda and I am the fish.' Sometimes, again, the lover of God says, 'I am Your dancing-girl.' He dances and sings before Him. He thinks of himself sometimes as the friend of God and sometimes as His handmaid. He looks on God sometimes as a child, as did Yaśoda, and sometimes as husband or sweetheart, as did the gopis.

"Sometimes Balarama looked on Krishna as a friend; sometimes he would think he was Krishna's umbrella or carpet. He served Krishna in all possible ways."

Was Sri Ramakrishna hinting at his own state of mind while thus describing the different attitudes of a lover of God?

Chaitanya's spiritual moods

Next he described Chaitanya's three spiritual moods.

MASTER: "Chaitanyadeva used to experience three moods. In the inmost mood he would be absorbed in samādhi, unconscious of the outer world. In the semi-conscious mood he would dance in ecstasy but could not talk. In the conscious mood he would sing the glories of God.

(To the devotees) "You are listening to my words. Try to assimilate them. When worldly people sit before a sādhu, for the time being they completely hide all worldly thoughts and ideas. But once away from the holy man they let them out again. You have seen a pigeon eating dried peas. You think he has digested them, but he keeps them in his crop. You can feel them there.

"At dusk put aside all duties and pray to God. One is reminded of Him by darkness. At the approach of darkness one thinks: 'I could see everything a moment ago. Who has brought about this change?' The Mussalmans put aside all activities and say their prayers at the appointed times."

Practice of japa
MUKHERJI: "Revered sir, is it good to practise japa?"

MASTER: "Yes. One attains God through japa. By repeating the name of God secretly and in solitude one receives divine grace. Then comes His vision. Suppose there is a big piece of timber lying under water and fastened to the land with a chain; by proceeding along the chain, link by link, you will at last touch the timber.

"Higher than worship is japa, higher than japa is meditation, higher than meditation is bhava, and higher than bhava are mahabhava and prema. Chaitanyadeva had prema, When one attains prema one has the rope to tie God."

Hazra entered the room.

MASTER (to Hazra): "Love of God, when it is intense and spontaneous, is called raga-bhakti. Vaidhi-bhakti, formal devotion, depends on scriptural injunctions. It comes and it goes. But raga-bhakti is like a stone emblem of Śiva that has sprung up out of the bowels of the earth. One cannot find its root; they say the root goes as far as Benares. Only an Incarnation of God and His companions attain raga-bhakti."

HAZRA: "Ah me!"

MASTER: "One day I was returning from the Pine-grove, when I saw you telling your beads. I said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, what a small minded fellow he is! He lives here and still he pratises japa with a rosary! Whoever comes he [referring to himself] will have his spiritual consciousness awakened all a once; he won't have to bother much, about japa. Go to Calcutta and you will find thousands telling their beads-even the prostitutes.'

(To M.) "Please bring Naran here in a carriage. I am making the same request to Mukherji. I shall give Naran something to eat when he comes. There is great significance in feeding boys like him."

Saturday, October 4, 1884
It was the day of the first full moon after the Durga Puja. Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the Calcutta house of Nabin Sen, the elder brother of Keshab Chandra Sen. On the previous Thursday Keshab's mother had begged the Master to pay her a visit in Calcutta.
The Master seated himself in a room on the upper floor of the house. With him were Baburam, Kishori, and a few other devotees. Nandalal and Keshab's other nephews, Keshab's mother, and other relatives of his, waited on the Master. It had been arranged to have devotional music performed in the room. M. was sitting in a room downstairs, listening to the kirtan.

Master with Brahmo devotees
Sri Ramakrishna said to the Brahmo devotees: "The world is impermanent. One should constantly remember death." Then he sang:

Remember this, O mind! Nobody is your own:
Vain is your wandering in this world.
Trapped in the subtle snare of māyā as you are,
Do not forget the Mother's name. . . .

The Master said to the devotees: "Dive deep. What will you gain by merely floating on the surface? Renounce everything for a few days, retire into solitude, and call on God with all your soul"

The Master sang:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in. the Ocean of God's Beauty;
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love. . . .

At Sri Ramakrishna's request the Brahmo devotees sang:

Thou art my All in All, O Lord!- the Life of my life, the Essence of essence;
In the three worlds I have none else but Thee to call my own.
Thou art my peace, my joy, my hope;
Thou my support, my wealth, my glory;
Thou my wisdom and my strength. . . .

The Master sang again:

O Mother, for Yaśoda Thou wouldst dance, when she called
Thee her precious "Blue Jewel":
Where hast Thou hidden that lovely form, O terrible Syama? . . .

The Brahmo devotees also sang to theaccompaniment of cymbals and drums:

O Mother, how deep is Thy love for men!
Mindful of it, I weep for joy.
Almost from the day of my birth
I have transgressed Thine every law,
And still Thou lookest on me with love,
Comforting me with sweetest words.
Mindful of it, I weep for joy.
O Mother, the burden of Thy love
Is far too great for me to bear;
My soul gives a heart-piercing cry
At Thy love's touch. To Thee I come,
Seeking a refuge at Thy feet.

They again sang of the Divine Mother:

O Mother, Thou my Inner Guide, ever awake within my heart!
Day and night Thou holdest me in Thy lap.
Why dost Thou show such tenderness to this unworthy child of Thine'?

Ah! It seems Thou art mad with love: now caressing, now with strong grasp
Holding me firm, Thou givest me to drink
Thy nectar, pouring in my ears Thy words of loving tenderness.
Unceasing is Thy love for me, a love that cannot see my faults ;
Whenever I am in danger, Thou dost save me.
Saviour of sinners! I know the truth: I am my Mother's and She is mine.

Now I shall listen to Her alone, and follow the path of righteousness;
Drinking the milk that flows from my Mother's breasts,
I shall be strong and sing with joy: "Hail, O Mother! Brahman Eternal!"

The Master and the Brahmo devotees sang several songs about Hari and Gaurānga.

Sunday, October 5, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room after the midday meal, with M., Hazra, the elder Kāli, Baburam, Ramlal, Hari, and others. Some of them sat on the floor and some stood about. On the previous day the Master had visited Keshab's mother at her Calcutta house and had made her happy with his devotional songs.

Hazra's eccentricities

Hazra had been living with the Master at Dakshineswar a long time. He was a little conceited about his knowledge and even criticized the Master now and then before others. Again, he would sit on the verandah of the Master's room and tell his beads with apparent concentration. He spoke slightingly of Chaitanya as a "modern Incarnation". He would say: "God gives not only pure devotion but also wealth. He has no lack of it. By attaining God one obtains the eight occult powers as well." Hazra had a small debt to clear up, about one thousand rupees. He had incurred it for the building of his house and was worried about paying it.

The elder Kāli had a position in an office, from which he received a small salary. He had a large family to maintain. He was devoted to the Master and visited him now and then, even absenting himself from the office.

KALI (to Hazra): "You go about criticizing people; you are like a touchstone, testing what is pure gold and what is impure. Why do you speak so much ill of others?" HAZRA: "Whatever I say, I say to him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] alone."

MASTER: "That is so."

Hazra began to explain Tattvajnana.

HAZRA: "The meaning of Tattvajnana is the knowledge of the existence of the twenty-four tattvas, or cosmic principles."

He was wrong about the meaning of the word.

A DEVOTEE: "What are they?"

HAZRA: "The five elements, the six passions, the five organs of perception, the five organs of action, and so forth."

M. (to the Master, smiling): "He says that the six passions are included in the twenty-four cosmic principles."

MASTER (smiling): "Listen to him! Notice how he explains Tattvajnana! The word really means 'knowledge of Self'. The word 'Tat' means the Supreme Self, and the word 'tvam', the embodied soul. One attains Supreme Knowledge, Tattvajnana, by realizing the identity of the embodied soul and the Supreme Self."

After a few minutes Hazra left the room and sat on the porch.

MASTER (to M. and the others): "He [meaning Hazra] only argues. This moment perhaps he understands, but the next moment he is his old self again.

"When the angler hooks a big fish and finds it pulling hard, he releases the line; otherwise it will snap and the angler himself will be thrown into the water. Therefore I do not say much to him.

(To M.) "Hazra said that a man could not be liberated unless he was born in a brahmin body. 'How is that?' I said. 'One attains liberation through bhakti alone. Savari was the daughter of a hunter. She, Ruhidas, and others belonged to the sudra caste. They were liberated through bhakti alone.' 'But still-Hazra insisted.

"He recognized Dhruva's spiritual greatness, but not as much as he recognized Prahlada's. When Lātu said, 'Dhruva had great yearning for God from his boyhood', he kept still.

"I said that there was nothing greater than the bhakti that sought no end and had no selfish motive. Hazra contradicted me. I said to him, 'A wealthy man is annoyed when a petitioner comes to him. "There he comes", he says angrily. "Sit down", he says to him

in an indifferent voice, and shows that he is much annoyed. He doesn't allow such a beggar to ride with him in his carriage.'

"But Hazra said that God was not like such wealthy people of the world; did He lack wealth, that He should feel pinched to give it away? Hazra said further: 'When rain falls from the sky, the Ganges and all the big rivers and lakes overflow with water. Small tanks, too, are filled. Likewise, God out of His grace grants wealth and riches as well as knowledge and devotion.'

(To the devotees) "But I call this impure devotion to God. Pure devotion has no desire behind it. You don't want anything from me, but you love to see me and hear my words. My mind also dwells on you. I wonder how you are and why you don't come.

"You don't want anything of God but still you love Him. That is pure bhakti, love of God with no motive behind it. Prahlada had it. He sought neither kingdom nor riches; he sought Hari alone."

M: "Hazra is a chatterbox. He won't achieve anything unless he becomes silent."

MASTER: "Now and then he comes to me and becomes mellowed. But he is a pest; again he argues. It is very hard to get rid of egotism. You may cut down an Aśwattha tree, but the next day a sprout will spring up. As long as the roots remain, the tree will grow again.

"I said to Hazra, 'Don't speak ill of anyone.' It is Narayana Himself who has assumed all these forms. One can worship even a wicked person. Haven't you observed the Kumari Puja? Why should you worship a girl who has all the physical limitations of a human being? It is because she is a form of the Divine Mother. But God dwells in a special way in His devotee. The devotee is His parlour. If the gourd has a large body then it makes a good Tānpura. It gives a nice sound."

Two monks had arrived at the temple garden in the morning. They were devoted to the study of the Bhagavad Gitā, the Vedānta, and other scriptures. They entered the Master's room, saluted him, and sat on the mat on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the small couch. The Master spoke to the sādhus in Hindusthani.

MASTER: "Have you had your meal?"

SĀDHU: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "What did you eat?"

SĀDHU: "Dal and bread. Will you take some?"

MASTER: "No, I take only a few morsels of rice. Well, your japa and meditation must be without any desire for results. Isn't that so?"

SĀDHU: "Yes, Sir."

MASTER: "That is good. One must surrender the result to God. What do you say? That is the view of the Gitā."

One sādhu said to the other, quoting from the Gitā: "O Arjuna, whatever action you perform, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give in charity, and whatever austerities you practise, offer everything to Me."

MASTER: "If you give God something, you receive it back a thousand times over. That is why after doing meritorious deeds one offers a handful of water to God. It is the symbol of offering the fruit to God. When Yudhisthira was about to offer all his sins to Krishna, Bhima warned him: 'Never do such a thing. Whatever you offer to Krishna you will receive back a thousandfold.'

(To one of the sādhus) "Well, sir, one should be de- sireless; one should renounce all desires. Isn't that so?"

SĀDHU: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "But I have the desire for bhakti. That is not bad. Rather, it is good. Sweets are bad, for they produce acidity. But sugar candy is an exception. Isn't that so?"

SĀDHU: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "Well, sir, what do you think of the Vedānta?"

SĀDHU: "It includes all the six systems of philosophy."

MASTER: "But the essence of Vedānta is: 'Brahman alone is real, and the world illusory; I have no separate existence; I am that Brahman alone.' Isn't that so?"

SĀDHU: "That is true, sir."

MASTER: "But for those who lead a householder's life, and those who identify themselves with the body, this attitude of 'I am He' is not good. It is not good for householders to read Vedānta or the Yoga-vāsishta. It is very harmful for them to read these books. Householders should look on God as their Master and on themselves as His servants. They should think, 'O God, You are the Master and the Lord, and I am Your servant.' People who identify themselves with the body should not have the attitude of 'I am He'."

The devotees in the room remained silent. Sri Ramakrishna was smiling a little, a picture of self-contentment. He appeared happy in his own Self.

One of the sādhus whispered in the other's ear: "Look! This is the state of the paramahamsa."

MASTER (to M.): "I feel like laughing."

Sri Ramakrishna smiled like a child. The monks left the room. The devotees were moving about in the room and on the porch.

Master (to M.) :"Did you go to Nabin Sen's house?"

M:"Yes, sir. I listened to the songs from down stairs."

MASTER: "That was well done. Your wife was there. She is a cousin of Keshab Sen, isn't she?"

M: "A distant cousin."

Sri Ramakrishna strolled up and down with M. No one else was with them.

MASTER: "A man visits his father-in-law's house. I, too, often used to think that I should marry, go to my father-in-law's house, and have great fun. But see what has come of it!"

M: "Sir, you say, 'If the boy holds his father's hand, he may slip; but he doesn't if the father holds his hand.' That is exactly your condition. The Mother has taken hold of your hand."

MASTER: "I met Bamandas at the Viswases' house. I said to him, 'I have come to see you.' As I was leaving the place I heard him say: 'Goodness gracious! The Divine Mother has caught hold of him, like a tiger seizing a man.' At that time I was a young man, very stout, and always in ecstasy.

Master's attitude toward women

"I am very much afraid of women. When I look at one I feel as if a tigress were coming to devour me. Besides, I find that their bodies, their limbs, and even their pores are very large. This makes me look upon them as she-monsters. I used to be much more afraid of women than I am at present. I wouldn't allow one to come near me. Now I persuade my mind in various ways to look upon women as forms of the Blissful Mother.

"A woman is, no doubt, a part of the Divine Mother. But as far as a man is concerned, especially a sannyāsi or a devotee of God, she is to be shunned. I don't allow a woman to sit near me very long, no matter how great her devotion may be. After a little while I say to her, 'Go and see the temples.'

If that doesn't make her move, I myself leave the room on the pretext of smoking.

"I find that some men are not at all interested in women. Niranjan says, 'A woman never enters my thought.' I asked Hari about it. He too says that his mind does not dwell on woman.

"Woman monopolizes three quarters of the mind, which should be given to God. And then, after the birth of a child, almost the whole mind is frittered away on the family. Then what is left to give to God?

"Again, there are some men who shed their last drop of blood, as it were, to keep their wives out of mischief. There is the gate-keeper, an old man, whose wife is only fourteen years old. She had to live with him. They lived in a thatched hut with walls made of dry leaves. People made holes in the wall to peep in. Now she has left him and run away.

"I know another man. He doesn't know where to keep his wife. There was some trouble at home, and now he is greatly worried. Let's not talk about these things any more.

"If a man lives with a woman, he cannot help coming under her control. Worldly men get up and sit down at the bidding of women. They all speak highly of their wives.

"Once I wanted to go to a certain place. I asked Ramlal's aunt about it. She forbade me to go; so I could not. A little while later I said to myself: 'I am not a householder. I have renounced "woman and gold". If, in spite of that, this is my plight, one can well imagine how much worldly people are controlled by their wives.'"

M: "One who lives in the midst of 'woman and gold' can't help being stained by it, even if only slightly. You told us about Jaynarayan. He was such a great scholar. When you visited him he was an old man. You found him warming pillows and blankets in the sun."

MASTER: "But he had no vanity of scholarship. Further, what he said about the last days of his life came to pass. He spent them in Benares, following the injunctions of the scriptures. I saw his children. They were wearing high boots and had been educated in English schools."

By means of questions and answers Sri Ramakrishna now explained to M. his own exalted state.

MASTER: "At first I went stark mad. Why am I less so now? But I get into that state now and then."

M: "You don't have just one mood. As you said, you experience various moods. Sometimes you are like a child, sometimes like a madman, sometimes like an inert thing, and sometimes like a ghoul. And now and then you are a natural person."

MASTER: "Yes, like a child. But I also experience the moods of a boy and a young man. When I give instruction I feel like a young man. Then there is my boyishness: like a boy twelve or thirteen years old, I want to be frivolous. That is why I joke and make merry with the youngsters.

"What do you think of Naran?"

M: "He has good traits, sir."

MASTER: "Yes, the shell of the gourd is good. The Tānpura made out of it will give good music. He says to me, 'You are everything.' Everyone speaks of me according to his comprehension. Some say that I am simply a sādhu, a devotee of God.

"If I forbid Naran to do something, he understands it very well. The other day I asked him to pull up the curtain, but he didn't do it. I had forbidden him to tie a knot, to sew his clothes, to lock a box, to pull up a curtain, and similar things. He understood it all. He who would renounce the world must practise all these disciplines. They are meant for sannyāsis.

"While practising *sādhanā* a man should regard a woman as a raging forest fire or a black cobra. But in the state of perfection, after the realization of God, she appears as the Blissful Mother. Then you will look on her as a form of the Divine Mother."

A few days earlier Sri Ramakrishna had spoken many words of warning to Narayan about women. He had said: "Don't let yourself touch the air near a woman's body. Cover yourself with a heavy sheet lest the air should touch your body. And keep yourself eight cubits, two cubits, or at least one cubit away from all women except your mother."

MASTER (to M.): "Naran's mother said to him about me, 'Even we are enchanted by the sight of him, not to speak of you, a mere child.' None but the guileless can realize God. How guileless Niranjan is!"

M: "True, sir."

MASTER: "Didn't you notice him that day in the carriage on the way to Calcutta? He is always the same-without guile. A man shows one side of his nature inside his house and another to the outside world. Since his father's death Narendra has been worried about his worldly affairs. He has a slightly calculating mind. How I wish that other youngsters were like Niranjan and Narendra!

"Today I went to the village to see Nilkantha's theatrical performance. It was given at Nabin Niyogi's house. The children there are very bad; they have nothing to do but find fault. In such a place a person's spiritual feeling is restrained. During a performance the other day I saw Doctor Madhu shedding tears. I looked at him alone.

(To M.) "Can you tell me why people feel so much attracted to this place [meaning himself]? What does it mean?"

M: "It reminds me of an episode in Krishna's life at Vrindāvan. Krishna transformed Himself into the cowherd boys and the calves, whereupon the cows began to feel more strongly attracted to the cowherd boys, the gopis, and the calves."

MASTER: "That is the attraction of God. The truth is, the Divine Mother creates the spell and it is that which attracts people.

"Well, not as many people come here as used to go to Keshab Sen. And how many people respect and honour Keshab! He is known even in England. Queen Victoria spoke with him. It is said in the Gitā that God's power is manifest in him who is honoured and respected by many. But so many people do not come here."

M: "It was the householders who went to Keshab Sen."

MASTER: "Yes, that is true. The worldly-minded."

M: "Will what Keshab has founded remain a long time?"

MASTER: "Why, he has written a samhita, a book of rules for the guidance of the members of his Brahmo Samaj."

M: "But it is quite different with the work done by a Divine Incarnation Himself-Chaitanya's work, for instance."

MASTER: "Yes, yes. That is true."

M: "You yourself tell us that Chaitanyadeva said, 'The seeds I have sown will certainly bear fruit some time or other.' A man left some seeds on the cornice of a house. Later on the house fell down and trees grew from those seeds."

MASTER: "Many people go to the Samaj founded by Shivanath and friends. Isn't that so?"

M: "Yes, sir. People of that sort."

MASTER (smiling): "Yes, yes. The worldly-minded go there, but not many of those who long for God and are trying to renounce 'woman and gold'."

M: "It will be fine if a current flows from this place. Everything will be carried away by its force. Nothing that comes out of this place will be monotonous."

MASTER (smiling): "I keep men's own ideals intact. I ask a Vaishnava to hold to his Vaishnava attitude and a Sakta to his. But this also I say to them 'Never feel that your path alone is right and that the paths of others a wrong and full of errors. Hindus, Mussalmans, and Christians are going to the same destination by different paths. A man can realize God by following his own path if his prayer is sincere.

"Vijay's mother-in-law said to me, 'Why don't you tell Balarām that it unnecessary to worship God with form; that it will be enough if he prays to the formless Satchidananda?' I replied, 'Why should I say such a thing, and why should he listen to me even if I should say it?' "

M: "That is true, sir. There are different paths to suit time, place, and the fitness of the candidate. Whatever path a man may follow, he will ultimately reach God if he is pure of heart and has sincere longing. That is what you say."

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room. Hari, the relative of the Mukherjis, M., and other devotees were on the floor. An unknown person saluted the Master and took a seat. The Master remarked later that his eyes were not good. They were yellow, like a cat's.

Hari prepared a smoke for Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER (to Hari): "Let me see the palm of your hand. This mark is good sign. Relax your hand."

He took Hari's hand into his as if to feel its weight.

MASTER: "He is still childlike. As yet there is no blemish in him. (To the devotees) From the hand I can tell whether a person is deceitful or guileless. (To Hari) Why, you should go to your father-in-law's house. You should talk to your wife and have a little fun with her if you like. (To M.) What do you say?" (M. and the others laugh.)

M: "If a new pot becomes bad, one can no longer keep milk in it."

MASTER (smiling): "How do you know that it is not already bad?"

The two Mukherjis, Mahendra and Priyanath, were brothers. They did not work in an office, but had their own flour-mill. Priyanath had been an engineer. Sri Ramakrishna talked to Hari about the Mukherji brothers.

MASTER: "The elder brother is nice, isn't he? He is artless."

HARI: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "Isn't the younger brother very miserly? I understand that since coming here he has improved a great deal. He once said to me, 'I didn't know anything before.' (To Hari) Do they give anything in charity?"

HARI: "Not much, as far as I can see. Their elder brother, now dead, was a very good man. He was very charitable."

Physical signs indicating character

MASTER (to M. and the others): "Whether a person will make spiritual progress or not can be known to a great extent by his physical marks. The hand of a deceitful person is heavy. A snub nose is not a good sign. Sambhu had that kind of nose; hence he was not quite sincere in spite of all his wisdom. Pigeon-breast is not a good sign either. Hard bones and heavy elbow-joints are bad signs too; and yellow eyes, like a cat's.

"A man becomes very mean if he has lips that are thick, like a dome's. A brahmin was here for a few months acting as priest of the Vishnu temple. I couldn't eat the food he touched. One day I suddenly exclaimed, 'He is a dome!' Afterwards he said to me: 'Yes, sir. We live in the dome quarters. I know how to make wicker baskets and such things, Just like a dome.'

"There are other bad physical signs: one eye and squint eyes. It is rather better to have one eye, but never squint eyes. Squint-eyed people are wicked and deceitful.

"A student of Mahesh Nyayaratna's came here. He described himself as an atheist. He said to Hriday: 'I am an atheist. You may take up the position of a believer in God and argue with me.' Thereupon I watched him closely and noticed that his eyes were yellow, like a cat's.

"Whether a person is good or bad can also be known from the way he walks."

Sri Ramakrishna paced the verandah. M. and Baburam walked with him.

MASTER (to Hazra): "A man came here. I saw that his eyes were like a cat's. He asked me: 'Do you know astrology? I am in some difficulty.' I said: 'No, I don't. Go to Baranagore. There you will find astrologers.'"

Master and Nilkantha

Baburam and M. talked about Nilkantha's theatrical performance. Baburam had spent the previous night at the temple garden after his return from Nabin Sen's house. In the morning he had attended Nilkantha's performance with the Master.

MASTER (to M. and Baburam): "What are you talking about?"

M. AND BABURAM: "About Nilkantha's performance."

While pacing the verandah Sri Ramakrishna suddenly took M. aside and said, "The less people know about your thoughts of God, the better for You," Saying these words the Master abruptly went away. A short time afterwards he began to talk with Hazra.

HAZRA: "Nilkantha told you he would pay you a visit. It would be good send for him."

MASTER: "No, he didn't sleep at all last night. It will be different if he comes here through the will of God."

Sri Ramakrishna asked Baburam to visit Narayan at his house. He looked on Narayan as God Himself, and so he longed to see him. The Master said to Baburam, "You may go to him with one of your English text-books."

About three o'clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room. Nilkantha arrived with five or six of his companions. The Master went toward the east door as if to

welcome him. The musicians bowed before the Master, touching the ground with their foreheads.

Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi. Baburam stood behind him. M., Nilkantha, and the musicians were in front of him, watching him in great amazement. Dinanath, an officer of the temple, looked on from the north side of the bed. Soon the room was filled with officers of the temple garden. Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy abated a little. He seated himself on a mat on the floor, surrounded by Nilkantha and other devotees.

MASTER (still in an ecstatic mood): "I am all right."

NILKANTHA (with folded hands): "Make me all right too."

MASTER (smiling): "Why, you are already all right. Adding the letter to 'a', one gets 'ka'. By adding another 'a' to 'ka', one still gets the same 'ka'." (All laugh.)

NILKANTHA: "Revered sir, I am entangled in worldliness."

MASTER (smiling): "God has kept you in the world for the sake of others. There are eight fetters. One cannot get rid of them all. God keeps one or two so that a man may live in the world and teach others. You have organized this theatrical company. How many people are being benefited by seeing your bhakti! If you give up everything, then where will these musicians go?

"God is now doing all these works through you. When they are finish, you will not return to them. The housewife finishes her household duties feeds everyone, including the menservants and maidservants, and then goes to take her bath. She doesn't come back then even if people shout for her."

NILKANTHA: "Please bless me."

MASTER: "Yaśoda went mad with grief because she was separated from Krishna. She went to Radhika, who was meditating. Radhika said to her an ecstatic state: 'I am the Ultimate Prakriti, the Primal Power. Ask a boon of Me.' Yaśoda said to her: 'What shall I ask of You? Please bless me, that with all my body, mind, and speech I may think of God and serve Him; that with my ears I may hear the singing of God's name and glories; that with my hands I may serve Hari and His devotees; that with my eyes I may behold His form and His devotees.'

"Your eyes fill with tears when you utter the name of God. Why then should you worry about anything? Divine love has grown in you.

"To know many things is ajnāna, ignorance. To know only one thing is jnāna, Knowledge-the realization that God alone is real and that He dwells in all. And to talk to Him is vijnāna, a fuller Knowledge. To love God in different ways, after realizing Him, is vijnāna.

"It is also said that God is beyond one and two. He is beyond speech and mind. To go up from the Lila to the Nitya and come down again from the Nitya to the Lila is mature bhakti.

"I love that song of yours about aspiring to reach the Lotus Feet of the Divine Mother. It is enough to know that everything depends on the grace of God. But one must pray to God; it will not do to remain inactive. The lawyer gives all the arguments and finishes his pleading by saying to the judge: 'I have said all I have to say. Now the decision rests with Your Honour.' "

After a few minutes Sri Ramakrishna said to Nilkantha: "You sang so much in the morning, and now you have taken the trouble to come here. But here everything is 'honorary'."

NILKANTHA: "Why so?"

MASTER (smiling): "I know what you will say."

NILKANTHA: "I shall get a precious gem from here."

MASTER: "You already have that precious gem. What will you gain by adding again the letter 'a' to 'ka'? If you didn't have the gem, should I like your songs so much?

Ramprasad had attained divine realization; that is why his songs appeal so much.

"I had already planned to hear your music. Later on Niyogi, too, came here to invite me."

The Master was sitting on the small couch. He told Nilkantha that he would like to hear a song or two about the Divine Mother.

Nilkantha sang two songs with his companions. When the Master heard the second song he stood up and went into samādhi. Presently he began to dance in an ecstasy of divine love. Nilkantha and the devotees sang and danced around him. Then Nilkantha sang a song about Śiva, and the Master danced with the devotees.

When the singing was over, Sri Ramakrishna said to Nilkantha, "I should like to hear that song of yours I heard in Calcutta."

M: "About Sri Gaurānga?"

MASTER: "Yes, yes!"

Nilkantha sang the song, "The beautiful Gaurānga, the youthful dancer, fair as molten gold."

Sri Ramakrishna sang again and again the line, "Everything is swept away by the onrush of love", and danced with Nilkantha and the other devotees. Those who saw that indescribable dancing were never to forget it. The room was filled with people, all intoxicated with divine joy. It seemed as if Chaitanya himself were dancing with his companions.

Manomohan was in an ecstatic mood. He was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and a brother-in-law of Rākhāl. Several ladies of his family had come with him. They were witnessing this divine music and dancing from the north verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna sang again, this time about Gaurānga and Nityananda:

Behold, the two brothers have came, who weep while chanting Hari's name. . . .

He danced with Nilkantha and the other devotees, improvising the line:

Behold, the two brothers have come, they who are mad with love of Radha.

Hearing the loud music, many people gathered about the room. The verandahs to the south and north, and the semicircular porch to the west of the room, were crowded with people. Even passengers in the boats going along the Gauges were attracted by the kirtan.

The music was over Sri Ramakrishna bowed to the Divine Mother and said, "Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan. My salutations to the jnanis, my salutations to the yogis, my salutations to the bhaktas."

The Master was seated on the semicircular porch with Nilkantha and the other devotees. The autumn moon flooded all the quarters with light. Sri Ramakrishna and Nilkantha talked.

NILKANTHA: "You are none other than Gaurānga."

MASTER: "Why should you say such a thing? I am the servant of .the servant of all. The waves belong to the Ganges; but does the Ganges belong to the waves?"

NILKANTHA: "You may say whatever you like, but we regard you as Gaurānga himself."

MASTER (tenderly, in an ecstatic mood): "My dear sir, I try to seek my 'I', but I do not find it. Hanuman said: 'O Rāma, sometimes I think that You are the whole and I am a part, and sometimes that You are the Master and I am Your servant. But when I have the Knowledge of Reality, I see that You are I and I am You.'"

NILKANTHA: "What shall I say, sir? Please be gracious to us."

MASTER (smiling): "You are ferrying many people across the ocean or the world. How many hearts are illumined by hearing your music!"

NILKANTHA: "You talk of ferrying. But bless me that I may not be drowned in the ocean myself."

MASTER (smiling): "If you get drowned, it will be in the Sea of Immortality."

Sri Ramakrishna was delighted with Nilkantha's company. He said to the musician: "For you to have come here! You whom people see as a result of many austerities and prayers! Listen to a song."

The Master sang a song, two lines of which ran:

When the Blissful Mother comes to my house, how much of the Chandi I shall hear!
How many monks will come here, and how many yogis with matted locks!

He said, continuing, "As long as the Divine Mother has come here, many yogis with matted locks will come too."

Sri Ramakrishna laughed. To M., Baburam, and the other devotees he said: "I feel very much like laughing. Just fancy, I am singing for these musicians!"

NILKANTHA: "We go about singing; but today we have had our true reward."

MASTER (smiling): 'when a shopkeeper sells an article, he sometimes gives a little extra something to the buyer. You sang at Nabin's house and have given the extra something here."

All laughed.

Chapter 31

ADVICE TO ISHAN

Saturday, October 11, 1884

SRI RAMAKRISHNA lay on the small couch in his room at the Dakshineswar temple garden. It was about two in the afternoon. M. and Priya Mukherji were sitting on the floor. M. had left his school at one o'clock and had just arrived at Dakshineswar. The Master was telling anecdotes about the calculating nature of the wealthy Jadu Mallick.

The worldly Jadu Mallick

MASTER: "Once I went to Jadu Mallick's house. He asked right away, 'How much is the carriage hire?' Someone told him it was three rupees and two *ānnās*. Then he questioned me about it. Next one of his people secretly asked the coachman, who said it was three rupees and four *ānnās* (All laugh.) At that he ran to us and said, 'How much did you say the carriage hire was?'

"A broker was present. He said to Jadu: 'There is a plot of land at Burra bazar for sale. Will you buy it?' Jadu asked the price and the broker told him. Jadu said, 'Won't he give it for less?' I said to Jadu: 'Come, come. You aren't going to buy the land. You're only bargaining. Isn't that so?' He turned to me and laughed.

"That is the nature of the worldly man. He wants people to come to him. That spreads his name in the market.

"Jadu went to Adhar's house. I told him it had made Adhar very happy. He said: 'What? What? Was he really happy?' A certain Mallick came to Jadu's house. He was very clever and deceitful. I saw it in his eyes. I looked at him and said: 'It isn't good to be clever. The crow is very clever, but it eats others filth.' I could tell he was badly off. Jadu's mother was amazed and said to me, 'How did you know he hadn't a penny?' I saw it from his appearance."

Narayan entered the room and sat on the floor.

MASTER (to Priyanath): "Well, your Hari is a fine young man."

PRIYANATH: "What is so fine about him? Of course, he has a childlike nature."

NARAYAN: "He addressed his wife as mother."

MASTER: "What! Even I can't do that. And he calls her mother! (To Priyanath) You see, the boy is very quiet. His mind is directed to God."

Sri Ramakrishna changed the subject of conversation.

MASTER: "Do you know what Hem said? He said to Baburam, 'God alone is real; all else is illusory.'(All laugh.) Oh, no! He said it sincerely. Again, he told me he would take me to his house and sing kirtan. But he didn't do it. I understand that he said later on, 'What will people say if I sing with drums and cymbals?' He was afraid that people might think he was crazy.

Warning devotees about women

"Haripada has fallen into the clutches of a woman of the Ghoshpara sect. He can't get rid of her. He says that she takes him on her lap and feeds him. She claims that she looks on him as the Baby Krishna. I have warned him a great many times. She says that she thinks of him as a child. But this maternal affection soon degenerates into something dangerous.

"You see, you should keep far away from woman; then you may realize God. It is extremely harmful to have much to do with women who have bad motives, or to eat food from their hands. They rob a man of his spirituality. Only by being extremely careful about woman can one preserve one's love of God. One day Bhavanāth, Rākhāl, and some other youngsters had cooked their own meal in the temple garden. They were sitting at their meal when a Baul arrived, sat down with them, and said he wanted to eat with them. I said that there was not enough food; if anything was left it would be kept for him. He became angry and left. On the Vijaya day a man allows anyone and everyone to feed him with his own hand. It is not good. But one can eat food from the hand of a devotee who is pure in heart.

"You must be extremely careful about women. Women speak of the attitude of Gopala! Pay no attention to such things. The proverb says: 'A woman devours the three worlds.' Many women, when they see handsome and healthy young men, lay snares for them. That is what they call the 'attitude of Gopala.'

"Those who develop dispassion from early youth, those who roam about yearning for God from boyhood, those who refuse all worldly life, belong to a different class. They belong to an unsullied aristocracy. If they develop true renunciation, they keep themselves at least fifty cubits away from women lest their spiritual mood should be destroyed. Once falling into the clutches of women, they no longer remain on the level of unsullied aristocracy. They fall from it and come to a lower level. People who practise renunciation from early youth belong to a very high level. Their ideal is very pure. They are stainless.

How to conquer passion

"How can a man conquer passion? He should assume the attitude of a woman. I spent many days as the handmaid of God. I dressed myself in women's clothes, put on ornaments, and covered the upper part of my body with a scarf, just like a woman. With the scarf on I used to perform the evening worship before the image. Otherwise, how could I have kept my wife with me for eight months? Both of us behaved as if we were the handmaids of the Divine Mother. I cannot speak of myself as a man. One day I was

in an ecstatic mood. My wife asked me, 'How do you regard me?' 'As the Blissful Mother', I said.

"Do you know the significance of the Śiva emblem? It is the worship of the symbols of fatherhood and motherhood. The devotee worshipping the image prays, 'O Lord, please grant that I may not be born into this world again; that I may not have to pass again through a mother's womb.' "

A tutor of the Tagores entered the room with some boys of the family.

Sri Ramakrishna continued talking.

MASTER (to the devotees): "Sri Krishna has a peacock feather on His crest. The feather bears the sign of the female sex. The significance of this is that Krishna carries Prakriti, the female principle, on His head. When Krishna joined the circle of the gopis to dance with them, He appeared there as a woman. That is why you see Him wearing women's apparel in the company of the gopis. Unless a man assumes the nature of a woman, he is not entitled to her company. Assuming the attitude of a woman, he can sport with her and enjoy her company.

Disciplines during the *Sādhanā* period

But a man must be extremely careful during the early stages of spiritual discipline. Then he must live far away from any woman. He must not go too close to one even if she is a great devotee of God. You see, a man must not sway his body while climbing to the roof; he may fall. Weak people should hold on to a support while going up the stairs.

"But it is quite different when one reaches perfection. After the realization of God there is not much for a man to fear; he has become to a great extent secure. The important thing is for a man somehow to climb to the roof. After that he can even dance there. But he cannot dance on the steps. Again, after climbing to the roof, you need no longer discard what you discarded before. You find that the stairs are made of the same materials-bricks, lime, and brick-dust-as the roof. The woman you have to be so careful about at the beginning will appear to you, after the realization of God, as the Divine Mother Herself. Then you will worship her as the Divine Mother. You won't fear her so much.

"The thing is to touch the 'granny', as children do in the game of hide-and-seek. Then you can do whatever you like.

Planes of mind

"Man, looking outward, sees the gross; at that time his mind dwells in the annamayakosha, the gross body. Next is the subtle body. Functioning through the subtle body, the mind dwells in the manomayakosha and the vijnanamayakosha. Next is the causal body. Functioning through the causal body the mind enjoys bliss; it dwells in the Ānandamaykosha. This corresponds to the semi-conscious state experienced by Chaitanya. Last of all, the mind loses itself in the Great Cause. It disappears. It merges in the Great Cause. What one experiences after that cannot be described in words. In his

inmost state of consciousness, Chaitanya enjoyed this experience. Do you know what this state is like? Dayananda described it by saying, 'Come into the inner apartments and shut the door. Anyone and everyone cannot enter that part of the house.

On meditation

"I used to meditate on the flame of a light. I thought of the red part as gross, the white part inside the red as subtle, and the stick-like black part, which is the innermost of all, as the causal.

"By certain signs you can tell when meditation is being rightly practised. One of them is that a bird will sit on your head, thinking you are an inert thing.

"I first met Keshab at a meeting of the Adi Samaj. Several members of the Samaj were sitting on the platform. Keshab was in the middle. I saw him motionless as a log. Pointing to Keshab, I said to Mathur Babu: 'Look there! That bait has been swallowed by a fish.' Because of that power of meditation he achieved what he wanted-name, fame, and so forth-through the grace of God.

"One can meditate even with eyes open. One can meditate even while talking. Take the case of a man with toothache.

TUTOR OF THE TAGORES: "Yes, sir. I know that very well." (All laugh.)
MASTER (smiling): "Yes, even when his teeth ache he does all his duties,but his mind is on the pain. Likewise one can meditate with eyes open and while talking to others as well."

TUTOR: "One of the epithets of God is the 'Redeemer of the sinner'. That is our hope. God is compassionate."

MASTER: "The Sikhs, too, said that God was compassionate. I asked, 'How is He compassionate?' 'Why,' they answered, 'He has begotten us; He has created so many things for us; He has brought us up to be men; and He protects us from danger at every step.' Thereupon I said: 'After begetting us, God looks after us and feeds us. Is there much credit in that? Suppose a son is born to you. Do you expect a man from another part of the city to bring him up?' "

Tendencies from previous births

TUTOR: "Revered sir, one man quickly succeeds in spiritual life, and another doesn't succeed at all. How do you explain that?"

MASTER: "The truth is that a man succeeds to a great extent because of tendencies inherited from his previous births. People think he has attained the goal all of a sudden. A man drank a glass of wine in the morning. It made him completely drunk. He began to behave improperly. People were amazed to see that he could be so drunk after one glass. But another man said, 'Why, he has been drinking all night.'

"Hanuman burnt down the golden city of Lanka. People were amazed that a mere monkey could burn the whole city. But then they said, 'The truth is that the city was burnt by the sighs of Sita and the wrath of Rāma.'

"Look at Lala Babu. He had so much wealth. Could he have renounced it all so suddenly without the good tendencies of his previous births? And Rani Bhavani. So much knowledge and devotion in a woman!

"In his last birth a man is endowed with sattva. His mind is directed to God. He longs for God. He withdraws his mind from worldly things.

"Krishnadas Pal came here. I found him full of rajas. But it must be said that he observed the Hindu customs. He left his shoes outside before entering the room. After a little conversation I discovered that he had no stuff inside. I asked him about man's duty. He said, 'To do good to the world.' I said: 'My dear sir, who are you? What good will you do to the world? Is the world such a small thing that you think you can help it?' "

Narayan arrived. Sri Ramakrishna was very happy to see him. He seated Narayan by his side on the small couch. He showed him his love by stroking his body and giving him sweets to eat. Then he asked Narayan tenderly, "Will you have some water?" Narayan was a student at M.'s school. At home his people beat him for visiting Sri Ramakrishna. The Master said to Narayan with an affectionate smile, "You had better get a leather jacket; then the beating won't hurt." Turning to Harish, the Master said that he would like to have a smoke.

Again addressing Narayan, Sri Ramakrishna said: "That woman who has established an artificial relationship of mother and son with Haripada came here the other day. I have warned Haripada very often. She belongs to the Ghoshpara sect. I asked her if she had found her 'man'. She said yes, and mentioned a man's name.

(To M.) "Ah! Nilkantha came here the other day. What spiritual fervour he has! He said he would come here another day and sing for us. They are dancing over there. Why don't you go and see it? (To Ramlal) There is no oil in the room. (Looking at the oil-jar) The servant hasn't filled it."

Sri Ramakrishna was walking up and down, now in his room, now on the south verandah. Occasionally pausing on the semicircular porch west of his room, he would look at the Ganges.

After a little while he returned to his room and sat on the small couch. It was past three in the afternoon. The devotees took their seats on the floor. The Master sat in silence before them, now and then casting a glance at the walls, where many pictures were hanging. To Sri Ramakrishna's left was a picture of Sarasvati, and beyond it, a picture of Gaur and Nitai singing kirtan with their devotees. In front of the Master hung pictures of Dhruva, Prahlada, and Mother Kāli. On the wall to his right was another picture of the Divine Mother, Rajarajesvari. Behind him was a picture of Jesus Christ raising the drowning Peter. Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna turned to M. and said: "You see, it is good to

keep pictures of sannyāsis and holy men in one's room. When you get up in the morning you should see the faces of holy persons rather than the faces of other men. People with rajasic qualities keep 'English' pictures on their walls-pictures of rich men, the King, the Queen, the Prince of Wales, and white men and women walking together. That shows their rajasic temperament.

"You acquire the nature of the people whose company you keep. Therefore even pictures may prove harmful. Again, a man seeks the company that agrees with his own nature. The paramahamsas keep near them a few young boys five or six years old. They allow such boys to be near them. Attaining the state of a paramahamsa, a man loves the company of boys. Like the paramahamsas, the boys are not under the control of the *Gunās*-sattva, rajas, or tamas.

"By looking at trees a man awakens in his heart the picture of a hermitage in which a rishi is practising austerity."

A brahmin from Sinthi entered the room and saluted Sri Ramakrishna. He had studied Vedānta in Benares. He was stout and had a smiling face.

MASTER: "Hello! How are you? You haven't been here in a long time."

PUNDIT (smiling): "Worldly duties, sir. You know I have very little leisure. The pundit sat down, and the Master began to talk with him.

Dayananda

MASTER: "You spent a long time in Benares. Tell us what you saw there. Tell us something about Dayananda."

PUNDIT: "Yes, I met him. You also met him, didn't you?"

MASTER: "Yes, I visited him. He was 'living then in a garden house on the other side of the Ganges. Keshab was expected there that day. He longed for Keshab as the chatak bird longs for rain. He was a great scholar and made fun of the Bengali language. He admitted the existence of the deities, but Keshab did not. Dayananda used to say: 'God has created so many things. Couldn't He have created the deities?' Dayananda believed the Ultimate Reality to be without form. Captain was repeating the name of Rāma. Dayananda said to him sarcastically, 'Better repeat "sandesh"!' "

PUNDIT: "In Benares the pundits had great discussions with Dayananda. Finally he was left alone with all the others against him. They made it so hot for him that he thought the only way to save himself was by running away. All the pundits shouted with one voice, 'Whatever Dayananda has said is to be despised!'

Theosophy

"I saw Colonel Olcott too. The Theosophists believe in the existence of mahatmas. They also speak of the 'lunar', 'solar', 'stellar', and other planes. A Theosophist can go in his

'astral body' to all these planes. Oh, Olcott said many such things. Well, sir, what do you think of Theosophy?"

MASTER: "The one essential thing is bhakti, loving devotion to God. Do the Theosophists seek bhakti? They are good if they do. If Theosophy makes the realization of God the goal of life, then it is good. One cannot seek God if one constantly busies oneself with the mahatmas and the lunar, solar, and stellar planes. A man should practise *sādhanā* and pray to God with a longing heart for love of His Lotus Feet. He should direct his mind to God alone, withdrawing it from the various objects of the world."

The Master sang:

How are you trying, O my mind, to know the nature of God?
You are groping like a madman locked in a dark room.
He is grasped through ecstatic love; how can you fathom Him
Without it? . . .
And, for that love, the mighty yogis practise yoga from age to age;
When love awakes, the Lord, like a magnet, draws to Him the soul.

Continuing, the Master said: "You may speak of the scriptures, of philosophy, of Vedānta; but you will not find God in any of these. You will never succeed in realizing God unless your soul becomes restless for Him.

Only through affirmation, never negation, can you know Him,
Neither through Veda nor through Tantra nor the six darsanas.
It is in love's elixir only that He delights, O mind;
He dwells in the body's inmost depths, in Everlasting Joy.

"One must be very earnest about God. Listen to another song:

Can everyone have the vision of Radha? Can everyone taste her love?

This, the rarest treasure of all, no earthly wealth can buy;
Without devotions and sādhanā none can ever obtain it.

The raindrop falling upon the deep when Svati shines on high
Is formed within the oyster's shell into a priceless pearl.
Can such a pearl be formed from rain that falls at other times?

Mothers with their babes in arms may beckon to the moon
To leave the sky and come to them; but only the babes are fooled.
Does the moon ever leave the sky and dwell upon the earth?

Preparation for God vision

"One must practise intense spiritual discipline. Can one obtain the vision of God all of a sudden, without any preparation?

"A man asked, 'Why don't I see God?' I said to him, as the idea came to my mind: 'You want to catch a big fish. First make arrangements for it. Throw spiced bait into the water. Get a line and a rod. At the smell of the bait the fish will come from the deep water. By the movement of the water you will know that a big fish has come.'

"You want to eat butter. But what will you achieve by simply repeating that there is butter in milk? You have to work hard for it. Only thus can you separate butter from milk. Can one see God by merely repeating, 'God exists'? One needs *sādhanā*.

"The Divine Mother Herself practised austere *sādhanā* to set an example for mankind. Sri Krishna, who is none other than the Ultimate Brahman, also practised *sādhanā* to set an example to others.

Purusha and Prakriti

"Sri Krishna is the Purusha and Radha the Prakriti, the ChitŚakti, the *Ādyāśakti*. Radha is the Prakriti, the embodiment of the three *Gunās*. Sattva, rajas, and tamas are in her. As you remove the layers of an onion, you will first see tints of both black and red, then only red, and last of all only white.

The Vaishnava scriptures speak of 'Kam-Radha', 'Prem-Radha', and 'Nitya-Radha'. Chandravali is Kam-Radha, and Srimati is Prem-Radha; Nanda saw Nitya-Radha holding Gopala in Her arms.

"The Brahman of Vedānta and the ChitŚakti are identical, like water and its wetness. The moment you think of water you must also think of its wetness, and the moment you think of water's wetness you must also think of water. Or it is like the snake and its wriggling motion. The moment you think of the snake you must a1so think of its wriggling motion, and the moment you think of the snake's wriggling motion you must also think of the snake. When do I call the Ultimate Reality by the name of Brahman? When It is actionless or unattached to action. When a man puts on a cloth he remains the same man as when he was naked. He was naked; now he is clothed. He may be naked again. There is poison in the snake, but it doesn't harm the snake. It is poison to him who is bitten by the snake.

Brahman Itself is unattached.

"Names and forms are nothing but the manifestations of the power of Prakriti. Sita said to Hanuman: 'My child, in one form I am Sita, in another form I am Rāma. In one form I am Indra, in another I am IndRani. In one form I am Brahma, in another, Brahmani. In one form I am Rudra, in another, Rudrani.' Whatever names and forms you see are nothing but the manifestations of the power of ChitŚakti. Everything is the power of ChitŚakti-even meditation and he who meditates. As long as I feel that I am meditating, I am within the jurisdiction of Prakriti. (To M.) Try to assimilate what I have said. One should hear what the Vedas and the Puranas say, and carry it out in life.

(To the pundit) "It is good to live in the company of holy men now and then. The disease of worldliness has become chronic in man. It is mitigated, to a great extent, in holy company.

Knowledge and ignorance

"'I' and 'mine'-that is ignorance. True knowledge makes one feel: 'O God, You alone do everything. You alone are my own. And to You alone belong houses, buildings, family, relatives, friends, the whole world. All is Yours.' But ignorance makes one feel: 'I am doing everything. I am the doer. House, buildings, family, children, friends, and property are all mine.'

Hollowness of worldly love

"Once a teacher was explaining all this to a disciple. He said, 'God alone, and no one else, is your own.' The disciple said: 'But, revered sir, my mother, my wife, and my other relatives take very good care of me. They see nothing but darkness when I am not present. How much they love me!' The teacher said: 'There you are mistaken. I shall show you presently that nobody is your own. Take these few pills with you. When you go home, swallow them and lie down in bed. People will think you are dead, but you will remain conscious of the outside world and will see and hear everything. Then I shall visit your home.

"The disciple followed the instructions. He swallowed the pills and lay as if unconscious in his bed. His mother, wife, and other relatives began to cry. Just then the teacher came in, in the guise of a physician, and asked the cause of their grief. When they had told him everything, he said to them: 'Here is a medicine for him. It will bring him back to life. But I must tell you one thing. This medicine must first be taken by one of his relatives and then given to him. But the relative who takes it first will die. I see his mother, his wife, and others here. Certainly one of you will volunteer to take the medicine. Then the young man will come back to life.'

"The disciple heard all this. First the physician called his mother, who was weeping and rolling on the ground in grief. He said to her: 'Mother, you don't need to weep any more. Take this medicine and your son will come to life. But you will die.' The mother took the medicine in her hand and began to think. After much reflection she said to the physician, with tears in her eyes: 'My child, I have a few more children. I have to think about them too. I am wondering what will happen to them if I die. Who will feed them and look after them?' The physician next called the wife and handed the medicine to her. She had been weeping bitterly too. With the medicine in her hand she also began to reflect. She had heard that she would die from the effect of the medicine. At last, with tears in her eyes, she said: 'He has met his fate. If I die, what will happen to my young children? Who will keep them alive? How can I take the medicine?' In the mean time the disciple had got over the effect of the pills. He was now convinced that nobody was really his own. He jumped out of bed and left the place with his teacher. The guru said to him, 'There is only one whom you may call your own, and that is God.'

"Therefore a man should act in such a way that he may have bhakti for the Lotus Feet of God and love God as his very own. You see this world around you. It exists for you only for a couple of days. There is nothing to it." PUNDIT (smiling): "Revered sir, I feel a spirit of total renunciation when I am here. I feel like going away, giving up the world."

MASTER: "No, no! Why should you give up? Give up mentally. Live unattached in the world.

"Surendra wanted to spend the night here occasionally. He brought a bed and even spent a day or two here. Then his wife said to him, 'You may go anywhere you like during the day-time, but at night you must not leave home.' What could poor Surendra do? Now he has no way of spending the night away from home.

Reason and love

"What will you achieve by mere reasoning? Be restless for God and learn to love Him. Reason, mere intellectual knowledge, is like a man who can go only as far as the outer court of the house. But bhakti is like a woman who goes into the inner court.

Different attitudes toward God

"One must take up a definite attitude toward God. Then alone can one realize Him. Rishis like Sanaka cherished the attitude of Śānta; Hanuman the attitude of a servant; the cowherd boys of Vrindāvan, like Sridāmā and Sudāmā, the attitude of a friend; Yaśoda the attitude of a mother; and Radha the attitude of a sweetheart.

"*'O God, Thou art the Lord and I am Thy servant'* - that is the servant's attitude, a very good one for aspirants."

PUNDIT: "Yes, sir."

The pundit from Sinthi left. It was dusk. Twilight hung over the Panchavati, the temples, and the river. Evening worship began in the different temples, accompanied by the sound of bells, gongs, and conch-shells. Sri Ramakrishna bowed before the pictures of the deities in his room. He was sitting on the small couch in an abstracted mood. A few devotees were on the floor. There was silence in the room.

Master and Ishan

An hour passed. Ishan and Kishori entered and sat down on the floor after saluting Sri Ramakrishna. Ishan was a great ritualist. He was devoted to the performance of the, various rites and ceremonies prescribed by the scriptures. The Master opened the conversation.

Characteristics of Knowledge

MASTER: "Can one attain knowledge of God by merely repeating the word 'God'? There are two indications of such knowledge. First, longing,that is to say, love for God. You may indulge in reasoning or discussion, but if you feel no longing or love, it is all futile. Second, the awakening of the Kundalini. As long as the Kundalini remains asleep, you have not attained knowledge of God. You may be spending hours poring over books or

discussing philosophy, but if you have no inner restlessness for God, you have no knowledge of Him.

Path of devotion

"When the Kundalini is awakened, one attains bhava, bhakti, prema, and so on. This is the path of devotion.

Path of karma

"The path of karma is very difficult. Through it one obtains some powers-I mean occult powers."

ISHAN: "Let me go and see Hazra."

Sri Ramakrishna sat in silence. After a while Ishan returned to the room accompanied by Hazra. The Master was still silent. A few moments later Hazra whispered to Ishan: "Let's leave him alone. Perhaps he will meditate now." Both left the room.

Sri Ramakrishna was still silent. In a few moments the devotees noticed that he was really meditating. Then he performed japa. He placed his right hand on his head, then on his forehead, then on his throat, then on his heart, and last of all on his navel. Was it meditation on the Primordial Energy in the six centres of the body?

Ishan and Hazra had gone to the Kāli temple. Sri Ramakrishna was absorbed in meditation. Meanwhile Adhar had arrived. It was about half past seven.

A little later the Master. went to the Kāli temple. He looked at the image, took some sacred Rowers from the feet of the Mother, and placed them on his head. He prostrated himself before the Mother and went round the image. He waved the chamara. He appeared ecstatic with divine fervour. Coming out, he found Ishan performing the sandhya with the kosakusi.

Rituals are only steps

MASTER (to Ishan): "What? You are still here? Are you still performing the sandhya? Listen to a song:

Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,
So long as I can breathe my last with Kāli's name upon my lips?
What need of rituals has a man, what need of devotions any more,
If he repeats the Mother's name at the three holy hours?
Rituals may pursue him close, but never can they overtake him.
Charity, vows, and giving of gifts do not appeal to Madan's mind;
The Blissful Mother's Lotus Feet are his whole prayer and sacrifice. . . .

"How long must a man continue the sandhya? As long as he has not developed love for the Lotus Feet of God, as long as he does not shed tears and his hair does not stand on end when he repeats God's name.

I bow my head, says Prasad, before desire and liberation;
Knowing the secret that Kāli is one with the highest Brahman,
I have discarded, once for all, both dharma and adharma.

"When the fruit grows, the flower drops off. When one has developed love of God and has beheld Him, then one gives up the sandhya and other rites. When the young daughter-in-law is with child, the mother-in-law reduces her activities. When she has been pregnant for nine months, she is not allowed to perform any household duty. After the birth of the child, she only carries the child on her arm and nurses it. She has no other duty. After the attainment of God, the sandhya and other rites are given up.

Master exhorts Ishan

"You cannot achieve anything by moving at such a slow pace. You need stern renunciation. Can you achieve anything by counting fifteen months as a year? You seem to have no strength, no grit. You are as mushy as flattened rice soaked in milk. Be up and doing! Gird your loins!

"I don't like that song:

Brother, joyfully cling to God;
Thus striving, some day you may attain Him.

I don't care for the line, *'Thus striving, some day you may attain Him.'* You need stern renunciation. I say the same thing to Hazra.

"You ask me why you don't feel stern renunciation. There is a reason for it. You have desires and tendencies within you. The same is true of Hazra. In our part of the country I have seen peasants bringing water into their paddy-fields. The fields have low ridges on all sides to prevent the water from leaking out; but these are made of mud and often have holes here and there. The peasants work themselves to death to bring the water, which, however, leaks out through the holes. Desires are the holes. You practise japa and austerities, no doubt, but they all leak out through the holes of your desires.

"They catch fish with a bamboo trap. The bamboo is naturally straight. But why is it bent in the trap? In order to catch the fish. Desires are the fish. Therefore the mind is bent down toward the world. If there are no desires, the mind naturally looks up toward God.

"Do you know what it is like? It is like the needles of a balance. On account of the weight of 'woman and gold' the two needles are not in line. It is 'woman and gold' that makes a man stray from the path of yoga. Haven't you noticed the flame of a candle? The slightest wind makes it waver. The state of yoga is like the candle-flame in a windless place.

"The mind is dispersed. Part of it has gone to Dāccā, part to Delhi, and another part to Coochbehar. That mind is to be gathered in; it must be concentrated on one object. If you want sixteen *ānnā's* worth of cloth, then you have to pay the merchant the full sixteen *ānnās*. Yoga is not possible if there is the slightest obstacle. If there is a tiny break in the telegraph-wire, then the news cannot be transmitted.

"You are no doubt in the world. What if you are? You must urrender the fruit of your action to God. You must not seek any result for yourself. But mark one thing. The desire for bhakti cannot be called a desire. You may desire bhakti and pray for it. Practise the tamas of bhakti and force your demand upon the Divine Mother.

This bitterly contested suit between the Mother and Her son-
What sport it is! says Ramprasad. I shall not cease tormenting Thee
Till Thou Thyself shalt yield the fight and take me in Thine arms at last.

"Trailokya once remarked, 'As I was born into the family, I have a share in the estate.'

"God is your own Mother. Is She a stepmother? Is it an artificial relationship? If you cannot force your demand on Her, then on whom can you force it? Say to Her:

Mother, am I Thine eight-months child? Thy red eyes cannot frighten me!.
A deed of gift I hold in my heart, attested by Thy Husband Śiva;
I shall sue Thee, if I must, and with a single point shall win.

"God is your own Mother. Enforce your demand. If you are part of a thing, you feel its attraction. Because of the element of the Divine Mother in me I feel attracted to Her. A true Saiva has some of the characteristics of Śiva; he has in him some of the elements of Śiva. He who is a true Vaishnava is endowed with some of the elements of Narayana.

"Nowadays you don't have to attend to worldly duties. Spend a few days thinking of God. You have seen that there is nothing to the world."

The Master sang:

Remember this, O mind! Nobody is your own:
Vain is your wandering in this world.
Trapped in the subtle snare of māyā as you are,
Do not forget the Mother's name.

Only a day or two men honour you on earth
As lord and master; all too soon
That form, so honoured now, must needs be cast away,
When Death, the Master, seizes you.

Even your beloved wife, for whom, while yet you live,
You fret yourself almost to death,
Will not go with you then; she too will say farewell,
And shun your corpse as an evil thing.

Continuing, the Master said: "What are these things you busy yourself with-this arbitration and leadership? I hear that you settle people's quarrels and that they make you the arbiter. You have been doing this kind of work a long time. Let those who care for such things do them. Now devote your mind more and more to the Lotus Feet of God. The saying goes: 'Ravana died in Lanka and Behula wept bitterly for him!'

"Sambhu, too, said, 'I shall build hospitals and dispensaries.' He was a devotee of God; so I said to him, 'Will you ask God for hospitals and dispensaries when you see Him?'

"Keshab Sen asked me, 'Why do I not see God?' I said, 'You do not see God because you busy yourself with such things as name and fame and scholarship.' The mother does not come to the child as long as it sucks its toy-a red toy. But when, after a few minutes, it throws the toy away and cries, then the mother takes down the rice-pot from the hearth and comes running to the child.

"You are engaged in arbitration. The Divine Mother says to Herself:'My child over there is now busy arbitrating and is very happy. Let him be.' "

In the mean time Ishan had been holding Sri Ramakrishna's feet. He said humbly, "It is not my will that I should do those things."

MASTER: "I know it. This is the Divine Mother's play-Her lila. It is the will of the Great Enchantress that many should remain entangled in the world. Do you know what it is like?

How many are the boats, O mind,
That float on the ocean of this world!
How many are those that sink!

Again,

Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best but one or two break free;
And Thou dost laugh and clap Thy hands, O
Mother, watching them!

Only one or two in a hundred thousand get liberation. The rest are entangled through the will of the Divine Mother.

"Haven't you seen the game of hide-and-seek? It is the 'granny's' will that the game should continue. If all touch her and are released, then the playing comes to a stop. Therefore it is not her will that all should touch her.

You see, in big grain stores the merchants keep rice in great heaps that touch the ceiling. Beside them there are heaps of lentils. To protect the grain from the mice, the merchants leave trays of puffed rice and sweetened rice near it. The mice like the smell and the sweet taste of these and so stayaround the trays. They don't find the big heaps of grain. Similarly, men are deluded by 'woman and gold'; they do not know where God is.”

"Rāma said to Nārada, 'Ask a boon of Me.' Nārada said: 'O Rāma, is there anything I lack? What shall I ask of Thee? But if Thou must give me a boon, grant that I may have selfless love for Thy Lotus Feet and that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching māyā.' Rāma said, 'Nārada, ask something else.' Nārada again replied: O Rāma, I don't want anything else Be gracious to me and see that I have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet.'”

"I prayed to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother, I don't want name and fame I don't want the eight occult powers. I don't want a hundred occult powers O Mother, I have no desire for creature comforts. Please, Mother, grant me the boon that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet.'”

"It is written in the Adhyātma Rāmāyana that Lakshmana asked Rāma 'Rāma, in how many forms and moods do You exist? How shall I be able to recognize You?' Rāma said: 'Brother, remember this. You may be certain that I exist wherever you find the manifestation of ecstatic love.' That love makes one laugh and weep and dance and sing; if anyone has developed such love, you may know for certain that God Himself is manifest there. Chaitanyadeva reached that state."

The devotees listened spellbound to Sri Ramakrishna. His burning words entered their souls, spurring them along the path of renunciation.

Now he spoke to Ishan in a serious voice.

MASTER: "Don't forget yourself because of what you hear from your flatterers. Flatterers gather around a worldly man. Vultures gather around the carcass of a cow.

"Worldly people have no stuff in them. They are like a heap of cow-dung. Flatterers come to them and say: 'You are so charitable and wise! You are so pious!' These are not mere words but pointed bamboos thrust at them. How foolish it is! To be surrounded day and night by a bunch of worldly brahmin pundits and hear their flattery!

"Worldly men are slaves of three things: they are slaves of their wives, slaves of their money, slaves of their masters. Can they have any inner stuff? There is a certain person whom I shall not name; he earns eight hundred rupees a month but is the slave of his wife. He stands up or sits down at her bidding.

"Arbitration and leadership? How trifling these are! Charity and doing good to others? You have had enough of these. Those who are to devote themselves to such things belong to a different class. Now the time is ripe for you to devote your mind to the Lotus Feet of God. If you realize God, you will get everything else. First God, then charity,

doing good to others, doing good to the world, and redeeming people. Why need you worry about these things. 'Ravana died in Lanka and Behula wept for him bitterly!'

"That's the trouble with you. It will be very good if a world-renouncing sannyāsi gives you some spiritual instruction. The advice of the worldly man will not be right, be he a brahmin pundit or anyone else.

"Be mad! Be mad with love of God! Let people know that Ishan has gone mad and cannot perform worldly duties any more. Then people will no longer come to you for leadership and arbitration. Throw aside the kosakusi and justify your name of Ishan."

Ishan quoted:

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
What need have I of knowledge or reason?

MASTER: "Mad! That's the thing! Shivanath once said that one 'loses one's head' by thinking too much of God. 'What?' said I. 'Can anyone ever become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness? God is of the nature of Eternity, Purity, and Consciousness. Through His Consciousness one becomes conscious of everything; through His Intelligence the whole world appears intelligent.' Shivanath said that some Europeans had gone insane, that they had 'lost their heads', by thinking too much about God. In their case it may be true; for they think of worldly things. There is a line in a song: 'Divine fervour fills my body and robs me of consciousness.' The consciousness referred to here is the consciousness of the outer world."

Ishan was seated touching Sri Ramakrishna's feet and listening to his words. Now and then he cast a glance at the basalt image of Kāli in the shrine. In the light of the lamp She appeared to be smiling. It was as if the living Deity, manifesting Herself through the image, was delighted to hear the Master's words, holy as the words of the Vedas.

ISHAN (pointing to the image); "Those words from your sacred lips have really come from there."

MASTER: "I am the machine and She is the Operator. I am the house and She is the Indweller. I am the chariot and She is the Charioteer. I move as She moves me; I speak as She speaks through me. In the Kaliyuga one does not hear the voice of God, it is said, except through the mouth of a child or a madman or some such person.

"A man cannot be a guru. Everything happens by the will of God. Heinous sins-the sins of many births-and accumulated ignorance all disappear in the twinkling of an eye, through the grace of God. When light enters a room that has been kept dark a thousand years, does it remove the thousand years' darkness little by little, or instantly? Of course, at the mere touch of light all the darkness disappears.

"What can a man do? He may speak many words, but after all is said and done everything rests with God. The lawyer says: 'I have said all that can be said. Now the verdict rests with the judge.'

"Brahman is actionless. When It is engaged in creation, preservation, and dissolution, It is called the Primal Power, *Ādyāśakti*. This Power must be propitiated. Don't you know that it is so written in the Chandi? The gods first sang a hymn to the*Ādyāśakti* in order to propitiate Her. Only then did Hari wake up from His yoga sleep."

ISHAN: "Yes, sir. Brahma and the other gods sang this hymn at the timeof the death of the demons Madhu and Kaitabha:

Svaha, Vashat, and Svadha art Thou; Thou the inner Self of the mantra;
Thou the Nectar of Immortality, O Everlasting One!
Eternal and unutterable art Thou, and yet Thou art manifest

In the three matras and the half matra:
O Goddess, Thou art Savitri; Thou art the Ultimate Mother;
All things have their support in Thee, by whom this universe was made.
O Goddess, Thou sustainest all, and all by Thee is devoured!

Thou it is that we call the Creator, when Thou createst the world,
O Embodiment of creation!
Thou it is that we call the Preserver, when Thou preservest it;
Thou it is that we call the Destroyer, when Thou destroyest it."

MASTER: "Yes, but you must assimilate that."

The Master rose. He mounted the platform in front of the shrine and saluted the Mother, touching the ground with his forehead. The devotees quickly gathered around him and fell at his feet. They all begged his grace. He descended from the platform and started toward his room, conversing with M. First he sang:

I bow my head, says Prasad, before desire and liberation;
Knowing the secret that Kāli is one with the highest Brahman,
I have discarded, once for all, both dharma and adharma.

The Master continued: "Do you know the meaning of dharma and adharma? Here dharma means religious acts enjoined by the scriptures, suchas charity, sraddha, feeding the poor, and the like.

"The performance of this dharma is called the path of karma. It is an extremely difficult path: it is very hard to act without motive. Therefore one is asked to pursue the path of devotion.

"A man was performing the sraddha ceremony at his house. He was feeding many people. Just then a butcher passed, leading a cow to slaughter. He could not control the

animal and became exhausted. He said to himself: 'Let me go into that house and enjoy the feast of the sraddha ceremony and strengthen my body. Then I shall be able to drag the cow along.' So he carried out his intention. But when he killed the cow, the sin of the slaughter fell also on the performer of the sraddha. That is why I say the path of devotion is better than the path of action."

The Master entered his room accompanied by M. He was humming a song. The forceful words of renunciation that he had just spoken to Ishan found expression through its words. He sang the lines:

Mother, take everything else away from me,
But leave me my necklace of bones and my pot of hemp!

Sri Ramakrishna sat down on the small couch, and Adhar, Kishori, and the other devotees sat on the foor.

MASTER (to tile devotees): "I was noticing Ishan, Why, he hasn't achieved anything! What can be the reason? He practised the purascharana for five months. That would have caused a revolution in any other person.'

ADHAR: "It wasn't wise of you to say those things to him in front of us."

MASTER: "How is that? He is so much given to japa! How can words affect him?"

After a while Sri Ramakrishna said to Adhar, "Ishan is very charitable, and he practises japa and austerity a great deal." The Master remained quiet a few moments. The eyes of the devotees were fixed on him. Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna said to Adhar, "You have both-yoga and bhoga."

Saturday, October 18, 1884

It was the day of the worship of Kāli, the Divine Mother. The worship was to begin at eleven o'clock at night. Several devotees arrived at the temple.

All creation is the sport of my mad Mother Kāli;
By Her māyā the three worlds are bewitched.
Mad is She and mad is Her Husband; mad are Her two disciples!
None can describe Her loveliness, Her glories, gestures, moods;
Śiva, with the agony of the poison in His throat,
Chants Her name again and again.
The Personal does She oppose to the Impersonal,
Breaking one stone with another;
Though to all else She is agreeable,
Where duties are concerned She will not yield.

Keep your raft, says Ramprasad, afloat on the sea of life,
Drifting up with the flood-tide, drifting down with the ebb.

The Master was quite overwhelmed with the song. He said that songs like these denoted a state of divine inebriation. He sang one after another:

This time I shall devour Thee utterly, Mother Kāli!
For I was born under an evil star,
And one so born becomes, they say, the eater of his mother. . . .

Then:

O Kāli, my Mother full of Bliss! Enchantress of the Almighty Śiva!
In Thy delirious joy Thou dancest, clapping Thy hands together! . . .

And then:

If at the last my life-breath leaves me as I repeat the name of Kāli,
I shall attain the realm of Śiva. What does Benares mean to me?
Infinite are my Mother's glories; who can find the end of Her virtues?
Śiva, beholding their smallest part, lies prostrate at Her Lotus Feet.
The singing was over. Two sons of Rajnarayan entered the room and bowed low before the Master. In the afternoon they had sung with their father the glories of the Divine Mother. The Master sang again with them:
All creation is the sport of my mad Mother Kāli

The younger brother requested Sri Ramakrishna to sing a certain song about Sri Gaurānga. The Master sang:

Gaur and Nitai, ye blessed brothers!
I have heard how kind you are,
And therefore I have come to you. . . .

Ramlal entered the room. The Master said to him: "Please sing something about the Divine Mother. It is the day of Her worship."

Ramlal sang:

Who is the Woman yonder who lights the field of battle?
Darker Her body gleams even than the darkest storm-cloud,
And from Her teeth there flash the lightning's blinding flames!

Dishevelled Her hair is flying behind as She rushes about,
Undaunted in this war between the gods and the demons.

Laughing Her terrible laugh, She slays the fleeing asuras,
And with Her dazzling flashes She bares the horror of war. . . .

Again Ramlal sang:

Who, is this terrible Woman, dark as the sky at midnight?
Who is this Woman dancing over the field of battle? . . .

Sri Ramakrishna began to dance to the song. Then he himself sang:

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight
To the blue lotus flower of Mother Syama's feet,
The blue flower of the feet of Kāli, Śiva's Consort.
Tasteless, to the bee, are the blossoms of desire.
My Mother's feet are black, and black, too, is the bee;
Black is made one with black! This much of the mystery
These mortal eyes behold, then hastily retreat.
But Kamalakanta's hopes are answered in the end;
He swims in the Sea of Bliss, unmoved by joy or pain.

After the music and dancing Sri Ramakrishna sat on the couch and the devotees sat on the floor. He said to M.: "It is a pity you weren't here in the afternoon. The musical recital of the Chandi was very fine."

Some of the devotees went to the temple to salute the image of the Divine Mother. Others sat quietly performing japa on the steps leading to the Ganges. It was about eleven o'clock, the most auspicious time for contemplation of the Divine Mother. The flood-tide was rising in the Ganges, and the lights on its banks were reflected here and there in its dark waters.

From outside the shrine M. was looking wistfully at the image. Ramlal came to the temple with a book in his hand containing the rules of the worship. He asked M. if he wanted to come in. M. felt highly favoured and entered the shrine. He saw that the Divine Mother was profusely decorated. The room was brilliantly illuminated by a large chandelier that hung from the ceiling. Two candles were burning in front of the image. On the floor were trays full of offerings. Red hibiscus flowers and bel-leaves adorned Her feet. She wore garlands round Her neck, M.'s eyes fell on the chamara. Suddenly he remembered that Sri Ramakrishna often fanned the Divine Mother with it. With some hesitation he asked Ramlal if he might fan the image. The priest gave his permission. M. joyously fanned the image. The regular worship had not yet begun.

The devotees again entered the Master's room. Beni Pāl had invited Sri Ramakrishna to visit the Sinthi Brahmo Samaj the next day, but had made a mistake in his letter with regard to the date.

MASTER (to M.): "Beni Pāl has sent me an invitation. But why has he put the wrong date?"

M: "The date was not written correctly. He wrote the letter carelessly."

As Sri Ramakrishna spoke, he was standing in the middle of the room with Baburam by his side. He leaned toward the disciple, touching his body.

Suddenly he went into samādhi. The devotees stood around with their eyes fixed on him. The Master's left foot was advanced a little; the shoulder was slightly inclined to one side; his arm rested on Baburam's neck near the ear. After a while he came down from the ecstatic state. As he stood there he put one hand to his cheek and appeared to be brooding over something. Then, smiling, he addressed the devotees.

MASTER: "I saw everything-how far the devotees had advanced. I saw Rākhāl, him (pointing to M.), Surendra, Baburam, and many others."

HAZRA: "Me?"

MASTER: "Yes."

HAZRA: "Many more obstacles?"

MASTER: "No."

HAZRA: "What about Narendra?"

MASTER: "I didn't see him. But I can tell about him. He is a little entangled. But I saw that everyone will succeed. (To M.) I saw that all are in hiding."

The devotees listened to these words with great wonder. It seemed to them that they were hearing an oracle.

MASTER: "But I got into that mood by touching Baburam."

HAZRA: "Who is first?"

Sri Ramakrishna was quiet for a time. Then he said, "I wish I had a few like Nityagopal." Again he appeared thoughtful. He remained standing. He said: "I wish Adhar Sen's duties would become fewer. But I am afraid the English officer will scold him. He may say, 'What is all this nonsense?'" (All smile.)

Sri Ramakrishna sat on the small couch, and the devotees on the floor. Baburam. and Kishori came quickly to the Master and began to stroke his feet gently.

MASTER (to Kishori): "What's the matter? Why so much service today?

The worship in the temple

Ramlal entered the room and saluted Sri Ramakrishna, touching the ground with his forehead. Then with great respect he touched the Master's feet. He was ready to worship the Divine Mother in the temple.

RAMLAL: "Please permit me to go to the shrine."

The Master twice uttered the words "Om Kāli" and said: "Perform the worship carefully. There is also a sheep to be slaughtered."

It was midnight. The worship began in the Kāli temple. The Master went to watch the ceremony. During the worship he stood near the image. Now the sheep was going to be slaughtered. The animal was consecrated before the Deity. People stood in lines watching the ceremony. While the sheep was being taken to the block Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room. He could not bear the sight.

Several devotees remained in the temple till two o'clock in the morning. Haripada came and asked them to take the prasad to the Master's room. After finishing their meal they lay down wherever they could for the remainder of the night.

It was morning. The dawn service in the temples was over and the theatrical performance was going on in the open hall in front of the shrine. M. was coming through the courtyard with Sri Ramakrishna. He wanted to take leave of the Master.

MASTER: "Why should you go now?"

M: "You are going to Sinthi in the afternoon. I too intend to be there. So I should like to go home for a few hours."

They came to the Kāli temple. At the foot of the steps M. saluted the Master.

MASTER: "You are going? All right. Please bring two pieces of cheap cloth for me. I shall use them while taking my bath."

Chapter 32

VISIT TO THE SINTHI BRAMO SAMAJ

October 19, 1884

ON THIS DAY Sri Ramakrishna again visited the Sinthi Brahmo Samaj. It was the occasion of the autumn festival of the Samaj, which was being celebrated at Benimadhav Pal's garden house. The hall was decorated with flowers and greens, flags and festoons, of various colours. Outside, the blue autumn sky with its fleecy clouds was reflected in the water of the lake.

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at half past four in the afternoon. Entering the hall, he bowed down before the altar. The Brahmo devotees, among whom could be noticed Vijay and Trailokya, sat around him. A sub-judge, who was a member of the Brahmo Samaj, was with them.

Trailokya was entertaining the devotees with his melodious music.

MASTER (to Trailokya): "That song of yours, 'O Mother, make me mad with Thy love', I enjoy very much. Won't you sing it?"

Trailokya sang:

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
What need have I of knowledge or reason?
Make me drunk with Thy love's Wine;
O Thou who stealest Thy bhaktas' hearts,
Drown me deep in the Sea of Thy love!
Here in this world, this madhouse of Thine,
Some laugh, some weep, some dance for joy:
Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Gaurānga,
All are drunk with the Wine of Thy love.
O Mother, when shall I be blessed
By joining their blissful company?

As he listened to the song, the Master's mind underwent a transformation, and presently he went into deep samādhi. Coming down a little to the plane of the sense world, he gave instruction to the devotees. His mind was still charged with the divine experience. His words were spoken as if in a state of intoxication. Gradually he became again fully conscious of the world.

MASTER: "O Mother! I don't want the bliss of divine inebriation. I shall eat siddhi.

Occult powers

(To the devotees) "By 'siddhi' I mean the attainment of the spiritual goal and not one of the eight occult powers. About the occult powers, Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Friend, if you find anyone who has acquired even one of the eight powers, then know for certain

he will not realize Me.' For powers surely beget pride, and God cannot be realized if there is the slightest trace of pride.

Four classes of devotees

"According to a certain school of thought there are four classes of devotees: the pravartaka, the sadhaka, the siddha, and the siddha of the siddha. He who has just begun religious life is a pravartaka. Such a man puts his denominational marks on his body and forehead, wears a rosary around his neck, and scrupulously follows other outer conventions. The sadhaka has advanced farther. His desire for outer show has become less. He longs for the realization of God and prays to Him sincerely. He repeats the name of God and calls on Him with a guileless heart. Now, whom should we call the siddha? He who has the absolute conviction that Cod exists and is the sole Doer; he who has seen God. And who is the siddha of the siddha? He who has not merely seen God, but has intimately talked with Him as Father, Son, or Beloved.

Difference between intellectual understanding and actual vision

"It is one thing to believe beyond a doubt that fire exists in wood, but it is quite another to get the fire from the wood, cook rice with its help, appease one's hunger, and so be satisfied. These are two entirely different things.

"No one can put a limit to spiritual experience. If you refer to one experience, there is another beyond that, and still another, and so on.

Advice to Brahmo

(In an ecstatic mood, referring to the Brahmos) 'They are Brahma jnanis. They believe in the formless Deity. That is good.

(To the Brahmo devotees) "Be firm in one ideal-either in God with form or in the formless God. Then alone will you realize God; otherwise not. With firm and unwavering belief the followers of God with form will realize Him, as will those who speak of Him as formless. You may eat a cake with icing either straight or sidewise; it will taste sweet either way. (All laugh.)

Need of firmness and conviction

"But you must have firm conviction, you must pray to Him whole-heartedly.

Faith of the worldly-minded

Do you know what the God of worldly people is like? It is like children's saying to one another while at play, 'I swear by God.' They have learnt the word from the quarrels of their aunts or grandmothers. Or it is like God to a dandy. The dandy, all spick and span, his lips red from chewing betel-leaf, walks in the garden, cane in hand, and, plucking a flower, exclaims to his friend, 'Ah! What a beautiful flower God has made!' But this feeling of a worldly person is momentary. It lasts as long as a drop of water on a red-hot frying-pan.

"You must be firm in one ideal. Dive deep. Otherwise you cannot get the gems at the bottom of the ocean. You cannot pick up the gems if you only float on the surface."

With these words the Master sang in the sweet voice that had bewitched the hearts of devotees like Keshab:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God's Beauty;
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love. . . .
The devotees felt as if they were in paradise itself.

Seek the Creator and not the world's beauty

MASTER (to the Brahmos): "Dive deep. Learn to love God. Plunge into divine love. You see, I have heard how you pray. Why do you Brahmos dwell so much on the glories of God? Is there such great need of your saying over and over again, 'O God, You have created the sky, the great oceans, the lunar world, the solar world, and the stellar world'?

"Everybody is wonder-struck at the mere sight of a rich man's garden house. People become speechless at the sight of the trees, the flowers, the ponds, the drawing-room, the pictures. But alas, how few are they who seek the owner of all these! Only one or two inquire after him. He who seeks God with a longing heart can see Him, talk to Him as I am talking to you. Believe my words when I say that God can be seen. But ah! To whom am I saying these words? Who will believe me?

Futility of mere study

"Can one find God in the sacred books? By reading the scriptures one may feel at the most that God exists. But God does not reveal Himself to a man unless he himself dives deep. Only after such a plunge, after the revelation of God through His grace, is one's doubt destroyed. You. may read scriptures by the thousands and recite thousands of texts; but unless you plunge into God with yearning of heart, you will not comprehend Him. By mere scholarship you may fool man, but not God.

"Scriptures and books-what can one achieve with these alone? Nothing can be realized without His grace. Strive with a longing heart for His grace. Through His grace you will see Him and He will talk to you."

Different degrees of divine manifestation

SUB-JUDGE: "Sir, does God show more grace to one than to another? If so, He can be accused of the fault of partiality."

MASTER: "What are you saying? Do you mean to say that the moon and a glow-worm are the same, though both give light? Iswar Vidyāsāgar asked me the same question. He said, 'Is it a fact, sir, that God gives more power to one and less to another?' 'God', I said, 'exists in every being as the All pervading Spirit. He is in the ant as well as in me. But there are different manifestations of His Power in different beings. If all are the same, then why have we come here to see you, attracted by your renown? Have you

grown a pair of horns? Oh, no! It is not that. You have compassion; you have scholarship; there is a greater degree of these virtues in you than in others. That is the reason you are so well known.' Don't you see that there are men who, single-handed, can defeat a hundred persons? Again, one man takes to his heels in fear of another; you see such a person, too. If there are not different manifestations of power in different beings, then why did people respect Keshab Sen so much?

"It is said in the Gitā that if a man is respected and honoured by many, whether it be for his scholarship or his music or his oratory or anything else, then you may know for certain that he is endowed with a special divine power."

A BRAMO (to the sub-judge): "Why don't you accept what he says?"

MASTER (sharply, to the Brahmo): "What sort of man are you? To accept words without conviction! Why, that is hypocrisy! I see you are only a counterfeit."

The Brahmo was much embarrassed.

Advice to the worldly-minded & Prayer in solitude

SUB-JUDGE: "Sir, must we renounce the world?"

MASTER: "No. Why should you? A man can realize God even in the world. But at the beginning he must spend a few days in solitude. He must practise spiritual discipline in a solitary place. He should take a room near his house, so that he may come home only for his meals. Keshab, Pratap, and others said to me, 'Sir, we follow the ideal of King Janaka.' 'Mere words don't make a King Janaka', I replied. 'How many austerities King Janaka first had to perform in solitude-standing on his head, and so on! Do something first; then you may become a King Janaka.' You see a man writing English fluently; but could he do that at the very start? Perhaps he was the son of poor parents; he was cook in a family and earned his meals by his service. Perhaps he had to struggle hard to go on with his studies. It is after all these efforts that he can now write such fluent English.

Danger of "woman and gold"

"I said to Keshab Sen further, 'How can the worldly man be cured of his serious disease unless he goes into solitude?' A worldly man is suffering from delirious fever, as it were. Suppose there are pickled tamarind and jars of water in the room of such a patient. Now, how can you expect him to get rid of the disease? Just see, the very mention of pickled tamarind is making my mouth water! (All laugh.) You can very well imagine what will happen if the tamarind is actually put in front of me. To a man, a woman is the pickled tamarind, and his desire for enjoyment, the jars of water. There is neither end nor limit to this desire for worldly enjoyment. And the things are in the patient's very room. Can you expect the patient to get rid of the delirious fever in this fashion? He must be removed for a few days to another place where there are neither pickled tamarind nor water-jars. Then he will be cured. After that if he returns to his old room he will have nothing to fear. 'Woman and gold' cannot do any harm to the man who lives in the world after attaining God. Only then can he lead a detached life in the world as King Janaka did. But he must be careful at the beginning. He must practise spiritual

discipline in strict solitude. The peepal-tree, when young, is fenced around to protect it from cattle. But there is no need for the fence when the trunk grows thick and strong. Then no harm will be done to the tree even if an elephant is tied to it. 'Woman and gold' will not be able to harm you in the least, if you go home and lead a householder's life after increasing your spiritual strength and developing love for the Lotus Feet of God through the practice of spiritual discipline in solitude.

"A man sets milk in a quiet place to curdle, and then he extracts butter from the curd. After once extracting the butter of Devotion and Knowledge from the milk of the mind, if you keep that transformed mind in the water of the world, it will float in the world unattached. But if the mind in its 'unripe' state-that is to say, when it is just like liquid milk-is kept in the water of the world, then the milk and water will get mixed. In that case it will be impossible for the mind to float unattached in the world.

"Live in the world but, in order to realize God, hold fast to His Lotus Feet with one hand and with the other do your duties. When you get a respite from your duties, cling to God's Lotus Feet with both hands-live in solitude and meditate on Him and serve Him ceaselessly."

SUB-JUDGE (joyously): "Sir, these are very beautiful words indeed. Of course one must practise spiritual discipline in solitude. But we forget all about it. We think we have become King Janaka outright! (The Master and the devotees laugh.) I feel very happy and peaceful even to hear that there is no need to give up the world and that God can be realized from home as well."

MASTER: "Why should you give up the world? Since you must fight, it is wise for you to fight from a fort. You must fight against your sense-organs, against your hunger and thirst. Therefore you will be wise to face the battle from the world. Further, in the Kaliyuga the life of a man depends on his food. If one day you have nothing to eat, then you will forget all about God. A man once said to his wife, 'I am going to leave the world.' She was a sensible woman. She said: 'Why should you wander about? If you don't have to knock at ten doors for your stomach's sake, go. But if that is the case, then better live in this one place.'

"Again I say, why should you give up the world? You will find it more convenient at home. You won't have to worry about food. You may even live with your wife. It isn't harmful. You will find near at hand all that the body needs at different times. When you are ill, you will have someone near you to nurse you.

"Sages like Janaka, Vyāsa, and Vasishtha lived in the world after attaining Knowledge. They fenced with two swords, the one of Knowledge and the other of action."

SUB-JUDGE: "How can we know that we have Knowledge?"

MASTER: "When one has Knowledge one does not see God any more at a distance. One does not think of Him any more as 'He'. He becomes 'This'. Then He is seen in one's own heart. God dwells in every man. He who seeks God realizes Him."

Sin and God's name
SUB-JUDGE: "Sir, I am a sinner. How can I say that God dwells in me?"

MASTER: "That's the one trouble with you Brahmos. With you it is always sin and sin! That's the Christian view, isn't it? Once a man gave me a Bible.A part of it was read to me, and it was full of that one thing-sin and sin! One must have such faith that one can say: 'I have uttered the name of God; I have repeated the name of Rāma or Hari. How can I be a sinner?' One must have faith in the glory of God's name."

SUB-JUDGE: "Sir, how can one have such faith?"

MASTER: "Have passionate love for God. One of your Brahmo songs says:

O Lord, is it ever possible to know Thee without love,
However much one may perform worship and sacrifice?

Pray to God in secret and with yearning, that you may have that passionate attachment and devotion to Him. Shed tears for Him. A man sheds a jugful of tears because his wife is sick or because he is losing money or because he is worrying about getting a job. But tell me, who ever weeps for God?'

Self-surrender to God
TRAILOKYA: "Sir, where is people's leisure? They must serve their English masters."

MASTER: "Well, then give God the power of attorney. If a man entrusts his affairs to a good person, will the latter do him any harm? With all the sincerity of your heart resign yourself to God and drive all your worries out of your mind. Do whatever duties He has assigned to you. The kitten does not have a calculating mind. It only cries, 'Mew, mew!' It lies in the kitchen contentedly if the mother cat leaves it there, and only calls the mother, crying, 'Mew, mew!' It has the same feeling of contentment when the mother cat puts it on the soft bed of the master of the house. It only cries for its mother."

Duty to wife and children
SUB-JUDGE: "Sir, we are householders. How long should we perform our worldly duties?"

MASTER: "Surely you have duties to perform. You must bring up your children, support your wife, and provide for her in case of your death. If you don't, then I shall call you unkind. Sages like Sukadeva had compassion. He who has no compassion is no man."

SUB-JUDGE: "How long should one support one's children?"

MASTER: "As long as they have not reached their majority. When the chick becomes a full-grown bird and can look after itself, then the mother bird pecks it and doesn't allow it to come near her." (All laugh.)

SUB-JUDGE: "What is a householder's duty to his wife?"

MASTER: "You should give her spiritual advice and support her during your lifetime and provide for her livelihood after your death, if she is a chaste wife.

"But if you are intoxicated with the Knowledge of God, then you have no more duties to perform. Then God Himself will think about your morrow if you yourself cannot do so. God Himself will think about your family if you are intoxicated with Him. If a landlord dies leaving behind a minor son, then a guardian appointed by the court takes charge of the son. These are all points of law; you know them."

SUB-JUDGE: "Yes, sir."

VIJAY: "Ah! Priceless words! God Himself carries on His shoulders all the responsibilities of a person who thinks of Him with single-minded devotion and is mad with divine love. A minor gets his guardian without seeking him. Alas, when shall I have that state of mind? How lucky they are who feel that way!"

TRAILOKYA: "Is it ever possible, sir, to have true knowledge of God while living in the world? Can one realize God here?"

MASTER (with a smile): "Why do you worry? You are enjoying both treacle and refined sugar. (All laugh.) You are living in the world with your mind in God. Isn't that true? Why shouldn't a man realize God in the world'? Certainly he can."

TRAILOKYA: What are the signs of a householder having attained Knowledge?"

MASTER: "His tears will flow, and the hair on his body will stand on end. No sooner does he hear the sweet name of God than the hair on his body stands on end from sheer delight, and tears roll down his cheeks. "A man cannot get rid of body-consciousness as long as he is attached to worldly things and loves 'woman and gold'. As he becomes less and less attached to worldly things, he approaches nearer and nearer to the Knowledge of Self. He also becomes less and less conscious of his body. He attains Self-Knowledge when his worldly attachment totally disappears. Then he realizes that body and soul are two separate things. It is very difficult to separate with a knife the kernel of a coconut from the shell before the milk inside has dried up. When the milk dries up, the kernel rattles inside the shell. At that time it loosens itself from the shell. Then the fruit is called a dry coconut.

Signs of God-vision

"The sign of a man's having realized God is that he has become like a dry coconut. He has become utterly free from the consciousness that he is the body. He does not feel happy or unhappy with the happiness or unhappiness of the body. He does not seek the comforts of the body. He roams about in the world as a jivanmukta, one liberated in life. 'The devotee of Kāli is a jivanmukta , full of Eternal Bliss.'

"When you find that the very mention of God's name brings tears to your eyes and makes your hair stand on end, then you will know that you have freed yourself from attachment to 'woman and gold' and attained God. If the matches are dry, you get a

spark by striking only one of them. But if they are damp, you don't get a spark even if you strike fifty. You only waste matches. Similarly, if your mind is soaked in the pleasure of worldly things, in 'woman and gold', then God-Consciousness will not be kindled in you. You may try a thousand times, but all your efforts will be futile. But no sooner does attachment to worldly pleasure dry up than the spark of God flashes forth."

Force your demand on the Divine Mother

TRAILOKYA: "What is the way to dry up the craving for worldly pleasure?"

MASTER: "Pray to the Divine Mother with a longing heart. Her vision dries up all craving for the world and completely destroys all attachment to 'woman and gold'. It happens instantly if you think of Her as your own mother. She is by no means a godmother. She is your own mother. With a yearning heart persist in your demands on Her. The child holds to the skirt of its mother and begs a penny of her to buy a kite. Perhaps the mother is gossiping with her friends. At first she refuses to give the penny and says to the child: 'No, you can't have it. Your daddy has asked me not to give you money. When he comes home I'll ask him about it. You will get into trouble if you play with a kite now.' The child begins to cry and will not give up his demand. Then the mother says to her friends: 'Excuse me a moment. Let me pacify this child.' Immediately she unlocks the cash-box with a click and throws the child a penny.

"You too must force your demand on the Divine Mother. She will come to you without fail. I once said the same thing to some Sikhs when they visited the temple at Dakshineswar. We were conversing in front of the Kāli temple. They said, 'God is compassionate.' 'Why compassionate?' I asked. They said, 'Why, revered sir, He constantly looks after us, gives us righteousness and wealth, and provides us with our food.' 'Suppose', I said, 'a man has children. Who will look after them and provide them with food-their own father, or a man from another village?'

SUB-JUDGE: "Is not God, then, compassionate, sir?"

MASTER: "Why should you think that? I just made a remark. What I mean to say is that God is our very own. We can exert force on Him. With one's own people one can even go so far as to say, 'You rascal! Won't you give it to me?'

Futility of egotism

(To the sub-judge) "Let me ask you one thing. Are vanity and egotism the result of knowledge or of ignorance? Egotism is of the nature of tamas; it is begotten by ignorance. On account of the barrier of ego one does not see God. 'All troubles come to an end when the ego dies.' It is futile to be egotistic. Neither body nor wealth will last. Once a drunkard was looking at the image of Durga. At the sight of Her decorations, he said, 'Well, Mother! However You may fix Yourself up, after two or three days they will drag You out and throw You into the Ganges.' (All laugh.)

"So I say to you all, you may be a judge or anybody else, but it is all for two days only. Therefore you should give up vanity and pride.

Sattva, rajas, and tamas

"The characteristics of sattva, rajas, and tamas are very different. Egotism sleep, gluttony, lust, anger, and the like, are the traits of' people with tamas. Men with rajas entangle themselves in many activities. Such a man has clothes all spick and span. His house is immaculately clean. A portrait of the Queen hangs on a wall in his drawing-room. When he worships God he wears a silk cloth. He has a string of rudraksha beads around his neck, and in between the beads he puts a few gold ones. When someone comes to visit the worship hall in his house, he himself acts as guide. After showing the hall, he says to the visitor: 'Please come this way, sir. There are other things too-the floor of white marble and the natmandir with its exquisite carvings.' When he gives in charity he makes a show of it. But a man endowed with sattva is quiet and peaceful. So far as dress is concerned, anything will do. He earns only enough money to give his stomach the simplest of food; he never flatters men to get money. His house is out of repair. He never worries about his children's clothing. He does not hanker for name and fame. His worship, charity, and meditation are all done in secret; people do not know, about them at all. He meditates inside his mosquito curtain. People think he doesn't sleep well at night and for that reason sleeps late in the morning. Sattva is the last step of the stairs; next is the roof. As soon as sattva is acquired there is no further delay in attaining God. One step forward and God is realized. (To the sub-judge) Didn't you say that all men were equal? Now you see that there are so many varieties of human nature.

Four classes of men

"There are still other classes and kinds of people. For instance, there are those who are eternally free, those who have attained liberation, those struggling for liberation, and those entangled in the world. So many varieties of men! Sages like Nārada and Sukadeva are eternally free. They are like a steamship, which not only crosses the ocean but can carry big animals, even an elephant. Further, the soul that is eternally free is like the superintendent of an estate. After bringing one part of the estate under control, he goes to another. Those struggling for liberation strive heart and soul to free themselves from the net of the world. One or two of them may get out of the net. They are called the liberated. The souls that are eternally free are like clever fish; they are never caught in the net.

"But the souls that are entangled, involved in worldliness, never come to their senses. They lie in the net but are not even conscious that they are entangled. If you speak of God before them, they at once leave the place. They say: 'Why God now? We shall think of Him in the hour of death.' But when they lie on their death-beds, they say to their wives or children: 'Why have you put so many wicks in the lamp? Use only one wick. Otherwise too much oil will be burnt.' While dying they think of their wives and children, and weep, 'Alas! What will happen to them after my death?'

The entangled soul

"The entangled souls repeat those very actions that make them suffer so much. They are like the camel, which eats thorny bushes till the blood streams from its mouth, but still will not give them up. Such a man may have lost his son and be stricken with grief, but still he will have children year after year. He may ruin himself by his daughter's

marriage, but still he will go on having daughters every year. And he says: 'What can I do? It's just my luck!' When he goes to a holy place he doesn't have any time to think of God. He almost kills himself carrying bundles for his wife. Entering the temple, he is very eager to give his child the holy water to drink or make him roll on the floor; but he has no time for his own devotions. These bound creatures slave for their masters to earn food for themselves and their families; and they earn money by lying, cheating, flattery. They laugh at those who think of God and meditate on Him, and call them lunatics.

"So you see how many different kinds of men there are. You said that all men were equal. But how many varieties of men there are! Some have more power and some less.

Thought of God at the hour of death

"The entangled creatures, attached to worldliness, talk only of worldly things in the hour of death. What will it avail such men if they outwardly repeat the name of God, take a bath in the Ganges, or visit sacred places? If they cherish within themselves attachment to the world, it must show up at the hour of death. While dying they rave nonsense. Perhaps they cry out in a delirium, 'Turmeric powder! Seasoning! Bay-leaf!' The singing parrot, when at ease, repeats the holy names of Radha and Krishna, but when it is seized by a cat it utters its own natural sound; it squawks, 'Kaa! Kaa!' It is said in the Gitā that whatever one thinks in the hour of death, one becomes in the after-life. King Bharata gave up his body exclaiming, 'Deer! Deer!' and was born as a deer in his next life. But if a man dies thinking of God, then he attains God, and he does not have to come back to the life of this world."

A BRAMO DEVOTEE: "Sir, suppose a man has thought of God at other times during his life, but at the time of his death forgets Him. Would he, on that account, come back to this world of sorrow and suffering? Why should it be so? He certainly thought of God some time during his life."

MASTER: "A man thinks of God, no doubt, but he has no faith in Him. Again and again he forgets God and becomes attached to the world. It is like giving the elephant a bath; afterwards he covers his body with mud and dirt again. 'The mind is a mad elephant.' But if you can make the elephant go into the stable immediately after bathing him, then he stays clean. Just so, if a man thinks of God in the hour of death, then his mind becomes pure and it gets no more opportunity to become attached to 'woman and gold'.

"Man has no faith in God. That is the reason he suffers so much. They say that when you plunge into the holy waters of the Ganges your sins perch on a tree on the bank. No sooner do you come out of the water after the bath than the sins jump back on your shoulders. (All laugh.) A man must prepare the way beforehand, so that he may think of God in the hour of death. The way lies through constant practice. If a man practises meditation on God, he will remember God even on the last day of his life."

A BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "You have spoken very beautifully, sir. Beautiful words, indeed."

Master's humility

MASTER: "Oh, this is just idle talk. But do you know my inner feeling? I am the machine and God is the Operator. I am the house and He is the Indweller. I am the engine and He is the Engineer. I am the chariot and He is the Charioteer. I move as He moves me; I do as He makes me do."

Presently Trailokya began to sing to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. Sri Ramakrishna danced, intoxicated with divine love. Many times he went into samādhi. He stood still, his eyes fixed, his face beaming, with one hand on the shoulder of a beloved disciple. Coming down a little from the state of ecstasy, he danced again like a mad elephant. Regaining consciousness of the outer world, he improvised lines to the music:

O Mother, dance about Thy devotees!
Dance Thyself and make them dance as well.
O Mother, dance in the lotus of my heart;
Dance, O Thou the ever blessed Brahman!
Dance in all Thy world-bewitching beauty.

An indescribable scene. The exquisite and celestial dance of a child completely filled with ecstatic love of God and identified heart and soul with the Divine Mother! The Brahmo devotees danced around the Master again and again, attracted like iron to a magnet. In ecstatic voices they chanted the name of Brahman. Again, they chanted the name of the Divine Mother. Many of them wept like children, crying, "Mother! Mother!"

When the music was over, the devotees and the Master sat down. Although it was about eight o'clock, the evening worship of the Brahmo Samaj had not yet begun. In the joy of this divine music they had forgotten all about their formal worship. Vijay, who was to conduct the evening service, sat facing the Master. His mother-in-law and the other Brahmo ladies wanted to see Sri Ramakrishna; so the Master went to meet them in another room.

After a time the Master came back and said to Vijay: "What devotion to God your mother-in-law has! About the worldly life she said to me: 'Oh, you needn't tell me about the world. No sooner does one wave disappear than another rises up.' 'But', I said, 'what is that to you? You have knowledge.' She replied: 'Where is my knowledge? I haven't yet been able to go beyond Vidyā-māyā and Avidyā-māyā. It won't help me much to go beyond just the illusion of ignorance; I shall have to transcend the illusion of knowledge as well. Only then shall I have true knowledge of God. I am quoting your own words.' "

While they were talking, Beni Pāl, their host, entered the room.

BENI (to Vijay): "Sir, please get up. It is already late. Please begin the worship."

VIJAY: "What further need is there of worship? I find that according to your arrangement the rice pudding is served first, and then the soup and other dishes."

MASTER (with a smile): 'The devotees provide offerings according to their temperaments. The sattvic devotee offers the Deity simple rice pudding, and the rajasic devotee, fifty different dishes. The tamasic devotee slaughters goats and other animals."

Vijay began to hesitate about going to the platform to conduct the worship. He said to the Master, "I shall conduct the worship from the platform only if you give me your blessing."

MASTER: "It will be all right if you don't feel any egotism, if you don't have the vain feeling: 'I am giving a lecture. Listen to me.' What begets egotism? Knowledge or ignorance? It is only the humble man who attains Knowledge. In a low place rain-water collects. It runs down from a mound.

"A man achieves neither Knowledge nor liberation as long as he has egotism. He comes back again and again to the world. The calf bellows, 'Hamba! Hamba!', that is, 'I! I!' That is why it suffers such agony. The butcher slaughters it and the shoe-maker makes shoes from its hide. Besides, its hide is used for the drum, which is beaten mercilessly. Still no end to its misery! At long last a carding machine is made from its entrails. While carding the cotton the machine makes the sound 'Tuhu! Tuhu!', that is, 'Thou! Thou!' Then the poor calf is released from all suffering. It no longer says, 'Hamba! Hamba!' but repeats, 'Tuhu! Tuhu!' The calf says, as it were, 'O God, Thou art the Doer and I am nothing. Thou art the Operator and I am the machine. Thou art everything.'

"Three words-'master', 'teacher', and 'father'-prick me like thorns. I am the son of God, His eternal child. How can I be a 'father'? God alone is the Master and I am His instrument. He is the Operator and I am the machine.

"If somebody addresses me as guru, I say to him: 'Go away, you fool! How can I be a teacher?' There is no teacher except Satchidananda. There is no refuge except Him. He alone is the Ferryman to take one across the ocean of the world. (To Vijay) It is very difficult to act as an Āchārya. It harms the Āchārya himself. Finding a number of men doing him reverence, he sits you put four seers of milk in a one-seer jar? If God, through His grace, ever reveals Himself to His devotee and makes him understand, then he will know; but not otherwise.

"That which is Brahman is Śakti, and That, again, is the Mother.
He it is, says Ramprasad, that I approach as Mother;
But must I give away the secret, here in the market-place?
From the hints I have given, 0 mind, guess what that Being is!

Ramprasad implies that he has known the truth of Brahman. He addresses Brahman as Mother.
"In another song Ramprasad expresses the same idea thus:

Knowing the secret that Kāli is one with the highest Brahman,
I have discarded, once for all, both dharma and adharma.

Adharma means unrighteous actions, actions forbidden by religion. Dharma means the pious actions prescribed by religion, as, for instance, charity to the poor, feeding the brahmins, and so on."

VIJAY: "What remains if one renounces both dharma and dharma?"

MASTER: "Pure love of God. I prayed to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother; here, take Thy dharma; here, take Thy adharma; and give me pure love for Thee. Here, take Thy virtue; here, take Thy vice; and give me pure love for Thee. Here, take Thy knowledge; here, take Thy ignorance; and give me pure love for Thee.' You see, I didn't ask even for knowledge or public recognition. When one renounces both dharma and adharma, there remains only pure love of God-love that is stainless, motiveless, and that one feels only for the sake of love."

A BRAMO DEVOTEE: "Is God different from His Śakti?"

MASTER: "After attaining Perfect Knowledge one realizes that they are not different. They are the same, like the gem and its brilliance. Thinking of the gem, one cannot but think of its brilliance. Again, they are like milk and its whiteness. Thinking of the one, you must also think of the other. But you cannot realize this non-duality before the attainment of Perfect Knowledge. Attaining Perfect Knowledge, one goes into samādhi, beyond the twenty-four cosmic principles. Therefore the principle of 'I' does not exist in that stage. A man cannot describe in words what he feels in samādhi.Coming down, he can give just a hint about it. I come down a hundred cubits, as it were, when I say 'Om' after samādhi. Brahman is beyond the injunctions of the Vedas and cannot be described. There neither 'I' nor 'you' exists.

"As long as a man is conscious of 'I' and 'you', and as long as he feels that it is he who prays or meditates, so long will he feel that God is listening to his prayer and that God is a Person. Then he must say: 'O God, Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant. Thou art the whole and I am a part of Thee. Thou art the Mother and I am Thy child.' At that time there exists a feeling of difference: 'I am one and Thou art another.' It is God Himself who makes us feel this difference; and on account of this difference one sees man and woman, light and darkness, and so on. As long as one is aware of this difference, one must accept Śakti, the Personal God. It is God who has put 'I-consciousness' in us. You may reason a thousand times; still this 'I' does not disappear. As long as 'I-consciousness' exists, God reveals Himself to us as a Person.

"Therefore, as long as a man is conscious of 'I' and of differentiation, he cannot speak of the attributeless Brahman and must accept Brahman with attributes. This Brahman with attributes has been declared in the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantra, to be Kāli, the Primal Energy."

Way to Brahmajnana

VIJAY: "How, sir, can one have the vision of the Primal Energy and attain Brahmajnana, the Knowledge of the attributeless Brahman?"

MASTER: "Pray to Him with a yearning heart, and weep. That will purify your heart. You see the reflection of the sun in clear water. In the mirror of his 'I-consciousness' the devotee sees the form of the Primal Energy, Brahman with attributes. But the mirror must be wiped clean. One does not see the right reflection if there is any dirt on the mirror.

"As long as a man must see the Sun in the water of his 'I-consciousness' and has no other means of seeing It, as long as he has no means of seeing the real Sun except through Its reflection, so long is the reflected sun alone one hundred per cent real to him. As long as the 'I' is real, so long is the reflected sun real-one hundred per cent real. That reflected sun is nothing but the Primal Energy.

"But if you seek Brahmajnana, the Knowledge of the attributeless Brahman, then proceed to the real Sun through Its reflection. Pray to Brahman with attributes, who listens to your prayers, and He Himself will give you full Knowledge of Brahman; for that which is Brahman with attributes is verily Brahman without attributes, that which is Brahman is verily Śakti. One realizes this non-duality after the attainment of Perfect Knowledge.

"The Divine Mother gives Her devotee Brahmajnana too. But a true lover of God generally does not seek the Knowledge of Brahman.

"There is another path, the path of knowledge, which is very difficult. You members of the Brahmo Samaj are not jnanis. You are bhaktas. The Jnāni believes that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory as a dream. To him, 'I' and 'you' are illusory as a dream.

"God is our Inner Controller. Pray to Him with a pure and guileless heart. He will explain everything to you. Give up egotism and take refuge in Him. You will realize everything."

The Master sang:

Dwell, O mind, within yourself;
Enter no other's home.
If you but seek there, you will find
All you are searching for.
God, the true Philosopher's Stone,
Who answers every prayer,
Lies hidden deep within your heart,
The richest gem of all.
How many pearls and precious stones
Are scattered all about
The outer court that lies before
The chamber of your heart!

He continued: "When you mix with people outside your Samaj, love them all. When in their company be one of them. Don't harbour malice toward them. Don't turn up your nose in hatred and say: 'Oh, this man believes in God with form and not in the formless God. That man believes in the formless God and not in God with form. This man is a Christian. This man is a Hindu. And this man is a Musslman.' It is God alone who makes people see things in different ways. Know that people have different natures. Realize this and mix with them as much as you can. And love all. But enter your own inner chamber to enjoy peace and bliss.

Lighting the lamp of Knowledge in the chamber of your heart,
Behold the face of the Mother, Brahman's Embodiment.

You can see your true Self only within your own chamber. The cowherds take the cows to graze in the pasture. There the cattle mix. They all form one herd. But on returning to their sheds in the evening they are separated. Then each stays by itself in its own stall. Therefore I say, dwell by yourself in your own chamber."

It was ten o'clock in the evening. The Master got into a carriage to return to Dakshineswar. One or two attending devotees got in with him. The carriage stood under a tree, in deep darkness. Beni Pāl wanted to send some sweets and other food with Sri Ramakrishna for Ramlal, the Master's nephew.

BENI PĀL: "Sir, Ramlal was not here this evening. With your permission I should like to send some sweets for him by your attendants."

MASTER (with great anxiety): "Oh, Beni Pāl! Oh, sir! Please don't send these things with me. That will do me harm. It is never possible for me to lay up anything. I hope you won't mind."

BENI PĀL: "As you please, sir. Please give me your blessing."

MASTER: "Oh, we have been very happy today! You see, he alone is a true man who has made money his servant. But those who do not know the use of money are not men even though they have human forms. They may have human bodies, but they behave like animals. You are blessed indeed. You have made so many devotees happy today."

Monday, October 20, 1884

Two days after the worship of Kāli, the Mārwāris of the Burrabazar section of Calcutta were celebrating the Annakuta festival. Sri Ramakrishna had been invited by the Mārwāri devotees to the ceremony at 12 Mallick Street. It was the second day of the bright fortnight of the moon. The festival connected with the worship of Kāli, known as the "Festival of Light", was still going on at Burra bazar.

About three o'clock in the afternoon M. and the younger Gopal came to Burrabazar. M. had in his hand a bundle of cloths he had purchased for Sri Ramakrishna. Mallick Street was jammed with people, bullock-carts, and carriages. As M. and Gopal approached Mallick Street they noticed Sri Ramakrishna in a carriage, which could hardly move

because of the jam. Baburam and Ram Chakravarty were with the Master. He smiled at M. and Gopal.

Sri Ramakrishna alighted from the carriage. With Baburam he proceeded on foot to the house of his host, M. leading the way. They saw the courtyard of the house filled with big bales of clothes which were being loaded into bullock-carts for shipment. The Mārwāri host greeted the Master and led him to the third floor of the house. A painting of Kāli hung on the wall. Sri Ramakrishna bowed before it. He sat down and became engaged in conversation with the devotees. One of the Mārwāris began to stroke his feet. The Master asked him to stop. After reflecting a minute he said, "All right, you can stroke them a little." His words were full of compassion.

MASTER (to M.): "What about your school?"

M: "Today is a holiday, sir."

MASTER (smiling): "Tomorrow there will be a musical recital of the Chandi at Adhar's house."

Master and the Mārwāri pundit

The host sent a pundit to Sri Ramakrishna. He saluted the Master and took a seat. Soon they were engaged in conversation. They talked about spiritual things.

MASTER: "God incarnates Himself for the bhakta and not for the Jnāni."

PUNDIT: "'I incarnate Myself in every age for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of dharma.' God becomes man, first, for the joy of the bhakta, and secondly, for the destruction of the wicked. The Jnāni has no desire."

MASTER (smiling): "But I have not got rid of all desires. I have the desire for love of God." The pundit's son entered the room. He saluted the Master and took a seat.

MASTER (to the pundit): "Well, what is bhava and what is bhakti?"

PUNDIT: "Meditation on God mellows the mind. This mellowness is called bhava. It is like the thawing of ice when the sun rises."

MASTER: "Well, what is prema?"

The pundit and Sri Ramakrishna were talking in Hindusthani. The former gave some sort of explanation of prema.

MASTER (to the pundit): "No! No! That is not the meaning. Prema means such love for God that it makes a man forget the world and also his body, which is so dear to him. Chaitanyadeva had prema."

PUNDIT: "Yes, sir. One behaves like a drunkard."

MASTER: "Some people develop bhakti and others do not; how do you explain that, sir?"

PUNDIT: "There is no partiality in God. He is the Wish-fulfilling Tree. Whatever a man asks of God he gets. But he must go near the Tree to ask the boon." The pundit said all this in Hindusthani. The Master explained it to M.in Bengali.

Different kinds of samādhi

MASTER: "Sir, please describe samādhi to us."

PUNDIT: "There are two kinds of samādhi: savikalpa and nirvikalpa. In nirvikalpa samādhi the functioning of the mind stops altogether."

MASTER: "Yes. The mind completely takes the form of Reality. The distinction between the meditator and the object of meditation does not exist. There are two other kinds of samādhi: chetana and jada. Nārada and Sukadeva attained chetana samādhi. Isn't that true, sir?"

PUNDIT: "Yes, sir, that is so."

MASTER: "Further, there are the unmana samādhi and the sthita samādhi. Isn't that true, sir?"

The pundit remained silent. He did not venture an opinion.

MASTER: "Well, sir, through the practice of japa and austerity one can get occult powers, such as walking on the water of the Ganges. Isn't that true?"

PUNDIT: "Yes, one can. But a devotee doesn't want them." The conversation continued for some time. The pundit said he would visit the Master at Dakshineswar the next ekadasi day.

MASTER: "Ah! Your boy is very nice."

PUNDIT: "Well, revered sir, all this is transitory. It is like the waves in a river-one goes down and another comes up."

MASTER: "You have substance in you."

After a few minutes the pundit saluted Sri Ramakrishna. He said: "I shall have to perform my daily devotions. Please let me go."

MASTER: "Oh, sit down! Sit down!"

The pundit sat down again. The conversation turned to hathayoga. The pundit discussed the subject with the Master in Hindusthani. Sri Ramakrishna said: "Yes, that is also a

form of austerity. But the hathayogi identifies himself with his body. His mind dwells on his body alone." The pundit took leave of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna conversed with the pundit's son.

MASTER: "One can understand the Bhagavata well if one has already studied the Nyaya, the Vedānta , and the other systems of philosophy. Isn't that so?"

PUNDIT'S SON: "Yes, sir. It is very necessary to study the Samkhya philosophy." The conversation went on. Sri Ramakrishna was leaning against a big pillow; the devotees were sitting on the floor. Lying in that position, the Master began to sing:

Brother, joyfully cling to God;
Thus striving, some day you may attain Him.

Their host entered the room and saluted Sri Ramakrishna. He was a pious man and devoted to the Master. The pundit's son was still there. The Master asked if the Panini, the Sanskrit grammar, was taught in the schools. He further asked about the Nyaya and the Vedānta philosophies. The host did not show much interest in the discussion and changed the subject.

HOST: "Revered sir, what is the way for us?"

MASTER: "Chanting the name and glories of God, living in the company of holy men, and earnestly praying to God."

HOST: "Please bless me, sir, that I may pay less and less attention to worldly things."

MASTER (smiling): "How much attention do you give to the world? Fifty per cent?" (Laughter.)

HOST: "You know that, sir. We cannot achieve anything without the grace of a holy person like yourself."

MASTER: "If you please God, everyone will be pleased. It is God alone that exists in the heart of the holy man."

HOST: "Nothing, of course, remains unrealized when one attains God. If a man attains God, he can give up everything else. If a man gets a rupee, he gives up the joy of a penny."

MASTER: "A little spiritual discipline is necessary. Through the practice of discipline one gradually obtains divine joy. Suppose a jar with money inside is hidden deep under the earth and someone wants to possess it. In that case he must take the trouble of digging for it. As he digs, he perspires. After much digging the spade strikes the metal jar. He feels a thrill at the sound. The more sound the spade makes, striking against the jar, the more joy he feels. "Pray to Rāma. Meditate on Him. He will certainly provide you with everything."

HOST: "Revered sir, you are Rāma Himself."

MASTER: "How is that? The waves belong to the river; does the river belong to the waves?"

HOST: "Rāma dwells only in the hearts of holy men. He cannot be seen in any other way. There is no Incarnation of God at the present time."

MASTER (smiling): "How do you know there is no Divine Incarnation?"

The host remained silent.

MASTER: "All cannot recognize an Incarnation. When Nārada visited Rāma, Rāma prostrated Himself before Nārada and said: 'We are worldly creatures. How can we be sanctified unless holy men like you visit us?' Further, Rāma went into exile in the forest to redeem His father's pledges. He saw that, since hearing of His exile, the rishis of the forest had been fasting. Many of them did not know that Rāma was none other than the Supreme Brahman."

HOST: "You too are that same Rāma."

MASTER: "For heaven's sake! Never say that."

As, Sri Ramakrishna spoke these words, he bowed down to the host and said, with folded hands: "'That Rāma dwells in all beings; He exists everywhere in the universe. "I am your servant. It is Rāma Himself who has become all men, animals, and other living beings."

HOST: "But sir, we do not know that."

MASTER: "Whether you know it or not, you are Rāma."

HOST: "You are free from love and hatred."

MASTER: "How so? I engaged a carriage to bring me to Calcutta and advanced the coachman three *ānnās*. But he didn't turn up. I became very angry with him. He is a very wicked man. He made me suffer a lot."

Sri Ramakrishna was resting. The Mārwāri devotees had been singing bhajan on the roof. They were celebrating the Krishna festival. Arrangements had been made for worship and food offering. At the host's request the Master went to see the image. He bowed down before the Deity.

Sri Ramakrishna was profoundly moved as he stood before the image. With folded hands he said: "O Govinda, Thou art my soul! Thou art my life! Victory to Govinda! Hallowed be the name of Govinda! Thou art the Embodiment of Satchidananda! Oh, Krishna! Ah,

Krishna! Krishna is knowledge. Krishna is mind. Krishna is life. Krishna is soul. Krishna is body. Krishna is caste. Krishna is family. O Govinda, my life and soul!"

Uttering these words," Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi. He remained standing. Ram Chatterji supported him.

After a long time the Master regained consciousness of the world. The Mārwāri devotees were about to take out the image. The offering of food was to take place outside the room. The Master joined the procession of devotees. The food was offered with *Ārati* and music. Sri Ramakrishna fanned the image.

Then began the ceremony of feeding the brahmins. They were seated on the roof. The Master and his devotees also partook of the prasad.

Sri Ramakrishna took leave of the host. It was evening and the street was jammed as before with people and vehicles. He said: "Let us get out of the carriage. It can go by a back street." Proceeding on foot, he found that a betel-leaf seller had opened his stall in front of a small room that looked like a hole. One could not possibly enter it without bending one's head. The Master said: "How painful it is to be shut in such a small space! That is the way of worldly people. And they are happy in such a life."

The carriage came up after making the detour. The Master entered it with Baburam, M., and Ram Chatterji. The younger Gopal sat on the roof of the carriage.

A beggar woman with a baby on her arm stood in front of the carriage waiting for alms. The Master said to M., "Have you any money?" Gopal gave her something.

The carriage rolled along Burra bazar. Everywhere there were signs of great festivity. The night was dark but illuminated with myriads of lights. The carriage came to the Chitpur road, which was also brightly lighted. The people moved in lines like ants. The crowd looked at the gaily decorated stores and stalls on both sides of the road. There were sweetmeat store and perfume stalls. Pictures, beautiful and gaudy, hung from the walls. Well-dressed shopkeepers sprayed the visitors with rose-water. The carriage stopped in front of a perfume stall. The Master looked at the pictures and lights and felt happy like a child. People were talking loudly. He cried out; "Go forward! Move on!" He laughed. He said to Baburam with a loud laugh: "Move on! What are you doing?" The devotees laughed too. They understood that the Master wanted them to move forward to God and not to be satisfied with their present state.

The carriage drove on. The Master noticed that M. had brought some cloths for him. M. had with him two pieces of unbleached and two pieces of washed cloth. But the Master had asked him only for the unbleached ones. He said to M.: "Give me the unbleached ones. You may keep the others. All right. You may give me one of them."

M: "Then shall I take back one piece?"

MASTER: "Then take both."

M: "As you please, sir."

MASTER: "You can give me those when I need them. You see, yesterday Beni Pāl wanted me to carry away some food for Ramlal. I told him I couldn't. It is impossible for me to lay up for the future."

M: 'That's all right, sir. I shall take back the two pieces of washed cloth."

MASTER (tenderly): "Don't you see, if any desire arises in my mind, it is for the good of you all? You are my own. I shall tell you if I need anything."

M. (humbly): "Yes, sir."

Referring to a devotee, Sri Ramakrishna said: "I said to him yesterday, 'Tomorrow I shall go to Burra bazar; please meet me there.' Do you know what he said? He said: The tram fare will be one *ānnā*. Where shall I get it?' He had been to Beni Pāl's garden yesterday and had officiated there as priest. No one had asked him to do it. He had put on the show himself. He wanted people to know that he was a member of the Brahmo Samaj. (To M.) Can you tell me what he meant when he said that the tram would cost him one *ānnā*?"

The conversation turned to the Annakuta festival of the Mārwāris.

MASTER (to the devotees): "What you have seen here one sees at Vrindāvan too. Rākhāl has been seeing the same thing there. But the mound of food at Vrindāvan is higher, and more people gather there. There you also see the Govardhan hill. That's the only difference.

"Did you notice the Mārwāris' devotion? That is the real Hindu ideal. That is the Sanatana Dharma. Did you notice their joy when they carried the image in procession? They were happy to think that they bore the throne of God on their shoulders.

"The Hindu religion alone is the Sanatana Dharma. The various creeds you hear of nowadays have come into existence through the will of God and will disappear again through His will. They will not last forever. Therefore I say, 'I bow down at the feet of even the modern devotees.' The Hindu religion has always existed and will always exist."

M. was going home. He saluted the Master and got out of the carriage near Sobha bazar. Sri Ramakrishna proceeded to Dakshineswar in a happy mood.

Chapter 33

WITH VARIOUS DEVOTEES

Sunday, October 26, 1884

IT WAS AFTERNOON, and many devotees were present in the Master's room. Among them were Manomohan, Mahimacharan, and M. They were joined later by Ishan and Hazra. Balarām and Rākhāl were still staying at Vrindāvan. The many young boys who at this time began to seek the Master's company later became his intimate disciples. Lātu lived with the Master, and Jogin, who lived in the village, was a frequent visitor.

Sri Ramakrishna, happy child of the Divine Mother that he was, radiated a joy and peace that were reflected in the hearts of his devotees and found expression in their happy faces. They were seated on the floor and had their eyes fixed on the Master, who was standing in a pensive mood, like a boy.

God in all beings

MASTER (to Manomohan): "I see Rāma in all things. You are all sitting here, but I see only Rāma in everyone of you."

MANOMOHAN: "Yes, sir. It is Rāma who has become everything. But, as you say, though all water is Narayana, yet some water is fit for drinking, some for washing the hands and face, and some only for cleaning pots and pans."

MASTER: "It is true. But I see that it is God Himself who has become everything-the universe and its living beings."

Presently the Master sat down on the small couch near his bed.

MASTER (to Mahimacharan): "There is no question of my being truthful; but must I develop a mania for it? If I once say that I shall not eat, then it is impossible for me to eat, even if I am hungry. Again, if I ask a particular man to take my water-jug to the pine-grove, he alone must carry it. If another man carries it, he will have to take it back. What a fix I am in! Is there no way out of it?

"Besides, I can't carry anything with me, neither food nor betel-leaf; for that means laying up for the future. I can't carry a little clay in my hand."

Just then a man entered the room and told the Master that Hriday was waiting to see him in Jadu Mallick's garden, near the gate.

The Master said to the devotees: "I shall have to see Hriday. Please don't leave the room." He put on his slippers and went toward the east gate of the temple garden, M. accompanying him. The road through the garden was covered with red brick-dust. The manager of the temple, who was standing on the road, saluted Sri Ramakrishna. The Master passed the north entrance of the temple compound, where the bearded sentries

sat. On his left he passed the kuthi, the building used by the proprietors of the temple. Then he walked on down the road which was lined on both sides with flowering trees, passing the reservoir on his right, and went outside the temple garden. He found Hriday waiting for him near the gate of Jadu Mallick's garden.

God in all beings

At the sight of the Master, Hriday, who had been standing there with folded hands, prostrated himself before him. When the Master told him to get up, he rose and began to cry like a child. How strange! Tears also appeared in the Master's eyes. He wiped them away with his hands. Hriday had made him suffer endless agonies, yet the Master wept for him.

MASTER: "Why are you here now?"

HRIDAY (weeping): "I have come to see you. To whom else shall I tell my sorrows?"

Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said to him by way of consolation: "One cannot avoid such sorrows in the world. Pleasure and pain are inevitable in worldly life. (Pointing to M.) That is why they come here now and then. They get peace of mind by hearing about God. What is your trouble?"

HRIDAY (weeping): "I am deprived of your company and so I suffer."

MASTER: "Why, was it not you who said to me, 'You follow your ideal and let me follow mine'?"

HRIDAY: "Yes, I did say that. But what did I know?"

MASTER: "I shall say good-bye to you now. Come another day and we shall talk together. Today is Sunday and many people have come to see me. They are waiting in my room. Have you had a good crop in the country?"

HRIDAY: 'It isn't bad."

MASTER: "Let me say good-bye. Come another day."

Hriday again prostrated himself before the Master, who started back to his room with M.

MASTER (to M.): "He tormented me as much as he served me. When my stomach trouble had reduced my body to a couple of bones and I couldn't eat anything, he said to me one day: 'Look at me-how well I eat! You've just taken a fancy that you can't eat.' Again he said: 'You are a fool! If I weren't living with you, where would your profession of holiness be?' One day he tormented me so much that I stood on the embankment ready to give up my body by jumping into the Ganges, which was then at flood-tide."

M. became speechless at these words of the Master. For such a man he had shed tears a few minutes before!

MASTER (to M.): "Well, he served me a great deal; then why should he have fallen on such evil days? He took care of me like a parent bringing up a child. As for me, I would remain unconscious of the world day and night. Besides, I was ill for a long time. I was completely at his mercy."

M. did not know how to answer Sri Ramakrishna; so he kept silent.

Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room and sat on the small couch. The devotees had been waiting for him eagerly. Several devotees from Konnagar had arrived. One of them came forward to question the Master.

Bhava and Mahabhava

DEVOTEE: "Sir, we hear that you go into samādhi and experience ecstasy. Please explain why and how you get into that mood."

MASTER: "Sri Radha used to experience Mahabhava. If any of her companions wanted to touch her while she was in that state, another of them would say: 'Please do not touch that body, the playground of Sri Krishna. Krishna is now sporting in her body.' It is not possible to experience bhava or mahabhava without the realization of God. When a fish comes up from a great depth, you see a movement on the surface of the water; and if it is a big one there is much splashing about. That is why a devotee 'laughs and weeps and dances and sings in the ecstasy of God'.

"One cannot remain in bhava very long. People take a man to be crazy if he sits before a mirror and looks at his face all the time."

Discipline for God-vision

DEVOTEE: "Sir, we hear that you see God. If you do, please show Him to us."

MASTER: "Everything depends on God's will. What can a man do? While chanting God's name, sometimes tears flow and at other times the eyes remain dry. While meditating on God, some days I feel a great deal of inner awakening, and some days I feel nothing.

"A man must work. Only then can he see God. One day, in an exalted mood, I had a vision of the Haldārpukur. I saw a low-caste villager drawing water after pushing aside the green scum. Now and then he took up the water in the palm of his hand and examined it. In that vision it was revealed to me that the water cannot be seen without pushing aside the green scum that covers it; that is to say, one cannot develop love of God or obtain His vision without work. Work means meditation, japa, and the like. The chanting of God's name and glories is work too. You may also include charity, sacrifice, and so on.

"If you want butter, you must let the milk turn to curd. It must be left in a quiet place. When the milk becomes curd, you must work hard to churn it. Only then can you get butter from the milk."

Futility of mere study

MAHIMACHARAN: "That is true, sir. Work is certainly necessary. One must labour hard. Only then does one succeed. There is so much to read! The scriptures are endless."

MASTER (to Mahimacharan): "How much of the scriptures can you read? What will you gain by mere reasoning? Try to realize God before anything else. Have faith in the guru's words, and work. If you have no guru, then pray to God with a longing heart. He will let you know what He is like.

"What will you learn of God from books? As long as you are at a distance from the market-place you hear only an indistinct roar. But it is quite different when you are actually there. Then you hear and see everything distinctly. You hear people saying: 'Here are your potatoes. Take them and give me the money.' "From a distance you hear only the rumbling noise of the ocean. Go near it and you will see many boats sailing about, birds flying, and waves rolling.

"One cannot get true feeling about God from the study of books. This feeling is something very different from book-learning. Books, scriptures, and science appear as mere dirt and straw after the realization of God.

"The one thing needful is to be introduced to the master of the house. Why are you so anxious to know beforehand how many houses and gardens, and how many government securities, the master possesses? The servants of the house would not allow you even to approach these, and they would certainly not tell you about their master's investments. Therefore, somehow or other become acquainted with the master, even if you have to jump over the fence or take a few pushes from the servants. Then the master himself will tell you all about his houses and gardens and his government securities. And what is more, the servants and the door-keeper will salute you when you are known to the master.' (All laugh.)

Yearning for God

DEVOTEE: "Now the question is how to become acquainted with the master." (Laughter.)

MASTER: "That is why I say that work is necessary. It will not do to say that God exists and then idle away your time. You must reach God somehow or other. Call on Him in solitude and pray to Him, 'O Lord! reveal Thyself to me.' Weep for Him with a longing heart. You roam about in search of 'woman and gold' like a madman; now be a little mad for God. Let people say, 'This man has lost his head for God.' Why not renounce everything for a few days and call on God in solitude?

Work hard for His realization

"What will you achieve by simply saying that God exists and doing nothing about it? There are big fish in the Haldārpukur; but can you catch them by merely sitting idly on the bank? Prepare some spiced bait and throw it into the lake. Then the fish will come from the deep water and you will see ripples. That will make you happy. Perhaps a fish will jump with a splash and you will get a glimpse of it. Then you will be so glad!

"Milk must be turned to curd and the curd must be churned. Only then will you get butter. (To Mahima) What a nuisance! Someone must show God to a man, while he himself sits idly by all the while! Someone must extract the butter and hold it in front of his mouth! (All laugh.) What a bother! Someone else must catch the fish and give it to him!

"A man wanted to see the king. The king lived in the inner court of the palace, beyond seven gates. No sooner did the man pass the first gate than he exclaimed, 'Oh, where is the king?' But there were seven gates, and he must pass them one after another before he could see the king."

MAHIMACHARAN: "By what kind of work can one realize God?"

MASTER: "It is not that God can be realized by this work and not by that. The vision of God depends on His grace. Still a man must work a little with longing for God in his heart. If he has longing he will receive the grace of God.

Favourable conditions for realization of God

"To attain God a man must have certain favourable conditions: the company of holy men, discrimination, and the blessings of a real teacher. Perhaps his elder brother takes the responsibility for the family; perhaps his wife has spiritual qualities and is very virtuous; perhaps he is not married at all or entangled in worldly life. He succeeds when conditions like these are fulfilled.

"In a certain family a man lay seriously ill. He was at the point of death. Someone said: 'Here is a remedy: First it must rain when the star Svati is in the ascendant; then some of that rain-water must collect in a human skull; then a frog must come there and a snake must chase it; and as the frog is about to be bitten by the snake, it must jump away and the poison of the snake must drop into the skull. You must prepare a medicine from this poison and give it to the patient. Then he will live.' The head of the family consulted the almanac about the star and set out at the right moment. With great longing of heart he began to search for the different ingredients. He prayed to God, 'O Lord, I shall succeed only if You bring together all the ingredients.' As he was roaming about he actually saw a skull lying on the ground. Presently there came a shower of rain. Then the man exclaimed: 'O gracious Lord, I have got the rain-water under Svati, and the skull too. What is more, some of the rain has fallen into the skull. Now be kind enough to bring together the other ingredients.' He was reflecting with a yearning heart when he saw a poisonous snake approaching. His joy knew no bounds. He became so excited that he could feel the thumping of his own heart. 'O God,' he prayed, 'now the snake has come too. I have procured most of the ingredients. Please be gracious and give me the remaining ones.' No sooner did he pray thus than a frog hopped up. The snake pursued it. As they came near the skull and the snake was about to bite the frog, the frog jumped over the skull and the snake's poison fell into it. The man began to dance, clapping his hands for joy. So I say that one gets everything through yearning.

"A man cannot realize God unless he renounces everything mentally. A sādhu cannot lay things up. 'Birds and wandering monks do not make provision for the morrow.' Such is the state of my mind that I cannot carry even clay in my hand. Once, when Hriday tormented me, I thought of leaving this place and going to Benares. I thought of taking some clothes with me. But how could I take money? So I could not go to Benares. (All laugh.)

(To Mahima) "You are a householder. Therefore you should hold both to 'this' and to 'that'-both to the world and to God."

MAHIMA: "Sir, can one who holds to 'that' also hold to 'this'?"

MASTER: "Once, sitting on the bank of the Ganges neat the Panchavati, holding a rupee in one hand and clay in the other, I discriminated, 'The rupee is the clay-the clay is verily the rupee, and the rupee is verily the clay', and then threw the rupee into the river. But I was a little frightened. 'How foolish of me to offend the goddess of fortune!' I thought. 'What shall I do if she doesn't provide me with food any more?' Then, like Hazra, I sought help in a ruse. I said to the goddess, 'Mother, may you dwell in my heart.' Once the Divine Mother was pleased with a man's austerities and said to him, 'You may ask a favour of Me.' 'O Mother,' said he, 'if You are so pleased. with me, then grant that I may eat from a gold plate with my grandchildren.' Now, in one boon the man got everything: grandchildren, wealth, and gold plate. (All laugh.)

"When the mind is freed from 'woman and gold', it can be directed to God and become absorbed in Him. It is the bound alone who can be freed.

The moment the mind 'turns away from God, it is bound. When does the lower needle of a pair of scales move away from the upper one? When one pan is pressed down by a weight. 'Woman and gold' is the weight.

"Why does a child cry on coming out of its mother's womb? With its cry it says, as it were: 'Just see where I am now! In my mother's womb I was meditating on the Lotus Feet of God; but see where I am now!'

(To Mahima) "You should renounce mentally. Live the life of a house holder in a spirit of detachment."

MAHIMA: "Can a man live in the world if his mind is once directed to God?"

See God in the world

MASTER: "Why not? Where will he go away from the world? I realize that wherever I live I am always in the Ayodhya of Rāma. This whole world is Rāma's Ayodhya. After receiving instruction from His teacher, Rāma said that He would renounce the world. Daśaratha sent the sage Vasishtha to Rāma to dissuade Him. Vasishtha found Him filled with intense renunciation. He said to Rāma: 'First of all, reason with me, Rāma; then You may leave the world. May I ask You if this world is outside, God? If that is so, then You may give it up.' Rāma found that it is God alone who has become the universe and all its

living beings. Everything in the world appears real on account of God's reality behind it. Thereupon Rāma became silent.

"In the world a man must fight against passions like lust and anger, against many desires, against attachment. It is convenient to fight from inside a fort-from his own home. At home he gets his food and other help from his wife. In the Kaliyuga the life of a man depends entirely on food. It is better to get food at one place than to knock at seven doors for it. Living at home is like facing the battle from a fort.

"Live in the world like a cast-off leaf in a gale. Such a leaf is sometimes blown inside a house and sometimes to a rubbish heap. The leaf goes wherever the wind blows-sometimes to a good place and sometimes to a bad. Now God has put you in the world. That is good. Stay here. Again, when He lifts you from here and puts you in a better place, that will be time enough to think about what to do then.

"God has put you in the world. What can you do about it? Resign everything to Him. Surrender yourself at His feet. Then there will be no more confusion. Then you will realize that it is God who does everything. All depends on 'the will of Rāma'."

Story of "the will of Rāma"

A DEVOTEE: "What is that story about 'the will of Rāma'?"

MASTER: "In a certain village there lived a weaver. He was a very pious soul. Everyone trusted him and loved him. He used to sell his goods in the market-place. When a customer asked him the price of a piece of cloth, the weaver would say: 'By the will of Rāma the price of the yarn is one rupee and the labour four *ānnās*; by the will of Rāma the profit is two *ānnās* . The price of the cloth, by the will of Rāma, is one rupee and six *ānnās*.' Such was the people's faith in the weaver that the customer would at once pay the price and take the cloth. The weaver was a real devotee of God. After finishing his supper in the evening, he would spend long hours' in the worship hall meditating on God and chanting His name and glories. Now, late one night the weaver couldn't get to sleep. He was sitting in the worship hall, smoking now and then, when a band of robbers happened to pass that way. They wanted a man to carry their goods and said to the weaver, 'Come with us.' So saying, they led him off by the hand. After committing a robbery in a house, they put a load of things on the weaver's head, commanding him to carry them. Suddenly the police arrived and the robbers ran away. But the weaver, with his load, was arrested. He was kept in the lock-up for the night. Next day he was brought before the magistrate for trial. The villagers learnt what had happened and came to court. They said to the magistrate, 'Your Honour, this man could never commit a robbery.' Thereupon the magistrate asked the weaver to make his statement.

'The weaver said: 'Your Honour, by the will of Rāma I finished my meal at night. Then by the will of Rāma I was sitting in the worship hall. It was quite late at night by the will of Rāma. By the will of Rāma I had been thinking of God and chanting His name and glories, when by the will of Rāma a band of robbers passed that way. By the will of Rāma they dragged me with them; by the will of Rāma they committed a robbery in a house;

and by the will of Rāma they put a load on my head. Just then, by the will of Rāma the police arrived, and by the will of Rāma I was arrested. Then by the will of Rāma the police kept me in the lock-up for the night, and this morning by the will of Rāma I have been brought before Your Honour.' The magistrate realized that the weaver was a pious man and ordered his release. On his way home the weaver said to his friends, 'By the will of Rāma I have been released.'

"Whether a man should be a householder or a monk depends on the will of Rāma. Surrender everything to God and do your duties in the world. What else can you do? A clerk was once sent to prison. After the prison term was over he was released. Now, what do you think he did? Cut capers or do his old clerical work?

"If the householder becomes a jivanmukta, then he can easily live in the world if he likes. A man who has attained Knowledge does not differentiate between 'this place' and 'that place'. All places are the same to him. He who thinks of 'that place' also thinks of 'this place'.

Master's first meeting with Keshab

"When I first met Keshab at Jaygopal's garden house, I remarked, 'He is the only one who has dropped his tail.' At this people laughed. Keshab said to them: 'Don't laugh. There must be some meaning in his words. Let us ask him.' Thereupon I said to Keshab: The tadpole, so long as it has not dropped its tail, lives only in the water. It cannot move about on dry land. But as soon as it drops its tail it hops out on the bank; then it can live both on land and in water. Likewise, as long as a man has not dropped his tail of ignorance, he can live only in the water of the world. But when he drops his tail, that is to say, when he attains the Knowledge of God, then he can roam about as a free soul, or live as a householder if he likes.' "

Mahimacharan and. the other devotees remained spellbound, listening to the Master's words.

Master and Devendra Tagore

MASTER: "Once I visited Devendranath Tagore with Mathur Babu. I said to Mathur: 'I have heard that Devendra Tagore thinks of God. I should like to see him.' 'All right,' said Mathur, 'I will take you to him. We were fellow students in the Hindu College and. I am very friendly with him.' We went to Devendra's house. Mathur and Devendra had not seen each other for a long time. Devendra said to Mathur: 'You have changed a little. You have grown fat around the stomach.' Mathur said, referring to me: 'He has come to see you. He is always mad about God.' I wanted to see Devendra's physical marks and said to him, 'Let me see your body.' He pulled up his shirt, and I found that he had very fair skin tinted red. His hair had not yet turned grey.

"At the outset I noticed a little vanity in Devendra. And isn't that natural? He had such wealth, such scholarship, such name and fame! Noticing that streak of vanity, I asked Mathur: 'Well, is vanity the outcome of knowledge or ignorance? Can a knower of Brahman have such a feeling as, "I am a scholar; I am a Jnāni; I am rich"?'

"While I was talking to Devendra, I suddenly got into that state of mind in which I can see a man as he really is. I was convulsed with laughter inside. In that state I regard scholars and the book-learned as mere straw. If I see that a scholar has no discrimination and renunciation, I regard him as worthless straw. I see that he is like a vulture, which soars high but fixes its look on a charnel-pit down below.

"I found that Devendra had combined both yoga and bhoga in his life. He had a number of children, all young. The family physician was there. Thus, you see, though he was a Jnāni, yet he was preoccupied with worldly life. I said to him: 'You are the King Janaka of this Kaliyuga.

Holding to one as well as the other,
He drank his milk from a brimming cup!

I have heard that you live in the world and think of God; so I have come to see you. Please tell me something about God.'

"He recited some texts from the Vedas. He said, 'This universe is like a chandelier and each living being is a light in it.' Once, meditating in the Panchavati, I too, had had a vision like that. I found his words agreed with my vision, and I thought he must be very great man. I asked him to explain his words. He said: 'God has created men to manifest His own glory; otherwise, who could know this universe? Everything becomes dark without the lights in the chandelier. One cannot even see the chandelier itself.'

"We talked a long time. Devendra was pleased and said to me, 'You must come to our Brahmo Samaj festival.' 'That', I said, 'depends on the will of God. You can see the state of my mind. There's no knowing when God will put me into a particular state.' Devendra insisted: 'No, you must come. 'But put on your cloth and wear a shawl over your body. Someone might say something. unkind about your untidiness, and that would hurt me.' 'No,' I replied, 'I cannot promise that. I cannot be a babu.' Devendra and Mathur laughed.

"The very next day Mathur received a letter from Devendra forbidding me to go to the festival. He wrote that it would be ungentlemanly of me not to cover my body with a shawl. (All laugh.)

Colonel Viswanath

"There is another big man: Captain. Though a man of the world, he is a great lover of God. (To Mahima) Talk to him some time. He knows the Vedas, the Vedānta, the Bhagavata, the Gitā, the Adhyātma Rāmāyana, and other scriptures by heart. You will find that out when you talk to him.

"He has great piety. Once I was going along a street in Baranagore and he held an umbrella over my head. He invites me to his house and shows me great attention. He fans me, massages my feet, and feeds me with various dishes. Once at his house I went into samādhi in the toilet; and he took care of me there though he is so particular about his orthodox habits. He didn't show any abhorrence for the place.

"He has many expenses. He supports his brothers who live in Benares. His wife was a miserly woman at first. Now she is so burdened by the expenses of the family that she cannot spend all the money she would like to.

"Captain's wife said to me: 'He doesn't enjoy worldly life. That is why he once said he would renounce the world.' True, every now and then he expressed that desire.

"Captain was born in a family of devotees. His father was a soldier. I have heard that on the battle-field he would worship Śiva with one hand and hold a naked sword in the other.

"Captain is a strong upholder of orthodox conventions. Because of my visiting Keshab Chandra Sen, he stopped coming here for a month. He said to me that Keshab had violated the social conventions: he dined with the English, had married his daughter into another caste, and had lost his own caste. I said to Captain: 'What do I care for such things? Keshab chants the name of God; so I go to him to hear about God. I eat only the plum; what do I care about the thorns?' But Captain remained stubborn. He said to me, 'Why do you see Keshab?' I answered him rather sharply: 'But I don't go to him for money; I go there to hear the name of God; And how is it that you visit the Viceroy's house? He is a mlechchha. How can you be in his company?' That silenced him a little.

"But he is a great devotee. When he worships he performs *Ārati* with camphor. When he recites hymns he becomes a totally different person. He becomes absorbed.

Essence of Vedānta

(To Mahimacharan) "In the light of Vedantic reasoning the world is illusory, unreal as a dream. The Supreme Soul is the Witness-the witness of the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. These things are in your line of thought. The waking state is only as real as the dream. Let me tell you a story that agrees with your attitude.

"There was a farmer who lived in the countryside. He was a real Jnāni. He earned his living by farming. He was married, and after many years a son was born to him, whom he named Haru. The parents loved the boy dearly. This was natural, since he was the one precious gem in the family. On account of his religious nature the farmer was loved by the villagers. One day he was working in the field when a neighbour came and told him that Haru had had an attack of cholera. The farmer at once returned home and arranged for treatment for the boy. But Haru died. The other members of the family were grief-stricken, but the farmer acted as if nothing had happened. He consoled his family and told them that grieving was futile. Then he went back to his field. On returning home he found his wife weeping even more bitterly. She said to him: "How heartless you are! You haven't shed one tear for the child.' The farmer replied quietly: 'Shall I tell you why I haven't wept? I had a very vivid dream last night. I dreamt I had become a king; I was the father of eight sons and was very happy with them. Then I woke up. Now I am greatly perplexed. Should I weep for those eight sons or for this one Haru?'

'The farmer was a Jnāni; therefore he realized that the waking state is as unreal as the dream state. There is only one eternal Substance, and that is the Ātman.

"But for my part I accept everything: Turiya and also the three states of waking, dream; and deep sleep. I accept all three states. I accept all- Brahman and also māyā, the universe, and its living beings. If I accepted less I should not get the full weight."

A DEVOTEE: "The full weight? How is that?" (All laugh.)

Qualified Advaita

MASTER: "Brahman is qualified by the universe and its living beings. At the beginning, while following the method of 'Not this, not this', one has to eliminate the universe and its living beings. But as long as 'I-consciousness' remains, one cannot but feel that it is God Himself who has become everything. He alone has become the twenty-four cosmic principles.

"When a man speaks of the essential part of the bel-fruit, he means its flesh only, and not the seeds and shell. But if he wants to speak of the total weight of the fruit, it will not do for him to weigh only the flesh. He must accept the whole thing: seeds and shell and flesh. Seeds and shell and flesh belong to one and the same fruit.

Synthesis of Sankara and Ramanuja

"The Nitya and the Lila belong to the same Reality. Therefore I accept everything, the Relative as well as the Absolute. I don't explain away the world as māyā. Were I to do that I should get short weight."

MAHIMACHARAN: "It is a good synthesis: from the Absolute to the Relative, and from the Relative to the Absolute."

MASTER: 'The jnanis regard everything as illusory, like a dream; but the bhaktas accept all the states. The milk flows only in dribblets from the Jnāni. (All laugh.) There are some cows that pick and choose their fodder; hence their milk flows only in dribblets. But cows that don't discriminate so much, and eat whatever they get, give milk in torrents. A superior devotee of God accepts both the Absolute and the Relative; therefore he is able to enjoy the Divine even when his mind comes down from the Absolute. Such a devotee is like the cows that give milk in torrents." (All laugh.)

MAHIMA: "But the milk of a cow that eats without discrimination smells a little." (Laughter.)

MASTER (with a smile): "That's true, no doubt: Therefore that milk should be boiled. One should boil such milk over the fire a little while; there will be no smell whatever if you boil the milk over the fire of Knowledge. (All laugh.)

Explanation of "Aum"

(To Mahima) "You explain 'Aum' with reference to 'a', 'u', and 'm' only."

AHIMA: "'A', 'u', and 'm' mean creation, preservation, and destruction."

MASTER: "But I give the illustration of the sound of a gong: 'tom', t-o-m. It is the merging of the Lila in the Nitya: the gross, the subtle, and the causal merge in the Great Cause; waking, dream, and deep sleep merge in Turiya. The striking of the gong is like the falling of a heavy weight into a big ocean. Waves begin to rise: the Relative rises from the Absolute; the causal, subtle, and gross bodies appear out of the Great Cause; from Turiya emerge the states of deep sleep, dream, and waking. These waves arising from the Great Ocean merge again in the Great Ocean. From the Absolute to the Relative, and from the Relative to the Absolute. Therefore I give the illustration of the gong's sound, 'tom'. I have clearly perceived all these things. It has been revealed to me that there exists an Ocean of Consciousness without limit. From It come all things of the relative plane, and in It they merge again. Millions of Brahmandas rise in that Chidakasa and merge in It again. All this has been revealed to me; I don't know, much about what your books say."

MAHIMA: "Those to whom such things were revealed did not write the scriptures. They were rapt in their own experiences; when would they write? One needs a somewhat calculating mind to write. Others learnt these things from the seers and wrote the books."

MASTER: "Worldly people ask why one does not get rid of attachment to 'woman and gold'. That attachment disappears after the realization of God. If a man once tastes the Bliss of Brahman, then his mind no longer runs after the enjoyment of sense pleasures or wealth or name and fame. If the moth once sees the light, it no longer goes into the darkness.

"Some friends said to Ravana: You have been assuming different forms for Sita. Why don't you go to her in the form of Rāma?' Ravana replied: 'When I contemplate Rāma, even the position of Brahma appears insignificant to me, not to speak of the company of another man's wife! How could I take the form of Rāma for such a purpose?'

"All worship and spiritual discipline are directed to one end alone, namely, to get rid of worldly attachment. The more you meditate on God, the less you will be attached to the trifling things of the world. The more you love the Lotus Feet of God, the less you will crave the things of the world or pay heed to creature comforts. You will look on another man's wife as your mother and regard your own wife as your companion in spiritual life. You will get rid of your bestial desires and acquire godly qualities. You will be totally unattached to the world. Though you may still have to live in the world, you will live as a jivamnukta. The disciples of Sri Chaitanya lived as householders in a spirit of detachment. "You may quote thousands of arguments from Vedānta philosophy to a true lover of God, and try to explain the world as a dream, but you cannot shake his devotion to God. In spite of all your efforts he will come back to his devotion.

"A man born with an element of Śiva becomes a Jnāni; his mind is always inclined to the feeling that the world is unreal and Brahman alone is real. But when a man is born with an element of Vishnu he. develops ecstatic love of God. That love can never be destroyed. It may wane a little now and then, when he indulges in philosophical reasoning, but it ultimately returns to him increased a thousandfold."

After the devotees had left the Master, Mahimacharan brought Hazra to the room. M. was present. Mahima said to Sri Ramakrishna: "Sir, I have a complaint against you. Why have you asked Hazra to go home? He has no desire to return to his family."

Duty to one's mother

MASTER: "His mother has told Ramlal how much she is suffering on account of his being away from home; so I have asked Hazra to go home, at least for three days, and see her. Can anyone succeed in spiritual discipline if it causes suffering for, his mother? While visiting Vrindāvan, I had almost made up my mind to live there. But, when I remembered my mother, I said to myself, 'My mother will weep if I stay away from her.' So I returned here with Mathur Babu. Besides, why should a Jnāni like Hazra be afraid of going back to the world?"

MAHIMA, (with a smile): "Sir, that would be a pertinent question if Hazra were a Jnāni."

MASTER (smiling): "Oh, Hazra has attained everything. He has just a little attachment to the world because of his children and a small debt. As people say, my aunt is now in perfect health, only she is slightly ill!"

MAHIMA: "Where, sir, is Hazra's knowledge?"

MASTER (smiling): "Oh, you don't know! Everybody says Hazra is quite a man.

Everybody knows that he lives in the Dakshineswar temple garden. People talk of nothing but Hazra. Who would bother to mention my name?" (All laugh.)

AZRA: "You, sir, are incomparable. You have no peer in the world. Therefore nobody understands you."

MASTER: "There you are! To be sure, no one can have dealings with the incomparable. So why should people mention me at all?"

MAHIMA: "What does he know, sir? He will do your bidding."

MASTER: "That is not so. You had better ask him about it. He said to me, 'You and I are on even terms.'"

MAHIMA: "He argues a great deal."

MASTER: "Now and then he teaches me a lesson. (All laugh.) Sometimes I scold him when he argues too much. Later, when I am lying in bed inside the mosquito curtain, I

feel unhappy at the idea of having offended him. So I leave the bed, go to Hazra, and salute him. Then I feel peace of mind.

(To Hazra) "Why do you address the Pure Ātman as 'Isvara'? The Pure Ātman is inactive and is the Witness of the three states. When I think of the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, then I call the Pure Ātman 'Isvara'. What is the Pure Ātman like? It is like a magnet lying at a great distance from a needle. The needle moves, but the magnet lies motionless, inactive."

Toward evening Sri Ramakrishna was pacing the room. M. was sitting alone, thinking. Suddenly the Master said to him tenderly: "Please give me a couple of linen shirts. As you know, I cannot use everybody's things. I thought of asking Captain for the shirts, but you had better give them to me." M. felt highly gratified and said, "As you please, sir."

At dusk incense was burnt in Sri Ramakrishna's room, and, as usual, he bowed before the pictures of gods and goddesses on the walls and chanted their names softly. From outside one could hear the murmuring of the Ganges and the music of the evening worship in the temples of Kāli, Vishnu, and Śiva. Through the door one could see the priest at a distance moving from one temple to another, a bell in his left hand and a light in his right, an attendant carrying the gong. The evening melody was in harmony with the spirit of the hour and place and with the innermost thoughts of the worshippers. For the time being the sordid things of daily life were forgotten.

Later Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his room in his usual blissful mood. Ishan had come from Calcutta. He had burning faith in God. He used to say, "If a man leaves the house with the hallowed name of Durga on his lips, then Śiva Himself protects him with His celestial weapons."

MASTER (to Ishan): "You have great faith. But I haven't so much. (All laugh.) God can be realized only through faith."

ISHAN; "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "You practise religious rites-japa, fasting, and the like. That is very good. If a man feels sincerely drawn to God, then God makes him practise all these disciplines. The devotee will certainly realize God if he practises them without desiring their results. A devotee observes many rites because of the injunctions of the scriptures. Such devotion is called vaidhibhakti. But there is a higher form of devotion known as raga-bhakti, which springs from yearning and love for God. Prahlada had such devotion. When the devotee develops that love, he no longer needs to perform prescribed rites.

November 9, 1884

Sri Ramakrishna was in his room, seated on the small couch and facing the east. The devotees were sitting on the floor. It was about midday when M. arrived and took a seat after saluting the Master. Gradually other devotees began to gather. Vijaykrishna

Goswami was there with several Brahmo devotees. The priest Ram Chakravarty was present also. Mahimacharan, Narayan, and Kishori arrived a few minutes later.

It was the beginning of winter. Sri Ramakrishna had felt the need of some shirts and had asked M. to bring them. Besides two broad cloth shirts, M. had brought another of a heavy material, for which Sri Ramakrishna had not asked.

MASTER (to M.): "You had better take that one back with you. You can use it yourself. There is nothing wrong in that. Tell me, what kind of shirt did I ask you to bring?"

M: "Sir, you told me to get you plain ones. You didn't ask me to buy the heavier one."

MASTER: "Then please take that one back. (To Vijay and the others) You see, Dwarika Babu gave me a shawl. The Mārwāri devotees also brought one for me. I couldn't accept."

Vijay interrupted the Master, saying: "That is right, sir. If a man needs a thing, he must accept it. And there must be a man to give it. Who but a man will give?"

God supplies the needs of devotees

MASTER: 'The giver is the Lord Himself. The mother-in-law said to her daughter-in-law: 'My child, I see that everybody has someone to render him a little personal service. It would be so nice if you could find someone to massage your feet.' The daughter-in-law said: 'Mother, God Himself will massage my feet. I don't need anyone else.' She spoke thus because she was a sincere lover of God.

"Once a fakir went to the Emperor Akbar to ask for money. The Emperor was saying his prayers. He prayed, 'O Lord, give me money; give me wealth.' The fakir started to leave the palace, but the Emperor motioned to him to wait. After finishing his prayers, Akbar came to the holy man and said, 'Why were you going away?' The fakir replied, 'You yourself were begging for money and wealth; so I thought that if I must beg, I would beg of God and not of a beggar.'"

VIJAY: "I saw a sādhu at Gaya. He did not take the initiative in anything. One day he wanted to feed some devotees. Suddenly we found that butter, flour, fruits, and other food-stuff had arrived from no one knew where."

Three classes of sādhus

MASTER (to Vijay and the others): 'There are three classes of sādhus: good, mediocre, and bad. The good sādhu makes no effort to get his food. The dandis, among others, belong to the mediocre and bad classes. To get food the mediocre sādhu will knock at the door of a house and say, 'Namo Narayana'. The bad sādhu starts a quarrel if he doesn't get his alms.

"The good sādhu behaves like a python. He sits in one place and the food comes to him. The python doesn't move from where it is. A young sādhu, who had been a am Brahmachari from his boyhood, went out to beg. A young girl offered him alms. The

sādhu saw her breasts and thought she had abscesses. He asked about them. The elderly women of the family explained that she would some day be a mother and that God had given her breasts to give milk to her children; God had provided for all this beforehand. At these words the sādhu was struck with wonder. He said: Then 1 don't need to beg. God must have provided for me too."

Some of the devotees thought that in that case they should not take any initiative either.

MASTER: "But those who think that an effort is needed must make the effort."

VIJAY: 'There is a nice story about that in the Bhaktamala."

MASTER: "Tell it to us."

VIJAY: "Please tell us yourself."

MASTER: "No, you tell it. 1 don't remember it very well. "One should hear these things at the beginning. That is why I listened to them years ago. But now I am no longer in that mood. Hanuman said: 'I don't know the position of the stars or the phase of the moon. I only think of Rāma.'

'The chatak bird craves only rain-water. Even when it is dying of thirst, it turns its beak upward and wants only water from the sky. The Ganges, the Jamuna, and the seven oceans are filled to the brim, but still it will not touch the water of the earth.

'Rāma and Lakshmana visited Pampa Lake. Lakshmana saw a crow very eager for water. Again and again it went to the edge of the water but would not drink. Lakshmana asked Rāma about it. Rāma said: 'Brother, this crow is a great devotee of God. Day and night it repeats the name of Rāma. Its throat is parched with thirst, but still it won't drink for fear of missing a repetition of Rāma's name.'

"On a full-moon night I said to Haladhāri, 'Brother, is it the night of the new moon?' (All laugh.)

(Smiling) "Yes, it is true. Once I was told that a characteristic of a man of Perfect Knowledge is that he cannot distinguish between the full moon and the new moon. But how could one convince Haladhāri of that? He said: This is certainly the dark Kaliyuga. He cannot distinguish the full moon from the new moon! And people respect him!"

Mahimacharan entered the room.

MASTER (respectfully): "Come in. Come in, sir. Please take a seat.

(To Vijay and the other devotees) "In the ecstatic state of mind I cannot remember a date. The other day there was a religious festival at Beni Pāl's garden. I forgot the date. I can no longer remember the last day of the month, when it is very auspicious to repeat the name ofGod."

Sri Ramakrishna remained thoughtful a few minutes.

MASTER: "But I remember if a man makes an engagement to visit me.

"A man attains this state when his mind is one hundred per cent absorbed in God. When Hanuman returned from Ceylon, Rāma said to him: 'You have seen Sita. Tell me, how did you find her?' Hanuman said: 'O Rāma, I saw that only the body of Sita lay there; it held neither her mind nor her soul. She has indeed consecrated her mind and soul to Your Lotus Feet. Therefore I saw only her body in Ceylon. Further, I saw the King of Death prowling about. But what could he do? It was only a body; it had neither mind nor soul.'

"If you meditate on an ideal you will acquire its nature. If you think of God day and night, you will acquire the nature of God. A salt doll went into the ocean to measure its depth. It became one with the ocean. What is the goal of books or scriptures? The attainment of God. A man opened a book belonging to a sādhu. He saw the word 'Rāma' written on every page. There was nothing else.

"If a man loves God, even the slightest thing kindles spiritual feeling in him. Then, repeating the name of Rāma but once, he gets the fruit of ten million sandhyas. At the sight of a cloud the peacock's emotion is awakened: he dances, spreading his tail. Radha had the same experience. Just the sight of a cloud recalled Krishna to her mind.

"Chaitanyadeva was passing a village. He heard that drums were made from the earth of that place. At once he was overwhelmed with ecstasy because drums are used in kirtan.

"But who can have this spiritual awakening? Only he who has renounced his attachment to worldly things. If the sap of attachment is totally dried up in a man, the slightest suggestion kindles his spiritual emotion. Though you strike a wet match a thousand times, it will not produce a spark. But if it is dried, the slightest rubbing will set it aflame.

"Pain and pleasure are inevitable in a body. He who has realized God dedicates his mind and life, his body and soul, to God. When Rāma and Lakshmana went to take their bath in Pampa Lake, they thrust their bows into the ground. Coming out of the water, Lakshmana took out his bow and found its tip stained with blood. Rāma said to him: 'Look, brother! Look. Perhaps we have hurt some creature." Lakshmana dug in the earth and found a big bullfrog. It was dying. Rāma said to the frog in a sorrowful voice: 'Why didn't you croak? We should have tried to save you. You croak lustily enough when you are in the jaws of a snake.' The frog said: 'O Lord, when I am attacked by a snake I croak, saying: "O Rāma, save me! O Rāma, save me!" This time I found that it was Rāma who was killing me; so I kept still.'"

Sri Ramakrishna remained silent a few moments watching the devotees. He had heard that Mahimacharan did not believe in following a guru. He began the conversation again.

Faith in guru

MASTER: "A man should have faith in the words of his guru. He doesn't have to look into his guru's character. 'Though my guru visits the grog-shop, still he is the Embodiment of Eternal Bliss.'

"A man who used to give recitals of the Chandi and the Bhagavata once said, 'A broomstick is itself unclean, but it cleans dirty places.' "

Mahimacharan studied the Vedānta. His aim was to attain Brahmajnana. He followed the path of knowledge and was always reasoning.

MASTER (to Mahima): "The aim of the Jnāni is to know the nature of his own Self. This is Knowledge; this is liberation. The true nature of the Self is that It is the Supreme Brahman: I and the Supreme Brahman are one. But this Knowledge is hidden on account of māyā.

"I said to Harish; 'This is the whole thing: the gold is hidden under a few basketfuls of earth, and you must remove the earth.'

"I-consciousness"

"The bhaktas retain 'I-consciousness'; the jnanis do not. Nangta used to teach how to establish oneself in the true Self, saying, 'Merge the mind in the buddhi and the buddhi in the Ātman; then you will be established in your true Self."

"But the 'I' persists. It cannot be got rid of. Imagine a limitless expanse of water: above and below, before and behind, right and left, everywhere there is water. In that water is placed a jar filled with water. There is water inside the jar and water outside, but the jar is still there. The 'I' is the jar.

"Even after attaining Knowledge, the Jnāni keeps his body as before. But the fire of Knowledge burns away his lust and other passions. Many days ago, during an electric storm, a thunderbolt struck the Kāli temple. We saw that no injury had been done to the doors; only the points of the screws were broken. The doors are the body, and the passions-lust and so forth-are the screws.

"A Jnāni loves to talk only about God. He feels pained if one talks about worldly things. But a worldly man belongs to a different class. He always has the turban of ignorance on his head. He always comes back to worldly topics.

"The Vedas speak of the 'seven planes' of mind. When the Jnāni's mind ascends to the fifth plane, he cannot listen to anything or talk of anything but God. At that stage only words of wisdom come from his lips.

"The Vedas speak of Satchidananda Brahman. Brahman is neither one nor two; It is between one and two. It cannot be described either as existence or as non-existence; It is between existence and non-existence.

Sincere and formal devotion

"When the devotee develops raga-bhakti, passionate love of God, he realizes Him. But one loses vaidhi-bhakti, formal devotion, as easily as one gains it. This is formal devotion: so much japa, so much meditation, so much sacrifice and homa, so many articles of worship, and the recitation of so many mantras, before the Deity. Such devotion comes in a moment and goes in a moment. Many people say: 'Well, friend, we have lived on havishya for so many days! How many times we have worshipped the Deity at our home! And what have we achieved?' But there is no falling away from raga-bhakti. And who gets this passionate love for God? Those who have performed many meritorious deeds in their past births, or those who are eternally perfect. Think of a dilapidated house, for instance: while clearing away the undergrowth and rubbish one suddenly discovers a fountain fitted with a pipe. It has been covered with earth and bricks, but as soon as they are removed the water shoots up.

Sign of a true devotee

"Those who have passionate love for God do not say any such thing as: 'O brother, how strict I have been about food! But what have I achieved?' New farmers give up cultivating if their fields do not yield any crops. But hereditary farmers will continue to cultivate their fields whether they get a crop or not. Their fathers and grandfathers were farmers; they know that they too must accept farming as their means of livelihood.

"Only those who have developed raga-bhakti for God may be called His sincere devotees. God becomes responsible for them. If you enter your name in a hospital register, the doctor will not discharge you until you are cured. Those who are held by God have nothing to fear. The son who holds to his father, while walking along the narrow ridge of a paddy-field, may slip if he absent-mindedly lets go his father's hand; but if the father holds the son by the hand, there is no such danger.

"Is there anything that is impossible for faith? And a true devotee has faith in everything: the formless Reality, God with form, Rāma, Krishna and the Divine Mother.

"Once, while going to Kamarpukur, I was overtaken by a storm. I was in the middle of a big meadow. The place was haunted by robbers. I began to repeat the names of all the deities: Rāma, Krishna, and Bhagavati. I also repeated the name of Hanuman. I chanted the names of them all. What does that mean? Let me tell you. While the servant is counting out the money to purchase supplies, he says, 'These pennies are for potatoes these for egg-plants, these for fish.' He counts the money separately, but after the list is completed, he puts the coins together.

"When one develops love of God, one likes to talk only of God. If you love a person, you love to talk and hear about him. A worldly person's mouth waters while he talks about his son. If someone praises his son, he will at once say to the boy, 'Go and get some water for your uncle to wash his feet.

"Those who love pigeons are highly pleased if you praise pigeons before them. But if you speak ill of pigeons, they will at once exclaim, 'Has anyone in your line for fourteen generations ever raised pigeons?'"

Advantage of a householder's life

Sri Ramakrishna now addressed Mahimacharan, who was a householder.

MASTER: "What need is there of renouncing the world altogether? It is enough if you can rid yourself of attachment. But you must have *sādhanā* you have to fight the sense-organs.

"It is a great advantage to fight from inside a fort. You get much help from the fort. The world is the place for enjoyment. After enjoying different things, you should give them up one by one. Once I had a desire to put a gold chain around my waist. I obtained one at last and put it on, but I had to take it off immediately.

"Once I ate some onion. While eating it I discriminated, 'O mind, this is onion.' Then I moved it to different places in my mouth and at last spat it out."

A musician was expected. He was to sing with his party. Sri Ramakrishna asked the devotees every now and then, "Where is the musician?"

MAHIMA: "We are quite all right as we are."

MASTER: "No, sir. You get this all through the year."

A devotee outside the room said, "The musician has come."

Sri Ramakrishna was filled with joy and said, "Ah! Has he?"

Mats were spread on the floor of the long verandah northeast of the Master's room. Sri Ramakrishna said: "Sprinkle a little Ganges water on the mats. Many worldly people have sat on them."

The ladies of Pyari Babu's family, from Bali, had come to visit the temples. They wanted to listen to the kirtan. A devotee said to Sri Ramakrishna: "These ladies have been inquiring whether there would be any place in the room for them. Can they have seats?" The kirtan had already begun. The Master said, "No, no! Where is any room here?"

Master and Narayan

Narayan arrived and saluted Sri Ramakrishna. The latter said tenderly: "Why have you come? Your people at home have beaten you so much!" He signed to Baburam to give Narayan something to eat. Narayan entered the Master's room. Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna followed him. He wanted to feed Narayan with his own hands. Afterwards he returned to the verandah.

Many devotees were present, including Vijay, Mahimacharan, Narayan, M., and the younger Gopal. Soon Narayan came back to the verandah and took his seat by the Master.

About three o'clock Adhar arrived. At the sight of him Sri Ramakrishna appeared excited. The devotee saluted the Master and sat on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna beckoned to him to come nearer.

When the music was over the gathering of devotees broke up. Some began to stroll in the garden and some went to the temples to watch the evening service.

In the evening arrangements were made for kirtan inside the Master's room. Sri Ramakrishna eagerly asked a devotee to have an extra lamp. The two lamps lit the room brightly.

Sri Ramakrishna said to Vijay: "Why are you sitting there? Come nearer to me." This time the kirtan created an intense atmosphere. The Master danced in an ecstasy of joy; the devotees also danced encircling him. While Vijay was dancing his cloth dropped. He was unconscious.

When the music was over, Vijay began to look for his key, which had fallen somewhere. The Master said to him with a laugh, "Why bother about it any more?"

He meant that Vijay should have nothing more to do with boxes and keys.

Kishori saluted Sri Ramakrishna and was about to take his leave. The Master blessed him, touching his chest tenderly, and bade him good-bye. His words were full of love. M. and Gopal saluted the Master. They too were about to take their leave. He said to them with the same affection: "Couldn't you go tomorrow morning? You may catch cold at night."

M. and Gopal decided to spend the night with Sri Ramakrishna. They sat on the floor with a few other devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna had had no rest the whole day: the devotees had been with him all the time. He went out for a few minutes. Returning to the room he saw M. taking down a song from Ramlal.

MASTER: "What are you doing?"

M. said that he was writing down a song. On being told what the song was, the Master remarked that it was a rather long song. M. wrote a line or two and then stopped writing.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna took his supper of farina pudding and one or two luchis. A lighted lamp stood on a stand by his side. M. sat near him. The Master asked if there were any sweets in the room. M. had brought some sandesh which he had put on the

shelf. Sri Ramakrishna asked M. to give him a sweet. M. searched for the sweets but could not find them. He was embarrassed. They had been given to the devotees.

After finishing his supper, Sri Ramakrishna sat on the small couch and M. seated himself on the foot-rug. The Master, talking about Narayan, was overcome with emotion.

MASTER: "I saw Naran today."

M: "Yes, sir. His eyes were moist. When I looked at his face I felt like weeping."

MASTER: 'The sight of him arouses a mother's love in me, as it were. His relatives beat him at home because he comes here. There is none to defend him."M : 'The other day he left his books at Haripada's house and fled to you.

MASTER: "It was not good for him to do that."

Sri Ramakrishna was silent. After a few minutes he continued.

MASTER: "You see, he has much substance in him. Otherwise, how could I be attracted to him even though I was listening to the kirtan at the time? I had to leave the music and go into the room. That never happened before."

Again Sri Ramakrishna fell silent. A few minutes later he began to talk.

MASTER: "In an ecstatic state I asked him how he was feeling. He just said he was happy. (To M.) Feed him now and then-as parents do their child."

Sri Ramakrishna then spoke about Tejchandra.

MASTER (to M.): "Please ask him what he thinks of me. Does he thinkof me as a Jnāni? Or what does he say about me? I understand that he is very reticent. (To Gopal) Ask Tejchandra to come here Saturdays and Tuesdays. (To M.) Suppose I go to your school and look for-"

M. thought that Sri Ramakrishna wanted to go to his school to see Narayan. He said to the Master, "You might as well wait at our house."

MASTER: "No, I have something else in mind. I should like to see whetherthere are other worth-while boys in the school."

M: "Of course you can go. Other visitors come to the school. You cancome too." Sri Ramakrishna was smoking. M. and Gopal finished their supper. They decided to sleep in the nahabat. M. again sat on the floor near Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER (to M.): 'There may be some pots and pans in the nahabat.Why not sleep here in this room?"

M: "Very well, sir."

It was ten or eleven o'clock at night. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch, resting against a pillow. M. sat on the floor. The Master was conversing with him. A lamp burnt on a stand near the wall. The Master felt great compassion for his devotees. He wanted to bless M. by accepting his personal service.

MASTER: "My feet ache. Please rub them gently."

M. seated himself on the small couch and took the Master's feet on his lap. He stroked them. Now and then Sri Ramakrishna would ask his disciple a question.

MASTER (smiling): "How did you like today's conversation?"

M: "Very much indeed."

MASTER (smiling): "How I spoke about the Emperor Akbar!"

M: "It was very good."

MASTER: "Repeat it to me."

M: "A fakir came to visit Akbar. The Emperor was saying his prayers. In his prayers he was asking God to give him wealth and riches. Thereupon the fakir was about to leave the room quietly. Later, when the Emperor asked him about it, the fakir said, 'If I must beg, why should I beg of a beggar?'"

MASTER: "What else did we talk about?"

M: "You told us a great deal about saving up for the future."

MASTER (smiling): "What did I say?"

M: "As long as a man feels that he must try, he should make an effort. How well you told us about it at Sinthi!"

MASTER: "What did I say?"

M: "God takes upon Himself complete responsibility for one who totally depends upon Him. It is like a guardian taking charge of a minor. You also told us that at a feast a child cannot by himself find a place to eat his meal; someone finds a place for him."

MASTER: "No, that is not quite to the point. I said that the child doesn't fall if the father leads him and holds his hand."

M: "You also described the three classes of sādhus. The best sādhu does not move about to get his food; he lives in one place and gets his food there, You told us about that

young sādhu who said, when he saw the breasts of a young girl, 'Why has she those abscesses?' You told us many other things."

MASTER (smiling): "What else?"

M: "About the crow of Pampa Lake. He repeated the name of Rāma day and night. That is why he couldn't drink the water though he went to its edge. And about the holy man in whose book was written only 'Om Rāma'. And what Hanuman said to Rāma."

MASTER: "What did he say?"

M: "Hanuman said to Rāma: 'I saw Sita in Ceylon; but it was only her body. Her mind and soul were lying at Your feet.'

"And about the chatak bird. He will not drink anything but rain-water. And about jnanayoga and bhaktiyoga."

MASTER: "What did I say about them?"

M: "As long as one is conscious of the 'jar', the ego will certainly remain. As long as one is conscious of 'I', one cannot get rid of the idea, 'I am the devotee and Thou art God'."

MASTER: "No, it is not that; the 'jar' doesn't disappear whether one is conscious of it or not. One cannot get rid of the 'I'. You may reason a thousand times; still it will not go."

M. remained silent a few moments.

M: "You had that talk with Ishan Mukherji in the Kāli temple. We were very lucky to be there."

MASTER (smiling): "Yes, yes. Tell me, what did I say?"

M: "You said that work is only the first step. You told us that you said to Sambhu Mallick, 'If God appears before you, will you ask Him for a number of hospitals and dispensaries?'

"You said another thing: God does not reveal Himself to a person as long as he is attached to work. You said that to Keshab Sen."

MASTER: "What did I say?"

M: "As long as the baby plays with the toy and forgets everything else, its mother looks after her cooking and other household duties; but when the baby throws away the toy and cries, then the mother puts down the rice-pot and comes to the baby.
"You said another thing that day: Lakshmana asked Rāma where one could find God; after a great deal of explanation, Rāma said to him, 'Brother, I dwell in the man in whom you find ecstatic love-a love which makes him laugh and weep and dance and sing.' "

MASTER: "Ah me! Ah me!"

Sri Ramakrishna sat in silence a few minutes.

M: "That day you spoke only words of renunciation to Ishan. Since then many of us have come to our senses. Now we are eager to reduce our duties. You said that day, 'Ravana died in Ceylon and Behula wept bitterly for him.'"

Sri Ramakrishna laughed aloud.

M. (humbly): "Sir, isn't it desirable to reduce the number of one's duties and entanglements?"

MASTER: "Yes. But it is a different thing if you happen to come across a sādhu or a poor man. Then you should serve him."

M: "And. that day you spoke very rightly to Ishan about flatterers. They are like vultures on a carcass. You once said that to Padmalochan also."

MASTER: "No, to Vamandas of Ulo."

After a while M. sat on the floor near the small couch. Sri Ramakrishna felt sleepy; he said to M.: "Go to sleep. Where is Gopal? Please shut the door."

Next morning Sri Ramakrishna left his bed very early. As usual, he chanted the holy names of the different gods and goddesses. Now and then he looked at the sacred river. The morning worship began in the temples of Radhakanta and Mother Kāli. M. had spent the night on the floor of the Master's room. He left his bed and watched the worship in. the different temples.

Sri Ramakrishna finished his bath and went with M. to the Kāli temple. He asked the disciple to lock the door of his room.

In the temple he took the seat in front of the image of Kāli and offered flowers, sometimes at Her feet and sometimes on his own head. He fanned the Deity. Then he returned to his room and asked M. to unlock the door. Entering the room, he sat on the small couch. He was completely overwhelmed with divine fervour and began to chant the name of God. M. sat alone on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna began to sing about the Divine Mother:

Who is there that can understand what Mother Kāli is?
Even the six darsanas are powerless to reveal Her.
It is She, the scriptures say, that is the Inner Self
Of the yogi, who in Self discovers all his joy;
She that, of Her own sweet will, inhabits every living thing. .

Then he sang:

All creation is the sport of my mad Mother Kāli;
By Her māyā the three worlds are bewitched. . . .

He continued:

O Kāli, who can know Thee? Numberless are Thy forms. . .

Again he sang:

O Mother, redeem me speedily!
From terror of the King of Death I am about to die.
M. said to himself, "I wish he would sing:
Mother, Thou canst not trick me any more,
For I have seen Thy crimson Lotus Feet."

Strangely enough, no sooner had the thought passed through M.'s mind than Sri Ramakrishna sang the song. A few minutes later he said to M., "What do you think of the present state of my mind?"

M. (smiling): "It is your simple and natural state."

Sri Ramakrishna sang to himself the following refrain of a song:

Unless a man is simple, he cannot recognize God, the Simple One.

Chapter 34

BANKIM CHANDRA

Saturday, December 6, 1884

Adhar

ADHAR, A GREAT DEVOTEE of Sri Ramakrishna, lived in Sobha bazar in the northern section of Calcutta. Almost every day, after finishing his hard work at the office and returning home in the late afternoon, he paid Sri Ramakrishna a visit. From his home in Calcutta he would go to Dakshineswar in a hired carriage. His sole delight was to visit the Master. But he would hear very little of what Sri Ramakrishna said; for, after saluting the Master and visiting the temples, he would lie down, at the Master's request, on a mat spread on the floor and would soon fall asleep. At nine or ten O'clock he would be awakened to return home. However, he considered himself blessed to be able to visit the God-man of Dakshineswar. At Adhar's request Sri Ramakrishna often visited his home. His visits were occasions for religious festivals. Devotees in large numbers would assemble, and Adhar would feed them sumptuously. One day, while Sri Ramakrishna was visiting his home, Adhar said to him: "Sir, you haven't come to our house for a long time. The rooms seemed gloomy; they had a musty smell. But today the whole house is cheerful; the sweetness of your presence fills the atmosphere. Today I called on God earnestly. I even shed tears while praying. "Is that so?" the Master said tenderly, casting a kindly glance on his disciple.

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at Adhar's house with his attendants. Everyone was in a joyous mood. Adhar had arranged a rich feast. Many strangers were present. At Adhar's invitation, several other deputy magistrates had come; they wanted to watch the Master and judge his holiness. Among them was Bankim Chandra Chatterji, perhaps the greatest literary figure of Bengal during the later part of the nineteenth century. He was one of the creators of modern Bengali literature and wrote on social and religious subjects. Bankim was a product of the contact of India with England. He gave modern interpretations of the Hindu scriptures and advocated drastic social reforms.

Sri Ramakrishna had been talking happily with the devotees when Adhar introduced several of his personal friends to him.

ADHAR (introducing Bankim): "Sir, he is a great scholar and has written many books. He has come here to see you. His name is Bankim Babu."

MASTER (smiling): "Bankim! Well, what has made you bent?"

BANKIM (smiling): "Why, sir, boots are responsible for it. The kicks of our white masters have bent my body."

Meaning of Radha and Krishna

MASTER: "No, my dear sir! Sri Krishna was bent on account of His ecstatic love. His body was bent in three places owing to His love for Radha. That is how some people explain

Sri Krishna's form. Do you know why He has a deep-blue complexion? And why He is of such small stature-only three and a half cubits measured by His own hand? God looks so as long as He is seen from a distance. So the water of the ocean looks blue from afar. But if you go near the ocean and take the water in your hand, you will no longer find it blue; it will be very clear, transparent. So the sun appears small because it is very far away; if you go near it, you will no longer find it small. When one knows the true nature of God, He appears neither blue nor small. But that is a far-off vision;one does not see it except in samādhi. As long as 'I' and 'you' exist, name and form will also exist. Everything is God's lila. His sportive pleasure. As long as a man is conscious of 'I' and 'you', he will experience the manifestations of God through diverse forms.

Purusha and Prakriti imply and, Their inner harmony

"Sri Krishna is the Purusha; Srimati is His Śakti, the Primal Power. The two are Purusha and Prakriti. What is the meaning of the Yugala Murti, the conjoined images of Radha and Krishna? It is that Purusha and Prakriti are not different; there is no difference between them. Purusha cannot exist without Prakriti, and Prakriti cannot exist without Purusha. If you mention the one, the other is understood. It is like fire and its power to burn; one cannot think of fire without its power to burn; again, one cannot think of fire's power to burn without fire. Therefore in the conjoined images of Radha and Krishna, Krishna's eyes are fixed on Radha and Radha's on Krishna. Radha's complexion is golden, like lightning; so Krishna wears yellow apparel. Krishna's complexion is blue, like a dark cloud; so Radha wears a blue dress; she has also decked herself with blue sapphires. Radha has tinkling anklets; so Krishna has them too. In other words, there is inner and outer harmony between Purusha and Prakriti."

As Sri Ramakrishna finished these words, Bankim and his friends began to whisper in English.

MASTER (smiling, to Bankim and the others): "Well, gentlemen! What are you talking about in English?"

ADHAR: "We are discussing what you have just said, your explanation of Krishna's form."

MASTER (smiling): "That reminds me of a funny story. It makes me want to laugh. Once a barber was shaving a gentleman. The latter was cut slightly by the razor. At once he cried out, 'Damn!' But the barber didn't know the meaning of the word. He put his razor and other shaving articles aside, tucked up his shirt-sleeves-it was winter-, and said: 'You said "damn" to me. Now you must tell me its meaning.' The gentleman said: 'Don't be silly. Go on with your shaving. The word doesn't mean anything in particular; but shave a little more carefully.' But the barber wouldn't let him off so easily. He said, 'If "damn" means something good, then I am a "damn", my father is a "damn", and all my ancestors are "damns". (All laugh.) But if it means something bad, then you are a "damn", your father is a "damn", and all your ancestors are "damns". (All laugh.) They are not only "damns", but "damn-damn-damn-da-damn-damn".'"(Loud laughter.)

As the laughter stopped, Bankim began the conversation.

Master and preaching

BANKIM: "Sir, why don't you preach?"

MASTER (smiling): "Preaching? It is only a man's vanity that makes him think of preaching. A man is but an insignificant creature. It is God alone who will preach-God who has created the sun and moon and so illumined the universe. Is preaching such a trifling affair? You cannot preach unless God reveals Himself to you and gives you the command to preach. Of course, no one can stop you from preaching. You haven't received the command, but still you cry yourself hoarse. People will listen to you couple of days and then forget all about it. It is like any other sensation; as long as you speak, people will say, 'Ah! He speaks well'; and the moment you stop, everything will disappear.

"The milk in the pot hisses and swells as long as there is heat under it. Take away the heat, and the milk will quiet down as before.

Preaching without God's command

"One must increase one's strength by *sādhanā*; otherwise one cannot preach. As the proverb goes: 'You have no room to sleep yourself and you invite a friend to sleep with you.' There is no place for you to lie down and you say: 'Come, friend! Come and lie down with me.' (Laughter.)

"Some people used to befoul the bank of the Haldārpukur at Kamarpukur every morning. The villagers would notice it and abuse the offenders. But that didn't stop it. At last the villagers filed a petition with the Government. An officer visited the place and put up a sign: 'Commit no nuisance. Offenders will be punished.' That stopped it completely. Afterwards there was no more trouble. It was a government order, and everyone had to obey it.

"Likewise, if God reveals Himself to you and gives you the command, then you can preach and teach people. Otherwise, who will listen to you?"

The visitors were listening seriously.

Life after death

MASTER (to Bankim): "I understand you are a great pundit and have written many books. Please tell me what you think about man's duties? What will accompany him after death? You believe in the hereafter, don't you?"

BANKIM: "The hereafter? What is that?"

MASTER: "True. When a man dies after attaining Knowledge, he doesn't have to go to another plane of existence; he isn't born again. But as long as he has not attained Knowledge, as long as he has not realized God, he must come back to the life of this earth; he can never escape it. For such a person there is a hereafter. A man is liberated

after attaining Knowledge, after realizing God. For him there is no further coming back to earth. If a boiled paddy-grain is sown, it doesn't sprout. Just so, if a man is boiled by the fire of Knowledge, he cannot take part any more in the play of creation; he cannot lead a worldly life, for he has no attachment to 'woman and gold'. What will you gain by sowing boiled paddy?"

BANKIM (smiling): "Sir, neither does a weed serve the purpose of a tree.'

MASTER: "But you cannot call a Jnāni a weed. He who has realized God has obtained the fruit of Immortality-not a common fruit like a gourd or a pumpkin. He is free from rebirth. He is not born anywhere-on earth, in the solar world, or in the lunar world.

"Analogy is one-sided. You are a pundit; haven't you read logic? Suppose you say that a man is as terrible as a tiger. That doesn't mean that he has a fearful tail or a tiger's pot-face! (All laugh.)

"I said the same thing to Keshab. He asked me, 'Sir, is there an after-life?' I didn't commit myself either way. I said that the potters put their pots in the sun to bake. Among them you see both baked and soft pots. Sometimes cattle trample over them. When the baked pots are broken, the potters throw them away; but when the soft ones are broken they keep them. They mix them with water and put the clay on the wheel and make new pots. They don't throwaway the unbaked pots. So I said to Keshab: 'The Potter won't let you go as long as you are unbaked. He will put you on the wheel of the world as long as you have not attained Knowledge, as long as you have not realized Him. He won't let you go. You will have to return to the earth again and again; there is no escape. You will be liberated only when you realize God. Then alone will the Potter let you go. It is because then you won't serve any purpose in this world of māyā.' The Jnāni has gone beyond māyā. What will he do in this world of māyā?

"But God keeps some jnanis in the world of māyā to be teachers of men. In order to teach others the Jnāni lives in the world with the help of Vidyā-māyā. It is God Himself who keeps the Jnāni in the world for His work. Such was the case with Sukadeva and Sankaracharya.

Duties of life

(To Bankim, smiling) "Well, what do you say about man's duties?"

BANKIM (smiling): "If you ask me about them, I should say they are eating, sleeping, and sex-life."

Master scolds Bankim

MASTER (sharply): "Eh? You are very saucy! What you do day and night comes out through your mouth. A man belches what he eats. If he eats radish, he belches radish; if he eats green coconut, he belches green coconut. Day and night you live in the midst of 'woman and gold'; so your mouth utters words about that alone. By constantly thinking of worldly things a man becomes calculating and deceitful. On the other hand, he

becomes guileless by thinking of God. A man who has seen God will never say what you have just said. What will a pundit's scholarship profit him if he does not think of God and has no discrimination and renunciation? Of what use is erudition if the mind dwells on 'woman and gold'?

"Kites and vultures soar very high indeed, but their gaze is fixed only on the charnel-pit. The pundit has no doubt studied many books and scriptures; he may rattle off their texts, or he may have written books. But if he is attached to women, if he thinks of money and honour as the essential things, will you call him a pundit? How can a man be a pundit if his mind does not dwell on God?

Devotees and the worldly-minded

"Some may say about the devotees: 'Day and night these people speak about God. They are crazy; they have lost their heads. But how clever we are! How we enjoy pleasure-money, honour, the senses!' The crow, too thinks he is a clever bird; but the first thing he does when he wakes up in the early morning is to fill his stomach with nothing but others' filth. Haven't you noticed how he struts about? Very clever indeed!"

There was dead silence.

Sri Ramakrishna continued: "But like the swan are those who think of God, who pray day and night to get rid of their attachment to worldly things and their love for 'woman and gold', who do not enjoy anything except the nectar of the Lotus Feet of the Lord, and to whom worldly pleasures taste bitter. If you put a mixture of milk and water before the swan, it will leave the water and drink only the milk. And haven't you noticed the gait of a swan? It goes straight ahead in one direction. So it is with genuine devotees: they go toward God alone. They seek nothing else; they enjoy nothing else.

(Tenderly, to Bankim) "Please don't take offence at my words."

BANKIM: "Sir, I haven't come here to hear sweet things."

MASTER (to Bankim): "'Woman and gold' alone is the world; that alone is māyā. Because of it you cannot see or think of God. After the birth of one or two children, husband and wife should live as brother and sister and talk only of God. Then both their minds will be drawn to God, and the wife will be a help to the husband on the path of spirituality. None can taste divine bliss without giving up his animal feeling. A devotee should pray to God to help him get rid of this feeling. It. must be a sincere prayer. God is our Inner Controller; He will certainly listen to our prayer if it is sincere.

"And 'gold'. Sitting on the bank of the Ganges below the Panchavati, I used to say, 'Rupee is clay and clay is rupee;' Then I threw both into the Ganges."

BANKIM: "Indeed! Money is clay! Sir, if you have a few pennies you can help the poor. If money is clay, then a man cannot give in charity or do good to others."

Charity -The sannyāsi's duty

MASTER (to Bankim): "Charity! Doing good! How dare you say you can do good to others? Man struts about so much; but if one pours foul water into his mouth when he is asleep, he doesn't even know it; his mouth overflows with it. Where are his boasting, his vanity, his pride, then?

"A sannyāsi must give up 'woman and gold'; he cannot accept it any more. One must not swallow one's own spittle. When a sannyāsi gives something to another, he knows that it is not himself who gives. Kindness belongs to God alone. How can a man lay claim to it? Charity depends on the will of Rāma. A true sannyāsi renounces 'woman and gold' both mentally and outwardly. He who eats no molasses must not even keep molasses about. If he does, and yet tells others not to eat it, they won't listen to him.

"A householder, of course, needs money, for he has a wife and children. He should save up to feed them. They say that the bird and the sannyāsi should not provide for the future. But the mother bird brings food in her mouth for her chicks; so she too provides. A householder needs money. He has to support his family.

The householder's duty

"If a householder is a genuine devotee he performs his duties without attachment; he surrenders the fruit of his work to God-his gain or loss, his pleasure or pain-and day and night he prays for devotion and for nothing else. This is called motiveless work, the performance of duty without attachment. A sannyāsi, too, must do all his work in that spirit of detachment; but he has no worldly duties to attend to, like a householder.

"If a householder gives in charity in a spirit of detachment, he is really doing good to himself and not to others. It is God alone that he serves- God, who dwells in all beings; and when he serves God, he is really doing good to himself and not to others. If a man thus serves God through all beings, not through men alone but through animals and other living beings as well; if he doesn't seek name and fame, or heaven after death; if he doesn't seek any return from those he serves; if he can carry on his work of service in this spirit-then he performs truly selfless work, work without attachment. Through such selfless work he does good to himself. This is called karma yoga. This too is a way to realize God. But it is very difficult, and not suited to the Kaliyuga.

"Therefore I say, he who works in such a detached spirit-who is kind and charitable-benefits only himself. Helping others, doing good to others-this is the work of God alone, who for men has created the sun and moon, father and mother, fruits, flowers, and corn. The love that you see in parents is God's love: He has given it to them to preserve His creation. The compassion that you see in the kind-hearted is God's compassion: He has given it to them to protect the helpless. Whether you are charitable or not, He will have His work done somehow or other. Nothing can stop His work.

"What then is man's duty? What else can it be? It is just to take refuge in God and to pray to Him with a yearning heart for His vision.

Difficulty of karma-yoga

"Sambhu said to me: 'It is my desire to build a large number of hospitals and dispensaries. Thus I can do much good to the poor.' I said to him: 'Yes, that is not bad if you can do it in a detached spirit. But to be detached is very difficult unless you sincerely love God. And further, if you entangle yourself in many activities, you will be attached to them in a way unknown to yourself. You may think you have no motive behind your work, but perhaps there has already grown a desire for fame and the advertising of your name. Then again, if you are entangled in too many activities, the pressure of them will make you forget God.' I also said to him: 'Sambhu, let me ask you one thing. If God appears before you, will you want Him or a number of hospitals and dispensaries?' If one realizes God, one doesn't enjoy anything else. One who has tasted syrup of sugar candy cannot enjoy a drink made from common treacle.

"Those who build hospitals and dispensaries, and get pleasure from that, are no doubt good people; but they are of a different type. He who is a real devotee of God seeks nothing but God. If he finds himself entangled in too much work, he earnestly prays, 'Lord, be gracious and reduce my work; my mind, which should think of Thee day and night, has been wasting its power; it thinks of worldly things alone.' Pure-souled devotees are in a class by themselves. You cannot have real love of God unless you know that God alone is real and all else illusory. You cannot have real love of God unless you know that the world is impermanent, only of two days' existence, while its Creator alone is real and eternal. "Janaka and sages like him worked in the world at the command of God.

Spirituality and book-learning

(To Bankim) "Some people think that God cannot be realized without the study of books and scriptures. They think that first of all one should learn of this world and its creatures; that first of all one should study 'science'. (All laugh.) They think that one cannot realize God without first understanding His creation. Which comes first, 'science' or God? What do you say?"

BANKIM: "I too think that we should first of all know about the different things of the world. How can we know of God without knowing something of this world? We should first learn from books."

MASTER: "That's the one cry from all of you. But God comes first and then the creation. After attaining God you can know everything else, if it is necessary.

"If you can somehow get yourself introduced to Jadu Mallick, then you will be able to learn, if you want to, the number of his houses and gardens and the amount of his money invested in government securities. Jadu Mallick himself will tell you all about them. But if you haven't met him and if you are stopped by his door-keepers when you try to enter his house, then how will you get the correct information about his houses, gardens, and government securities? When you know God you know all else; but then you don't care to know small things. The same thing is stated in the Vedas. You talk about the virtues of a person as long as you haven't seen him, but no sooner does he

appear before you than all such talk stops. You are beside yourself with joy simply to be with him. You feel overwhelmed by simply conversing with him. You don't talk about his virtues any more.

"First realize God, then think of the creation and other things. Valmiki was given the name of Rāma to repeat as his mantra, but was told at first to repeat 'mara'. 'Ma' means God and 'ra' the world. First God and then the world. If you know one you know all. If you put fifty zeros after a one, you have a large sum; but erase the one and nothing remains. It is the one that makes the many. First one, then many. First God, then His creatures and the world.

God and the world

"The one thing you need is to realize God. Why do you bother so much about the world, creation, 'science', and all that? Your business is to eat mangoes. What need have you to know how many hundreds of trees there are in the orchard, how many thousands of branches, and how many millions of leaves? You have come to the garden to eat mangoes. Go and eat them. Man is born in this world to realize God; it is not good to forget that and divert the mind to other things. You have come to eat mangoes. Eat the mangoes and be happy."

BANKIM: "Where do we get the mangoes?"

MASTER: "Pray to God with a longing heart. He will surely listen to your prayer if it is sincere. Perhaps He will direct you to holy men with whom you can keep company; and that will help you on your spiritual path. Perhaps someone will tell you, 'Do this and you will attain God.'"

BANKIM: "Who? The guru? He enjoys all the good mangoes himself and gives us the bad ones!" (Laughter.)

MASTER: "Why should that be so? The mother knows what food suits the stomachs of her different children. Can all of them digest pilau and Kalia? Suppose a fish has been procured. The mother doesn't give pilau and Kalia to all the children. For the weak child with a poor stomach she prepares simple soup. But does that mean she loves him the less?

Faith in guru

"One must have faith in the guru's words. The guru is none other than Satchidananda. God Himself is the Guru. If you only believe his words like a child, you will realize God. What faith a child has! When a child's mother says to him about a certain man, 'He is your brother', the child believes he really is his brother. The child believes it one hundred and twenty-five percent, though he may be the son of a brahmin, and the man the son of a blacksmith. The mother says to the child, 'There is a bugaboo in that room', and the child really believes there is a bugaboo in the room. Such is the faith of a child! One must have this childlike faith in the guru's words. God cannot be realized by a mind that is hypocritical, calculating, or argumentative. One must have faith and sincerity.

Hypocrisy will not do. To the sincere, God is very near; but He is far, far away from the hypocrite.

Yearning for God-vision

"One must have for God the yearning of a child. The child sees nothing but confusion when his mother is away. You may try to cajole him by putting a sweetmeat in his hand; but he will not be fooled. He only says, 'No, I want to go to my mother.' One must feel such yearning for God. Ah, what yearning! How restless a child feels for his mother! Nothing can make him forget his mother. He to whom the enjoyment of worldly happiness appears tasteless, he who takes no delight in anything of the world-money, name, creature comforts, sense pleasure-, becomes sincerely grief-stricken for the vision of the Mother. And to him alone the Mother comes running, leaving all Her other duties.

"Ah, that restlessness is the whole thing. Whatever path you follow-whether you are a Hindu, a Mussalman, a Christian, a Sakta, a Vaishnava, or a Brahmo-the vital point is restlessness. God is our Inner Guide. It doesn't matter if you take a wrong path-only you must be restless for Him. He Himself will put you on the right path.
"Besides, there are errors in all paths. Everyone thinks his watch is right; but as a matter of fact no watch is absolutely right. But that doesn't hamper one's work. If a man is restless for God he gains the company of sādhus and as far as possible corrects his own watch with the sādhu's help."

Trailokya of the Brahmo Samaj began to sing. Presently Sri Ramakrishna stood up and lost consciousness of the outer world. He became completely indrawn, absorbed in samādhi. The devotees stood around him in a circle. Pushing aside the crowd, Bankim came near the Master and began to watch him attentively. He had never seen anyone in samādhi.

After a few minutes Sri Ramakrishna regained partial consciousness and began to dance in an ecstatic mood. It was a never-to-be-forgotten scene. Bankim and his Anglicized friends looked at him in amazement. Was this the God-intoxicated state? The devotees also watched him with wondering eyes.

The singing and dancing over, the Master touched the ground with his forehead, saying, 'Bhagavata - Bhakta - Bhagavan! Salutations to the jnanis, yogis, and bhaktas! Salutations to all!" He sat down again and all sat around him.

BANKIM (to the Master): "Sir, how can one develop divine love?"

MASTER: "Through restlessness-the restlessness a child feels for his mother. The child feels bewildered when he is separated from his mother, and weeps longingly for her. If a man can weep like that for God he can even see Him.

"At the approach of dawn the eastern horizon becomes red. Then one knows it will soon be sunrise. Likewise, if you see a person restless for God, you can be pretty certain that he hasn't long to wait for His vision.

"A disciple asked his teacher, 'Sir, please tell me how I can see God.' 'Come with me,' said the guru, 'and I shall show you.' He took the disciple to a lake, and both of them got into the water. Suddenly the teacher pressed the disciple's head under the water. After a few moments he released him and the disciple raised his head and stood up. The guru asked him, 'How did you feel?' The disciple said, 'Oh! I thought I should die; I was panting for breath.' The teacher said, 'When you feel like that for God, then you will know you haven't long to wait for His vision.'

(To Bankim) "Let me tell you something. What will you gain by floating on the surface? Dive a little under the water. The gems lie deep under the water; so what is the good of throwing your arms and legs about on the surface? A real gem is heavy. It doesn't float; it sinks to the bottom. To get the real gem you must dive deep."

BANKIM: "Sir, what can we do? We are tied to a cork. It prevents us from diving." (All laugh.)

MASTER: "All sins vanish if one only remembers God. His name breaks the fetters of death. You must dive; otherwise you can't get the gem. Listen to a song."

The Master sang in his sweet voice:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God's Beauty;
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love.

Go seek, O mind, go seek Vrindāvan in your heart,
Where with His loving devotees
Sri Krishna sports eternally.

Light up, O mind, light up true wisdom's shining lamp,
And let it burn with steady flame
Unceasingly within your heart.

Who is it that steers your boat across the solid earth?
It is your guru, says Kubir;
Meditate on his holy feet.

All listened spellbound. Again Sri Ramakrishna began to talk.

MASTER (to Bankim): "There are some who do not want to dive. They say, 'Won't we become deranged if we go to excess about God?' Referring to those who are intoxicated with divine love, they say, 'These people have lost their heads.' But they don't understand this simple thing: God is the Ocean of Amrita, Immortality. Once I said to Narendra: 'Suppose there were a cup of syrup and you were a fly. Where would you sit to drink the syrup?' Narendra said, 'I would sit on the edge of the cup and stretch out my neck to drink it.' 'Why?' I asked. 'What's the harm of plunging into the middle of the cup and drinking the syrup?' Narendra answered, 'Then I should stick in the syrup and

die.' 'My child,' I said to him, 'that isn't the nature of the Nectar of Satchidananda. It is the Nectar of Immortality. Man does not die from diving into It. On the contrary he becomes immortal.'

"Therefore I say, dive deep. Don't be afraid. By diving deep in God one becomes immortal."

Bankim bowed low before the Master. He was about to take his leave.

BANKIM: "Sir, I am not such an idiot as you may think. I have a prayer to make. Please be kind enough to grace my house with the dust of your holy feet."

MASTER: "That's nice. I shall go if God wills."

BANKIM: "There too you will see devotees of God."

MASTER (smiling):"How so? What kind of devotees are they? Are they like those who said, 'Gopal! Gopal! Kesava! Kesava!'?"(All laugh.)

A DEVOTEE: "What is the story of 'Gopal', sir?"

MASTER (smiling): "Let me tell you. At a certain place there is a goldsmith's shop. The workers there are known as pious Vaishnavas: they have strings of beads around their necks, religious marks on their foreheads, and bags containing rosaries in their hands. They repeat the names of God aloud. One can almost call them sādhus; only they have to work as goldsmiths to earn their bread and support their wives and children. Many customers, hearing of their piety, come to the shop because they believe that in that shop there will be no trickery with their gold or silver. When the customers enter the shop, they see the workers repeating the name of Hari with their tongues and doing their work with their hands. No sooner do the customers take seats in the shop than one of the workers cries out, 'Kesava! Kesava! Kesava!' A few minutes later another says, 'Gopal! Gopal! Gopal!' After they talk a little while, the third man cries out, 'Hari! Hari! Hari!' In the mean time the customers have almost finished their transactions. Then the fourth exclaims, 'Hara! Hara! Hara!' The customers are very much impressed with the devotion and fervour of the owners and feel themselves quite secure in handing them the money. They are sure they won't be cheated.

"But do you know what lies behind all this? The man who says 'Kesava! Kesava!' after the arrival of the customers means, 'Who are they?' In other words, he wants to know how intelligent they are. The man who says 'Gopal! Gopal!' means to say he finds them no better than a herd of cows. The man saying 'Hari! Hari!' means, 'May I rob them?'; he suggests that since they are like a herd of cows they can be robbed. And the last man, who says 'Hara! Hara!', replies, 'Yes, rob them.' He means that since the customers are like a herd of cows, they can certainly be robbed. Here, too, you see a group of pious men, very much devoted to God!" (All laugh.)

Bankim took his leave; but he was absent-minded. When he reached the door he discovered that he had dropped his shawl in the room; he was in his short-sleeves. A gentleman handed him his shawl.

Of the devotees at Adhar's house, Sarat and Sannyal were brahmins. But Adhar belonged to the lower caste of the goldsmiths, and so the two brahmins quickly left, lest they should be pressed by their host to take their meal there. Sarat and Sannyal had been coming to the Master only a short time and did not know how fond the Master was of Adhar. The Master used to say that the devotees formed a separate caste by themselves; among them there could be no caste distinction.

Adhar entertained the Master and the devotees with a feast. It was quite late in the evening when the devotees returned home, cherishing in their hearts the image of the Master in his spiritual ecstasy and remembering his words of great wisdom.
Since Bankim had invited Sri Ramakrishna to visit his home, the Master a few days later sent Girish and M. to his Calcutta residence. At that time Bankim had a long discussion with these two devotees about the Master. He told them that he wanted to visit Sri Ramakrishna again. But his desire was not fulfilled.

Chapter 35

AT THE STAR THEATRE (II)

Sunday, December 14, 1884

SRI RAMAKRISHNA arrived at the Star Theatre on Beadon Street in Calcutta to see a play about the life of Prahlada. M., Baburam, Narayan, and other devotees were with him. The hall was brightly lighted. The play had not yet begun. The Master was seated in a box, talking with Girish.

MASTER (smiling): "Ah! You have written nice plays."

Assimilation of spiritual ideas

GIRISH: "But, sir, how little I assimilate! I just write."

MASTER: "No, you assimilate a great deal. The other day I said to you that no one could sketch a divine character unless he had love of God in his heart.

"Yes, one needs to assimilate spiritual ideas. I went to Keshab's house to see the play, Nava-Vrindāvan. I saw a deputy magistrate there who earned eight hundred rupees a month. Everyone said that he was a very learned man; but I found him restless because of a boy, his son. He was very anxious to find a good seat for the boy; he paid no attention to the spiritual conversation of the players. The boy was pestering him with questions: 'Father! What is this? What is that?' He was extremely busy with the boy. You see, he merely read books; but he didn't assimilate their ideas."

GIRISH: "I often ask myself, 'Why bother about the theatre any more?'"

MASTER: "No, no! Let things be as they are. People will learn much from your plays."

Master sees a performance

The performance began. Prahlada was seen entering the schoolroom as a student. At the sight of him Sri Ramakrishna uttered once or twice the word "Prahlada" and went into samādhi.

During another scene Sri Ramakrishna wept to see Prahlada under an elephant's feet. He cried when the boy was thrown into the fire.

The scene changed. Lakshmi and Narayana were seen seated in Goloka. Narayana was worried about Prahlada. This scene, too, threw Sri Ramakrishna into an ecstatic mood.

After the performance Girish conducted Sri Ramakrishna to his private room in the theatre. He said to the Master, "Would you care to see the farce, *Vivaha Vibhrata* [The Confusion of Marriage']?"

MASTER: "Oh, no! Why something like that after the life of Prahlada? I once said to the leader of a theatrical troupe, 'End your performance with some religious talk.' We have been listening to such wonderful spiritual conversation; and now to see 'The Confusion of Marriage'! A worldly topic! We should become our old selves again. We should return to our old mood."

GIRISH: "How did you like the performance?"

MASTER: "I found that it was God Himself who was acting the different parts. Those who played the female parts seemed to me the direct embodiments of the Blissful Mother, and the cowherd boys of Goloka the embodiments of Narayana Himself. It was God alone who had become all these.

Signs of God-vision & Different moods of liberated souls

"There are signs by which you can know whether a man has truly seen God. One of these is joy; there is no hesitancy in him. He is like the ocean: the waves and sounds are on the surface; below are profound depths. The man who has seen God behaves sometimes like a madman; sometimes like a ghoul, without any feeling of purity or impurity; sometimes like an inert thing, remaining speechless because he sees God within and without; sometimes like a child, without any attachment, wandering about unconcernedly with his cloth under his arm. Again, in the mood of a child, he acts in different ways: sometimes like a boy, indulging in frivolity; sometimes like a young man, working and teaching with the strength of a lion.

"Man cannot see God on account of his ego. You cannot see the sun when a cloud rises in the sky. But that doesn't mean there is no sun; the sun is there just the same.

"But there is no harm in the 'ego of a child'. On the contrary, this ego is helpful. Greens are bad for the stomach; but hinche is good. So hinche cannot properly be called greens. Sugar candy, likewise, cannot be classed with other sweets. Other sweets are injurious to the health, but not sugar candy.

"So I said to Keshab, 'If I tell you more than I have already said, you won't be able to keep your organization together.' That frightened him. Then I said to him, 'There is no harm in the "ego of a child" or the "ego of a servant".'

"He who has seen God finds that God alone has become the world and all its living beings; it is He who has become all. Such a person is called a superior devotee."

The ego of the devotee & Three classes of devotees

GIRISH (smiling); "Yes, God is everything. But the devotee keeps a trace of ego; that is not harmful."

MASTER (smiling): "Yes, there is no harm in that. That trace of ego is kept in order to enjoy God. You can enjoy divine bliss only when you make a distinction between yourself

and God-the distinction between the servant and the Master.
"There is also the devotee of the mediocre class: he sees that God dwells in all beings as their Inner Guide. But the inferior devotee says, 'God exists; He is up there', that is to say, beyond the sky. (All laugh.)

"When I saw the cowherd, boys of Goloka in your performance I felt that God has become all. He who has seen God knows truly that God alone is the Doer, that it is He who does everything."

GIRISH: "Sir, I know truly that it is God who does everything."

MASTER: "I say, 'O Mother, I am the machine and You are the Operator; I am inert and You make me conscious; I do as You make me do; I speak as You make me speak.' But the ignorant say, 'I am partly responsible, and God is partly responsible.' "
GIRISH: "Sir, I am not really doing anything. Why should I bother about work at all?"

MASTER: "No, work is good. When the ground is well cultivated and cleared of stones and pebbles, whatever you plant will grow. But one should work without any personal motive.

"There are two types of paramahamsas: the Jnāni and the premi. The Jnāni is self-centred; he feels that it is enough to have Knowledge for his own self. The premi, like Sukadeva, after attaining his own realization, teaches men. Some eat mangoes and wipe off the traces from their mouths; but some share their mangoes with others. Spades and baskets are needed to dig a well. After the digging is over, some throw the spades and baskets into the well. But others put them away; for a neighbour may use them. Sukadeva and a few others kept the spades and baskets for the benefit of others. (To Girish) You should do the same."

GIRISH: "Please bless me, sir."

MASTER: "Have faith in the Divine Mother and you will attain everything."

GIRISH: "But I am a sinner."

MASTER: "The wretch who constantly harps on sin becomes a sinner."

GIRISH: "Sir, the very ground where I used to sit would become unholy."

MASTER: "How can you say that? Suppose a light is brought into a room that has been dark a thousand years; does it illumine the room little by little, or all in a flash?"

GIRISH: "Then you have blessed me."

MASTER: "If you sincerely believe it. What more shall I say? I eat and drink and chant the name of God."

GIRISH: "I have no sincerity. Please give it to me."

MASTER: "I? Sages like Nārada and Sukadeva could have done that."

GIRISH: "I don't see Nārada and Sukadeva. 'But you are here before me."

MASTER (smiling): "All right. You have faith."

All remained silent. The conversation began again.

GIRISH: "I have one desire: love of God for its own sake."

MASTER: "Only the Isvarakotis have such love. It is not for ordinary men."

All sat in silence. The Master began to sing in an absent-minded mood, his gaze turned upward:

Can everyone have the vision of Syama? Is Kāli's treasure for everyone?
Oh, what a pity my foolish mind will not see what is true!
Even with all His penances, rarely does Śiva Himself behold
The mind-bewitching sight of Mother Syama's crimson feet.

To him who meditates on Her the riches of heaven are poor indeed;
If Syama casts Her glance on him, he swims in Eternal Bliss.

The Prince of yogis, the King of the gods, meditate on Her feet in vain;
Yet worthless Kamalakanta yearns for the Mother's blessed feet!

Girish repeated:

Yet worthless Kamalakanta yearns for the Mother's blessed feet!

Restlessness for God-vision

MASTER (to Girish): "One can realize God through intense renunciation. But the soul must be restless for Him, as restless as one feels for a breath of air when one's head is pressed under water.

"A man can see God if he unites in himself the force of these three attractions: the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man, the husband's attraction for the chaste wife, and the child's attraction for its mother. If you can unite these three forms of love and give it all to God, then you can see Him at once.

Cry to your Mother Syama with a real cry, O mind!
And how can She hold Herself from you?

"If a devotee prays to God with real longing, God cannot help revealing Himself to him.

"The other day I told you the meaning of bhakti. It is to adore God with body, mind, and words. 'With body' means to serve and worship God with one's hands, go to holy places with one's feet, hear the chanting of the name and glories of God with one's ears, and behold the divine image with one's eyes. 'With mind' means to contemplate and meditate on God constantly and to remember and think of His lila. 'With words' means to sing hymns to Him and chant His name and glories.

"Devotion as described by Nārada is suited to the Kaliyuga. It means to chant constantly the name and glories of God. Let those who have no leisure worship God at least morning and evening by whole-heartedly chanting His name and clapping their hands.

"The 'ego of a devotee' begets no pride; it does not create ignorance. On the contrary it helps one realize God. This ego is no more like the ordinary ego than hinche is like ordinary greens. One generally becomes indisposed by eating greens; but hinche removes excessive bile; it does one good. Sugar candy is not like ordinary sweets. Sweets are generally harmful, but sugar candy removes acidity.
"Nishtha leads to bhakti; bhakti, when mature, becomes bhava; bhava, when concentrated, becomes mahabhava; and last of all is prema. Prema is like a cord: by prema God is bound to the devotee; He can no longer run away. An ordinary man can at best achieve bhava. None but an Isvarakoti attains mahabhava and prema. Chaitanyadeva attained them.

"What is the meaning of jnanayoga? It is the path by which a man can realize the true nature of his own Self; it is the awareness that Brahman alone is his true nature. Prahlada sometimes was aware of his identity with Brahman. And sometimes he would see that God was one and he another; at such times he would remain in the mood of bhakti.

"Hanuman said, 'O Rāma, sometimes I find that You are the whole and I a part, sometimes that You are the Master and I Your servant; but, O Rāma, when I have the Knowledge of Reality, I see that You are I and I am You.'"

GIRISH: "Ah!"

Worldly man's spiritual discipline

MASTER: "Why shouldn't a man be able to realize God in the world? But he must have discrimination and dispassion; he must have the unshakable awareness that God alone is real and all else is unreal and has but a two days' existence. It will not do to float on the surface. You must dive deep."

With these words, the Master sang:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God's Beauty;
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love. . . .

MASTER: "You must remember another thing: in the ocean there is danger of alligators, that is to say, of lust and the like."

GIRISH: "I am not afraid of the King of Death."

MASTER: "But I am speaking of the danger of the alligators of lust and the like. Because of them one should smear one's body with turmeric before diving in-the turmeric of discrimination and dispassion.

"Some attain knowledge of God in the world. Mention is made of two classes of yogis: the hidden and the known. Those who have renounced the world are 'known' yogis: all recognize them. But the 'hidden' yogis live in the world. They are not known. They are like the maidservant who performs her duties in the house but whose mind is fixed on her children in the country. They are also, as I have told you, like the loose woman who performs her household duties zealously but whose mind constantly dwells on her lover. It is very hard to cultivate discrimination and dispassion. It is not easy to get rid of the idea, 'I am the master and all these are mine.' I saw a deputy magistrate, who earns a salary of eight hundred rupees, paying no attention to a religious discourse. He had brought one of his children with him and was busy finding a good place for him to sit. I know another man, whom I shall not name, who used to devote a great deal of time to japa; but he bore false witness in court for the sake of ten thousand rupees. Therefore I say that a man can realize God in the world, too, but only if he has discrimination and dispassion."

Master and Girish

GIRISH: "What will happen to this sinner?"

Sri Ramakrishna sang in a tender voice, turning his eyes upward:

Meditate on the Lord, the Slayer of hell's dire woes,
He who removes the fear of death;
Thinking of Him, the soul is freed from worldly grief
And sails across the sea of life in the twinkling of an eye.

Consider, O my mind, why you have come to earth;
What gain is there in evil thoughts and deeds?
Your way lies not through these: perform your penance here
By meditating long and deep on the everlasting Lord.

MASTER: "'Sails across the sea of life in the twinkling of an eye.' One attains the vision of God if Mahamaya steps aside from the door. Mahamaya's grace is necessary: hence the worship of Śakti. You see, God is near us, but it is not possible to know Him because Mahamaya stands between. Rāma, Lakshmana, and Sita were walking along. Rāma walked ahead, Sita in the middle, and Lakshmana last. Lakshmana was only two and a half cubits away from Rāma, but he couldn't see Rāma because Sita-Mahamaya-was in the way.

"While worshipping God, one should assume a definite attitude. I have three attitudes: the attitude of a child, the attitude of a maidservant, and the attitude of a friend. For a long time I regarded myself as a maidservant and a woman companion of God; at that time I used to wear skirts and ornaments, like a woman. The attitude of a child is very good.

"The attitude of a 'hero' is not good. Some people cherish it. They regard themselves as Purusha and woman as Prakriti; they want to propitiate woman through intercourse with her. But this method often causes disaster."

GIRISH: "At one time I too cherished that idea."

Sri Ramakrishna looked at Girish pensively.

GIRISH: "I still have that twist in my mind. Tell me what I should do."

Sri Ramakrishna reflected a minute and said, "Give God your power of attorney. Let Him do whatever He likes."

The conversation then turned to Sri Ramakrishna's young devotees.
MASTER (to Girish and the others): "In meditation I see the inner traits of these youngsters. They have no thought of acquiring house and property. They do not crave sex pleasure. Those of the youngsters who are married do not sleep with their wives. The truth is that unless a man has got rid of rajas and has acquired sattva, he cannot steadily dwell in God; he cannot love God and realize Him."

GIRISH: "You have blessed me."

MASTER: "How is that? I said that you would succeed if you were sincere."

Saying this, the Master exclaimed, "Ānandamayi!" and went into samādhi. He remained in that state a long time. Regaining partial consciousness, he said, "Where are those rascals?" M. brought Baburam to him. Sri Ramakrishna looked at Baburam and the other devotees and said, still in ecstasy.

"The bliss of Satchidananda is indeed good; but what about the bliss of divine inebriation?"

He began to sing:

Once for all, this time, I have thoroughly understood;
From One who knows it well, I have learnt the secret of bhava…

Again he sang:

Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,
So long as I can breathe my last with Kāli's name upon my lips?

The Master continued, saying, "While praying to the Divine Mother, I said, 'O Mother, I don't seek anything else: give me only pure love for Thee.' "

Sri Ramakrishna was pleased with Girish's calm mood. He said to him, "This mood of yours is good; the calm mood is the best."

The Master was seated in the manager's room. A man entered and said, "Will you see the farce. 'The Confusion of Marriage'? It is being played now."

Sri Ramakrishna said to Girish: "What have you done? This farce after the life of Prahlada! First sweets and rice pudding and then a dish of bitter herbs!" After the theatre, the actresses, following Girish's instructions, came to the room to salute Sri Ramakrishna. They bowed before him, touching the ground with their foreheads. The devotees noticed that some of the actresses, in saluting the Master, touched his feet. He said to them very tenderly, "Please don't do that, mother!"

After the actresses had left the room, Sri Ramakrishna said to the devotees, "It is all He, only in different forms."

The carriage was ready at the door. Girish and the others came to the street to see the Master off. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna stepped into the carriage, he went into deep samādhi. Narayan and several other devotees were with him. The carriage started for Dakshineswar.

Saturday, December 27, 1884

It was the Christmas season. Taking advantage of the holiday, many devotees came to the temple garden to visit the Master, some of them arriving in the morning. Among these were Kedār, Ram, Nityagopal, Tārak, Surendra, M., Sarada Prasanna, and a number of young devotees. This was Sarada Prasanna's first visit.

MASTER (to M.): "Where is Bankim? Haven't you brought him with you?" Bankim was a school boy whom Sri Ramakrishna had met in Bagh bazar. Noticing him even from a distance, the Master had said that he was a fine boy.

After a while Sri Ramakrishna went to the Panchavati with the devotees. They surrounded him, some sitting and some standing. He was seated on the cement platform around the tree, facing the southwest. He asked M. with a smile, "Have you brought the book?"

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "Read a little to me."

The devotees were eager to know the name of the book. It was called **Devi Choudhurani**. The Master had heard that the book dealt with motiveless action. He had also heard of the great renown of its author, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, whom he had met some days before, and he wanted to gauge the author's mind from the book.

M. said: "A young girl-the heroine-fell into the hands of a robber named Bhavani Pathak. Her name had been Prafulla, but the robber changed it to 'Devi Choudhurani'. At heart Bhavani was a good man. He made Prafulla go through many spiritual disciplines; he also taught her how to perform selfless action. He robbed wicked people and with that money fed the poor and helpless. He said to Prafulla, 'I chastise the wicked and protect the virtuous.'"

MASTER: "But that is a king's duty."

M: "In one place the author writes of bhakti. Bhavani Pathak sent a girl named Nishi to keep Prafulla company. Nishi was full of piety and looked on Krishna as her husband. Prafulla was already married; she had lost her father and lived with her mother. The neighbours had created a scandal about her character and avoided her, and so her father-in-law had not allowed her to live with his son. Later her husband had married again; but Prafulla was extremely devoted to her husband.

(To Sri Ramakrishna) "Now, sir, you can follow the story."

M. read:

NISHI: "I am a daughter of Bhavani Pathak. He is my father. He has also, in a way, given me in marriage."

PRAFULLA: "What do you mean?"

NISHI: "I have surrendered my all to Krishna."

PRAFULLA: "How is that?"

NISHI: "My beauty, youth, and soul."

PRAFULLA: "Then He is your husband."

NISHI: "Yes, because he alone is my husband who completely possesses me."

PRAFULLA (with a sigh): "I do not know. You talk that way because you do not know what a husband is. If you had a real husband, you could never have liked Sri Krishna.

The foolish Brajeswar-Prafulla's husband-was unaware that his wife loved him so much.

NISHI: "All can love Sri Krishna, because He has infinite beauty, infinite youth, and infinite splendour."

This young lady was a disciple of Bhavani and well-versed in logic. But Prafulla was illiterate; she could not answer Nishi's arguments.But the writers of the Hindu social laws knew the reply. God is infinite, no doubt; but one cannot keep the infinite in the small cage of the heart. One can do so only with the finite. Therefore the infinite Creator of the universe is worshipped by the Hindu in the cage of his heart as Sri Krishna, the finite Personal God. The husband of a woman has a still more definite form. Therefore if the wife cherishes pure conjugal love, the husband becomes the first step toward God. Hence the husband is the only Deity to the Hindu woman. Other societies are inferior to Hindu society in this respect.

Prafulla was an ignorant girl; she could not understand Nishi's arguments. She said, "Friend, I do not understand all these arguments; but you haven't yet told me your name."

NISHI: "Bhavani Pathak has given me the name of Nishi, Night. I am the sister of Diva, Day. One day I shall introduce my sister to you. Let me continue what I was saying. God alone is the real Husband; and to a woman the husband is her only God. Sri Krishna is the God of all. Why should we cherish two Deities, two Gods? If you divide to little bhakti of this small heart, how little there will be!"

PRAFULLA: "Don't be silly. Is there any limit to a woman's bhakti?"

NISHI: "There is no end to a woman's love. But bhakti is one thing, and love another"

Summarizing part of the book, M. said that Bhavani initiated Prafulla into spiritual life.

He continued reading:

During the first year Bhavani did not allow any man to enter Prafulla's house nor did he allow her to speak to any man outside the house. During the second year the rule about speaking was withdrawn, but no man was allowed inside her house. In the third year Prafulla shaved her head. Now Bhavani allowed his select disciples to see her. The shaven-headed disciple would converse with them on scriptural topics, keeping her eyes cast on the ground.

M. then read that Prafulla began the study of the scriptures; that she finished grammar and read Raghuvamsa, Kumara Sambhava, Sakuntala, and Naishadha; and that she studied a little of the Samkhya, Vedānta, and Nyaya philosophies.

Master and book-learning

MASTER: "Do you know what that means? People like the author of this book believe that knowledge is impossible without the study of books. They think that first comes the knowledge of books and then comes the knowledge of God. In order to know God one must read books! But if I want to know Jadu Mallick, must I first know the number of his houses and the amount of money he has in government securities? Do I really need all this information? Rather I should somehow enter his house, be it by flattering his gate-keepers or by disregarding their rough treatment, and talk to Jadu Mallick himself. Then, if I want to know about his wealth or possessions, I shall only have to ask him about them. Then it will be a very easy matter for me.

First God and then the world

First comes Rāma, then His riches, that is, the universe, This is why Valmiki repeated the mantra, 'mara'. 'Ma' means God, and 'ra' the world, that is to say, His riches."

The devotees listened to the Master's words with rapt attention.

M. continued with the story of Prafulla:

Prafulla finished her studies and then practised spiritual austerity for many days. Then one day Bhavani visited her; he wanted to instruct her about selfless work. He quoted to her from the Gitā: "Therefore do thou always perform obligatory actions without attachment; by performing action without attachment one attains to the highest."

He told her the three characteristics of disinterested action: first, control of the sense-organs; second, absence of egotism; and third, surrendering the fruit of action to Sri Krishna. He further told her that no dharma is possible for the egotistic person. Quoting from the Gitā, he said: "The *Gunās* of Prakriti perform all action. With the understanding deluded by egotism, man thinks, I am the doer."

Bhavani next spoke to her about surrendering the fruit of action to Sri Krishna. Again he quoted from the Gitā : "Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou givest away, whatever austerity thou practisest, O son of Kunti, do that as an offering unto Me."

MASTER: "This is fine. These are the words of the Gitā; one cannot refute them. But something else must be noted. The author speaks about surrendering the fruit of action to Sri Krishna, but not about cultivating bhakti for Him."

M: "No, that is not especially mentioned here.

"Next Prafulla and Bhavani talked about the use of money. Prafulla said that she offered all her wealth to Krishna."

M. read from the book again.

PRAFULLA: "Like my actions, I offer all my wealth to Sri Krishna."

BHAVANI: "All?"

PRAFULLA: "Yes, all."

BHAVANI: "In that case you won't he able to perform action in a detached spirit. If you have to work to earn your food, you will be attached to that work. Hence there are two alternatives before you: either you will have to get your food by begging, or you will have to live on your money. Even a beggar becomes attached to the alms he receives; therefore you must use your own money to maintain your body."

M. (to the Master, smiling): "That is the nature of the calculating mind."

MASTER: "Yes, that is the nature of the calculating mind; that is the way the worldly man thinks. But he who seeks God plunges headlong; he doesn't calculate about how much or how little he needs for the protection of his body."

M: "Next Bhavani asked Prafulla, 'How will you offer all this money to Sri Krishna?' Prafulla said: 'Why, Sri Krishna dwells in all beings. I shall distribute the money among them.' Bhavani answered, 'Good! Good!'

"Quoting from the Gitā , Bhavani said: 'He who sees Me in all things and all things in Me, never becomes separated from Me, nor do I become separated from him. That yogi who, established in unity, worships Me dwelling in all beings, abides in Me, whatever his mode of life. O Arjuna, that yogi is regarded as the highest who judges the pleasure and pain of all beings by the same standard that he applies to himself."

MASTER: "These are the characteristics of the highest bhakta."

M. again read from the book:

A man must work hard if he wants to help all beings with charity. Hence it is necessary for him to make a little display of clothes, of pomp and luxury. Therefore Bhavani said, "A little shop-keeping is necessary."

MASTER (sharply): "'A little shopkeeping is necessary!' One speaks as one thinks. If a man thinks of worldly things day and night, and deals with people hypocritically, then his words are coloured by his thoughts. If one eats radish, one belches radish. Instead of talking about 'shopkeeping', he should rather have said, 'A man should act as if he were the doer, knowing very well that he is really not the doer.' The other day a man was

singing here. The song contained words like 'profit' and 'loss'. I stopped him. If one contemplates a particular subject day and night, one cannot talk of anything else."

The reading continued. The author was describing the realization of God. Prafulla had become Devi Choudhurani. It was the month of Vaiśākh. Devi was seated on the roof of her house-boat talking with Diva and another woman companion. The moon was up. The boat had cast anchor in the Ganges. The conversation turned to the question of whether one could see God. Devi said, "As the aroma of a flower is directly perceived by the nose, so God is directly perceived by the mind."

At this point the Master interrupted and said: "Yes, God is directly perceived by the mind, but not by this ordinary mind. It is the pure mind that perceives God, and at that time this ordinary mind does not function. A mind that has the slightest trace of attachment to the world cannot be called pure. When all the impurities of the mind are removed, you may call that mind Pure Mind or Pure Ātman."

M: "The author says a little later that God cannot easily be perceived by the mind.

He says that one needs a telescope to have that direct vision. Yoga is the telescope. Yoga, as it is described in the Gitā, is of three kinds: jnāna, bhakti, and karma. One is able to see God through this telescope of yoga."

MASTER: "That is very good. These are the words of the Gitā."

M: "At last Devi Choudhurani met her husband. She showed him great devotion and said to him: 'You are my God. I wanted to learn the worship of another God but I did not succeed. You have taken the place of all gods.' "

MASTER (smiling): "'I did not succeed.' This is the dharma of a woman totally devoted to her husband. This also is a path."

The reading was over. The Master was smiling. The devotees looked at him, eagerly waiting to hear what he would say.

MASTER (to the devotees, smiling): "This is not so bad; it is called the dharma of chastity, the single-minded devotion of a wife to her husband. If God can be worshipped through an image, why shouldn't it be possible to worship Him through a living person? It is God Himself who sports in the world as men.

Master's spiritual experiences

"Oh, what a state I passed through! I passed some days absorbed in Śiva and Durga; some days absorbed in Radha and Krishna, and some days absorbed in Sita and Rāma. Assuming Radha's attitude, I would cry for Krishna, and assuming Sita's attitude, I would cry for Rāma.

"But lila is by no means the last word. Passing through all these states, I said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, in these states there is separation. Give me a state where there is no separation.' Then I remained for some time absorbed in the Indivisible Satchidananda. I removed the pictures of the gods and goddesses from my room. I began to perceive God in all beings. Formal worship dropped away. You see that bel-tree. I used to go there to pluck its leaves. One day, as I plucked a leaf, a bit of the bark came off. I found the tree full of Consciousness. I felt grieved because I had hurt the tree. One day I tried to pluck some *Durva* grass, but I found I couldn't do it very well. Then I forced myself to pluck it.

"I cannot cut a lemon. The other day I managed to cut one only with great difficulty; I chanted the name of Kāli and cut the fruit as they slaughter an animal before the Goddess. One day I was about to gather some flowers.

They were everywhere on the trees. At once I had a vision of Virat; it appeared that His worship was just over. The flowers looked like a bouquet placed on the head of the Deity. I could not pluck them.

"God sports through man as well. I see man as the embodiment of Narayana. As fire is kindled when you rub two pieces of wood together, so God can be seen in man if you have intense devotion. If there is suitable bait, big fish like carp gulp it down at once. When one is intoxicated with prema, one sees God in all beings. The gopis saw Krishna in everything; to them the whole world was filled with Krishna. They said that they themselves were Krishna. They were then in a God-intoxicated state. Looking at the trees, they said, 'These are hermits absorbed in meditation on Krishna.' Looking at the grass they said, 'The hair of the earth is standing on end at the touch of Krishna.'

"Devotion to the husband is also a dharma. The husband is God. Why shouldn't it be so? If God can be worshipped through an image, why not also through a living man? But three things are necessary in order to feel the presence of God in an image: first, the devotion of the priest; second, a beautiful image; and third, the devotion of the householder. Vaishnavcharan once said that in the end the mind of the devotee is absorbed in the human manifestation of God.

"But you must remember one thing. One cannot see God sporting as man unless one has had the vision of Him. Do you know the sign of one who has God-vision? Such a man acquires the nature of a child. Why a child? Because God is like a child. So he who sees God becomes like a child.

"God-vision is necessary. Now the question is, how can one get it? Intense renunciation is the means. A man should have such intense yearning for God that he can say, 'O Father of the universe, am I outside Your universe? Won't You be kind to me, You wretch?'.

"You partake of the nature of him on whom you meditate. By worshipping Śiva you acquire the nature of Śiva. A devotee of Rāma meditated on Hanuman day and night. He used to think he had become Hanuman. In the end he was firmly convinced that he had

even grown a little tail. Jnāna is the characteristic of Śiva, and bhakti of Vishnu. One who partakes of Śiva's nature becomes a Jnāni, and one who partakes of Vishnu's nature becomes a bhakta."

Chaitanya & The Divine Incarnation and the ordinary man

M: "But what about Chaitanyadeva? You said he had both knowledge and devotion."

MASTER (sharply): "His case was different. He was an Incarnation of God. There is a great difference between him and an ordinary man. The fire of Chaitanya's renunciation was so great that when Sarvabhauma poured sugar on his tongue, instead of melting, it evaporated into air. He was always absorbed in samādhi. How great was his conquest of lust! To compare him with a man! A lion eats meat and yet it mates only once in twelve years; but a sparrow eats grain and it indulges in sex-life day and night. Such is the difference between a Divine Incarnation and an ordinary human being. An ordinary man renounces lust; but once in a while he forgets his vow. He cannot control himself.

(To M):"He who has realized God looks on man as a mere worm. 'One cannot succeed in religious life if one has shame, hatred, or fear.' These are fetters. Haven't you heard of the eight fetters?

"How can one who is eternally perfect be afraid of the world? He knows how to play his game. An eternally perfect soul can even lead a worldly life if he desires. There are people who can fence with two swords at the same time; they are such expert fencers that, if stones are thrown at them, the stones hit the swords and come back."

Yoga and God-vision

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, how can one see God?"

MASTER: "Can you ever see God if you do not direct your whole mind toward Him? The Bhagavata speaks about Sukadeva. When he walked about he looked like a soldier with fixed bayonet. His gaze did not wander; it had only one goal and that was God. This is the meaning of yoga.

"The chatak bird drinks only rain-water. Though the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Godavari, and all other rivers are full of water, and though the seven oceans are full to the brim, still the chatak will not touch them. It will drink only the water that falls from the clouds.

"He who has developed such yoga can see God. In the theatre the audience remains engaged in all kinds of conversation, about home, office, and school, till the curtain goes up; but no sooner does it go up than all conversation comes to a stop, and the people watch the play with fixed attention. If after a long while someone utters a word or two, it is about the play.

"After a drunkard has drunk his liquer, he talks only about the joy of drunkenness."

Nityagopal was seated in front of Sri Ramakrishna. He was always in ecstasy. He sat there in silence.

MASTER (to Nityagopal, smiling): "Gopal! Why are you always silent?" Nityagopal answered like a child, "I-do-not-know."

MASTER: "I understand why you don't say anything; perhaps you are afraid of committing a transgression. You are right. Jaya and Vijaya were gate-keepers for Narayana. They refused Sanaka, Sanātana, and other rishis' admission into His palace. For this transgression, Jaya and Vijaya had to be born three times on earth.

"Again, there is the instance of Sridāmā; he was Viraja's gate-keeper in Goloka. Sri Krishna was in Virajā's house. Rādhika went there to surprise Krishna and wanted to enter the house. Sridāmā would not admit her, and so Radhika cursed him to be born as a demon on earth. But Sridāmā, too, cursed her.

"But there is one thing you should remember. When a boy walks holding his father's hand, he may fall into the gutter; but what has he to fear if the father holds him by the hand?"

The story of Sridāmā is narrated in the *Brahma-vaivarta Purana*.

Kedār, who was a government official, had been living at Dāccā for sometime. He had been transferred there from Calcutta. He was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and had gathered together at Dāccā many devotees, who came to him regularly for spiritual instruction. As one should not come empty handed to a religious man, the devotees would bring Kedār sweets and other offerings.

KEDĀR (to the Master, humbly): "Should I eat those offerings?"

MASTER: "It won't injure you if the offerings are given out of love for God. But they are harmful if they are given with any selfish motive."

KEDĀR: "I have explained everything to the devotees and now I feel relieved. I have told them that he who has given me his blessing knows all."

MASTER (smiling): "That is true. You see, people of all sorts come here. So they find here different things."

KEDĀR: "I do not need to know different things."

MASTER (smiling): "Why not? One should know a little of everything. If a man starts a grocery-shop, he keeps all kinds of articles there, including a little lentil and tamarind. An expert musician knows how to play a little on all instruments."

Sri Ramakrishna left the room and went toward the pine-grove. The devotees began to walk about in the garden. Several went to the Panchavati. Sri Ramakrishna met them there and said: "I have indigestion. I took a meal at the Mallicks'. They are very worldly people."

A few of the Master's personal things lay scattered on the cement platform of the Panchavati, and he asked M. to bring them. He proceeded to his room and the devotees followed.

In the afternoon the Master rested awhile. Afterwards a few devotees arrived. The Master sat on the small couch reclining against a pillow.

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, can one know God's attributes through the intellect?"

MASTER: "Certainly not by this ordinary intellect. Can one know God so easily? One must practise *sādhanā*. One must also adopt a particular attitude toward God, for instance, the attitude of a servant toward his master. The rishis of old had the attitude of Śānta. Do you know the attitude of the jnanis? It is to meditate on one's own Self. (To a devotee, with a smile) What is your attitude?"

The devotee gave no answer.

MASTER (smiling): "You have two attitudes: you meditate on your own Self and also cherish toward God the attitude of a servant. Am I not right?"

DEVOTEE (hesitating and smiling): "Yes, sir."

MASTER (smiling): "You see, as Hazra says, I can read people's thoughts.

"One can maintain those two attitudes only at a very advanced stage. Prahlada maintained them. But one must work hard in order to practise this ideal.

"Let me give an illustration. Suppose a man is grasping the thorny branch of a plum-tree. His hand bleeds profusely; but he says, 'There is nothing the matter with me; I am not hurt.' If you ask him about his wound, he will say, 'It's all right; I am quite well.' Now is there any meaning in the mere utterance of these words? One must practise discipline in keeping with this ideal."

The devotees were giving their whole attention to what the Master was saying.

Chapter 36

THE MASTER'S BIRTHDAY

Sunday, February 22, 1885

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting on the northeast verandah outside his room at Dakshineswar. It was about eight o'clock in the morning. Many devotees, including Narendra, Rākhāl, Girish, Baburam, and Surendra, were present. They were celebrating the Master's birthday, which had fallen on the previous Monday. M. arrived and saluted him. The Master signed to him to take a seat near him.

Narottam was singing kirtan. Sri Ramakrishna was in partial ecstasy. The subject was Krishna's meeting with His cowherd friends in the meadow. Krishna had not yet arrived. The cowherd boys were restless for Him. One of them said that Mother Yaśoda was preventing Krishna from coming. Balāi [Balaram's pet name] said in a determined voice that he would bring Krishna with the sound of his horn. Balāi's love for Krishna knew no bounds. The music went on. The cowherd boys and girls heard Krishna's flute and were filled with spiritual emotion.

Master's love for Narendra

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna's eyes fell on Narendra, who was sitting very near him. He stood up and went into samādhi; he stood there touching Narendra's knee with his foot. Regaining consciousness he took his seat again. Narendra left the room. The music went on.

Sri Ramakrishna whispered to Baburam: "There is *Kshir* [sweet milk preparation] in the room. Give Narendra some."

Did the Master see Narendra as the embodiment of God?

After the kirtan Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room. Tenderly he began to feed Narendra with sweets. It was Girish's belief that God Himself had been born in the person of Sri Ramakrishna.

GIRISH (to the Master): "Your ways are like Krishna's. He too pretended many things to His mother Yaśoda."

MASTER: "True. It was because Krishna was an Incarnation of God. When God is born as a man He acts that way. You see, Krishna easily lifted the hill of Govardhan with His hand, but He made Nanda believe that He found it very hard to carry a footstool."

GIRISH: "Yes, sir, I have understood you now."

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch. It was about eleven o'clock. Ram and the other devotees wanted to dress him in a new cloth. The Master said, "No, no."

Pointing to an English-educated man, he said "What will he say about it?" At the earnest request of the devotees he said "Well, since you insist, I shall have to agree."

The devotees were arranging the Master's meal in the room. He asked Narendra to sing.

Narendra sang:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Thy formless beauty sparkles;
Therefore the yogis meditate in a dark mountain cave.
In the lap of boundless dark, on Mahanirvana's waves upborne,
Peace flows serene and inexhaustible.

Taking the form of the Void, in the robe of darkness wrapped,
Who art Thou, Mother, seated alone in the shrine of samādhi?
From the Lotus of Thy fear-scattering Feet flash Thy love's lightnings;
Thy Spirit-Face shines forth with laughter terrible and loud!

Master's samādhi

As Narendra sang the line, *"Who art Thou, Mother, seated alone in the shrine of samādhi?",* Sri Ramakrishna went into deep samādhi and lost all outer consciousness. After a long time, when he was regaining partial consciousness, the devotees seated him on the carpet and placed a plate of food before him. Still overcome with divine emotion, he began to eat the rice with both hands. He said to Bhavanāth, "Feed me." Because of his ecstatic mood he could not use his own right hand. Bhavanāth began to feed him Sri Ramakrishna could eat very little. Rām said to him, "Nityagopāl will eat from your plate."

MASTER: "Why from my plate? Why?"

RAM: "Why not?"

Nityagopal was also in an ecstatic mood. The Master put a morsel or two into his mouth with his own hand.

Some devotees from Konnagar arrived by boat. They entered Sri Ramakrishna's room singing kirtan; afterwards they went out to take some refreshments. Narottam was in the room. The Master said to him and the other devotees: "The music of the Konnagar devotees was dull. Music should be so lively as to make everyone dance. One should sing a song like this:

See how all Nadia is shaking
Under the waves of Gaurānga's love!

And along with it these lines:

Behold, the two brothers have come, who weep while chanting Hari's name,

The brothers who, in return for blows, offer to sinners Hari's love. . . .

And these too:

Gaur and Nitai, ye blessed brothers!
I have heard how kind you are,
And therefore I have come to you.

The devotees were taking the prasad. It was a sumptuous feast. Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "Haven't you invited the Mukherjis? Ask Surendra to feed the musicians."

Bepin Sarkar arrived. The devotees introduced him to the Master. Sri Ramakrishna sat up and said to the devotees, "Give him a seat and some betel-leaf." He said to Bepin humbly: "I am sorry not to be able to talk to you. There is a great crowd today."

Pointing to Girindra, Sri Ramakrishna said to Baburam, "Give him a carpet." Nityagopal was sitting on the floor. The Master asked a devotee to give him a carpet too.

Physician Mahendra of Sinthi arrived. The Master, smiling, asked Rākhāl by a sign to have the physician examine his pulse.

Turning to Ramlal, the Master said, "Be friendly with Girish Ghosh; then you will get a free ticket to the theatre."

Narendra had been talking a long time with Hazra on the porch. Since his father's death Narendra had been having financial worries. He entered the room and took a seat.

Hazra's eccentricities

MASTER (to Narendra): "Were you with Hazra? Both of you are in the same boat. You know the saying about the two friends: 'You are away from your country and he is away from his beloved.' Hazra, too, needs fifteen hundred rupees. (Laughter.)

"Hazra says: 'Narendra has acquired one hundred per cent sattva, though still there is in him a pink glow of rajas. But I have one hundred and twenty-five per cent pure sattva.' (All laugh.)

"I say to Hazra, 'You indulge in reasoning only: that is why you are so dry.' He retorts, 'No, I am dry because I drink the nectar of the sun.'

"Speaking of pure bhakti, I say to Hazra, 'A real devotee does not pray to God for money or riches.' Hazra replies: 'When the flood of divine grace descends, the rivers overflow; and further, the pools and canals are filled. By the grace of God one gets not only pure devotion but also the six supernatural powers, and money too.' "

Narendra and many other devotees were seated on the floor. Girish entered the room and joined them.

MASTER (to Girish): "I look on Narendra as Ātman. I obey him."

GIRISH: "Is there anyone you don't obey?"

MASTER (smiling): "He has a manly nature and I have the nature of a woman. He is a noble soul and belongs to the realm of the Indivisible Brahman."

Girish went out to have a smoke.

NARENDRA (to the Master): "I had a talk with Girish Ghosh. He is indeed a great man. We talked about you."

MASTER: "What did you say about me?"

NARENDRA: "That you are illiterate and we are scholars. Oh, we talked in that vein!" (Laughter.)

MANI MALLICK (to the Master): "You have become a pundit without reading a book."

Goal of scriptural study

MASTER (to Narendra and the others): "Let me tell you this: really and truly I don't feel sorry in the least that I haven't read the Vedānta or the other scriptures. I know that the essence of the Vedānta is that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. And what is the essence of the Gitā? It is what you get by repeating the word ten times. Then it is reversed into, *'Tagi',* which refers to renunciation. The pupil should hear the essence of the scriptures from the guru; then he should practise austerity and devotions. A man needs the letter he has received from home as long as he has not learnt its contents. After reading it, however, he sets out to get the thing he has been asked to send. Likewise, what need is there of the scriptures if you know their essence? The next thing is the practice of spiritual discipline."

Girish entered the room.

MASTER (to Girish): "Hello! What were you saying about me? I eat, drink, and make merry."

GIRISH: "What should we have been saying about you? Are you a holy man?"

MASTER: "No, nothing of the sort. Truly I do not feel I am a holy man.

GIRISH: "I am not your equal even in joking."

MASTER: "I once went to Jaygopal Sen's garden house wearing a red bordered cloth. Keshab was there. Looking at the red borders Keshab said: 'What's this? Such a flash of colour today! Such a display of red border I said, 'I have to cast a spell on Keshab; hence this display.' "

Narendra was going to sing again. Sri Ramakrishna asked M. to take down the Tānpura

from the wall. Narendra was a long time tuning it. The Master and the devotees became impatient. Binode said, "He will tune it today and sing another day." (Laughter.)

Sri Ramakrishna laughed. He said: "I feel like breaking the Tānpura to pieces! What is this? Only 'Tong-tong'! Then he will practise: 'Tana-nana -nere-num'!"

BHAVANĀTH: "Everybody feels annoyed like this before a musical performance begins."

NARENDRA (still tuning): "If you don't understand it."

MASTER (smiling): "There! He explains away our complaints!"

Narendra began to sing. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the small couch. Nityagopal and the other devotees were on the floor.

Narendra sang:

O Mother, Thou my Inner Guide, ever awake within my heart!
Day and night Thou holdest me in Thy lap.
Why dost Thou show such tenderness to this unworthy child of Thine?..
Then he sang:
O my lute of a single string!
Sing the blessed Mother's name,
For She is the solace of my soul. . . .

And again:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Thy formless beauty sparkles;
Therefore the yogis meditate in a dark mountain cave. . . .

In an ecstatic mood Sri Ramakrishna came down and sat by Narendra's side. He began to talk, still in ecstasy.

MASTER: "Shall I sing? Fie! (To Nityagopal) What do you say? One should listen to singing to awaken the inner spirit. Nothing matters afterwards. "He has kindled the fire. That is nice. Now all is silence. That's nice too. I am silent; you be silent too. The thing is to dive into the Elixir of Bliss.

"Shall I sing? Well, I may. Water is water whether it is still or in waves."

Narendra was seated near the Master. He was constantly worried about his financial difficulties at home. He was now twenty-three years old. Sri Ramakrishna looked at him intently.

MASTER (to Narendra, smiling): "Undoubtedly you are 'Kha'. But you have to worry about 'taxes'; that's the trouble." By "taxes" the Master meant Narendra's financial difficulties at home.

MASTER: "Krishnakishore used to say that he was 'Kha'. One day I visited him at his home and found him worried. He wouldn't talk to me freely. I asked him: 'What's the matter? Why are you brooding like this?' Krishna kishore said: 'The tax-collector came today. He said my pots and pans would be sold at auction if I didn't pay my taxes. That's what I am worrying about.' I laughed and said: 'How is that? You are surely 'Kha', the Ākāśa. Let the rascals take away your pots and pans. What is that to you?'

Occult powers

(To Narendra) "So I am saying that you are 'Kha'. Why are you so worried? Don't you know that Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, 'If you have one of the eight siddhis, you may get a little power, but you will not realize Me.' By siddhis one may acquire powers, strength, money, and such things, but not God.

Go beyond duality

"Let me tell you something else. Go beyond knowledge and ignorance. People say that such and such a one is a Jnāni; but in reality it is not so. Vasishtha was a great Jnāni, but even he was stricken with grief on account of the death of his sons. At this Lakshmana said to Rāma: 'This is amazing, Rāma. Even Vasishtha is so grief-stricken!' Rāma said: 'Brother, he who has knowledge has ignorance as well. He who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. He who knows good also knows bad. He who knows happiness also know misery. Brother, go beyond duality, beyond pleasure and pain, beyond knowledge and ignorance.' (To Narendra) So I am asking you to go beyond both knowledge and ignorance."

Sri Ramakrishna went back to his small couch. The devotees were seated on the floor. Surendra sat by his side. The Master cast an affectionate look on him and began to give him advice.

Advice to Surendra

MASTER (to Surendra): "Come here every now and then. Nangta used to say that a brass pot must be polished every day; otherwise it gets stained. One should constantly live in the company of holy men.

"The renunciation of 'woman and gold' is for sannyāsis. It is not for you.

Now and then you should go into solitude and call on God with a yearning heart. Your renunciation should be mental.

"Unless a devotee is of the heroic type he cannot pay attention to both God and the world. King Janaka lived a householder's life only after attaining perfection through austerity and prayer. He fenced with two swords, the one of Knowledge and the other of action."

The Master sang:

This very world is a mansion of mirth;
Here I can eat, here drink and make merry.

Janaka's might was unsurpassed;
What did he lack of the world or the Spirit?
Holding to one as well as the other,
He drank his milk from a brimming cup!

Duties of householders

MASTER: "For you, as Chaitanya said, the disciplines to be practised are kindness to living beings, service to the devotees, and chanting the name of God.

(To Surendra) "Why do I say all this to you? You work in a merchant's office. I say this to you because you have many duties to perform there.

"You tell lies at the office. Then why do I eat the food you offer me? Because you give your money in charity; you give away more than you earn. 'The seed of the melon is bigger than the fruit', as the saying goes.

"I cannot eat anything offered by miserly people. Their wealth is squandered in these ways: first, litigation; second, thieves and robbers; third, physicians; fourth, their wicked children's extravagance. It is like that.

Master praises charity

"Your giving money away in charity is very good. Those who have money should give in charity. The miser's wealth is spirited away, but the money of the charitable person is saved. He spends it for a righteous purpose. At Kamarpukur I have seen the farmers cutting channels to irrigate their fields. Sometimes the water rushes in with such force that the ridges around the fields are washed away and the crops destroyed. For this reason the farmers make holes here and there in the ridges. Since the water escapes through the holes, the ridges are not destroyed by the rush of the water. Furthermore, the escaping water deposits soft clay in the fields, which increases their fertility and gives a richer crop. He who gives away in charity achieves great results. He achieves the four fruits: dharma, artha, kama, and moksha."

The devotees listened with great attention to Sri Ramakrishna's words.

SURENDRA: "I cannot meditate well. I repeat the Divine Mother's name now and then. Lying in bed, I repeat Her name and fall asleep."

MASTER: "That is enough. You remember Her, don't you?

"There are two kinds of yoga: Mano Yoga and Karma Yoga. To perform, following the guru's instructions, such pious acts as worship, pilgrimage, and service to living beings is called karmayoga. The duties that Janaka performed are also called karmayoga. The meditation and contemplation of the yogis is called manoyoga."

"Sometimes I say to myself in the Kāli temple, 'O Mother, the mind is nothing but Yourself.' Therefore Pure Mind, Pure Buddhi, and Pure Ātman are one and the same thing."

It was about dusk. Many of the devotees saluted Sri Ramakrishna and started to go home. The Master went to the west porch. Bhavanāth and M. were with him.

MASTER (to Bhavanāth): "Why do you come here so seldom?"

BHAVANĀTH (smiling): "Sir, I visit you once in a fortnight. I saw you in the street the other day, so I didn't come here."

MASTER: "What do you mean? What can you gain by mere seeing? Touch and talk are also necessary."

The evening worship had begun in the temples. It was the eighth day of the bright fortnight of the moon; the temple domes, the courtyard, the gardens, and the trees were shining in the moonlight. The Ganges was flowing north with a murmuring sound. Sri Ramakrishna sat on the small couch in his room absorbed in contemplation of the Divine Mother.

The evening worship was over. One or two devotees were still in the temple garden. Narendra had left. Sri Ramakrishna was pacing the verandah northeast of his room. M. stood there looking at him. Suddenly he said to M., "Ah, how sweet Narendra's music is!"

M: "Yes, sir. That song beginning with 'In dense darkness' is particularly beautiful."

MASTER: "You are right. That song has a deep meaning. A part of my mind is still drawn to it."

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "Meditation in darkness is prescribed in the Tantra."

Master and Girish

Girish Ghosh came and stood by Sri Ramakrishna, who had started to sing:

Is Kāli, my Mother, really black?
The Naked One, of blackest hue,
Lights the Lotus of the Heart. . . .

Sri Ramakrishna was filled with divine fervour. Standing with one arm resting on Girish's body he sang:

Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,
So long as I can breathe my last with Kāli's name upon my lips?
What need of rituals has a man, what need of devotions any more,
If he repeats the Mother's name at the three holy hours?

Rituals may pursue him close, but never can they overtake him.
. . .

Then he sang:

Once for all, this time, I have thoroughly understood;
From One who knows it well, I have learnt the secret of bhava.
A man has come to me from a country where there is no night,
And now I cannot distinguish day from night any longer;
Rituals and devotions have all grown profitless for me.

My sleep is broken; how can I slumber any more?
For now I am wide awake in the sleeplessness of yoga.
O Divine Mother, made one with Thee in yoga-sleep at last,
My slumber I have lulled asleep for evermore.
I bow my head, says Prasad, before desire and liberation;
Knowing the secret that Kāli is one with the highest Brahman,
I have discarded, once for all, both righteousness and sin.
As Sri Ramakrishna looked at Girish, his ecstatic fervour became more intense.

He sang:

I have surrendered my soul at the fearless feet of the Mother;
Am I afraid of Death any more?
Unto the tuft of hair on my head
Is tied the almighty mantra, Mother Kāli's name.
My body I have sold in the market-place of the world
And with it have bought Sri Durga's name. . .

Intoxicated with God, Sri Ramakrishna repeated the lines:

My body I have sold in the market-place of the world
And with it have bought Sri Durga's name.

Looking at Girish and M. he said, "'Divine fervour fills my body and robs me of consciousness.'

"Here 'consciousness' means consciousness of the outer world. One needs the Knowledge of Reality and Brahman.

Selfless divine love

"Bhakti, love of God, is the only essential thing. One kind of bhakti has a motive behind it. Again, there is a motiveless love, pure devotion, a love of God that seeks no return. Keshab Sen and the members of the Brahmo Samaj didn't know about motiveless love. In this love there is no desire; it is nothing but pure love of the Lotus Feet of God.

"There is another kind of love, known as urjhitabhakti, an ecstatic love of God that overflows, as it were. When it is awakened, the devotee 'laughs and weeps and dances

and sings'. Chaitanyadeva is an example of this love. Rāma said to Lakshmana, 'Brother, if anywhere you see the manifestation of urjhita bhakti, know for certain that I am there.'"

GIRlSH: "Everything is possible through your grace. What was I before? And see what I am now."

MASTER: "You had latent tendencies; so they are manifesting themselves now. Nothing happens except at the proper time. Take the case of a patient. Nature has almost cured him, when the physician prescribes a herb and asks him to drink its juice. After taking the medicine he is completely cured. Now, is the patient cured by the medicine, or does he get well by himself? Who can tell?

"Lakshmana said to Lava and Kusa: 'You are mere children; you don't know Rāma's power. At the touch of His feet, Ahalyā, who had been turned into a stone, got back her human form.' Lava and Kusa said: 'Revered sir, we know that. We have heard the story. The stone became Ahalyā because of the power of the holy man's words. The sage Gautama said to her: "In the Tretayuga, Rāma will pass this hermitage. You will become Hanuman being again at the touch of His feet."' Now, who can tell whether the miracle happened in order that the sage's words should be fulfilled or on account of Rāma's holiness?

"Everything happens by the will of God. If your spiritual consciousness has been awakened at this place, know that I am only an instrument. 'Uncle Moon is everybody's uncle.' All happens by the will of God."

GIRISH (smiling): "Did you say 'by the will of God'? What I am saying is the very same thing." (All laugh.)

MASTER (to Girish): "By being guileless one can speedily realize God. There are several kinds of people who do not attain divine knowledge. First, a man with a perverse mind; he is not guileless. Second, one who is very fastidious about outer purity. Third, a doubting person."

Sri Ramakrishna spoke highly of Nityagopal's ecstasy.

Three or four devotees stood near Sri Ramakrishna on the verandah and listened to his words about the exalted state of the paramahamsa. The Master said: "A Paramahamsa is always conscious that God alone is real and all else illusory. Only the swan has the power to separate milk from a mixture of milk and water. The swan's tongue secretes an acid that separates the milk from the mixture. The paramahamsa also possesses such a juice; it is his ecstatic love for God. That separates the Real from the mixture of the Real and the unreal. Through it one becomes aware of God and sees Him."

Wednesday, February 25, 1885

Knowledge of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna was at the house of Girish Ghosh in Bosepara Lane, Calcutta. It was about three o'clock when M. arrived and prostrated himself before him. The Master was going to see a play at the Star Theatre. He was talking with the devotees about the Knowledge of Brahman.

MASTER: "Man experiences three states of consciousness: waking, dream, and deep sleep. Those who follow the path of knowledge explain away the three states. According to them, Brahman is beyond the three states. It is also beyond the gross, the subtle, and the causal bodies, and beyond the three *Gunās*-sattva, rajas, and tamas. All these are māyā, like a reflection in a mirror. The reflection is by no means the real substance. Brahman alone is the Substance and all else is illusory.

"The knowers of Brahman say, further, that it is the identification of the soul with the body that creates the notion of duality. In that state of identification the reflection appears real. When this identification disappears, a man realizes, 'I am He; I am Brahman.'

Two paths of Brahmajnana

A DEVOTEE: "Then shall we all follow the path of reasoning?"

MASTER: "Reasoning is one of the paths; it is the path of the Vedantists. But there is another path, the path of bhakti. If a bhakta, weeps longingly for the Knowledge of Brahman, he receives that as well. These are the two paths: jnāna and bhakti.

The ego of the Divine Incarnation

"One may attain the Knowledge of Brahman by either path. Some retain bhakti even after realizing Brahman, in order to teach humanity. An Incarnation of God is one of these.

"A man cannot easily get rid of the ego and the consciousness that the body is the soul. It becomes possible only when, through the grace of God, he attains samādhi-nirvikalpa samādhi, jada samādhi.

"The ego of the Incarnations returns to them when they come down from the plane of samādhi; but then it is the 'ego of Knowledge' or the 'ego of Devotion'. Through the 'ego of Knowledge' they teach men. Sankaracharya kept the 'ego of Knowledge'.

"Through the 'ego of Devotion' Chaitanyadeva tasted divine love and enjoyed the company of the devotees. He talked about God and chanted His name.

The path of bhakti

"Since one cannot easily get rid of the ego, a bhakta does not explain away the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. He accepts all the states. Further, he accepts the three *Gunās*-sattva, rajas, and tamas. A bhakta sees that God alone has become the twenty-

four cosmic principles, the universe, and all living beings. He also sees that God reveals Himself to His devotees in a tangible form, which is the embodiment of Spirit.

"The bhakta takes shelter under Vidyā-māyā. He seeks holy company, goes on pilgrimage, and practises discrimination, devotion, and renunciation. He says that, since a man cannot easily get rid of his ego, he should let the rascal remain as the servant of God, the devotee of God.

Meaning of liberation

"But a bhakta also attains the Knowledge of Oneness; he sees that nothing exists but God. He does not regard the world as a dream, but says that it is God Himself who has become everything. In a wax garden you may see various objects, but everything is made of wax.

"But a man realizes this only when his devotion to God has matured. One gets jaundice when too much bile accumulates. Then one sees everything as yellow. From constantly meditating on Krishna, Radhika saw everything as Krishna; moreover, she even felt that she herself had become Krishna. If a piece of lead is kept in a lake of mercury a long time, it turns into mercury. The cockroach becomes motionless by constantly meditating on the kumira worm; it loses the power to move. At last it is transformed into a kumira. Similarly, by constantly meditating on God the bhakta loses his ego; he realizes that God is he and he is God. When the cockroach becomes the kumira everything is achieved. Instantly one obtains liberation.

"As long as God retains the ego in a man, he should establish a definite relationship with God, calling on Him as Master, Mother, Friend, or the like. I spent one year as a handmaid-the handmaid of the Divine Mother, the Embodiment of Brahman. I used to dress myself as a woman. I put on a nose-ring. One can conquer lust by assuming the attitude of a woman.

Master warns against lust

"One must worship the *Ādyāśakti*. She must be propitiated. She alone has assumed all female forms. Therefore I look on all women as mother. The attitude of looking on woman as mother is very pure. The Tantra mentions the *Vamachara* method also. But that is not a good method; it causes the aspirant's downfall. A devotee keeping an object of enjoyment near him has reason to be afraid.

"Looking on woman as mother is like fasting on the Ekadasi day without touching even a drop of water; in this attitude there is not the slightest trace of sensual enjoyment. Another way of observing the Ekadasi allows the taking of fruit and the like. One can also observe the day by eating luchi and curries! But my attitude is not to touch even a drop of water while I observe the fast. I worshipped the Shorasi as my mother; I looked on all parts of her body as those of my mother. This attitude of regarding God as Mother is the last word in *sādhanā*. 'O God, Thou art my Mother and I am Thy child'-this is the last word in spirituality.

Sannyāsi's discipline

"The sannyāsi's way of living is like observing the ekadasi fast without taking even a drop of water. If he clings to enjoyment, then he has reason to be afraid. 'Woman and gold' is enjoyment. If a monk enjoys it, he is swallowing his own spittle, as it were. There are different kinds of enjoyment: money, wealth, name, fame, and sense pleasures. It is not good for a sannyāsi to sit in the company of a woman devotee, or even to talk to her. This injures him and others as well. Then others cannot learn from him; he cannot set an example to humanity. A sannyāsi keeps his body in order to teach mankind.

"To sit with a woman or talk to her a long time has also been described as a kind of sexual intercourse. There are eight kinds. To listen to a woman and enjoy her conversation is one kind; to speak about a woman is another kind; to whisper to her privately is a third kind; to keep something belonging to a woman and enjoy it is a fourth kind; to touch her is a fifth. Therefore a sannyāsi should not salute his guru's young wife, touching her feet. These are the rules for sannyāsis.

Householders discipline

"But the case is quite different with householders. After the birth of one or two children, the husband and wife should live as brother and sister. The other seven kinds of sexual intercourse do not injure them much.

"A householder has various debts: debts to the gods, to the fathers, and to the rishis. He also owes a debt to his wife. He should make her the mother of one or two children and support her if she is a chaste woman.

"Householders do not know who is a good wife and who is a bad wife, who is a vidyaŚakti and who is an avidyaŚakti. A vidyaŚakti, a good wife, has very little lust and anger. She sleeps little. She pushes her husband's head away from her. She is full of affection, kindness, devotion, modesty, and other noble qualities. Such a wife serves all, looking on all men as her children. Further, she helps increase her husband's love of God. She doesn't spend much money lest her husband should have to work hard and thus not get leisure to think of God.

"Mannish women have different traits. These are bad traits: squint eyes and hollow eyes, catlike eyes, lantern jaws like a calf's, and pigeon-breast."

GIRISH: "What is the way for people like us?"

Different aspects of bhakti

MASTER: "Bhakti is the only essential thing. Bhakti has different aspects: the sattvic, the rajasic, and the tamasic. One who has sattvic bhakti is very modest and humble. But a man with tamasic bhakti is like a highwayman in his attitude toward God. He says: 'O God, I am chanting. Your name; how can I be a sinner? O God, You are my own Mother; You must reveal your-self to me.' "

GIRISH (smiling): "It is you, sir, who teach us tamasic bhakti."

Different kinds of samādhi

MASTER (smiling): "There are certain signs of God-vision. When a man sees God he goes into samādhi. There are five kinds of samādhi. First, he feels the *Mahāvāyu* rise like an ant crawling up. Second, he feels It rise like a fish swimming in the water. Third, he feels It rise like a snake wriggling along. Fourth, he feels It rise like a bird flying-flying from one branch to another. Fifth, he feels It rise like a monkey making a big jump; the *Mahāvāyu* reaches the head with one jump, as it were, and samādhi follows.

"There are two other kinds of samādhi. First, the sthita samādhi, when the aspirant totally loses outer consciousness: he remains in that state a long time, it may be for many days. Second, the *Unmana Samādhi*: it is to withdraw the mind suddenly from all sense-objects and unite it with God.

(To M.) "Do you understand this?"

M: "Yes, sir."

GIRISH: "Can one realize God by *sādhanā*?"

MASTER: "People have realized God in various ways. Some through much austerity, worship, and devotion; they have attained perfection through their own efforts. Some are born perfect, as for example Nārada and Sukadeva; they are called nityasiddha, eternally perfect. There are also those who have attained perfection all of a sudden; it is like a man's unexpectedly coming into a great fortune. Again, there are instances of people's realizing God in a dream and by divine grace."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sang, intoxicated with divine fervour:

Can everyone have the vision of Syama? Is Kāli's treasure for everyone?
Oh, what a pity my foolish mind will not see what is true! . . .

Sri Ramakrishna remained in ecstasy a few moments. Girish and the other devotees were seated before him. A few days earlier Girish had been very rude to the Master at the Star Theatre; but now he was in a calm state of mind.

MASTER (to Girish): "This mood of yours is very good; it is peaceful. I prayed about you to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, make him peaceful so that he won't abuse me.' "

GIRISH (to M.): "I feel as if someone were pressing my tongue. I can't talk."

Sri Ramakrishna was still in an indrawn mood; he seemed to be gradually forgetting the men and the objects around him. He tried to bring his mind down to the relative world. He looked at the devotees.

Looking at M., he said: "They all come to Dakshineswar. Let them. Mother knows everything." To a young man of the neighbourhood he said: "Hello! What do you think? What is the duty of man?" All sat in silence. To Narayan he said: "Don't you want to pass the examinations? But, my dear child, a man freed from bondage is Śiva; entangled in bondage, he is jiva."

Sri Ramakrishna was still in the God-intoxicated mood. There was a glass of water near him. He drank the water. He said to himself, "Why, I have drunk water in this mood!"

It was not yet dusk. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Atul, who was seated in front of him. Atul was Girish's brother and a lawyer of the High Court of Calcutta. A brahmin neighbour was also seated near him.

MASTER (to Atul): "All I want to tell you is this. Follow both; perform your duties in the world and also cultivate love of God."

BRAHMIN: "Can anyone but a brahmin achieve perfection?"

MASTER: "Why should you ask that? It is said that in the Kaliyuga the sudras achieve love of God. There are the instances of Savari, Ruhidas, the untouchable Guhaka, and others."

NARAYAN (smiling): "Brahmins and sudras-all are one."

BRAHMIN: "Can a man realize God in one birth?"

MASTER: "Is anything impossible for the grace of God? Suppose you bring a light into a room that has been dark a thousand years; does it remove the darkness little by little? The room is lighted all at once. (To Atul) Intense renunciation is what is needed. One should be like an unsheathed sword. When a man has that renunciation, he looks on his relatives as black cobras and his home as a deep well.

"One should pray to God with sincere longing. God cannot but listen to prayer if it is sincere."

All sat in silence, pondering Sri Ramakrishna's words.

MASTER (to Atul): "What is worrying you? Is it that you haven't that grit, that intense restlessness for God?"

How to cultivate longing for God

ATUL: "How can we keep our minds on God?"

MASTER: *"Abhyāsa Yoga,* the yoga of practice. You should practise calling on God every day. It is not possible to succeed in one day; through daily prayer you will come to long for God.

"How can you feel that restlessness if you are immersed in worldliness day and night? Formerly Jadu Mallick enjoyed spiritual talk; he liked to engage in it himself. But nowadays he doesn't show that much interest. He surrounds himself with flatterers day and night and indulges in worldly talk."

It was dusk. The lamp was lighted in the room. Sri Ramakrishna chanted the divine names. He was singing and praying. He said, "Chant the name of Hari, repeat the name of Hari, sing the name of Hari." Again he said, "Rāma! Rāma! Rāma!" Then: "O Mother! Thou dost ever enjoy Thine eternal Sports. Tell us, O Mother, what is the way? We have taken refuge in Thee; we have taken shelter at Thy feet."

Finding Girish restless, Sri Ramakrishna remained silent a moment. He asked Tejchandra to sit near him. The boy sat near the Master. He whispered to M. that he would have to leave soon.

MASTER (to M.): "What did he say?"

M: "He said he would have to go home."

MASTER: "Why do I attract these boys to me so much? They are pure vessels untouched by worldliness. A man cannot assimilate instruction if his mind is stained with worldliness. Milk can be safely kept in a new pot; but it turns sour if kept in a pot in which curd has been made. You may wash a thousand times a cup that has held a solution of garlic, but still you cannot remove the smell."

Master at the theatre

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the Star Theatre, on Beadon Street, to see a performance of Vrishaketu He sat in a box, facing the south. M. and other devotees were near him.

MASTER (to M.): "Has Narendra come?"

M: "Yes, sir."

The performance began. Karna and his wife Padmavati sacrificed their son to please God, who had come to them in the guise of a brahmin to test Karna's charity. During this scene one of the devotees gave a suppressed sigh. Sri Ramakrishna also expressed his sorrow.

After the play Sri Ramakrishna went to the recreation room of the theatre. Girish and Narendra were already there. The Master stood near Narendra and said, "I have come."

Sri Ramakrishna took a seat. The orchestra was playing in the auditorium.

MASTER (to the devotees): "I feel happy listening to the concert. The musicians used to play on the sanai at Dakshineswar and I would go into ecstasy. Noticing this, a certain sādhu said, 'This is a sign of the Knowledge of Brahman.'"

The orchestra stopped playing and Sri Ramakrishna began the conversation.

MASTER (to Girish): "Does this theatre belong to you?"

GIRISH: "It is ours, sir."

MASTER: "'Ours' is good; it is not good to say 'mine'. People say 'I' and 'mine'; they are egotistic, small-minded people."

NARENDRA: "The whole world is a theatre."

MASTER: "Yes, yes, that's right. In some places you see the play of vidyā and in some, the play of avidyā."

NARENDRA: "Everything is the play of vidyā."

MASTER: "True, true. But a man realizes that when he has the Knowledge of Brahman; But for a bhakta, who follows the path of divine love, both exist-Vidyā-māyā and Avidyā-māyā.

"Please sing a little."

Narendra sang:

Upon the Sea of Blissful Awareness waves of ecstatic love arise:
Rapture divine! Play of God's Bliss!
Oh, how enthralling!
Wondrous waves of the sweetness of God, ever new and ever enchanting,
Rise on the surface, ever assuming
Forms ever fresh.
Then once more in the Great Communion all are merged, as the barrier walls
Of time and space dissolve and vanish:
Dance then, O mind!
Dance in delight with hands upraised, chanting Lord Hari's holy name.

As Narendra sang the words, *"Then once more in the Great Communion all are merged",* Sri Ramakrishna said to him, "One realizes this after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman; then all is vidyā, Brahman, as you said." As Narendra sang the line, *"Dance in delight with hands upraised, chanting Lord Hari's holy name",* the Master said to him, "Sing that line twice."

After the song Sri Ramakrishna resumed the conversation.

GIRISH: "Devendra Babu hasn't come. He says in a mood of wounded pride: 'We haven't any stuff inside us, no filling of thickened milk. We are filled only with worthless lentil-paste. Why should we go there?"

MASTER (surprised): "Does he say that? He never said so before."

Sri Ramakrishna took some refreshments and handed some to Narendra.

JATIN DEVA (to the Master): "You always say: 'Narendra, eat this! Eat that!' Are the rest of us fools? Are we like straw washed ashore by the flood-tide?"

Sri Ramakrishna loved Jatin dearly. Jatin visited the Master now and then at Dakshineswar and occasionally spent the night there. He belonged to an aristocratic family of Sobhabazar. The Master said laughingly to Narendra, "He is talking about you."

Sri Ramakrishna laughed and showed his affection to Jatin by touching his chin. He said to Jatin, "Come to Dakshineswar; I'll give you plenty to eat."

The Master went into the auditorium to see a farce. He sat in a box. He laughed at the conversation of the maidservant. After a while he became absent-minded and whispered a few words to M.

MASTER (to M.): "Well, is what Girish Ghosh says true?"

Girish had lately been speaking of Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation of God.

M: "Yes, sir, it must be true. Otherwise why should it appeal to our minds?"

MASTER: "You see, a change is coming over me. The old mood has changed. I am not able to touch any metal now."

M. listened to these words in wonder.

MASTER: "There is a very deep meaning in this new mood." Was the Master hinting that a God-man cannot bear any association with worldly treasure?

MASTER (to M.): "Well, do you notice any change in me?"

M: "In what respect, sir?"

MASTER: "In my activities."

M: "Your activities are increasing as more people come to know about you."

MASTER: "Do you see? What I said before is now coming true."

After a few moments he said, "Can you tell me why Paltu can't meditate well?"

Sri Ramakrishna was ready to leave for Dakshineswar. He had remarked to a devotee about Girish, "You may wash a thousand times a cup that has held a solution of garlic; but is it ever possible to get rid of the smell altogether?" Girish was offended by this remark. When the Master was about to leave, Girish spoke.

GIRISH: "Will this smell of garlic go?"

MASTER: "Yes, it will."

GIRISH: "So you say it will."

MASTER: "All smell disappears when a blazing fire is lighted. If you heat the cup smelling of garlic, you get rid of the smell; it becomes a new cup.

"The man who says he will not succeed will never succeed. He who feels he is liberated is indeed liberated; and he who feels he is bound verily remains bound. He who forcefully says, 'I am free' is certainly free; and he who says day and night, 'I am bound' is certainly bound."

Chapter 37

THE MASTER AND NARENDRA

Sunday, March 1, 1885

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was seated on the small couch in his room, absorbed in deep samādhi. Mahimacharan, Ram, Manomohan, Nabai Chaitanya, M., and other devotees were sitting on a mat spread on the floor. They were watching the Master intently.

It was the day of the Dolayatra, a Hindu religious festival. Sri Krishna and Radha are the central figures of this celebration, their images being placed on a swing, which is rocked now and then. A red powder is showered on the images. Later, friends and relatives throw the powder at one another. This festival is celebrated when winter passes into spring, on a full-moon day rendered doubly sacred by its association with the birth of Sri Chaitanya.

The devotees saw that the Master was returning to consciousness of the world, though his mind still lingered in the realm of God-vision.

The Master said to Mahimacharan, "My dear sir, please tell us something about love of God."

What need is there of penance if God is worshipped with love?
What is the use of penance if God is not worshipped with love?
What need is there of penance if God is seen within and without?
What is the use of penance if God is not seen within and without?

O Brahman! O my child! Cease from practising further penances.
Hasten to Sankara, the Ocean of Heavenly Wisdom;
Obtain from Him the love of God, the pure love praised by devotees,
which snaps in twain the shackles that bind you to the world.

Mahima said, "Once while the great sage Nārada was practising austerity, he suddenly heard a heavenly voice repeating those lines."

Two kinds of devotion

MASTER; "There are two classes of devotees: jivakotis, or ordinary men, and Isvarakotis, or Divine Messengers. The jivakoti's devotion to God is called vaidhi, formal; that is, it conforms to scriptural laws. He worships God with a fixed number of articles, repeats God's holy name a specified number of times, and so on and so forth. This kind of devotion, like the path of knowledge, leads to the Knowledge of God and to samādhi. The jivakoti does not return from samādhi to the relative plane.

"But the case of the Isvarakoti is different. He follows the process of 'negation' and 'affirmation'. First he negates the world, realizing that it is not Brahman; but then he affirms the same world, seeing it as the manifestation of Brahman. To give an illustration: a man wanting to climb to the roof first negates the stairs as not being the

roof, but on reaching the roof he finds that the stairs are made of the same materials as the roof: brick, lime, and brick-dust. Then he can either move up and down the stairs or remain on the roof, as he pleases.

Vision of God

"Sukadeva was absorbed in samādhi-nirvikalpa samādhi, jada samādhi. Since Suka was to recite the Bhagavata to King Parikshit, the Lord sent the sage Nārada to him. Nārada saw him seated like an inert thing, absolutely unconscious of the world around him. Thereupon Nārada sang four couplets on the beauty of Hari, to the accompaniment of the vina. While the first couplet was being sung the hair on Suka's body stood on end. Next he shed tears; for he saw the form of God, the Embodiment of Spirit, within himself, in his heart. Thus Sukadeva saw the form of God even after jada samādhi. He was an Isvarakoti.

How a liberated soul lives in the world

"Hanuman, after having the vision of God both with form and without, remained firmly devoted to the form of Rāma, the Embodiment of Consciousness and Bliss.

"Prahlada sometimes realized, 'I am He'; sometimes he felt that he was the servant of God. How can such a person live without love of God? That is why he must accept the relationship of master and servant, feeling that God is the Master and himself the servant. This enables him to enjoy the Bliss of Hari. In this attitude he feels that God is the Bliss and he himself is the enjoyer.

"The 'ego of Devotion', the 'ego of Knowledge', and the 'ego of a child' do not harm the devotee. Sankaracharya kept the ego of Knowledge'.

Detachment of a child

The 'ego of a child' is not attached to anything. The child is beyond the three *Gunās*; he is not under the control of any of them. One moment you find him angry; the next moment it is all over. One moment you see him building his play house; the next moment he forgets all about it. Now you see him love his playmates; but if they are out of his sight a few days he forgets all about them. A child is not under the control of any of the *Gunās*-sattva, rajas, or tamas.

"I-consciousness"after God-realization

"The bhakta feels, 'O God, Thou art the Lord and I am Thy devotee.' This 'I' is the 'ego of bhakti'. Why does such a lover of God retain the 'ego of Devotion'? There is a reason. The ego cannot begot rid of; so let the rascal remain as the servant of God, the devotee of God.

"You may reason a thousand times, but you cannot get rid of the ego. The ego is like a pitcher, and Brahman like the ocean-an infinite expanse of water on all sides. The pitcher is set in this ocean. The water is both inside and out; the water is everywhere; yet the pitcher remains. Now, this pitcher is the 'ego of the devotee'. As long as the ego remains, 'you' and 'I' remain, and there also remains the feeling, 'O God, Thou art the

Lord and I am Thy devotee; Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant.' You may reason a million times, but you cannot get rid of it. But it is different if there is no pitcher."

Narendra entered the room and saluted the Master. They began to talk together. Presently the Master came down from the couch and sat on the floor, on which a mat had been spread. In the mean time the room had become filled with people, both devotees and visitors.

Master warns Narendra about householders

MASTER (to Narendra): "Are you well? I hear that you often visit Girish Ghosh at his house. Is it true?"

NARENDRA: "Yes, sir, I go there now and then."

Girish had been visiting Sri Ramakrishna for some months. The Master said that none could fathom the depth of Girish's faith. And his longing for God was as intense as his faith was deep. At home, he was always absorbed in the thought of Sri Ramakrishna. Many of the Master's devotees visited him; they talked only about Sri Ramakrishna. But Girish was a householder who had had varied experiences of worldly life, and the Master knew that Narendra would renounce the world, that he would shun "woman and gold" both mentally and outwardly.

MASTER: "Do you visit Girish frequently? No matter how much one washes a cup that has contained a solution of garlic, still a trace of the smell will certainly linger. The youngsters who come here are pure souls-untouched by 'woman and gold'. Men who have associated a long time with 'woman and gold' smell of the garlic, as it were. They are like a mango pecked by crows. Such a fruit cannot be offered to the Deity in the temple, and you would hesitate to eat it yourself. Again, take the case of a new pot and another in which curd has been made. One is afraid to keep milk in the second pot, for the milk very often turns sour.

"Householder devotees like Girish form a class by themselves. They desire yoga and also bhoga. Their attitude is that of Ravana, who wanted to enjoy the maidens of heaven and at the same time realize Rāma. They are like the asuras, the demons, who enjoy various pleasures and also realize Narayana."

NARENDRA: "But Girish has given up his old associates."

MASTER: "Yes, yes. He is like a bull castrated in old age. In Burdwan I once saw an ox moving about the cows. I asked a bullock-cart driver: 'what is this? an ox? How strange!' He said to me: 'True, sir. But it was castrated in old age, and so it hasn't altogether shaken off the old tendencies.'

"In a certain place there sat some sannyāsis. A young woman happened to pass by. All continued as before to meditate on God, except one of them, who cast sidelong glances at her. Before becoming a monk he had been the father of three children.

"If you make a solution of garlic in a cup, won't it be hard to remove the smell from it? Can a worthless tree like the babui produce mangoes? Of course such a thing may become possible through the occult powers of a yogi; but can everyone acquire such powers?

Worldly people have no time for spiritual practice

"When have worldly people time to think of God? A man wanted to engage a pundit who could explain the Bhagavata to him. His friend said: 'I know of an excellent pundit. But there is one difficulty: he does a great deal of farming. He has four ploughs and eight bullocks and is always busy with them; he has no leisure.' Thereupon the man said: 'I don't care for a pundit who has no leisure. I am not looking for a Bhagavata scholar burdened with ploughs and bullocks. I want a pundit who can really expound the sacred book to me.'

"There was a king who used to listen daily to a pundit's exposition of the Bhagavata. Every day at the end of their study the pundit would ask the king, 'O King, have you understood what I have read?' To this question the king would daily give the same reply: 'Sir, you had better understand it first yourself.' Each day, when the pundit returned home, he would ponder the meaning of the king's words. He was a pious man, devoted to prayer and meditation. Gradually he came to his senses and realized that the only real thing in the world is the Lotus Feet of God, and that all else is illusory. He felt dispassion for the world and took up the life of a monk. As he was leaving the world he sent a man to the king with the message: 'Yes, O King! Now I have understood.'

"But do I look down on worldly people? Of course not. When I see them, I apply the Knowledge of Brahman, the Oneness of Existence. Brahman itself has become everything; all are Narayana Himself. Regarding all women as so many forms of the Divine Mother, I see no difference between a chaste woman and a streetwalker.

"Alas! I find no customers who want anything better than kalai pulse. No one wants to give up 'woman and gold'. Man, deluded by the beauty of woman and the power of money, forgets God. But to one who has seen the beauty of God, even the position of Brahma, the Creator, seems insignificant.

"A man said to Ravana, 'You have been going to Sita in different disguises; why don't you go to her in the form of Rāma?' 'But', Ravana replied 'when I meditate on Rāma in my heart, the most beautiful women-celestial maidens like Rambha and Tilottama-appear no better than ashes of the funeral pyre. Then even the position of Brahma appears trivial to me, not to speak of the beauty of another man's wife.'

"Alas! I find that all the customers here seek worthless *Kalai* Pulse. Unless, the soul is pure, it cannot have genuine love of God and single-minded devotion to the ideal. The mind wanders away to various objects.

(To Manomohan) "You may take offence at my words; but I said to Rākhāl, 'I would rather hear that you had drowned yourself in the Ganges than learn that you had accepted a job under another person and become his servant.'

"One day a Nepalese girl came here. She sang devotional songs to the accompaniment of the esraj. When someone asked her if she was married, she said sharply: 'What? I am the handmaid of God! Whom else could I serve?'

"How can a man living in the midst of 'woman and gold' realize God? It is very hard for him to lead an unattached life. First, he is the slave of his wife, second, of money, and third, of the master whom he serves.

Akbar and the holy man

"When Akbar was Emperor of Delhi there lived a hermit in a hut in the forest. Many people visited the holy man. At one time he felt a great desire to entertain his visitors. But how could he do so without money? So he decided to go to the Emperor for help, for the gate of Akbar's palace was always open to holy men. The hermit entered the palace while the Emperor was at his daily devotions and took a seat in a corner of the room. He heard the Emperor conclude his worship with the prayer, 'O God, give me money; give me riches', and so on and so forth. When the hermit heard this he was about to leave the prayer hall; but the Emperor signed to him to wait. When the prayer was over, Akbar said to him, 'You came to see me; how is it that you were about to leave without saying anything to me?' 'Your Majesty need not trouble yourself about it', answered the hermit. 'I must leave now.' When the Emperor insisted, the hermit said, 'Many people visit my hut, and so I came here to ask you for some money.' 'Then', said Akbar, 'why were you going away without speaking to me?' The hermit replied: 'I found that you too were a beggar; you too prayed to God for money and riches. Thereupon I said to myself, "Why should I beg of a beggar? If I must beg, let me beg of God." ' "

NARENDRA: "Nowadays Girish Ghosh thinks of nothing but spiritual things."

MASTER: "That is very good. But why is he so abusive? Why does he use such vulgar language to me? In my present state of mind I cannot bear such rudeness. When a thunderbolt strikes near a house, the heavy things inside the house are not much affected; but the window-panes rattle. Nowadays I cannot bear such roughness. A man living on the plane of sattva cannot bear noise and uproar. That is why Hriday was sent away. It was the Divine Mother who sent him away. During the later part of his stay he went to extremes; he became very rough and abusive. (To Narendra) Do you agree with Girish about me?"

NARENDRA: "He said he believed you to be an Incarnation of God. I didn't say anything in answer to his remarks."

MASTER: "But how great his faith is! Don't you think so?"

The devotees listened intently to the Master's words. He was still seated on the mat spread on the floor, with M. by his side and Narendra in front of him. The devotees were sitting around.

After a few minutes silence he said to Narendra tenderly, "My child, you will not attain God without renouncing 'woman and gold'." As he said this, great emotion welled up in his heart. Fixing on Narendra an earnest and tender look, he sang:

We are afraid to speak, and yet we are afraid to keep still;
Our minds, O Radha, half believe that we are about to lose you!
We tell you the secret that we know-
The secret whereby we ourselves, and others, with our help,
Have passed through many a time of peril;
Now it all depends on you.

Sri Ramakrishna seemed to be afraid lest Narendra should leave him. Narendra looked at the Master with tears in his eyes.

A visitor who was there for the first time heard and saw all this. He said to the Master, "Sir, if one must renounce 'woman and gold', then what shall a householder do?"

MASTER: "You may enjoy 'woman and gold'. What has passed between us is no concern of yours." Mahimacharan, a householder devotee, heard everything and sat speechless.

MASTER (to Mahima): "Go forward. Push on. You will discover the forest of sandal-wood. Go farther and you will find the silver-mine. Go farther still and you will see the gold-mine. Do not stop there. Go forward, and you will reach the mines of rubies and diamonds. Therefore I say, go forward."

MAHIMA: "But, sir, something holds us back. We can't move."

MASTER (with a smile): "Why? Cut the reins. Cut them with the sword of God's name. 'The shackles of *Kala,* Time, are cut by Kāli's name.'

"Every now and then, the Master cast his gracious look on Narendra. He said, "Have you now become an experienced physician?" Quoting a Sanskrit verse he said, "He who has killed only a hundred patients is a novice in medicine; but he becomes an expert after killing a thousand!"

Was the Master hinting that Narendra, even though still young, had had many painful experiences of life? Narendra smiled and kept silent.

It was afternoon. The devotees were seated around the Master, listening to Nabai Chaitanya's singing.

Suddenly the Master left the room, but the music continued. M. accompanied the Master. Sri Ramakrishna walked across the courtyard and entered the temple of Radhakanta. He bowed down before the images, M. following him. There was some red powder in a tray. The Master offered a little powder to the images and bowed down again. Next he proceeded to the Kāli temple. Passing up the seven steps, he stood on the open porch and looked at the image. Then he entered the shrine, offered red powder to the Divine Mother, and saluted Her. As he left the temple he asked M., "Why didn't you Bring Baburam with you?"

Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room accompanied by M. and another devotee carrying the tray of red powder. He offered a little of it to all the pictures of gods and goddesses in his room, but not to those of Jesus Christ and himself. Then he threw the powder on the bodies of Narendra and the other devotees. They all took the dust of his feet.

In the cool shade of the late afternoon the devotees walked about in the temple garden, leaving the Master and M. in the room. The Master whispered to M.: "All say that they meditate well. But why is it different with Paltu? What do you think of Narendra? He is utterly guileless. Just now he is faced with many difficult family problems and so his spiritual progress is a little checked; but it will not be so for long."

Narendra was arguing on the verandah with a Vedantist. Now and then the Master went out to look at them. As the devotees gathered in the room he asked Mahima to recite a hymn. Mahima chanted a verse from the Mahanirvana Tantra:

> *We worship the Brahman-Consciousness in the Lotus of the Heart,*
> *The Undifferentiated, who is adored by Hari, Hara, and Brahma. . . .*

Mahima recited a few more hymns and at last one to Śiva, by Sankaracharya, that compared the world to a deep well and a wilderness. Mahima was a householder.

The hymn ran thus:

> *O Great God! O Thou Auspicious One, with the moon shining in Thy crest!*
> *Slayer of Madana! Wielder of the trident! Unmoving One! Lord of the Himalayas!*
> *O Consort of Durga, Lord of all creatures! Thou who scatterest the distress of the fearful!*
> *Rescue me, helpless as I am, from the trackless forest of this miserable world.*
>
> *O Beloved of Parvati's heart! O Thou moon-crested Deity!*
> *Master of every being! Lord of hosts! O Thou, the Lord of Parvati!*
> *O Vamadeva, Self-existent One! O Rudra, Wielder of the bow!*

Rescue me, helpless as I am, from the trackless forest of this miserable world.

O blue-throated God! Śiva, whose ensign is the bull! O Five-faced One!
Lord of the worlds, who wearest snakes upon Thy wrists! O Thou Auspicious One!
O Śiva! O Pasupati! O Thou, the Lord of Parvati!
Rescue me, helpless as I am, from the trackless forest Of this miserable world.

O Lord of the Universe! O Śiva Sankara! OGod of Gods!
Thou who dost bear the river Ganges in Thy matted locks!
Thou, the Master of Pramatha and Nandika! O Hara, Lord of the world!
Rescue me, helpless as I am, from the trackless forest of this miserable world.

O King of Kasi, Lord of the cremation ground of Manikarnika!
O mighty Hero, Thou the Destroyer of Daksha's sacrifice! O All-pervasive One!
O Lord of hosts! Omniscient One, who art the sole Indweller in every heart! O Lord!
Rescue me, helpless as I am, from the trackless forest of this miserable world.

O Great God! Compassionate One! O Benign Deity!
O Byomakesa! Blue-throated One! O Lord of hosts!
Thy body is smeared with ashes! Thou art garlanded with human skulls!
Rescue me, helpless as I am, from the trackless forest of this miserable world.

O Thou who dwellest on Mount Kailas! Thou whose carrier is thebull!
O Conqueror of death! O Three-eyed One! Lord of the three worlds!
Beloved of Narayana! Conqueror of lust! Thou, Śakti's Lord!
Rescue me, helpless as I am, from the trackless forest of this miserable world.

Lord of the Universe! Refuge of the whole world! O Thou of infinite forms!
Soul of the Universe! O Thou in whom repose the infinite virtues of the world!
O Thou adored by all! Compassionate One! O Friend of the poor!

Rescue me, helpless as I am, from the trackless forest of this miserable world.

MASTER (to Mahima): "Why do you call the world a deep well or a trackless forest? An aspirant may think so in the beginning; but how can he be frightened by the world if he holds fast to God? Then he finds that-

This very world is a mansion of mirth;
Here I can eat, here drink and make merry.

"Why should you be frightened? Hold fast to God. What if the world is like a forest of thorns? Put on shoes and walk on the thorns. Whom should you fear? You won't have to play again the part of the 'thief' in the game of hide-and-seek, once you touch the granny'.

"King Janaka used to fence with two swords-the one of Knowledge and the other of action. Nothing can frighten an expert player. (To M.) "My mind is still drawn to what he just recited."

Sri Ramakrishna referred to the hymns chanted by Mahima.

Nabai Chaitanya and the other devotees began to sing. They were joined by the Master, who danced, drunk with divine love. Afterwards he said: "This is the one thing needful, the chanting of God's name. All else is unreal. Love and devotion alone are real, and other things are of no consequence."

Later Sri Ramakrishna went out in the direction of the Panchavati. He asked M. about Binode, a student in M.'s school, who now and then experienced ecstasy while thinking of God. The Master loved him dearly. As he was returning to his room with M., he asked: "Well, some speak of me as an Incarnation of God. What do you think about it?" The Master came back to his room and sat on the small couch. He repeated the question to M. The other devotees were seated at a distance and could not follow the conversation.

MASTER: "What do you say?"

M: "I think so too. You are like Sri Chaitanya."

MASTER: "Is it a full manifestation of God, or a part? Tell me how much.'

M: "I don't know, sir. But it is true that there is in you an Incarnation of the Divine Power. There is no doubt that God alone dwells in you."

MASTER: "That is true. Chaitanya also wanted to realize Śakti, the Divine Power."

Narendra was engaged in a heated discussion. Ram, who had recently recovered from, an illness, joined him.

MASTER (to M.): "I don't like such discussions. (To Ram) Will you stop that? You haven't been well. All right, go on softly; don't get so excited. (To M.) I don't like these discussions. I used to weep and pray to the Divine Mother saying: 'O Mother, any man says it is this, while another says it is that. Do Thou tell me, O Mother, what is the truth.'"

Saturday, March. 7, 1885

At three o'clack in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was in his room at Dakshineswar conversing happily with his devotees. Baburam, the younger Naren, Paltu, Haripada, Mohinimohan, and others were present. A young brahmin who had been staying with the Master a few days was also there.The Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna's wife, was living in the nahabat. Occasianally she would come to Sri Ramakrishna's room to attend to his needs. Mohinimohan had braught his wife and Nabin's mother with him to the temple garden from Calcutta. The ladies were with the Holy Mother; they were waiting far an opportunity to visit the Master when the men devotees would leave the room.

Master talks about his young disciples

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch. As he looked at the young devotees his face beamed with joy.

Rākhāl was not then liying at Dakshineswar with the Master. Since his return from Vrindāvan he had been living at home.

MASTER (smjling): "Rākhāl is now enjoying his 'pension'. Since his return from Vrindāvan he has been staying at home. His wife is there. But he said to me that he would not accept any work even if he were offered a salary of a thousand rupees.

"Rākhāl would lie down here and say to me that he didn't care even for my campany. He was then passing through such an exalted state.

"Bhavanāth is married; but he spends the whole night in spiritual conversation with his wife. The couple passes their time talking of God alone: I said to him, 'Have a little fun with your wife now and then.' 'What?' he retorted angrily. 'Shall we too indulge in frivolity?' "

Sri Ramakrishna began to talk about Narendra.

MASTER (to the devotees): "I haven't felt the same strong longing for the younger Naren that I felt for Narendra.

(To Haripada) "Do you go to Girish Ghosh's house?"

HARIPADA: "Yes, I go there very often. He is our neighbour."

MASTER: "Does Narendra, too, go there?"

HARIPADA: "Yes, I see him there occasionally."

MASTER: "What does he say in reply to Girish?" [Girish Ghosh spoke of Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation of God.]

HARIPADA: "Narendra has been defeated in the argument."

MASTER: "No, Narendra says, 'Girish Ghosh has such strong faith; why should I contradict him?' "

The brother of Judge Anukal Mukhopadhyaya's son-in-law was in the room. The Master asked him, "Do you know Narendra?"

BROTHER: "Yes, sir. He is a very intelligent young man."

MASTER (to the devotees): "He must be a good man because he speaks highly of Narendra. Narendra was here the other day and sang with Trailokya Sannyal. But that day his singing seemed flat to me."

Baburam was a student in the Entrance Class in the school where M. taught.

MASTER (to Baburam): "Where are your books? Aren't you attending to your studies? (To M.) He wants to stick to both.

"That is very difficult. What will you gain by knowing God partially? Vasishthadeva, great sage that he was, was overcome at the death of his sons. That amazed Lakshmana and he asked Rāma the reason. Rāma said: 'Brother, what is there to wonder at? He who has knowledge has ignorance also. Brother, go beyond both knowledge and ignorance.' If a thorn enters the sole of your foot, you get anothet thorn to take out the first one. Afterwards you throw both away. Likewise, one procures the thorn of knowledge to remove the thorn of ignorance; then one goes beyond both knowledge and ignorance."

BABURAM (smiling): "That's what I want."

MASTER (smiling): "But, my child, can you attain it by holding to both? If you want that, then come away."

BABURAM (smiling): "Take me away from the world."

MASTER (to M.): "Rākhāl lived with me, but that was different; his father agreed to it. If these boys stay here there will be trouble.

(To Baburam) "You have no strength of mind; you haven't much courage. Just see how the younger Naren says, 'I will come away for good."

Sri Ramakrishna came down from the small couch and sat among the youngsters on the floor. M. sat by his side.

Master's eagerness for a spiritual companion

MASTER (to M.): "I have been seeking one who has totally renounced woman and gold. When I find a young man, I think that perhaps he will live with me; but everyone raises some objection or other.

"A ghost sought a companion. It is said that a man who dies on a Saturday or Tuesday becomes a ghost. Therefore, whenever the ghost saw anybody fall from a roof or stumble and faint on the road on either of those days, he would run to him, hoping that the man, through an accidental death, would become a ghost and be his companion. But such was his ill luck that everyone revived. The poor thing could not get a companion.

"Just see, Rākhāl always gives his wife as an excuse. He says, 'What will become of her?' When I touched Narendra on the chest, he became unconscious; then he cried out: 'Oh, what have you done to me? Don't you know that I have a father and mother?' "Why has God made me lead this kind of life? Chaitanyadeva became a sannyāsi so that all would salute him. Whoever salutes an Incarnation, even once, obtains liberation."

Mohinimohan had brought a basket of sweetmeats for Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER: "Who has brought these sweets?”

Baburam pointed to Mohinimohan.

Sri Ramakrishna touched the sweets, uttering the word "Om", and ate a little. Then he distributed them among the devotees. To the surprise of the others, he fed the younger Naren and a few of the boys with his own hand.

MASTER (to M): "This has a meaning. There is a greater manifestation of God in men of pure heart. In former years, when I used to go to Kamarpukur, I would feed some of the young boys with my own hand. Chine Sankhari would say, 'Why doesn't he feed us that way?' But how could I? They led an immoral life. Who would feed them?"

Sri Ramakrishna was in the happiest mood with his young and pure-souled devotees. He was seated on the small couch and was doing funny imitations of a kirtani. The devotees laughed heartily. The kirtani is dressed lavishly and covered with ornaments. She sings standing on the floor, a coloured kerchief in her hand. Now and then she coughs to draw people's attention and blows her nose, raising her nose-ring. When a respectable gentleman enters the room she welcomes him with appropriate words, still continuing her song. Now and then she pulls her sari from her arms to show off her jewels.

The devotees were convulsed, with laughter at this mimicry by Sri Ramakrishna. Paltu rolled on the ground. Pointing to him, the Master said to M.: "Look at that child! He is rolling with laughter." He said to Paltu with a smile: "Don't report this to your father, or he will lose the little respect he has for me. You see, he is an 'Englishman."

False piety

MASTER (to the devotees): "There are people who indulge in all kinds of gossip at the time of their daily devotions. As you know, one is not permitted to talk then; so they

make all kinds of signs, keeping their lips closed. In order to say, 'Bring this', 'Bring that', they make sounds like 'Huh', 'Uhuh'. All such things they do! (Laughter.)

"Again, there are some who bargain for fish while telling their beads. As they count the rosary, with a finger they point out the fish, indicating, That one, please.' They reserve all their business for that time! (Laughter.)

"There are women who come to the Ganges for their bath and, instead of thinking of God, gossip about no end of things. 'What jewels did you offer at the time of your son's marriage?'- 'Has so-and-so returned from her father-in law's house?' - 'So-and-so is seriously ill.' - 'So-and-so went to see the bride; we hope that they will offer a magnificent dowry and that there will be a great feast.' - 'Harish always nags at me; he can't stay away from me even an hour.' - 'My child, I couldn't come to see you all these days; I was so busy with the betrothal of so-and-so's daughter.'

"You see, they have come to bathe in the holy river, and yet they indulge in all sorts of worldly talk."

The Master began to look intently at the younger Naren and went into samādhi. Did he see God Himself in the pure-souled devotee?

The devotees silently watched the figure of Sri Ramakrishna motionless in samādhi. A few minutes before there had been so much laughter in the room; now there was deep silence, as if no one were there. The Master sat with folded hands as in his photograph.

After a short while his mind began to come down to the relative plane. He heaved a long sigh and became aware of the outer world. He looked at the devotees and began to talk with them of their spiritual progress.

MASTER (to the younger Naren): "I have been eager to see you. You will succeed. Come here once in a while. Well, which do you prefer-jnāna or bhakti?"

THE YOUNGER NAREN: "Pure bhakti."

MASTER: "But how can you love someone unless you know him? (Pointing to M, with a smile) How can you love him unless you know him? (To M.) Since a pure-souled person has asked for pure bhakti, it must have some meaning.

Genuine bhakti

"One does not seek bhakti of one's own accord without inborn tendencies. This is the characteristic of prema-bhakti. There is another kind of bhakti, called jnāna-bhakti, which is love of God based on reasoning.

(To the younger Naren) "Let me look at your body; take off your shirt. Fairly broad chest. You will succeed. Come here now and then."

Sri Ramakrishna was still in the ecstatic mood. He spoke tenderly to the other devotees about their future.

MASTER (to Paltu): "You will succeed, too, but, it will take a little time.

(To Baburam) "Why don't I attract you to me? It is just to avoid trouble.

(To Mohinimohan) "As for you you are all right. There is a little yet to be done. When that is achieved, nothing will remain-neither duty nor work nor the world itself. Is it good to get rid of everything?"

As Sri Ramakrishna spoke these words he looked at Mohini affectionately, as if scanning his inmost feelings. Was Mohini really wondering whether it would, be wise to renounce all for God? After a while Sri Ramakrishna said, "God binds the Bhagavata pundit to the world with one tie; otherwise, who would remain to explain the sacred book? He keeps the pundit bound for the good of men. That is why the Divine Mother has kept you in the world."

Now Sri Ramakrishna spoke to the young brahmin.

MASTER: "Give up knowledge and reasoning; accept bhakti. Bhakti alone is the essence. Is this the third day of your stay here?"

BRAHMIN (with folded hands): "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "Have faith. Depend on God. Then you will not have to do anything yourself. Mother Kāli will do everything for you.

"Jnāna goes as far as the outer court, but bhakti can enter the inner court. The Pure Self is unattached. Both vidyā and avidyā are in It, but It is unattached. Sometimes there is a good and sometimes a bad smell in the air, but the air itself is unaffected.

Nature of Ātman

"Once Vyasadeva was about to cross the Jamuna. The gopis also were there. They wanted to go to the other side of the river to sell curd, milk, and cream. But there was no ferry at that time. They were all worried about how to cross the river, when Vyāsa said to them, 'I am very hungry.' The milkmaids fed him with milk and cream. He finished almost all their food. Then Vyāsa said to the river, 'O Jamuna, if I have not eaten anything, then your waters will part and we shall walk through.' It so happened. The river parted and a pathway was formed between the waters. Following that path, the gopis and Vyāsa crossed the river. Vyāsa had said, 'If I have not eaten anything'. That means, the real man is Pure Ātman. Ātman is unattached and beyond Prakriti. It has neither hunger nor thirst; It knows neither birth nor death; It does not age, nor does It die. It is immutable as Mount Sumeru.

Jeevanmukta & Separation of body and soul

"He who has attained this Knowledge of Brahman is a jivanmukta, liberated while living in the body. He rightly understand that the Ātman and the body are two separate things. After realizing God one does not identify the Ātman with the body. These two are separate, like the kernel and the shell of the coconut when its milk dries up. The Ātman moves, as it were, within the body. When the 'milk' of worldly-mindedness has dried up, one gets Self-knowledge. Then one feels that Ātman and body are two separate things. The kernel of a green almond or betel-nut cannot be separated from the shell; but when they are ripe the juice dries up and the kernel separates from the shell. After the attainment of the Knowledge of Brahman, the 'milk' of worldly-mindedness dries up.

"But it is extremely difficult to attain the Knowledge of Brahman. One doesn't get it by merely talking about it. Some people feign it. (Smiling) There was a man who was a great liar; but, on the other hand, he used to say he had the Knowledge of Brahman. When someone took him to task for telling lies, he said: 'Why, this world is truly like a dream. If everything is unreal, then can truth itself be real? Truth is as unreal as falsehood.'" (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna sat with the devotees on the mat on the floor. He was smiling. He said to the devotees, "Please stroke my feet gently." They carried out his request. He said to M., "There is great significance in this." Placing his hand on his heart, the Master said, "If there is anything here, then through this service the ignorance and illusion of the devotees will be completely destroyed."

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna became serious, as if about to reveal a secret.

Revelation about himself

MASTER (to M.): "There is no outsider here. The other day, when Harish was with me, I saw Satchidananda come out of this sheath, It said, 'I incarnate Myself in every age.' I thought that I myself was saying these words out of mere fancy. I kept quiet and watched. Again Satchidananda Itself spoke, saying, 'Chaitanya, too, worshipped Śakti.' "

The devotees listened to these words in amazement. Some wondered whether God Himself was seated before them in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master paused a moment. Then he said, addressing M., "I saw that it is the fullest manifestation of Satchidananda; but this time the Divine Power is manifested through the glory of sattva."

The devotees sat spellbound.

MASTER (to M.): "Just now I was saying to the Mother, 'I cannot talk much.' I also said to Her, 'May people's inner consciousness be awakened by only one touch!' You see, such is the power of Yogamaya that She can cast a spell. She did so at Vrindāvan. That is why Subol was able to unite Sri Krishna and Radhika. Yogamaya, the Primal Power, has a power of attraction. I applied that power myself.

(To M.) "Well, do you think that those who come here are realizing anything?"

M: "Yes, sir, it must be so."

MASTER: "How do you know?"

M. (smiling): "Everyone says, 'Whoever goes to him doesn't return to the world.'

MASTER (smiling): "A bullfrog was caught by a water-snake. The snake could neither swallow the frog nor let it go. As a result the frog suffered very much; he croaked continuously. And the snake suffered too. But if the frog had been seized by a cobra, he would have been quiet after one or two croaks. (All laugh.)

(To the young devotees) "Read the Bhaktichaitanya- chandrika by Trailokya. Ask Trailokya for a copy. He has written well about Chaitanyadeva."

A DEVOTEE: "Will he give it to us?"

MASTER (smiling): "Why not? If a farmer has a good crop of melons he can easily give away two or three. (All laugh.) Won't Trailokya give you the book free?

(To Paltu) "Come here now and then."

PALTU: "I shall come whenever I can."

MASTER: "Will you see me in Calcutta when I go there?"

PALTU: "Yes, I shall try."

MASTER; "That's the answer of a calculating mind."

PALTU: "If I don't say, 'I shall try', I may be a liar."

MASTER (to M.): "I don't mind the lies of these boys. They are not free.

(To Haripada) "Why hasn't Mahendra Mukherji come here lately?"

HARlPADA: "I'm not quite sure why."

M. (smiling): "He's practising jnanayoga!"

MASTER: "No, it's not that. The other day he promised to send me in his carriage to the theatre to see a play about the life of Prahlada; but he didn't send the carriage. Perhaps that is why he doesn't come."

M: "One day I saw Mahima Chakravarty and had a talk with him. It seems that Mahendra visits him."

MASTER: "But Mahima talks about bhakti also. He loves to recite the hymn: 'what need is there of penance if God is worshipped with love?' "

M. (smiling): "He says that because you make him say it."

About Girish

Girish Chandra Ghosh was always talking to the devotees about the Master.

HARIPADA: "Girish Ghosh sees many visions nowadays. After going home from here he remains absorbed in spiritual moods and sees many things."

MASTER: 'That may be true. Coming to the Ganges, one sees many things-boats, ships, and what not."

HARIPADA: "Girish Ghosh says: 'From now on I shall occupy myself only with my work. In the morning, on the stroke of the clock, I shall sit down with my pen and ink-pot and write for the whole day.' He makes the resolve, no doubt, but cannot carry it out. No sooner do we visit him than he begins to talk about you. You asked him to send Narendra here in a carriage. He said, 'I shall hire a carriage for Narendra.' "

At five o'clock the younger Naren was ready to go home. Sri Ramakrishna stood by his side on the northeast verandah and gave him various instructions. Then the boy saluted the Master and departed. Many of the devotees also took their leave.

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch talking to Mohini. Mohini's wife was almost mad with grief on account of her son's death. Sometimes she laughed and sometimes she wept. But she felt peaceful in Sri Ramakrishna's presence.

MASTER: "How is your wife now?"

MOHINI: "She becomes quiet whenever she is here; but sometimes at home she becomes very wild. The other day she was going to kill herself."

When Sri Ramakrishna heard this he appeared worried. Mohini said to him humbly, "Please give her a few words of advice."

MASTER: "Don't allow her to cook. That will heat her brain all the more. And keep her in the company of others so that they may watch her."

It was dusk. Preparations were going on in the temples for the evening worship. The lamp was lighted in the Master's room and incense was burnt. Seated on the small couch, Sri Ramakrishna saluted the Divine Mother and chanted Her name in a tender voice. There was nobody in the room except M, who was sitting on the floor.

Sri Ramakrishna rose from the couch. M also stood up. The Master asked him to shut the west and north doors of the room. M obeyed and stood by Sri Ramakrishna on the porch.

The Master said that he wanted to go to the Kāli temple. Leaning on M.'s arm, he came down to the terrace of the temple. He asked M. to call Baburam and sat down.

After visiting the Divine Mother, the Master returned to his room across the court, chanting, "O Mother! Mother! Rajarajesvari!"

Sri Ramakrishna entered his room and sat on the small couch. He had been passing through an extraordinary state of mind: he could not touch any metal. He had said a few days before, "It seems that the Divine Mother has been removing from my mind all ideas of possession." He had been eating from plantain-leaves and drinking water from an earthen tumbler. He could not touch a metal jar; so he had asked the devotees to get a few earthen jars for him. If he touched metal plates or pots, his hand ached as if stung by a horned fish.

Prasanna had brought a few earthen pots, but they were very small. The Master said with a smile: These pots are too small. But he is a nice boy. Once I asked him to take off his clothes, and he stood naked in front of me. What a child he is!"

Tārak of Belgharia arrived with a friend and bowed low before Sri Ramakrishna, who was sitting on the small couch. The room was lighted by an oil lamp. A few devotees were sitting on the floor.

Tārak was about twenty years old, and married. His parents did not allow him to come to Sri Ramakrishna. He lived mostly at his home near Bowbazar. The Master was very fond of him. Tārak's friend had a tamasic nature; he rather scoffed at the Master and religious ideas in general.

MASTER (to Tārak's friend): "Why don't you go and visit the temples?"

FRIEND: "Oh, I've seen them before."

MASTER: "Is it wrong for Tārak to come here?"

FRIEND: "You know best."

MASTER (pointing to M.): "He is a headmaster."

FRIEND: "Oh!"

Master warns Tārak

Sri Ramakrishna asked about Tatak's health and talked with him at length. Tārak was ready to leave. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to be careful about many things.

MASTER: "My good man, beware. Beware of 'woman and gold'. Once you sink in the māyā of a woman, you will not be able to rise. It is the whirlpool of the Viśālākśi. He who has fallen into it cannot pull himself out again. Come here now and then."

TĀRAK: "My people at home don't let me."

A DEVOTEE: "Suppose someone's mother says to him, 'Don't go to Dakshineswar.' Suppose she curses him, saying, 'If you go there you will be drinking my blood!'"

MASTER: "A mother who says that is no mother; she is the embodiment of avidyā. There is no sin in disobeying such a mother. She obstructs her son's path to God. There is no harm in disobeying your elders for the sake of God. For Rāma's sake Bharat did not obey his mother Kaikeyi. The gopis did not obey their husbands when they were forbidden to visit Krishna. Prahlada disobeyed his father for God. Vali disregarded the words of Sukracharya, his teacher, in order to please God. Bibhishana went against the wishes of Ravana, his elder brother, to please Rāma. But you must obey your elders in all other things. Let me see your hand."

Sri Ramakrishna took Tārak's hand into his own and seemed to feel its weight. A few moments later he said: "There is a little crookedness in your mind; but that will go. Pray to God a little and come here now and then. Yes, that twist will go. Is it you that have hired the house at Bowbazar?"

TĀRAK: "Not I, sir, but my parents."

MASTER (smiling): "They or you? Is it because you are afraid of the 'tiger'?" Tārak had a young wife. Did the Master mean that a woman is like a tiger to a man?

Tārak saluted Sri Ramakrishna and took his leave. The Master lay down on the small couch. He seemed worried about Tārak. Suddenly he said to M., "Why do I worry so much about these young boys?" M. kept still. He was thinking over a reply. The Master asked him, "Why don't you speak?"

Mohini's wife entered the room and sat at one side. Sri Ramakrishna spoke to M. about Tārak's friend.

MASTER: "Why did Tārak bring that fellow with him?"

M: "Perhaps he wanted a companion for the road. It is a long way from Calcutta; so he brought a friend with him."

The Master suddenly addressed Mohini's wife and said: "By unnatural death one becomes an evil spirit. Beware. Make it clear to your mind. Is this what you have come to after hearing and seeing so much?" Mohini was about to take his leave. He saluted Sri Ramakrishna. His wife also saluted the Master, who stood near the north door of the room. Mohini's wife spoke to him in a whisper.

MASTER: "Do you want to stay here?"

MOHINI'S WIFE: "Yes, I want to spend a few days with the Holy Mother at the Nahabat. May I?"

MASTER: "That will be all right. But you talk of dying. That frightens me. And the Ganges is so near!"

Chapter 38

WITH THE DEVOTEES IN CALCUTTA

March 11, 1885

Balarām Bose

ON THE MORNING of Wednesday, March 11, Sri Ramakrishna and some of his disciples visited Balarām Bose's house. Balarām was indeed blessed among the householder disciples of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna often described him as a rasaddar, or supplier of stores, appointed by the Divine Mother to take care of his physical needs. Balarām's house in Calcutta had been sanctified many times by the Master's presence. There he frequently lost himself in samādhi, dancing, singing, or talking about God. Those of the Master's disciples and devotees who could not go to Dakshineswar visited him there and received his instruction. He often asked Balarām to invite young disciples such as Rākhāl, Bhavanāth, and Narendra to his house, saying: "These pure souls are veritable manifestations of God. To feed them is to feed God Himself. They are born with special divine attributes. By serving them you will be serving God." And so it happened that whenever the Master was at Balarām's house the devotees would gather there. It was the Master's chief vineyard in Calcutta. It was here that the devotees came to know each other intimately.

M taught in a school in the neighbourhood. He often brought his young students to visit the Master at Balarām's house. On this day, having learnt of Sri Ramakrishna's arrival, M. went there at noon during the recess hour of the school. He found the Master resting in the drawing room after his midday meal. Several young boys were in the room. M prostrated himself before the Master and sat by his side.

MASTER (tenderly): "How could you come now? Have you no school work?"

M: "I have come directly from school. Just now I have no important work to do."

A DEVOTEE: "No, sir; he is playing truant today." (All laugh.)

M. said to himself, "Alas! It is indeed as if some invisible power had drawn me here."

The Master, looking a little thoughtful, asked M. to come nearer. He said, "Please wring out my wet towel and put my coat in the sun." Then he continued: "My legs and feet ache. Please rub them gently."

M. felt very happy to be given the privilege of rendering these services to the Master.

Master's exalted spiritual state

Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "Can you tell me why I have been feeling like this the past few days? It is impossible for me to touch any metal. When I touched a metal cup I felt as if I had been stung by a horned fish. There was an excruciating pain all over my arm. But I must use a brass water-jar, and so I tried to carry it after covering it with my towel. But the moment I touched the jar I felt the same acute pain in my arm. It was an

unbearable pain! At last I prayed to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother, I shall never do it again. Please forgive me this time.'

The younger Naren

"The younger Naren often visits me. Do you think his people at home will object? He is very pure and doesn't know what carnal pleasure is."

M: "He is a 'large receptacle'."

MASTER: "That is true. Further, he says he remembers spiritual things after hearing them once only. He told me, 'I used to weep in my boyhood because I couldn't see God.'"

The Master and M. were thus talking about the young devotee when someone reminded M. of his school.

MASTER: "What is the time now?"

A DEVOTEE: "It is ten minutes to one."

MASTER (to M.): "You had better go now. It is getting late for you. You have left your duties. (To Lātu) Where is Rākhāl?"

LĀTU: "He has gone home."

MASTER: "What? Has he gone away without seeing me?"

After school-hours M. returned to Balarām's house and found the Master sitting in the drawing-room, surrounded by his devotees and disciples. Among them were Girish, Suresh, Balarām, Lātu, and Chunilal. The Master's face was beaming with a sweet smile, which was reflected in the happy faces of those in the room. M. was asked to take a seat by the Master's side.

MASTER (to Girish): "You had better argue this point with Narendra and see what he has to say."

GIRISH: "Narendra says that God is infinite; we cannot even so much as say that the things or persons we perceive are parts of God. How can Infinity have parts? It cannot."

Mystery of Divine Incarnation

MASTER: "However great and infinite God may be, His Essence can and does manifest itself through man by His mere will. God's Incarnation as a man cannot be explained by analogy. One must feel it for oneself and realize it by direct perception. An analogy can give us only a little glimpse. By touching the horns, legs, or tail of a cow, we in fact touch the cow herself; but for us the essential thing about a cow is her milk, which comes through the udder. The Divine Incarnation is like the udder. God incarnates Himself as man from time to time in order to teach people devotion and divine love."

GIRISH: "Narendra says: 'Is it ever possible to know all of God? He is infinite.' "

MASTER (to Girish): "Who can comprehend everything about God? It is not given to man to know any aspect of God, great or small. And what need is there to know everything about God? It is enough if we only realize Him. And we see God Himself if we but see His Incarnation. Suppose a person goes to the Ganges and touches its water. He will then say, 'Yes, I have seen and touched the Ganges.' To say this it is not necessary for him to touch the whole length of the river from Hardwar to Gangasagar. (Laughter.)

"If I touch your feet, surely that is the same as touching you. (Laughter.) If a person goes to the ocean and touches but a little of its water, he has surely touched the ocean itself. Fire, as an element, exists in all things, but in wood it is present to a greater degree."

GIRISH (smiling): "I am looking for fire. Naturally I want to go to a place where I can get it."

Seek God in man

MASTER (smiling): "Yes, fire, as an element, is present more in wood than in any other object. If you seek God, then seek Him in man; He manifests Himself more in man than in any other thing. If you see a man endowed with ecstatic love, overflowing with prema, mad after God, intoxicated with His love, then know for certain that God has incarnated Himself through that man.

(To M.) "There is no doubt that God exists in all things; but the manifestations of His Power are different in different beings. The greatest manifestation of His Power is through an Incarnation. Again, in some Incarnation there is a complete manifestation of God's Power. It is the Śakti, the Power of God, that is born as an Incarnation."

GIRISH: "Narendra says that God is beyond our words and thought."

God known to the pure mind

MASTER: "That is not altogether true. He is, no doubt, unknowable by this ordinary mind, but He can indeed be known by the pure mind. The mind and intellect become pure the moment they are free from attachment to 'woman and gold'. The pure mind and pure intellect are one and the same. God is known by the pure mind. Didn't the sages and seers of olden times see God? They realized the All-pervading Consciousness by means of their inner consciousness."

GIRISH (with a smile): "I defeated Narendra in the argument."

MASTER: "Oh, no! He said to me: 'When Girish Ghosh has so much faith in God's Incarnation as man, what can I say to him? It is not proper to meddle with such faith.'"

GIRISH (with a smile): "Sir, we are very free and easy with our words.

But M. is sitting there with his lips shut tight. What in the world is passing through his mind? What do you say about it, sir?"

MASTER (with a laugh): "There is a common adage that tells people to beware of the following: a man with a loose tongue, a man whose mind cannot be fathomed even by an expert diver, a man who sticks the sacred tulsi-leaf in his ears as a sign of holiness, a woman wearing a long veil to proclaim her chastity, and the cold water of a reservoir covered with green scum, by bathing in which one gets typhoid fever. These are all dangerous things. (With a smile) But it is different with M. He is a serious man." (All laugh.)

CHUNILAL: "People have begun to whisper about M.'s conduct. The younger Naren and Baburam are his students, as are Naran, Paltu, Purna, and Tejchandra. The rumour is that he brings these boys to you and so they neglect their studies. The boys' guardians hold M. responsible."

MASTER: "But who would believe their words?"

Master's love for Narayan

They were thus talking when Naran entered the room and bowed low before the Master. He was a student seventeen or eighteen years old and of fair complexion. He was dearly loved by the Master, who was very eager to see the boy and feed him. Many a time at the temple garden at Dakshineswar the Master wept silently for Naran. He looked on him as the manifestation of Narayana Himself.

GIRISH (at the sight of Naran): "There! Who told him about this? Now we realize that M. is at the root of all the mischief." (All laugh.)

MASTER (smiling): "Stop! Hold your tongue. There is already an evil rumour about him."

The conversation next turned to Narendra.

A DEVOTEE: "Why doesn't he come to you so frequently nowadays?"

MASTER (quoting a proverb): "Man's worries over bread and butter are simply amazing; they make even Kalidasa lose his wits."

BALARĀM: "Narendra frequently visits his friend Annada Guha of the family of Shiva Guha."

MASTER: "Yes, I have heard that too. Narendra and his friends meet at the house of a government officer and conduct meetings of the Brahmo Samaj there."

A DEVOTEE: "The officer's name is Tarapada."

BALARĀM (smiling): "The brahmins say that Annada Guha is a very egotistic man."

MASTER: "Never listen to what the brahmins say. You know their nature very well. If a man doesn't give them money, they will call him bad; on the other hand, if a man is generous to them, they will call him good. (All laugh.) I know Annada. He is a good man."

The drawing-room was full of devotees. The Master wanted to hear some songs. At his request Tarapada sang about Krishna:

O Kesava, bestow Thy grace
Upon Thy luckless servants here!
O Kesava, who dost delight
To roam Vrindāvan's glades and groves!

O Madhava, our mind's Bewitcher!
Sweet One, who dost steal our hearts,
Sweetly playing on Thy flute!

(Chant, O Mind, the name of Hari,
Sing aloud the name of Hari,
Praise Lord Hari's name!)

O Thou Eternal Youth of Braja,
Tamer of fierce Kaliya,
Slayer of the afflicted's fear!

Beloved, with the arching eyes
And crest with arching peacock feather,
Charmer of Sri Radha's heart!
Govardhan's mighty Lifter, Thou,
All garlanded with sylvan flowers!
O Damodara, Kamsa's Scourge!

O Dark One, who dost sport in bliss
With sweet Vrindāvan's gopi maids.

(Chant, O mind, the name of Hari,
Sing aloud the name of Hari,
Praise Lord Hari's name!)

MASTER (to Girish): "Ah! It is a beautiful song. Did you write it?"

A DEVOTEE: "Yes, sir, he wrote all the songs for his play, the Chaitanyalila."

MASTER: "This one has really hit the mark."

At Sri Ramakrishna's request Tarapada sang two more songs. In the first, Nitai exhorts people to share Radha's love for Sri Krishna:

Come one and all! Take Radha's love!
The high tide of her love flows by;
It will not last for very long.
Oh, come then! Come ye, one and all!
In countless streams it flows from her;
As much as you desire is yours.

Made all of love, she pours out love
Unstintingly for everyone;
Her love intoxicates the heart
With heavenly bliss, and thrills the soul.
Oh, come and sing Lord Hari's name,
Drawn by her love. Oh, come ye all!
Next he sang about Gaurānga:

Who art Thou, Gaur of the golden hue,
That quenchest the thirst of my soul?
Thou raisest a storm in the sea of Love,
And scarcely can I steady my boat.

Once as a cowherd boy in Vrindāvan
Thou didst tend the cows;
In Thy hands Thou heldest the flute
That so bewitched the gopi maids;

Lifting Govardhan's mount in Thine arms,
Thou shieldedst Vrindāvan from ill;
And at the wounded gopis' feet
Humbledst Thyself in repentant love.

The devotees pressed M. to sing; but M. was shy and asked them in a whisper to excuse him.

GIRISH (to the Master): "Sir, we can't find a way to persuade M. to sing."

MASTER (annoyed): "Yes, he can bare his teeth at school, but shyness overpowers him when he is asked to sing!"

M., feeling greatly distressed, remained speechless. Suresh Mitra, a beloved householder disciple of the Master, was seated at a distance, The Master cast an affectionate glance at him and said to him, pointing to Girish, "You talk of having lived a wild life but here is one you could not surpass."

SURESH (with a smile): "Yes, sir, he is my elder brother in that respect."(All laugh.)

GIRISH (to the Master): "Well, sir, I didn't have any education during my boyhood, but still people say I am a learned man."

MASTER: "Mahimacharan has studied many scriptures. A big man. (To M.) Isn't that so?"

M: "Yes, sir."

GIRISH: "What? Book-learning? I have seen enough of it. It can't fool me any more."

The purpose of the scriptures

MASTER (with a smile): "Do you know my attitude? Books, scriptures, and things like that only point out the way to reach God. After finding the way, what more need is there of books and scriptures? Then comes the time for action.

"A man received a letter from home informing him that certain presents were to be sent to his relatives. The names of the articles were given in the letter. As he was about to go shopping for them, he found that the letter was missing. He began anxiously to search for it, several others joining in the search. For a long time they continued to search. When at last the letter was discovered, his joy knew no bounds. With great eagerness he opened the letter and read it. It said that he was to buy five seers of sweets, a piece of cloth, and a few other things. Then he did not need the letter any more, for it had served its purpose. Putting it aside, he went out to buy the things. How long is such a letter necessary? As long as its contents are not known. When the contents are known one proceeds to carry out the directions. "In the scriptures you will find the way to realize God. But after getting all the information about the path, you must begin to work, Only then can you attain your goal.

Mere scholarship condemned

"What will it avail a man to have mere scholarship? A pundit may have studied many scriptures, he may recite many sacred texts, but if he is still attached to the world and if inwardly he loves 'woman and gold', then he has not assimilated the contents of the scriptures. For such a man the study of scriptures is futile.

"The almanac forecasts the rainfall for the year. You may squeeze the book, but you won't get a drop of water-not even a single drop." (Laughter.)

GIRISH (sniiling): "What did you say, sir, about squeezing the almanac? Won't a single drop of water come out of it?" (All laugh.)

MASTER (with a s1Ilile): "The pundits talk big, but where is their mind fixed? On 'woman and gold', on creature comforts and money. The vulture soars very high in the sky, but its eyes are fixed on the charnel-pit. It is continually looking for charnel-pits, carcasses, and dead bodies.

Narendra's many virtues

(To Girish) "Narendra is a boy of a very high order. He excels in everything: vocal and instrumental music and studies. Again, he has control over his sense-organs. He is truthful and has discrimination and dispassion. So many virtues in one person! (To M.) What do you say? Isn't he unusually good?"

M: "Yes, sir, he is."

MASTER (aside to M.): "He [meaning Girish] has great earnestness and faith."

M. looked at Girish, and marvelled at his tremendous faith. Girish had been coming to Sri Ramakrishna only a short time and had already recognized his spiritual power. To M. he seemed a familiar friend and kinsman, related to him by the strong bond of spirituality. Girish was one of the gems in the necklace of the Master's devotees.

Narayan asked the Master whether he would sing. Sri Ramakrishna sang of the Divine Mother:

Cherish my precious Mother Syama
Tenderly within, O mind;
May you and I alone behold Her,
Letting no one else intrude.

O mind, in solitude enjoy Her,
Keeping the passions all outside;
Take but the tongue, that now and again
It may cry out, "O Mother! Mother!"

Suffer no breath of base desire
To enter and approach us there,
But bid true knowledge stand on guard,
Alert and watchful evermore.

Then he sang, as if he were one of the afflicted souls of the world:

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,
Do not deprive Thy worthless child of bliss!
My mind knows nothing but Thy Lotus Feet
The King of Death scowls at me terribly;
Tell me, Mother, what shall I say to him? . . .

Again he sang about the bliss of the Divine Mother:

Behold my Mother playing with Śiva, lost in an ecstasy of joy!
Drunk with a draught of celestial wine, She reels and yet She does not fall . . .

The devotees listened to the songs in deep silence. After a few moments Sri Ramakrishna said, "I have a slight cold; so I couldn't sing well."

Gradually it became dusk. The shadow of evening fell on Calcutta. For the moment the noise of the busy metropolis was stilled. Gongs and conch-shells proclaimed the evening worship in many Hindu homes. Devotees of God set aside their worldly duties and turned

their minds to prayer and meditation. This joining of day and night, this mystic twilight, always created an ecstatic mood in the Master.

Master's prayer

The devotees seated in the room looked at Sri Ramakrishna as he began to chant the sweet name of the Divine Mother. After the chanting he began to pray. What was the need of prayer to a soul in constant communion with God? Did he not rather want to teach erring mortals how to pray? Addressing the Divine Mother, he said, "O Mother, I throw myself on Thy mercy; I take shelter at Thy Hallowed Feet. I do not want bodily comforts; I do not crave name and fame; I do not seek the eight occult powers. Be gracious and grant that I may have pure love for Thee, a love unsmitten by desire, untainted by any selfish ends-a love craved by the devotee for the sake of love alone. And grant me the favour, O mother, that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching māyā, that I may never be attached to the world, to 'woman and gold', conjured up by Thy inscrutable māyā! O mother, there is no one but thee whom I may call my own. Mother, I do not know how to worship; I am without austerity; I have neither devotion nor knowledge. Be gracious, Mother, and out of Thy infinite mercy grant me love for Thy Lotus Feet." Every word of this prayer, uttered from the depths of his soul, stirred the minds of the devotees. The melody of his voice and the childlike simplicity of his face touched their hearts very deeply.

Girish invited the Master to his house, saying that he must go there that very night.

MASTER: "Don't you think it will be late?"

GIRISH: "No, sir. You may return any time you like. I shall have to go to the theatre tonight to settle a quarrel there."

It was nine o'clock in the evening when the Master was ready to start for Girish's house. Since Balarām had prepared supper for him, Sri Ramakrishna said to Balarām: "Please send the food you have prepared for me to Girish's, I shall enjoy it there." He did not want to hurt Balarām's feelings.

As the Master was coming down from the second floor of Balarām's house, he became filled with divine ecstasy. He looked as if he were drunk.

Narayan and M. were by his side; a little behind came Ram, Chuni, and the other devotees. No sooner did he reach the ground floor than he became totally overwhelmed. Narayan came forward to hold him by the hand lest he should miss his footing and fall. The Master expressed annoyance at this. A few minutes later he said to Narayan affectionately: "If you hold me by the hand people may think I am drunk. I shall walk by myself."

Girish's house was not far away. The Master passed the crossing at Bosepara Lane. Suddenly he began to walk faster. The devotees were left behind. Presently Narendra was seen coming from a distance. At other times the Master's joy would have been

unbounded at the thought of Narendra or at the mere mention of his name; but now he did not even exchange a word with his beloved disciple.

As the Master and the devotees entered the lane where Girish lived, he was able to utter words. He said to Narendra: "Are you quite well, my child? I could not talk to you then." Every word the Master spoke was full of infinite tenderness. He had not yet reached the door of Girish's house, when suddenly he stopped and said, looking at Narendra: "I want to tell you something.'This' is one and 'that' is another." Who could know what was passing through his innermost soul at that moment?

At Girish's house

Girish stood at the door to welcome the Master. As Sri Ramakrishna entered the house, Girish fell at his feet and lay there on the floor like a rod. At the Master's bidding he stood up, touching the Master's feet with his forehead. Sri Ramakrishna was taken to the drawing- room on the second floor. The devotees followed him and sat down, eager to get a view of the Master and listen to every word that fell from his lips.

As Sri Ramakrishna was about to take the seat reserved for him, he saw a newspaper lying near it. He signed to someone to remove the paper. Since a newspaper contains worldly matters-gossip and scandal-, he regarded it as unholy. After the paper was removed he took his seat. Nityagopal came forward and bowed low before the Master.

MASTER: "Well! You haven't been to Dakshineswar for a long time."

NITYAGOPAL: "True, sir. I haven't been able to go there. I haven't been well. I have had pains all over my body."

MASTER: "How are you now?"

NITYAGOPAL: "Not so well, sir."

MASTER: "Bring your mind down one or two notes."

NITYAGOPAL: "I don't like people's company. They say all kinds of things about me. That sometimes frightens me, but again I feel great strength within."

MASTER: "That's only natural. Who lives with you?"

NITYAGOPAL: "Tārak. He is always with me. But sometimes he too gets on my nerves."

MASTER: "Nangta told me that there lived at his monastery an ascetic who had acquired occult powers. He used to go about with his eyes fixed on the sky. But when one of his companions left him, he became disconsolate."

Again the Master went into an ecstatic mood. Strange thoughts seemed to stir his mind and he remained speechless. After a while he said: "Art Thou come? I too am here." Who could pretend to understand these words?

Narendra and Girish argue about God

Many of his devotees were in the room: Narendra, Girish, Ram, Haripada, Chuni, Balarām, and M. Narendra did not believe that God could incarnate Himself in a human body. But Girish differed with him; he had the burning faith that from time to time the Almighty Lord, through His inscrutable Power, assumes a human body and descends to earth to serve a divine purpose.

The Master said to Girish, "I should like to hear you and Narendra argue in English."

The discussion began; but they talked in Bengali. Narendra said: "God is Infinity. How is it possible for us to comprehend Him? He dwells in every human being. It is not the case that He manifests Himself through one person only."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA (tenderly): "I quite agree with Narendra. God is everywhere. But then you must remember that there are different manifestations of His Power in different beings. At some places there is a manifestation of His avidyaŚakti, at others a manifestation of His vidyaŚakti. Through different instruments God's Power is manifest in different degrees, greater and smaller. Therefore all men are not equal."

RAM: "What is the use of these futile arguments?"

MASTER (sharply): "No! No! There is a meaning in all this."

GIRISH (to Narendra): "How do you know that God does not assume a human body?"

NARENDRA: "God is beyond words or thought."

MASTER: "No, that is not true. He can be known by the pure buddhi, which is the same as the Pure Self. The seers of old directly perceived the Pure Self through their pure buddhi."

GIRISH (to Narendra): "Unless God Himself teaches men through, His human Incarnation, who else will teach them spiritual mysteries? God takes a human body to teach men divine knowledge and divine love. Otherwise, who will teach?"

NARENDRA: "Why, God dwells in our own heart; He will certainly teach us from within the heart."

MASTER (tenderly): "Yes, yes. He will teach us as our Inner Guide." Gradually Narendra and Girish became involved in a heated discussion. If God is Infinity, how can He have parts? What did Hamilton say? What were the views of Herbert Spencer, of Tyndall, of Huxley? And so forth and so on.

MASTER (to M.): "I don't enjoy these discussions. Why should I argue at all? I clearly see that God is everything; He Himself has become all. I see that whatever is, is God. He is everything; again, He is beyond everything. I come to a state in which my mind and

intellect merge in the Indivisible. At the sight of Narendra my mind loses itself in the consciousness of the Absolute. (To Girish) What do you say to that?"

GIRISH (with a smile): "Why ask me? As if I understood everything except that one point!" (All laugh.)

MASTER: "Again, I cannot utter a word unless I come down at least two steps from the plane of samādhi. Sankara's Non-dualistic explanation of Vedānta is true, and so is the Qualified Non-dualistic interpretation of Ramanuja."

Qualified Monism

NARENDRA: "What is Qualified Non-dualism?"

MASTER: "It is the theory of Ramanuja. According to this theory, Brahman, or the Absolute, is qualified by the universe and its living beings: These three-Brahman, the world, and living beings-together constitute One. Take the instance of a bel-fruit. A man wanted to know the weight of the fruit. He separated the shell, the flesh, and the seeds. But can a man get the weight by weighing only the flesh? He must weigh flesh, shell, and seeds together. At first it appears that the real thing in the fruit is the flesh, and not its seeds or shell. Then by reasoning you find that the shell, seeds, and flesh all belong to the fruit; the shell and seeds belong to the same thing that the flesh belongs to. Likewise, in spiritual discrimination one must first reason, following the method of 'Not this, not this': God is not the universe; God is not the living beings; Brahman alone is real, and all else is unreal. Then one realizes, as with the bel-fruit, that the Reality from which we derive the notion of Brahman is the very Reality that evolves the idea of living beings and the universe. The Nitya and the Lila are the two aspects of one and the same Reality; therefore, according to Ramanuja, Brahman is qualified by the universe and the living beings. This is the theory of Qualified Non-dualism.

Futility of mere reasoning

(To M.) "I do see God directly. What shall I reason about? I clearly see that He Himself has become everything; that He Himself has become the universe and all living beings.

"But without awakening one's own inner consciousness one cannot realize the All-pervading Consciousness. How long does a man reason? So long as he has not realized God. But mere words will not do. As for myself, I clearly see that He Himself has become everything. The inner consciousness must be awakened through the grace of God. Through this awakening a man goes into samādhi. He often forgets that he has a body. He gets rid of his attachment to 'woman and gold' and does not enjoy any talk unless it is about God. Worldly talk gives him pain. Through the awakening of the inner consciousness one realizes the All-pervading Consciousness."

The discussion came to a close. Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "I have observed that a man acquires one kind of knowledge about God through reasoning and another kind through meditation; but he acquires a third kind of Knowledge about God when God reveals Himself to him, His devotee. If God Himself reveals to His devotee the nature of Divine Incarnation-how He plays in human form-, then the devotee doesn't have to, reason

about the problem or need an explanation. Do you know what it is like? Suppose a man is in a dark room. He goes on rubbing a match against a match-box and all of a sudden light comes. Likewise, if God gives us this flash of divine light, all our doubts are destroyed. Can one ever know God by mere reasoning?"

Sri Ramakrishna asked Narendra to sit by his side. He tenderly inquired about his health and showed him much affection.

NARENDRA (to the Master): "Why, I have meditated on Kāli for three or four days, but nothing has come of it."

Kāli and Brahman

MASTER: "All in good time, my child. Kāli is none other than Brahman That which is called Brahman is really Kāli. She is the Primal Energy. When that Energy remains inactive, I call It Brahman, and when It creates. preserves, or destroys, I call It Śakti or Kāli. What you call Brahman I call Kāli.

"Brahman and Kāli are not different. They are like fire and its power to burn: if one thinks of fire one must think of its power to burn. If one recognizes Kāli one must also recognize Brahman; again, if one recognizes Brahman one must recognize Kāli. Brahman and Its Power are identical. It is Brahman whom I address as Śakti or Kāli."

It was late at night: Girish asked Haripada to call a cab, for he had to go to the theatre. As Haripada was about to leave the room the Master said with a smile: "Mind, a cab. Don't forget to bring one." (All laugh.)

HARIPADA (smiling): "Yes, sir. I am going out just for that. How can I forget it?"

GIRISH: "That I should have to go to the theatre and leave you here!"

MASTER: "No, no. You must hold to both. King Janaka paid attention to both religious and worldly duties and 'drank his milk from a brimming cup'." (All laugh.)

GIRISH: "I have been thinking of leaving the theatre to the youngsters."

MASTER: "No, no. It is all right. You are doing good to many."

Narendra said in a whisper, "Just a moment ago he [meaning Girish] was calling him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] God, an Incarnation, and now he is attracted to the theatre!"

Master's love for Narendra

Narendra was sitting beside the Master. The latter looked at him intently and suddenly moved closer to his beloved disciple. Narendra did not believe in God's assuming a human body; but what did that matter? Sri Ramakrishna's heart overflowed with more and more love for his disciple. He touched Narendra's body and said, quoting from a song:

Do you feel that your pride is wounded?
So be it, then; we too have our pride.

Then the Master said to Narendra: "As long as a man argues about God, he has not realized Him. You two were arguing. I didn't like it.

"How long does one hear noise and uproar in a house where a big feast is being given? So long as the guests are not seated for the meal. As soon as food is served and people begin to eat, three quarters of the noise disappears. (All laugh.) When the dessert is served there is still less noise. But when the guests eat the last course, buttermilk, then one hears nothing but the sound 'soop, sup'. When the meal is over, the guests retire to sleep and all is quiet.

"The nearer you approach to God, the less you reason and argue. When you attain Him, then all sounds-all reasoning and disputing-come to an end. Then you go into samādhi-sleep-, into communion with God in silence."

The Master gently stroked Narendra's body and affectionately touched his chin, uttering sweetly the holy words, "Hari Om! Hari Om! Hari Om!" He was fast becoming unconscious of the outer world. His hand was on Narendra's foot. Still in that mood he gently stroked Narendra's body. Slowly a change came over his mind. With folded hands he said to Narendra: "Sing a song, please; then I shall be all right. How else shall I be able to stand on my own legs?" Again he became speechless. He sat motionless as a statue. Presently he became intoxicated with divine love and said: "O Radha, watch your step! Otherwise you may fall into the Jamuna. Ah! How mad she is with love of Krishna!"

The Master was in a rapturous mood. Quoting from a song, he said:

Tell me, friend, how far is the grove
Where Krishna, my Beloved, dwells?
His fragrance reaches me even here,
But I am tired and can walk no farther.

Then the Master completely forgot the outer world. He did not notice anyone in the room, not even his beloved Narendra seated by his side. He did not know where he himself was seated. He was totally merged in God.

Suddenly he stood up, shouting, "Deep drunk with the Wine of Divine Love!" As he took his seat again, he muttered, "I see a light coming, but I know not whence it comes."

Now Narendra sang:

Lord, Thou hast lifted all my sorrow with the vision of Thy face,
And the magic of Thy beauty has bewitched my mind;
Beholding Thee, the seven worlds forget their never-ending woe;
What shall I say, then, of myself, a poor and lowly soul? . . .

Listening to the song, Sri Ramakrishna again went into deep samādhi. His eyes were closed and his body was transfixed.

Coming down from the ecstatic mood he looked around and said, "Who will take me to the temple garden?" He appeared like a child who felt confused in the absence of his companion.

It was late in the evening. The night was dark. The devotees stood by the carriage that had been brought to take the Master to Dakshineswar. They helped him in gently, for he was still in deep ecstasy. The carriage moved down the street and they looked after it with wistful eyes. Soon the devotees turned homeward, a gentle south wind blowing in their faces. Some were humming the lines of the song:

Lord, Thou hast lifted all my sorrow with the vision of Thy face,
And the magic of Thy beauty has bewitched my mind.

April 6, 1885

Sri Ramakrishna sat in the drawing-room of Balarām's house talking to M. It was a very hot day and long past three o'clock. He had come to Calcutta to see some of his young disciples and also to visit Devendra's house.

MASTER (to M.): "I gave my word that I would be here at three o'clock; so I have come. But it is very hot."

M: "Yes, sir, you must have suffered very much."

The devotees were fanning Sri Ramakrishna.

About Puma

MASTER: "I have come here for Baburam and the younger Naren. Why haven't you brought Purna?"

M: "He doesn't like to come to a gathering of people. He is afraid you might praise him before others and his relatives might then hear about it."

MASTER: "Yes, that's true. I won't do it in the future. Well, I understand that you are giving Purna religious instruction. That is fine."

M: "As a matter of fact, the same thing is written in one of the textbooks of the school. It says:

With all thy soul love God above;
And as thyself thy neighbour love.

If their guardians are displeased with such teachings, it can't be helped."

MASTER: "No doubt many things like that are written in those books; but the authors themselves do not assimilate what they write. This power of assimilation comes from

associating with holy men. People listen to instruction only when it is given by a sādhu who has truly renounced the world; they are not much impressed by the writings or the words of a mere scholar. Suppose a physician has a big jar of molasses by his side, and he asks his patients not to eat molasses; the patients won't pay much attention to his advice.

"Well, how do you find Purna? Does he go into ecstatic moods?"

M: "No, I haven't noticed in him any outer sign of such emotion. One day I told him those words of yours."

MASTER: "What words?"

M: "You told us that if a man is a 'small receptacle' he cannot control spiritual emotion; but if he is a 'large receptacle' he experiences intense emotion without showing it outwardly. You said that a big lake does not become disturbed when an elephant enters it; but when the elephant enters a pool, one sees tremendous confusion and the water splashes on the banks."

MASTER: "Purna will not show his emotion outwardly; he hasn't that kind of temperament. His other signs are good. What do you say?"

M: "His eyes are very bright and prominent."

MASTER: "Mere bright eyes are not enough. The eyes of a godly person are different. Did you ask him what he felt after meeting me?"

M: "Yes, sir, we talked about that. He has been telling me for the last four or five days that whenever he thinks of God or repeats His name, tears flow from his eyes and the hair on his body stands on end-such is his joy."

MASTER: "Indeed! That's all he needs."

The Master and M: were silent a few moments. Then M. said, "He is waiting"

MASTER: "Who?"

M: "Purna. Perhaps he has been standing at the door of his house. When any of us passes that way he will come running and salute us."

MASTER: "Ah! Ah!"

Sri Ramakrishna was resting, reclining against a bolster. M had brought with him a twelve year-old boy who was a student in his school. His name was Kshirode.

M: "He is a nice boy. He finds great joy in spiritual talk."

MASTER (smiling): "He has eyes like a deer's."

The boy saluted Sri Ramakrishna, touching his feet. Then he gently stroked the Master's feet.

MASTER (to M.): "Rākhāl is staying at home now; he has an abscess and is not well. I understand that his wife expects a baby."

Paltu and Binode were seated in front of Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER (to Paltu, smiling): "What did you say to your father? (To M.)He answered back when his father told him not to come here. (To Paltu) What did you say?"

PALTU: "I said to him: 'Yes, I go to him. Is that wrong?' (The Master and M. laugh.) I shall say more if necessary."

MASTER (to M., smiling): "No, no! Should he go so far?"

M: "No, sir, he should not go too far." (Sri Ramakrishna laughs.)

MASTER (to Binode): "How are you? Why haven't you come to Dakshineswar?"

BINODE: "I almost came, but then I was afraid of falling ill again. I have been ill and am not doing well."

MASTER: "Come to Dakshineswar with me. The air is very good there. You will recover."

The younger Naren entered the room. Sri Ramakrishna was going out to wash his hands and face. The younger Naren followed him with a towel; he wanted to pour water for the Master. M was with them.

MASTER: "It's very hot today."

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "How do you live in that small room of yours? Doesn't it get very hot on the upper floor?"

M: "Yes, sir, it gets very hot."

MASTER: "Besides, your wife has been suffering from brain trouble. You should keep her in a cool room."

M: "Yes, sir. I have asked her to sleep downstairs."

Sri Ramakrishna returned to the drawing-room and took his seat.

MASTER (to M.): "Why didn't you come to Dakshineswar last Sunday?"

M: "Sir, there was no one else at home. My wife was not well and no one was there to look after her."

Sri Ramakrishna was on his way in a carriage to Devendra's house in Nimu Goswami's Lane. The younger Naren, M, and one or two other devotees were with him. The Master felt great yearning for Purna. He began to talk of the young disciple.

MASTER (to M.): "A great soul! Or how could he make me do japa for his welfare? But Purna doesn't know anything about it."

M and the other devotees were amazed at these words.

MASTER: "It would have been nice if you had brought him here with you today. Why didn't you?"

Seeing the younger Naren laugh, the Master and the other devotees laughed too. The Master said to M., laughing and pointing to Naren: "Look at him! Look! How naive he looks when he laughs, as if he knew nothing. He never thinks of these three things: land, wife, and money. God cannot be realized unless the mind is totally free from 'woman and gold'."

Master at Devendra's house

The carriage proceeded to Devendra's house. Once Sri Ramakrishna had said to Devendra at Dakshineswar, "I have been thinking of visiting your house one day." Devendra had replied: "The same idea came to my mind today, and I have come here to ask that favour of you. You must grace my house this Sunday." "But", the Master had said, you have a small income. Don't invite many people. The carriage hire will also run to a big amount." Devendra had answered, laughing: "What if my income is small? 'One can run into debt to eat butter!' "At these words Sri Ramakrishna had laughed a long time.

Soon the carriage reached Devendra's house. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "Devendra, don't make elaborate arrangements for my meal. Something very simple will do. I am not very well today."

Sri Ramakrishna seated himself in the drawing-room on the ground floor of Devendra's house. The devotees sat around him. It was evening. The room was well lighted. The younger Naren, Ram, M., Girish, Devendra, Akshay, Upendra, and some other devotees were present. As the Master cast his glance on a young devotee, his face beamed with joy. Pointing to the devotee, Sri Ramakrishna said to the others: "He is totally free from attachment to land, wife, and money, the three things that entangle one in worldliness. The mind that dwells on these three cannot be fixed on God. He saw a vision, too. (To the devotee) Tell us, what did you see?"

DEVOTEE (laughing): "I saw a heap of dung. Some were seated on it, and some sat at a distance."

MASTER: "It was a vision of the plight of the worldly people who are forgetful of God. It shows that all these desires are disappearing from his mind. Need one worry about anything if one's mind is detached from 'woman and gold'? How strange! Only after much meditation and japa could I get rid of these desires; and how quickly he could banish them from his mind! Is it an easy matter to get rid of lust? I myself felt a queer sensation in my heart six months after I had begun my spiritual practice. Then I threw myself on the ground under a tree and wept bitterly. I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, if it comes to that, I shall certainly cut my throat with a knife!'

(To the devotees) "If the mind is free from 'woman and gold', then what else can obstruct a man? He enjoys then only the Bliss of Brahman."

Śaśi had recently been visiting Sri Ramakrishna. He was studying at the Vidyāsāgar College for his Bachelor's degree. The Master began to talk about him.

MASTER (to the devotees): "That boy will think of money for some time. But there are some who will never do so. Some of the youngsters will not marry."

The devotees listened silently to the Master.

MASTER : "It is hard to recognize an Incarnation of God unless the mind is totally free from 'woman and gold'. A man asked a. seller of egg-plants the value of a diamond. He said, 'I can give nine seers of egg-plants in exchange, and not one more.'"

At these words all the devotees laughed. The younger Naren laughed very loudly. Sri Ramakrishna noticed that he had quickly understood the implication of these words.

MASTER: "What a subtle mind he has! Nangta also could understand things that way, in a flash-the meaning of the Gitā, the Bhagavata, and other scriptures.

Master praises renunciation

"Renunciation of 'woman and gold' from boyhood! Amazing indeed! It falls to the lot of a very few. A person without such renunciation is like a mango struck by a hail-stone. The fruit cannot be offered to the Deity, and even a man hesitates to eat it.

"There are people who during their youth committed many sins, but in old age chant the name of God. Well, that is better than nothing.

"The mother of a certain Mallick, who belonged to a very noble family, asked me if prostitutes would ever be saved. She herself had led that kind of life; that is why she asked the question. I said: 'Yes, they too will be saved, if only they cry to God with a yearning heart and promise not to repeat their sins.' What will the mere chanting of Hari's name accomplish? One must weep sincerely."

The kirtan began to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. The singer was a professional. He sang about Sri Gaurānga's initiation as a monk by Keshab Bharati:

Oh, what a vision I have beheld in Keshab Bharati's hut!
Gora, in all his matchless grace,
Shedding tears in a thousand streams! . . .

Sri Ramakrishna went into ecstasy when he heard the song. The musician sang again, describing the suffering of a milkmaid of Vrindāvan at her separation from Sri Krishna. She was seeking her Krishna in the madhavi bower:

O madhavi, give me back my Sweet One!
Give me, give me back my Sweet One!
Give Him back, for He is mine,
And make me your slave for ever.
He is my life, as water is to the fish;
O madhavi, you have hidden Him in your bosom!
I am a simple, guileless girl,
And you have stolen my Beloved.
O madhavi, I die for my Sweet One;
I cannot bear to live without Him.
Without my Madhava I shall die;
Oh, give Him, give Him back to me!

Now and then Sri Ramakrishna sang with the musicians, improvising Lines:

How far from here is Mathura,
Where dwells the Beloved of my soul?

Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi. His body was motionless. He remained in that state a long time.

Gradually he came down to the consciousness of the outer world. Still in a spiritual mood, he began to talk, sometimes addressing the devotees, some-times the Divine Mother.

MASTER: "Mother, please attract him to Thee. I can't worry about him any more. (To M.) My mind is inclined a little to your brother-in-law.

About Girish

(To Girish) "You utter many abusive and vulgar words; but that doesn't matter. It is better for these things to come out. There are some people who fall ill on account of blood-poisoning; the more the poisoned blood finds an outlet, the better it is for them. At the time when the *Upādhi* of a man is being destroyed, it makes a loud noise, as it were. Wood crackles when it burns; there is no more noise when the burning is over.

"You will be purer day by day. You will improve very much day by day. People will marvel at you.

"I may not come many more times; but that doesn't matter. You will succeed by yourself."

The Master's spiritual mood became very intense. Again he talked to the Divine Mother.

MASTER: "Mother, what credit is there in making a man good who is already good? O Mother, what wilt Thou accomplish by killing one who is already dead? Only if Thou canst kill a person who is still standing erect wilt Thou show Thy glory."

Sri Ramakrishna remained silent a few moments. Suddenly he said in a slightly raised voice: "I have come from Dakshineswar. I am going, Mother!" It was as if a child had heard the call of its mother from a distance and was responding to it. He again became motionless, absorbed in samādhi. The devotees looked at him with un-winking eyes. Still in an ecstatic mood he said, "I shall not eat any more luchi." At this point a few Vaishnava priests, who had come from the neighbourhood, left the place.

Sri Ramakrishna began to talk with his devotees in a very joyous spirit. It was the month of April and the day was very sultry. Devendra had made ice-cream. He offered it to the Master and the devotees. M said in a low voice, "Encore! Encore!" The devotees laughed. At the sight of the ice-cream.

Sri Ramakrishna was happy as a child.

MASTER: "The kirtan was very nice. The song described beautifully the gopis' state of mind: 'O madhavi, give me back my Sweet One!' The milkmaids of Vrindāvan were drunk with ecstatic love for Krishna. How wonderful! Mad for Krishna!"

A devotee, pointing to another devotee, said, "He has the attitude of the gopis."

RAM: "No, he has both-the attitude of tender love and the attitude of austere knowledge."

MASTER: "What is it you are talking about?"

Sri Ramakrishna inquired about Surendra.

RAM: "I sent him word, but he hasn't come."

MASTER: "He gets very tired from his heavy office-work."

A DEVOTEE: "Ram Babu has been writing about you."

MASTER (smiling): "What is he writing?"

DEVOTEE: "He is writing an article on The Bhakti of the Paramahamsa'."

MASTER: "Good! That will make Ram famous."

GIRISH (smiling): "He says he is your disciple."

MASTER: "I have no disciple. I am the servant of the servant of Rāma." Some people of the neighbourhood had dropped in; but they did not please the Master. He said: "What sort of place is this? I don't find a single pious soul here."

Devendra took Sri Ramakrishna into the inner apartments and offered him refreshments. Afterwards the Master returned to the drawing-room with a happy face and took his seat. The devotees sat around him'. Upendra and Akshay sat on either side of him and stroked his feet. The Master spoke highly of the women of Devendra's family, saying: "They are very nice. They come from the country; so they are very pious."

The Master was absorbed in his own joy. In a happy mood he began to sing:

Unless a man is simple, he cannot recognize God, the Simple One. . .

Again he sang:

Stay your step, O wandering monk
Stand there with begging-bowl in hand,
And let me behold your radiant face . . .
Once more:
A mendicant has come to us, ever absorbed in divine moods;
Holy alike is he to Hindu and Musslman . . ..

Girish saluted the Master and took his leave. Devendra and the other devotees took the Master to his carriage. Seeing that one of his neighbours was sound asleep on a bench in the courtyard, Devendra woke him up. The neighbour rubbed his eyes and said, "Has the Paramahamsa come?" All burst into laughter. The man had come a long time before Sri Ramakrishna's arrival, and because of the heat had spread a mat on the bench, lain down, and gone sound asleep.

Sri Ramakrishna's carriage proceeded to Dakshineswar. He said to M. happily, "I have eaten a good deal of ice-cream; bring four or five cones for me when you come to Dakshineswar." Continuing, he said, "Now my mind is drawn to these few youngsters: the younger Naren, Purna, and your brother-in-law."

M: "Do you mean Dwija?"

MASTER: "No, he is all right; I mean his elder brother."
The carriage rolled on to the Kāli temple at Dakshineswar.

Chapter 39

THE MASTER'S REMINISCENCES

April 12, 1885

Master's own reminiscences

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting with the devotees in Balarām's drawing room in Calcutta. M. arrived at three o'clock. Girish, Balarām, the younger Naren, Paltu, Dwija, Purna, Mahendra Mukherji, and many other devotees were there. Shortly Trailokya Sannyal, Jaygopal Sen, and other members of the Brahmo Samaj arrived. Many woman devotees were present also, seated behind a screen. Among them was Mohini's wife, who had almost gone insane on account of her son's death. There were a few other afflicted souls like her who used to visit the Master to obtain peace of mind.

Sri Ramakrishna was describing to the devotees the various incidents of his *sādhanā* and the phases of his spiritual realization.

Various forms of his meditation

MASTER: "During my *sādhanā*, when I meditated, I would actually see a person sitting neat me with a trident in his hand. He would threaten to strike me with the weapon unless I fixed my mind on the Lotus Feet of God, warning me that it would pierce my breast if my mind strayed from God.

"The Divine Mother would put me in such a state that sometimes my mind would come down from the Nitya to the Lila, and sometimes go up from the Lila to the Nitya.

"Sometimes, when the mind descended to the Lila, I would meditate day and night on Sita and Rāma. At those times I would constantly behold the forms of Sita and Rāma. Rāmlāla was my constant companion. Sometimes I would bathe Him and sometimes feed Him.

"Again, I used to be absorbed in the ideal of Radha and Krishna and would constantly see their forms. Or again, I would be absorbed in Gaurānga. He is the harmonization of two ideals: the Purusha and the Prakriti. At such times I would always see the form of Gaurānga.

Master's meditation on formless Spirit

"Then a change came over me. The mind left the plane of the Lila and ascended to the Nitya. I found no distinction between the sacred tulsi and the ordinary sajina plant. I no longer enjoyed seeing the forms of God; I said to myself, 'They come and go.' I lifted my mind above them. I removed all the pictures of gods and goddesses from my room and began to meditate on the Primal Purusha, the Indivisible Satchidananda, regarding myself as His handmaid.

Three kinds of *sādhanā*

"I practised all sorts of *sādhanā*. There are three classes of *sādhanā*: sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic. In the sattvic *sādhanā* the devotee calls on the Lord with great longing or

simply repeats His name; he doesn't seek any result in return. The rajasic *sādhanā* prescribes many rituals: purascharana, pilgrimage, panchatapa, worship with sixteen articles, and so forth. The tamasic *sādhanā* is a worship of God with the help of tamas. The attitude of a tamasic devotee is this: 'Hail, Kāli! What? Wilt Thou not reveal Thyself to me? If not, I will cut my throat with a knife!' In this discipline one does not observe conventional purity; it is like some of the disciplines prescribed by the Tantra.

"During my *sādhanā* period I had all kinds of amazing visions. I distinctly perceived the communion of Ātman. A person exactly resembling me entered my body and began to commune with each one of the six lotuses. The petals of these lotuses had been closed; but as each of them experienced the communion, the drooping flower bloomed and turned itself upward. Thus blossomed forth the lotuses at the centres of Muladhara, Svadhisthana, Anāhata, Visuddha, Ājnā, and Sahasrara. The drooping flowers turned upward. I perceived all these things directly.

"When I meditated during my *sādhanā*, I used to think of the unflickering flame of a lamp set in a windless place.

Nature of deep concentration

"In deep meditation a man is not at all conscious of the outer world. A hunter was aiming at a bird. A bridal procession passed along beside him, with the groom's relatives and friends, music, carriages, and horses. It took a long time for the procession to pass the hunter, but he was not at all conscious of it. He did not know that the bridegroom had gone by.

"A man was angling in a lake all by himself. After a long while the float began to move. Now and then its tip touched the water. The angler was holding the rod tight in his hands, ready to pull it up, when a passer-by stopped and said, 'Sir, can you tell me where Mr. Bannerji lives?' There was no reply from the angler, who was just on the point of pulling up the rod. Again and again the stranger said to him in a loud voice, 'Sir, can you tell me where Mr. Bannerji lives?' But the angler was unconscious of everything around him. His hands were trembling, his eyes fixed on the float. The stranger was annoyed and went on. When he had gone quite a way, the angler's float sank under water and with one pull of the rod he landed the fish. He wiped the sweat from his face with his towel and shouted after the stranger. 'Hey!' he said. 'Come here! Listen!' But the man would not turn his face. After much shouting, however, he came back and said to the angler, 'Why are you shouting at me?' 'What did you ask me about?' said .the angler. The stranger said, 'I repeated the question so many times and now you art asking me to repeat it once more!' The angler replied, 'At that time my float was about to sink; so I didn't hear a word of what you said.'

Single-mindedness in meditation

"A person can achieve such single-mindedness in meditation that he will see nothing, hear nothing. He will not be conscious even of touch. A snake may crawl over his body, but he will not know it. Neither of them will be aware of the other.

"In deep meditation the sense-organs stop functioning; the mind does not look outward. It is like closing the gate of the outer court in a house. There are five objects of the senses: form, taste, smell, touch, and sound. They are all left outside.

"At the beginning of meditation the objects of the senses appear before the aspirant. But when the meditation becomes deep, they no longer bother him. They are left outside. How many things I saw during meditation! I vividly perceived before me a heap of rupees, a shawl, a plate of sweets, and two women with rings in their noses. 'What do you want?' I asked my mind. 'Do you want to enjoy any of these things?' 'No,' replied the mind, 'I don't want any of them. I don't want anything but the Lotus Feet of God.' I saw the inside and the outside of the women, as one sees from out side the articles in a glass room. I saw what is in them: entrails, blood, filth, worms, phlegm, and such things."

Girish Chandra Ghosh used to say now and then that he could cure illness by the strength of the Master's name.

Occult powers

MASTER (to Girish and the other devotees): "People of small intellect seek occult powers-powers to cure disease, win a lawsuit, walk on water, and such things. But the genuine devotees of God don't want anything except His Lotus Feet. One day Hriday said to me, 'Uncle, please ask the Mother for some powers, some occult powers.' I have the nature of a child. While I was practising japa in the Kāli temple, I said to Kāli, 'Mother, Hriday asked me to pray to You for some occult powers.' The Divine Mother at once showed me a vision. A middle-aged prostitute, about forty years old, appeared and sat with her back to me. She had large hips and wore a black-bordered sari. Soon she was covered with filth. The Mother showed me that occult powers are as abominable as the filth of that prostitute. Thereupon I went to Hriday and scolded him, saying: 'why did you teach me such a prayer? It is because of you that I had such an experience.'

A false teacher

"People with a little occult power gain such things as name and fame. Many of them want to follow the profession of guru, gain people's recognition, and make disciples and devotees. Men say of such a guru: 'Ah! He is having a wonderful time. How many people visit him! He has many disciples and followers. His house is overflowing with furniture and other things. People give him presents. He has such power that he can feed many people if he so desires.'

"The profession of a teacher is like that of a prostitute. It is the selling of oneself for the trifle of money, honour, and creature comforts. For such insignificant things it is not good to prostitute the body, mind, and soul, the means by which one can attain God. A man once said about a certain woman: 'Ah! She is having a grand time now. She is so well off! She has rented a room and furnished it with a couch, a mat, pillows, and many other things. And how many people she controls! They are always visiting her.' In other words, the woman has now become a prostitute. Therefore her happiness is unbounded.

Formerly she was a maidservant in a gentleman's house; now she is a prostitute. She has ruined herself for a mere trifle.

Master's visions during *sādhanā*

"How many other visions I saw while meditating during my *sādhanā*! Once I was meditating under the bel-tree when 'Sin' appeared before me and tempted me in various ways. He came to me in the form of an English soldier. He wanted to give me wealth, honour, sex pleasure, various occult powers, and such things. I began to pray to the Divine Mother. Now I am telling you something very secret. The Mother appeared. I said to Her, 'Kill him, Mother!' I still remember that form of the Mother, Her world bewitching beauty. She came to me taking the form of Krishnamayi. But it was as if her glance moved the world."

Sri Ramakrishna became silent. Resuming his reminiscences, he said: "How many other visions I saw! But I am not permitted to tell them. Someone is shutting my mouth, as it were. I used to find no distinction between the sacred tulsi and the insignificant sajina leaf. The feeling of distinction was entirely destroyed. Once I was meditating under the banyan when I was shown a Musslman with a long beard. He came to me with rice in an earthen plate. He fed some other Musslmans with the rice and also gave me a few grains to eat. The Mother showed me that there exists only One, and not two. It is Satchidananda alone that has taken all these various forms; He alone has become the world and its living beings. Again, it is He who has become food.

(To Girish, M., and the others) "I have the nature of a child. Hriday said to me, 'Uncle, ask the Mother for some occult powers.' At once I went to the temple to ask Her about them. At that time God had put me in such a state that I had to listen to those who lived with me. I felt like a child who sees darkness all around unless someone is with him. I felt as if I should die unless Hriday was near me. You see I am in that state of mind just now.While I am speaking to you my inner spirit is being awakened."

As Sri Ramakrishna uttered these words, he was on the point of plunging into samādhi and losing consciousness of time and space. But he was trying with the utmost difficulty to control himself. He said to the devotees in an ecstatic mood: "I still see you. But I feel as if you had been sitting here forever. I don't recall when you came or where you are."

Sri Ramakrishna was silent a few minutes. Then, regaining partial consciousness, he said, "I shall have a drink of water." He often said things like this after samādhi, in order to bring down his mind to the ordinary plane of consciousness. Girish was a newcomer and did not know this; so he started to bring some water. Sri Ramakrishna asked him not to, saying, "No, my dear sir, I cannot drink now."

The Master and the devotees were silent a while. Sri Ramakrishna resumed the conversation.

MASTER: (to M.):"Well,have I done any wrong in telling these secret experiences?"

M. did not know what to say and kept quiet.

MASTER: "Why should there be any harm in it? I have told these things to create faith in you all."

After a while he said to M. very humbly, "Will you kindly bring him here?" He referred to Purna.

M. (hesitating): "Yes, Sir. I shall send for him this very moment.

MASTER (eagerly): "In Purna I have reached the 'post'.

Was Sri Ramakrishna hinting that Purna was perhaps the last devotee of his inner circle?

Experience of mahabhava

Sri Ramakrishna then described to Girish, M., and the other devotees his own experience of mahabhava.

MASTER (to the devotees): "My joy after that experience was equal to the pain I suffered before it. Mahabhava is a divine ecstasy; it shakes the body and mind to their very foundation. It is like a huge elephant entering a small hut. The house shakes to its foundation. Perhaps it falls to pieces.

"The burning pain that one feels when one is separated from God is not an ordinary feeling. It is said that the fire of this anguish in Rupa and Sanatana scorched the leaves of the tree under which they sat. I was unconscious three days in that state. I couldn't move. I lay in one place. When I regained consciousness, the Brahmani took me out for a bath. But my skin couldn't bear the touch of her hand; so my body had to be covered with a heavy sheet. Only then could she hold me with her hand and lead me to the bathing-place. The earth that had stuck to my body while I was lying on the ground had become baked.

"In that state I felt as if a ploughshare were passing through my back-bone. I cried out: 'Oh, I am dying! I am dying!' But afterwards I was filled with great joy."

The devotees listened breathlessly to these experiences of the Master.

MASTER (to Girish): "But it isn't necessary for you to go so far. My experiences are for others to refer to. You busy yourself with five different things, but I have one ideal only. I do not enjoy anything but God. This is what God has ordained for me. (Smiling) There are different trees in the forest, some shooting up with one trunk and others spreading out with five branches. (All smile.)

"Yes, my experiences are for others to refer to. But you should live in the world in a spirit of detachment. You will no doubt have dirt on your body, but you must shake it off as the mudfish shakes off the mud. You may swim in the black ocean of the world, but your body should not be stained."

GIRISH (smiling): "But you too had to marry." (Laughter.)

MASTER (smiling): "Marriage is necessary for the sake of samskara. But how could I lead a worldly life? So uncontrollable was my divine fervour that every time the sacred thread was put around my neck it dropped off.

Some believe that Sukadeva also had to marry for the sake of samskara. They say he even had a daughter. (All laugh.)

Power of "woman and gold"

"'Woman and gold' alone is the world. It makes one forget God."

GIRISH: "But how can we get rid of 'woman and gold'?"

MASTER: "Pray to God with a yearning heart. Pray to Him for discrimination. 'God alone is real and all else illusory'-this is discrimination. One strains water through a fine sieve in order to separate the dirt from it. The clear water goes through the sieve leaving the dirt behind. Apply the sieve of discrimination to the world. Live in the world after knowing God. Then it will be the world of vidyā.

"Just see the bewitching power of women! I mean the women who are the embodiment of avidyā, the power of delusion. They fool men, as it were. They take away their inner substance. When I see a man and woman sitting together, I say to myself, 'Alas, they are done for' (Looking at M.) Haru, such a nice boy, is possessed by a witch. People ask: 'Where is Haru? Where is he?' But where do you expect him to be? They all go to the banyan and find him sitting quietly under it. He no longer has his beauty, power, or joy. Ah! He is possessed by the witch that lives in the banyan.

"If a woman says to her husband, 'Go there', he at once stands up, ready to go. If she says, 'Sit down here', immediately he sits down.

"A job-seeker got tired of visiting the manager in an office. He couldn't get the job. The manager said to him, 'There is no vacancy now; but come and see me now and then.' This went on for a long time, and the candidate lost all hope. One day he told his tale of woe to a friend. The friend said: 'How stupid you are! Why are you wearing away the soles of your feet going to that fellow? You had better go to Golap. You will get the job tomorrow.' 'Is that so?' said the candidate. 'I am going right away.' Golap was the manager's mistress. The candidate called on her and said: 'Mother, I am in great distress. You must help me out of it. I am the son of a poor brahmin. Where else shall I go for help? Mother, I have been out of work many days. My children are about to starve to death. I can get a job if you but say the word.' Golap said to him, 'Child, whom should I speak to?' She said to herself: 'Ah, the poor brahmin! He has been suffering too much.' The candidate said to her, 'I am sure to get the job if you just put in a word about it to the manager.' Golap said, 'I shall speak to him today and settle the matter.' The very next morning a man called on the candidate and said, 'You are to work in the manager's office, beginning today.' The manager said to his English boss: 'This man is very competent. I have appointed him. He will do credit to the firm.'

"All are deluded by 'woman and gold'. But I do not care for it at all. And I swear to you that I do not know anything but God."

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, a new sect, named, 'Nava Hullol', has been started. Lalit Chatterji is one of the members."

MASTER: "There are different views. All these views are but so many paths to reach the same goal. But everyone believes that his view alone is right, that his watch alone keeps correct time."

GIRISH (to M.): "Do you remember what Pope says about it?

'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own."

MASTER (to M.): "What does it mean?"

M: "Every one thinks that his own watch keeps the correct time. But different watches do not give the same time."

MASTER: "But however wrong the watches may be, the Sun never makes a mistake. One should check one's watch with the sun."

A DEVOTEE: Mr. X- tells lies.

Efficacy of truthfulness

MASTER: "Truthfulness in speech is the *tapasya* of the Kaliyuga. It is difficult to practise other austerities in this cycle. By adhering to truth one attains God. Tulsidas said: 'Truthfulness, obedience to God, and the regarding of others' wives as one's mother, are the greatest virtues. If one does not realize God by practising them, then Tulsi is a liar.'

"Keshab Sen assumed his father's debts. Others would have repudiated them. I visited Devendra's Samaj at Jorashanko and found Keshab meditating on the dais. He was then a young man. I said to Mathur Babu, 'Of all who are meditating here, this young man's "float" alone has sunk under water. The "fish" is biting at the hook.'

"There was a man-whom I shall not name-who for ten thousand rupees told a lie in court. In order to win the lawsuit he made me give an offering to the Divine Mother. He said to me, 'Father, please give this offering to the Mother.' Trusting him like a child, I gave the offering."

DEVOTEE: "A nice man indeed!"

MASTER: "But he had such faith in me that he believed the Mother would grant his prayer if I but made the offering."

Referring to Lalit Babu, Sri Ramakrishna said: "Is it an easy matter to get rid of pride? There are very few who are without pride. Balarām is one of them. (Pointing to a devotee) And here is another. Other people in their position would have swelled with pride. They would have parted their hair and showed other traits of tamas. They would have been proud of their learning. The 'fat brahmin' [referring to Prankrishna] still has a little of it.

To M.) Mahima Chakravarty has read many books, hasn't he?"

M: "Yes, sir, he has read a great deal."

MASTER (smiling): "I wish he and Girish could meet. Then we could enjoy a little discussion."

GIRISH (smiling): "Doesn't he say that by means of *sādhanā* all people can be like Sri Krishna?"

MASTER: "Not exactly that, but something like it."

DEVOTEE: "Sir, can all be like Sri Krishna?"

Special traits of a Divine Incarnation

MASTER: "An Incarnation of God or one born with some of the characteristics of an Incarnation is called an Isvarakoti. An ordinary man is called a jiva or jivakoti. By dint of *sādhanā* a jivakoti can realize God; but after samādhi he cannot come back to the plane of relative consciousness.

"The Isvarakoti is like the king's son. He has the keys to all the rooms of the seven-storey palace; he can climb to all the seven floors and come down at will. A jivakoti is like a petty officer. He can enter some of the rooms of the palace; that is his limit.

"Janaka was a Jnāni. He attained Knowledge by means of his *sādhanā*. But Sukadeva was Knowledge itself."

GIRISH: "Ah!"

Nārada and Sukadeva

MASTER: "Sukadeva did not attain Knowledge through *sādhanā*. Like Sukadeva, Nārada also had the Knowledge of Brahman. But he retained bhakti in order to teach people. Prahlada sometimes assumed the attitude of 'I am He', sometimes that of a servant of God, and sometimes that of His child. Hanuman also was like that.
"All may wish for such a lofty state, but all cannot attain it. Some bamboos are hollower than others; some are more solid inside."

A DEVOTEE: "You say that your spiritual experiences are for others to refer to. Tell us what we should do."

Master urges intense dispassion

MASTER: "If you want to realize God, then you must cultivate intense dispassion. You must renounce immediately what you feel to be standing in your way. You should not put it off till the future. 'Woman and gold' is the obstruction. The mind must be withdrawn from it.

"One must not be slow and lazy. A man was going to bathe; he had his towel on his shoulder. His wife said to him: 'You are worthless. You are getting old and still you cannot give up some of your habits. You cannot live a single day without me. But look at that man! What a renouncer he is!'

"HUSBAND: 'Why? What has he done?'

"WIFE: 'He has sixteen wives and he is renouncing them one by one. You will never be able to renounce.'

HUSBAND: 'Renouncing his wives one by one! You are crazy. He won't be able to renounce. If a man wants to renounce, does he do it little by little?'

WIFE (smiling): 'Still he is better than you.'

"HUSBAND: 'You are silly; you don't understand. He cannot renounce. But I can. See! Here I go!' "

The Master continued: "That is called intense renunciation. No sooner did the man discriminate than he renounced. He went away with the towel on his shoulder. He didn't turn back to settle his worldly affairs. He didn't even look back at his home.

"He who wants to renounce needs great strength of mind. He must have a dare-devil attitude like a dacoit's. Before looting a house, the dacoits shout: 'Kill! Murder! Loot!'

"Cultivate devotion and love of God and so pass your days. What else can you do? When Krishna went away, Yaśoda became insane with grief and visited Radha. Radha was moved by her sorrow and appeared before her as *Ādyāśakti*. She said, 'My child, ask a boon of Me.' Yaśoda replied: 'Mother, what else shall I ask of You? Bless me that I may serve Krishna alone with my body, mind, and speech; that I may behold His devotees with these eyes; that I may go with these feet to the place where His divine sport is manifested; that I may serve Him and His devotees with these hands; and that I may devote all my sense-organs to His service alone.' "

As Sri Ramakrishna uttered these words, he was about to go into ecstasy.

Suddenly he exclaimed: "Kāli, the Embodiment of Destruction! No, Nityakali, my eternal Divine Mother" With great difficulty he restrained himself. He was starting to say more about Yaśoda, when Mahendra Mukherji arrived.

Advice to householders

Mahendra and his younger brother, Priya, had been visiting the Master for some time. Mahendra owned a flour-mill and other businesses. His brother was an engineer. Both the brothers engaged people to manage their affairs and therefore had considerable leisure. Mahendra was thirty-six or thirty-seven and his brother two years younger. Besides their country home at Kedeti, they had a house at Baghbazar, Calcutta. A young devotee named Hari accompanied them on their visits to Sri Ramakrishna. Hari was married but greatly devoted to the Master. Mahendra and Hari had not visited Dakshineswar for a long time. They saluted Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER: "Hello! Why haven't you visited Dakshineswar for so long?"

MAHENDRA: "Sir, I have been away from Calcutta. I was at Kedeti."

MASTER: "You have no children. You don't serve anybody. And still you have no leisure! Goodness gracious!"

The devotees remained silent. Mahendra was a little embarrassed.

MASTER (to Mahendra): "Why am I saying all this to you? You are sincere and generous. You have love for God."

MAHENDRA: "You are saying these words for my good."

MASTER (smiling): "You see, we don't take any collection during the performance at our place. Jadu's mother says to me, 'Other sādhus always ask for money, but you do not.' Worldly people feel annoyed if they have to spend money.

"A theatrical performance was being given at a certain place. A man felt a great desire to take a seat and see it. He peeped in and saw that a collection was being taken from the audience. Quietly he slipped away. Another performance was being given at some other place. He went there and, inquiring, found that no collection would be taken. There was a great rush of people. He elbowed his way through the crowd and reached the center of the hall. There he picked out a nice seat for himself, twirled his moustaches, and sat through the performance. (All laugh.)

"You have no children to divert your mind. I know a deputy magistrate who draws a salary of eight hundred rupees a month. He went to Keshab's house to see a performance. I was there too. Rākhāl and a few other devotees were with me and sat beside me. After a while Rākhāl went out for a few minutes. The deputy magistrate came over and made his young son take Rākhāl's seat. I said, 'He can't sit there.' 'At that time I was in such a state of mind that I had to do whatever the person next to me would ask me to do; so I had seated Rākhāl beside me. As long as the performance lasted the deputy did nothing but gibber with his son. The rascal didn't look at the performance even once. I heard, too, that he is a slave to his wife; he gets up and sits down as she tells him to. And he didn't see the performance for that snub-nosed monkey of a boy.

(To Mahendra) "Do you practise meditation?"

MAHENDRA: "Yes, sir. A little."

MASTER: "Come to Dakshineswar now and then."

MAHENDRA (smiling): "Yes, sir. I will. You know where my knots and twists are. You will straighten them out."

MASTER (smiling): "First come to Dakshineswar; then I shall press your limbs to see where your twists are. Why don't you come?"

MAHENDRA: "Because of the pressure of my duties. Besides, I have to go to my country home now and then."

MASTER (to Mahendra, pointing his finger at the devotees): "Have they no homes or dwelling-places? Have they no duties? How is it that they come?

(To Hari) "Why haven't you come to Dakshineswar? Is your wife living with you?"

HARI: "No, sir."

MASTER: "Then why did you forget me?"

HARI: "I haven't been well, sir."

MASTER (to the devotees): "He looks thin. He has no small measure of bhakti. He is overflowing with it, but it is of a rather troublesome nature." (Laughter.)

Sri Ramakrishna used to address a certain devotee's wife by the name of "Habi's mother". Her brother, a college student aged about twenty, was there. He stood up, ready to go and play cricket. His younger brother, named Dwija, was also a devotee of the Master. Both brothers left the room. A few minutes later Dwija returned. The Master said, "Why didn't you go?" A devotee answered: "He wants to hear the music. Perhaps that is why he has come back."

Trailokya, the Brahmo devotee, was to sing for the Master. Paltu arrived. The Master said: "Who is this? Ah! It is Paltu."

Purna, another young devotee, also arrived. It was with great difficulty that Sri Ramakrishna had managed to have him come. His relatives strongly objected to his visiting the Master. Purna was a student in the fifth grade of the school where M. taught. The boy prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna. The Master seated him by his side and was talking to him in a low voice. M. alone was sitting near them. The other devotees were talking about various things. Girish, sitting on the other side of the room, was reading a life of Keshab.

MASTER (to Purna): "Come nearer."

GIRISH(to M.): "Who is this boy?"

M. was afraid that others might notice the boy. This would make trouble for him at home and M would be responsible for it.

M. (Sharply): "Don't you see he is a boy?"

GIRISH (smiling): "I need no ghost to tell me that."

The Master and the boy were talking in low tones.

MASTER: "Do you practise what I asked you to?"

PURNA: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "Do you dream? Do you dream of a flame? A lighted torch? A married woman? A cremation ground? It is good to dream of these things."

PURNA: "I dreamt of you. You were seated and were telling me something."

MASTER: "What? Some instructions? Tell me some of it."

PURNA: "I don't remember now."

MASTER: "Never mind. But it is very good. You will make progress. You feel attracted to me, don't you?"

A few minutes later Sri Ramakrishna said to the boy, "Won't you come there?" He meant Dakshineswar. "I can't promise", answered the boy.

MASTER: "Why? Doesn't one of your relatives live there?"

PURNA: "Yes, sir. But it won't be very convenient for me to go." Girish was reading a life of Keshab written by Trailokya of the Brahmo Samaj. In it Trailokya said that at first Sri Ramakrishna had been very much opposed to the world but that after meeting Keshab he had changed his mind and had come to believe that, one could lead a spiritual life in the world as well. Several devotees had told the Master about this. They wanted to discuss it with Trailokya. Those passages in the book had been read to the Master.

Noticing the book in Girish's hand, Sri Ramakrishna said to Girish, M., Ram, and the other devotees: "Those people are busy with the world. That is why they set such a high value on worldly life. They are drowned in 'woman and gold'. One doesn't talk that way after realizing God. After enjoying divine bliss, one looks on the world as crow-droppings. At the very outset I utterly renounced everything. Not only did I renounce the company of worldly people, but now and then the company of devotees as well. I noticed

that the devotees were dropping dead one by one, and that made my heart writhe with pain. But now I keep one or two of them with me."

Girish left for home, saying he would come back. Trailokya arrived with Jaygopal Sen. They bowed before the Master and sat down. He inquired about their health. The younger Naren entered the room and saluted Sri Ramakrishna. The Master said to him, "Why didn't you see me last Saturday?"

Trailokya was ready to sing.

MASTER: "Ah! You sang that day about the Blissful Mother. How sweetly you sang! Others' songs seem insipid to me. That day I didn't enjoy even Narendra's singing. Why don't you sing those same songs again?"

Trailokya sang:

Victory to Gora, Sachi's son!
Hail, Abode of every virtue,
Touchstone of Love, Ocean of Bliss,
Man's bewitcher, beauteous of form,
Enchanting the eye like shining gold!
His tender arms that reach to the knee,
Graceful and long as lotus stalks,
Are lovingly stretched to all mankind,
His lotus face of matchless beauty
Overflows with the nectar of Love;
His cheeks are covered with curling hair!
Alight with heavenly love, his beauty
Charms the eye! Beaming with fervour,
Radiant with Bliss, his body trembling
With Hari's joy, Gaurānga the golden
Dances like a mad elephant, shaking
In all his limbs with the frenzy of love!
Gaurānga, singer of Hari's glories,
Prize of every sādhu's heart,
Rarest of men, the Ocean of Love,
Embraces the outcaste, calls him brother,
Takes him in his arms in fervent love!

He dances with both his arms upraised,
And sings Hari's name; the tears are streaming
Down his cheeks; he weeps, he cries,
He trembles, roars, and rages, saying,
"Where is Hari, the Jewel of my heart?"
The hair on his limbs is standing on end,
Like a kadamba flower is his body,

Covered with dust he rolls on the ground.
O Thou, the Abode of Hari's lila,
Fountain-head of Love's elixir,
Friend of the helpless, Glory of Banga,
Hail Chaitanya, Thou who shinest
Bright as the moon, in the bhakta's heart!

Sri Ramakrishna left the room for a minute. The women devotees were seated near the screen. They were eager to see Sri Ramakrishna. Trailokya went on with his music.

Sri Ramakrishna entered the room again and said to Trailokya, "Please sing a little about the Blissful Mother."

Trailokya sang:

O Mother, how deep is Thy love for men!
Mindful of it, I weep for joy. . . .

Listening to the song, the younger Naren went into deep meditation. He remained as still as a log. Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "Look at him. He is totally unaware of the outer world."
The song was over. At Sri Ramakrishna's request, Trailokya sang:

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
What need have I of knowledge or reason? . . .
Ram asked him to sing about Hari.

Trailokya sang:

Chant, O mind, the name of Hari,
Sing aloud the name of Hari,
Praise Lord Hari's name!
And praising Hari's name, O mind,
Cross the ocean of this world.
Hari dwells in earth, in water,
Hari dwells in fire and air;

In sun and moon He dwells.
Hari's ever living presence
Fills the boundless universe.

M. said in a low voice to Trailokya, "Please- 'Gaur and Nitai, ye blessed brothers'."

Sri Ramakrishna, too, asked him to sing the song. Trailokya and the devotees sang it in chorus, the Master joining them. When it was over, the Master sang:

Behold, the two brothers have come, who weep while chanting Hari's name,
The brothers who, in return for blows, offer to sinners Hari's love,
Embracing everyone as brother, even the outcaste shunned by men.
Behold, the two brothers have come, who once were Kanai and Balāi of Braja. . . .
Sri Ramakrishna sang again:
See how all Nadia is shaking
Under the waves of Gaurānga's love! . . .

Then:

Who are they that walk along, chanting Hari's name?
O Madhai, go out and see!
They seem to be Gaur and Nitai,
With golden anklets on their lovely feet;
Shaven of head and clad in rags,
They reel like madmen as they go. . . .

The younger Naren was about to leave.

MASTER: "Show great devotion to your parents; but don't obey them if they stand in your way to God. You must gird your loins with great determination and say, 'This rogue of a father!'"

NAREN: "Truly, I have no fear."

Girish arrived. Sri Ramakrishna introduced him to Trailokya. He asked them to talk to each other. A few minutes later the Master said, "That song again, please."

Trailokya sang:

Victory to Gora, Sachi's son!
Hail, Abode of every virtue,
Touchstone of Love, Ocean of Bliss,
Man's bewitcher, beauteous of form,
Enchanting the eye like shining gold! . . .

Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi. He stood up, totally unconscious of the world.

Regaining partial consciousness, he begged Trailokya to sing "Oh, what a vision I have beheld".

Trailokya sang:

Oh, what a vision I have beheld in Keshab Bharati's hut!
Gora, in all his matchless grace
Shedding tears in a thousand streams!
Like a mad elephant
He dances in ecstasy and sings,
Drunk with an overwhelming love.
Rolling flat upon the ground and swimming in his tears,
He weeps and shouts Lord Hari's name,
Piercing the very heavens with his cries,
Loud as a lion's roar;
Then most humbly he begs men's love,
To feel himself the servant of God.
Shorn of his locks, he has put on the yogi's ochre robe;
Even the hardest heart must melt
To see his pure and heavenly love.
Smitten with man's deep woe,
He has abandoned everything
And pours out love unstintingly.

Oh, would that Premdas were his slave and, passing from door to door,
Might sing Gaurānga's endless praise!

The music was over. It was about dusk. Sri Ramakrishna was surrounded by the devotees.

MASTER (to Ram): "There were no instruments to accompany the songs. The singing creates an atmosphere when there is proper accompaniment. (Smiling) Do you know how Balarām manages a festival? He is like a miserly brahmin raising a cow. The cow must eat very little but give milk in torrents. (All laugh.) Sing your own songs and beat your own drums: that's Balarām's idea!" (All laugh.)

Discussion with Trailokya

As evening came on, lamps were lighted in the drawing-room and on the verandah. Sri Ramakrishna bowed to the Divine Mother and began to chant the name of God. The devotees sat around and listened to his sweet chanting. They wanted to discuss with Trailokya his remarks about the Master's change of opinion on worldly life. Girish started the discussion.

GIRISH (to Trailokya): "You have written that, after coming in contact with Keshab, Sri Ramakrishna changed his views about worldly life; but it isn't true."

MASTER (to Trailokya and the other devotees): "If a man enjoys the Bliss of God, he doesn't enjoy the world. Having tasted divine bliss, he finds the world insipid. If a man gets a shawl, he doesn't care for broadcloth."

TRAILOKYA: "I referred to those who wanted to lead a worldly life. I didn't mean renouncers"

Divine bliss is the highest

MASTER: "What are you talking about? People talk about leading a religious life in the world. But if they once taste the bliss of God they will not enjoy anything else. Their attachment to worldly duties declines. As their spiritual joy becomes deeper, they simply cannot perform their worldly duties. More and more they seek that joy. Can worldly pleasures and sex pleasures be compared to the bliss of God? If a man once tastes that bliss he runs after it ever afterwards. It matters very little to him then whether the world remains or disappears.

"Though the chatak bird is about to die of a parched throat, and around it there are seven oceans, rivers, and lakes overflowing with water, still it will not touch that water. Its throat is cracking with thirst, and still it will not drink that water. It looks up, mouth agape, for the rain to fall when the star Svati is in the ascendant. 'To the chatak bird all waters are mere dryness beside Swati water.'

Holding to both God and the world

"People say they will hold to both God and the world. After drinking an ounce of wine, a man may be pleasantly intoxicated and also conscious of the world; but can he be both when he has drunk a great deal more?"

After the bliss of God nothing else tastes good. Then talk about 'woman and gold' stabs the heart, as it were. (Intoning) 'I cannot enjoy the talk of worldly people.' When a man becomes mad for God, he doesn't enjoy money or such things."

TRAILOKYA: "But, sir, if a man is to remain in the world, he needs money and he must also save. He has to give in charity and-"

Worldly man's charity

MASTER: "What? Do you mean that one must first save money and then seek God? And you talk about charity and kindness! A worldly man spends thousands of rupees for his daughter's marriage. Yet, all the while, his neighbours are dying of starvation; and he finds it hard to give them two morsels of rice; he calculates a thousand times before giving them even that much. The People around him have nothing to eat; but what does he care about that? He says to himself: 'What can I do? Let the rascals live or die. All I care about is that the members of my family should live well.' And they talk about doing good to others!"

TRAILOKYA: "But, sir, there are good people in the world as well. Take the case of Pundarika Vidyanidhi, the devotee of Chaitanya. He lived in the world."

MASTER: "He had drunk wine up to his neck. If he had drunk a little more, he couldn't have led a worldly life."

Trailokya remained silent. M said aside to Girish, 'Then what he has written is not true."

GIRISH (to Trailokya): "Then what you have written is not true."

TRAILOKYA: "Why so? Doesn't he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] admit that a man can lead a spiritual life in the world?"

MASTER: "Yes, he can. But such a man should first of all attain Knowledge and then live in the world. First he should realize God. Then 'he can swim in a sea of slander and not be stained.' After realizing God, a man can live in the world like a mudfish. The world he lives in after attaining God is the world of vidyā. In it he sees neither woman nor gold. He finds there only devotion, devotee, and God. You see, I too have a wife, and 'a few pots and pans in my room; I too feed a few vagabonds; I too worry about the devotees-Habi's mother for instance-when they come here."

A DEVOTEE (to Trailokya): "I have read in your book that you do not believe in the Incarnation of God. You said so in connection with Chaitanya."

TRAILOKYA: "Why, Chaitanya himself protested against the idea of Divine Incarnation. Once, in Puri, Advaita and the other devotees sang a song to the effect that Chaitanya was God. At this Chaitanya shut the door of his room. Infinite are the glories of God. As he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] says, the devotee is the parlour of God. Suppose a parlour is very well furnished; does that mean that the master of the house has exhausted all his power and splendour in that one parlour?"

GIRISH: "He [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] says that prema alone is the essence of God; we need the man through whom this ecstatic love of God flows. He says that the milk of the cow flows through the udder; we need the udder; we do not care for the other parts of the cow-the legs, tail, or horns."

TRAILOKYA: "The milk of God's prema flows through an infinite number of channels. God has infinite powers."

GIRISH: "But what other power can stand before prema?"

TRAILOKYA: "It is possible if He who has the power wants it. Everything is in God's power."

GIRISH: "Yes, I admit that. But there is also a thing called the power of avidyā."

TRAILOKYA: "Is avidyā a thing? Does there exist a substance called avidyā? It is only a negation, as darkness is the negation of light. There is no doubt that we prize prema most: what is a drop to God is an ocean to us. But if you say that prema is the last word about God, then you limit God Himself."

MASTER (to Trailokya and the other devotees): "Yes, yes, that is true. But an ounce of wine makes me drunk. What need have I to count the gallons of wine in the tavern? What need have we to know about the infinite powers of God?"

GIRISH (to Trailokya): "Do you believe in the Incarnation of God?"

TRAILOKYA: "God incarnates Himself through His devotees alone. There cannot be a manifestation of infinite powers. It simply isn't possible. It is impossible for any man to manifest infinite powers."

GIRISH: "You can serve your children as 'Brahma Gopala'. Then why isn't it possible to worship a great soul as God?"

MASTER (to Trailokya): "Why all this bother about infinity? If I want to touch you, must I touch your entire body? If you want to bathe in the Ganges, must you touch the whole river from Hardwar down to the ocean?

" 'All troubles come to an end when the ego dies.' As long as a trace of 'I-consciousness' remains, one is conscious of difference. Nobody knows what remains after the 'I' disappears. Nobody can express it in words. That which is remains. After the 'I' disappears one cannot say that a part manifests through this man and the rest through another. Satchidananda is the ocean. The pot of 'I' is immersed in it. As long as the pot exists, the water seems to be divided into two parts: one part inside the pot and the other part outside it. But when the pot is broken there is only one stretch of water. One cannot even say that. Who would say that?"

After the discussion Sri Ramakrishna became engaged in pleasant conversation with Trailokya.

MASTER: "You are happy. Isn't that so?"

TRAILOKYA: "But I shall become my old self again as soon as I leave this place. Here I feel very much the awakening of spiritual consciousness."

MASTER: "You don't have to be afraid of walking on thorns if you are wearing shoes. You needn't be afraid of 'woman and gold' if you know that God alone is real and all else illusory."

It was about nine o'clock in the evening. Balarām took Trailokya to another room and gave him refreshments. Sri Ramakrishna began to tell the devotees about Trailokya and people of his views.

MASTER (to Girish, M., and the other devotees): "Do you know what these people are like? They are like a frog living in a well, who has never seen the outside world. He knows only his well; so he will not believe that there is such a thing as the world. Likewise, people talk so much about the world because they have not known the joy or God.

(To Girish) "Why do you argue with them so much? They busy themselves with both-the world and God. One cannot understand the joy of God unless one has tasted it. Can anybody explain sex pleasure to a five-year-old boy? Worldly people talk about God only

from hearsay. Children, hearing their old aunts quarrelling among themselves, learn to say, 'There is my God', 'I swear by God.'

"But that doesn't matter. I don't blame such people. Can all comprehend the Indivisible Satchidananda? Only twelve rishis could recognize Ramachandra. All cannot recognize an Incarnation of God. Some take him for an ordinary man, some for a holy person, and only a few recognize him as an Incarnation.

"One offers a price for an article according to one's capital. A rich man said to his servant: 'Take this diamond to the market and let me know how different people price it. Take it, first of all, to the egg-plant seller.' The servant took the diamond to the egg-plant seller. He examined it, turning it over in the palm of his hand, and said, 'Brother, I can give nine seers of egg-plants for it.' 'Friend,' said the servant, 'a little more-say, ten seers.' The egg-plant seller replied: 'No, I have already quoted above the market price. You may give it to me if that price suits you.' The servant laughed. He went back to his master and said: 'Sir, he would give me only nine seers of egg-plants and not one more. He said he had offered more than the market price.' The master smiled and said: 'Now take it to the cloth-dealer. The other man deals only in egg-plants. What does he know about a diamond? The cloth-dealer has a little more capital. Let us see how much he offers for it.' The servant went to the cloth-dealer and said: 'Will you buy this? How much will you pay for it?' The merchant said: 'Yes, it is a good thing. I can make a nice ornament out of it. I will give you nine hundred rupees for it.' 'Brother,' said the servant, 'offer a little more and I will sell it to you. Give me at least a thousand rupees.' The cloth-dealer said: 'Friend, don't press me for more. I have offered more than the market price. I cannot give a rupee more. Suit yourself.' Laughing the servant returned to his master and said: 'He won't give a rupee more than nine hundred. He too said he had quoted above the market price.' The master said with a laugh: 'Now take it to a jeweller. Let us see what he has to say.' The servant went to a jeweller. The jeweller glanced at the diamond and said at once, 'I will give you one hundred thousand rupees for it.'

"They talk of practising religion in the world. Suppose a man is shut up in a room. All the doors and windows are closed. Only a little light comes through a hole in the ceiling. Can he see the sun with that roof over his head? And what will he do with only one ray of light? 'Woman and gold' is the roof. Can he see the sun unless he removes the roof? Worldly people are shut up in a room, as it were.

Discussion about Divine Incarnations

"The Incarnations of God belong to the class of the Isvarakotis. They roam about in the open spaces. They are never imprisoned in the world, never entangled by it. Their ego is not the 'thick ego' of worldly people. The ego, the 'I-consciousness', of worldly people is like four walls and a roof: the man inside them cannot see anything outside. The ego of the Incarnations and other Isvarakotis is a 'thin ego': through it they have an uninterrupted vision of God. Take the case of a man who stands by a wall on both sides of which there are meadows stretching to infinity. If there is a hole in the wall, through it he can see everything on the other side. If the hole is a big one, he can even pass

through it. The ego of the Incarnations and other Isvarakotis is like the wall with a hole. Though they remain on this side of the wall, still they can see the endless meadow on the other side. That is to say, though they have a human body, they are always united with God. Again, if they will, they can pass through the big hole to the other side and remain in samādhi. And if the hole is big enough, they can go through it and come back again. That is to say, though established in samādhi, they can again descend to the worldly plane."

The devotees listened breathlessly to these words about the mystery of Divine Incarnation.

Chapter 40

THE MASTER AT THE HOUSES OF BALARĀM AND GIRISH

Friday, April 24, 1885

Master and M.

ABOUT ONE O'CLOCK in the afternoon M. arrived at Balarām's house in Calcutta and found the Master asleep in the drawing-room, one or two devotees resting near him. M began to fan the Master gently. A few minutes later Sri Ramakrishna woke up and sat on the bed with his clothes in a rather untidy condition. M saluted him and took the dust of his feet.

MASTER (tenderly to M.): "Are you well? I'm feeling rather uneasy. I have a sore in my throat. I suffer very much during the early hours of the morning. Can you tell me how I may be cured? (In a worried tone) They served pickled mango with the meal. I ate a little of it.

"How is your wife? I noticed the other day that she was looking rather sickly. Give her soothing drinks to keep her nerves cool."

M: "Green coconut milk, sir?"

MASTER: "Yes. A drink made of sugar candy is also good."

M: "Since last Sunday I have been living at our house with my parents."

MASTER: "You have done well. It will be convenient for you to live at home. Since your parents live there, you won't have to worry so much about the family."

While Sri Ramakrishna was talking, his mouth became dry. He said to M., like a child: "I feel a dryness in my mouth. Do you all feel that way?"

M. (to Jogin): "Is your mouth also drying up?"

JOGIN: "No. Perhaps it is due to the heat."

Jogindra of Ariadaha was an intimate disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and later, after the passing away of the Master, renounced the world. Sri Ramakrishna's clothes were still untidy. Some of the devotees smiled.

MASTER: "I look like a mother nursing her babies. (All laugh.) Well, my tongue is drying up. Shall I eat a pear or a jamrul?"

BABURAM: "Let me get a jamrul for you."

MASTER: "You don't have to go out in this sun."

M was still fanning the Master.

MASTER: "You may stop now. You have been fanning a long time."

M: "I am not tired, sir."

MASTER (tenderly): "No?"

M taught in a school in the neighbourhood. He had a little recess at one o'clock, during which he visited Sri Ramakrishna. It was time for him to go back to the school. He saluted the Master.

MASTER (to M.): "Must you go now?"

A DEVOTEE: "School is not over yet. He came here during recess."

MASTER (smiling): "He is like a mother with seven or eight children. Day and night she is busy with her worldly duties. But now and then she makes time to serve her husband."

M.'s school closed at four o'clock. He came back to Balarām's house and found the Master sitting in the drawing room. The devotees were arriving one by one. The younger Naren and Ram came. Narendra, too, was there. M saluted the Master and took a seat, The ladies sent a plate of halua for Sri Ramakrishna. Because of the sore in his throat he could not eat any hard food.

MASTER (to Narendra): "Ah! This is nice stuff! Eat some! It is good! Eat some!" (All laugh.)

Dusk was coming on. Sri Ramakrishna was about to go to the house of Girish, who had arranged a festival to celebrate the Master's coming. The Master came down from the second floor of Balarām's house with M. and a few other devotees. Near the gate he saw a beggar chanting the name of Rāma, and he stood still. He fell into a meditative mood and remained standing a few minutes. He said to M., "He sings well" A devotee gave the beggar four pice.

Sri Ramakrishna entered Bosepara Lane. Laughing, he said to M.: "What are these people saying? 'There comes Paramahamsa's battalion!' What these fools say!" (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna entered Girish's house. The latter had invited a large number of devotees to join the festival. Many of them were present. They all stood up to receive the Master, who, smiling, took his seat. The devotees sat around him. Among them were Girish, Mahimacharan, Ram, and Bhavanāth, and also Baburam, Narendra, Jogin, the younger Naren, Chuni, Balarām, M., and the other devotees who had accompanied the Master from Balarām's house.

MASTER (to Mahimacharan): "I said to Girish about you, 'There is one-very deep. You are only knee-deep.' Now you must help me check up on what I said. I want to see you two argue. But don't compromise." (All laugh.)

Girish and Mahimacharan started their discussion. Soon Ram said: "Let them stop. Let us have some kirtan."

MASTER (to Ram): "No, no! This has a great deal of meaning. They are 'Englishmen'. I want to hear what they say."

Discussion about Divine Incarnation

Mahimacharan contended that all could become Krishna by means of *sādhanā*. Girish said that Sri Krishna was an Incarnation of God. However much a man practised *sādhanā*, he could never be an Incarnation.

MAHIMA: "Do you know what I mean? Let me give an illustration. The bel-tree can become a mango-tree if only the obstructions are removed. It can be done by the practice of yoga."

GIRISH: "You may say whatever you like, but it cannot be done either by the practice of yoga or by anything else. Only a Krishna can become Krishna. If anybody has all the attributes of another person, Radha for instance, then he is none other than that person-Radha herself. If I see in a person all the attributes of Krishna, then I shall conclude that I am seeing Krishna Himself."

Mahimacharan could not argue well. At last he had to accept Girish's views.

MAHIMA (to Girish): "Yes, sir, both views are right. God has willed the path of knowledge. He has also willed the path of bhakti. (Pointing to Sri Ramakrishna) As he says, by different paths people ultimately reach one and the same goal."

MASTER (aside to Mahima): "You see, what I said was right, wasn't it?"

MAHIMA: "Yes, sir. As you say, both paths are right."

MASTER (pointing to Girish): "Haven't you noticed how deep his faith is? He forgot to eat his refreshments. Like a dog, he would have tom your throat if you hadn't accepted his view. But we have enjoyed the discussion. You two have known each other and I myself have learnt many things."

The musician arrived with his party and sat in the middle of the room. He was waiting for a sign from Sri Ramakrishna to begin the kirtan. The master gave his permission.

RAM (to the Master): "Please tell them what to sing."

Kirtan about Radha and Krishna

MASTER: "What shall I suggest? (After a little reflection) Well, let them sing the prelude to the union of Radha and Krishna."

The musician sang:

My Gora, my treasure, the jewel among men,
Weeps as he chants Sri Radha's name
And rolls on the ground; with fervent love
He chants her name again and again.
The tears stream from his love-filled eyes;
Once more he rolls upon the ground,
As chanting her name he faints away.
The hair on his body stands on end;
His tongue can lisp but a single word.
Says Basu: Why is Gora so restless?

The kirtan continued. Radha had met Krishna on the bank of the Jamuna under the kadamba tree. Her companions describe her physical and mental condition:

A hundred times each hour, in and out of the room she goes;
Restless, breathing hard, she looks toward the kadamba grove.
Is she afraid of the elders? Has she been possessed by a ghost?
Filled with restlessness, she cannot keep her dress arranged;
Her jewels have fallen off; she trembles every now and then.
Alas, she is so young! A princess born, and a wife besides!
What is it that she craves? We do not understand her mind;
But we can guess her hand is reaching out to catch the moon.
Humbly says Chandidas: Radha has fallen in Krishna's trap.

The kirtan went on. Radha's friends say to her.

Tell us, O Radha of comely face! Tell us what it is that ails you.
Why has your mind wandered away? Why do you claw the earth in frenzy?
Tell us why your golden skin has taken the ashy hue of cinders.
From your body the scarlet cloth has dropped unheeded to the ground;
Ah! Your eyes are red with tears; your lovely lotus face has withered.
Tell us what it is that ails you, lest our hearts should break with grief.

Radha says to her friends:

I long for the sight of Krishna's face.

The musician sang again.

Hearing Krishna's flute, Radha has gone mad. She says to her friends:
Who is the Sorcerer that dwells in the kadamba grove?
His flute-notes suddenly enter my ears and strike a chord in my heart;
Piercing my very soul, they slay my dharma and drive me mad.
With restless mind and streaming eyes, alas! I can scarcely breathe:
How He plays His magic flute, whose music thrills my soul!
Because He is out of my sight, my heart expires; I cannot stay home.
My soul yearns for Him; racked with pain, it longs to see Him once more.
Says Uddhava Das: But you will die, O Radha, when you behold Him!

The music continued. Radha's heart yearns for the vision of Krishna. She says to her friends:

First I heard His magic flute from the kadamba grove,
And the next day the minstrel told me of Him and thrilled my soul;
Another day, O friend of my heart, you chanted His blessed name.
(Ah, the blessed name of Krishna, full of honeyed sweetness!)
The wise men, too, described to me His virtues without number.
I am a weak and simple girl, and stern, alas! are my elders;
My love for my Beloved grows; how can I live any longer?
After reflecting long, I find that I must die at last:
Can you not tell me a way, O friend, by which I may meet my Krishna?

As Sri Ramakrishna heard the line, "Ah, the blessed name of Krishna, full of honeyed sweetness!", he could not remain seated any longer. He stood up in a state of unconsciousness and went into deep samādhi. The younger Naren stood at his right. Regaining partial consciousness, the Master repeated the name of Krishna in his melodious voice. Tears flowed down his cheeks. He sat down again. The musician continued his singing.

Visakha, a friend of Radha, runs out and brings a portrait of Krishna. She holds it before Radha's eyes. Radha says: "I see the picture of Him whom I beheld on the Jamuna's bank. Ever since then I have been in this plight.

I see the picture of Him whom I beheld on the Jamuna's bank;
The name Visakha spoke is the name of Him who is painted here.
He who played on the flute is the Beloved of my soul;
His virtues the minstrel sang to me; He has bewitched my heart.
It is none other than He!" So saying, Radha falls in a swoon.
Restored to her senses by her friends, at once she says to them,
"Show me Him, O friends, whom I saw reflected in my soul."
And they promise her that they will.

Now Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra and the other devotees began to sing the kirtan in a loud voice. They sang:

Behold, the two brothers have come, who weep while chanting Hari's name. . . .

They continued:

See how all Nadia is shaking
Under the waves of Gaurānga's love. . . .

Again Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi. After regaining consciousness of the outer world, he returned to his seat. Turning to M., he said, "I don't remember which way I was facing before." Then he began to talk to the devotees.

About Hazra

NARENDRA (to the Master): "Hazra has now become a good man."

MASTER: "You don't know. There are people who repeat Rāma's name with their tongues but hide stones under their arms to throw at others."

NARENDRA: "I don't agree with you, sir. I asked him about the things people complain of. He denied them."

MASTER: "He is steadfast in his devotions. He practises japa a little. But he also behaves in a queer way. He doesn't pay the coachman his fare."

NARENDRA: "That isn't true, sir. He said he had paid it."

MASTER: "Where did he get the money?"

NARENDRA: "From Ramlal or someone else."

MASTER: "Did you ask him all these things in detail? Once I prayed to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, if Hazra is a hypocrite then please remove him from here.' Later on I told him

of my prayer. After a few days he came to me and said, 'You see, I am still here.' (The Master and the others laugh.) But soon afterwards he left.

"Hazra's mother begged me through Ramlal to ask Hazra to come home. She was almost blind with weeping. I tried in various ways to persuade him to visit her. I said: 'Your mother is old. Go and see her once.' I couldn't make him go. Afterwards the poor mother died weeping for him."

NARENDRA: "This time he will go home."

MASTER: "Yes, yes! He will go home! He is a rogue. He is a rascal. You don't understand him. You are a fool. Gopal said that Hazra stayed at Sinthi a few days. People used to supply him with butter, rice, and other food. He had the impudence to tell them he couldn't swallow such coarse rice and bad butter. Ishan of Bhatpara accompanied him there. He ordered Ishan to carry water for him. That made the other brahmins very angry."

NARENDRA: "I asked him about that too. He said that Ishan Babu had himself come forward with the water. Besides, many brahmins of Bhatpara showed him respect."

MASTER (smiling): "That was the result of his japa and austerity. You see, physical traits to a great extent influence character. Short stature and a body with dents here and there are not good traits. People with such traits take a long time to acquire spiritual knowledge."

BHAVANĀTH: "Let us stop talking about these things."

MASTER: "Don't misunderstand me. (To Narendra) You say you understand people; that is why I am telling you all this. Do you know how I look on people like Hazra? I know that just as God takes the form of holy men, so He also takes the form of cheats and rogues. (To Mahimacharan) What do you say? All are God."

MAHIMA: "Yes, sir. All are God."

GIRISH (to the Master): "Sir, what is ekangi prema?"

MASTER: "It means one-sided love. For instance, the water does not seek the duck, but the duck loves water. There are other kinds of love: sadharani, samanjasa, and samartha. In the first, which is ordinary love, the lover seeks his own happiness; he doesn't care whether the other person is happy or not. That was Chandravali's attitude toward Krishna. In the second, which is a compromise, both seek each other's happiness. This is a noble kind of love. But the third is the highest of all. Such a lover says to his beloved, 'Be happy yourself, whatever may happen to me.' Radha had this highest love. She was happy in Krishna's happiness. The gopis, too, had attained this exalted state.

"Do you know who the gopis were? Ramachandra was wandering in the forest where sixty thousand rishis dwelt. They were very eager to see Him. He cast a tender glance at them. According to a certain Purana, they were born later on as the gopis of Vrindāvan."

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, who may be called an antaranga?"

MASTER: "Let me give an illustration. A natmandir has pillars inside and outside. An antaranga is like the inside pillars. Those who always live near the guru are the antarangas.

(To Mahimacharan) "The Jnāni wants neither a form of God nor His Incarnation. While wandering in the forest, Ramachandra saw a number of rishis. They welcomed Him to their Āśrama with great love and said to Him: 'O Rāma, today our life is blessed because we have seen You. But we know You as the son of Daśaratha. Bharadvaja and other sages call You a Divine Incarnation; but that is not our view. We meditate on the Indivisible Satchidananda.' Rāma was pleased with them and smiled.

Master's exalted mood

"Ah, what a state of mind I passed through! My mind would lose itself in the Indivisible Absolute. How many days I spent that way! I renounced bhakti and bhakta, devotion and devotee. I became inert. I could not feel the form of my own head. I was about to die. I thought of keeping Ramlal's aunt near me.

"I ordered the removal of all pictures and portraits from my room. When I regained outer consciousness, when the mind climbed down to the ordinary level, I felt as if I were being suffocated like a drowning person. At last I said to myself, 'If I can't bear people, then how shall I live?' Then my mind was again directed to bhakti and bhakta. 'What has happened to me?' I kept asking people. Bholanath said to me, 'This state of mind has been described in the Mahabharata.' How can a man live, on coming down from the plane of samādhi? Surely he requires devotion to God and the company of devotees. Otherwise, how will he keep his mind occupied?"

MAHIMACHARAN (to the Master): "Sir, can a man return from the plane of samādhi to the plane of the ordinary world?"

MASTER (in a low voice, to Mahima): "I shall tell you privately. You are the only one fit to hear it.

Difference between a jiva and an Incarnation

"Koar Singh also asked me that question. You see, there is a vast difference between the jiva and Isvara. Through worship and austerity, a jiva can at the utmost attain samādhi; but he cannot come down from that state. On the other hand, an Incarnation of God can come down from samādhi. A jiva is like an officer of the king; he can go as far as the outer court of the seven-storey palace. But the king's son has access to all the seven floors; he can also go outside. Everybody says that no one can return from the plane of samādhi. In that case, how do you account for sages like Sankara and Ramanuja? They retained the 'ego of Knowledge'."

MAHIMA: "That is true, indeed. Otherwise, how could they write books?"

MASTER: "Again, there are the instances of sages like Prahlada, Nārada, and Hanuman. They too retained bhakti after attaining samādhi."

MAHIMA: "That is true, sir."

Divine knowledge destroys egotism

MASTER: "Some people indulge in philosophical speculation and think much of themselves. Perhaps they have studied a little Vedānta. But a man cannot be egotistic if he has true knowledge. In other words, in samādhi man becomes one with God and gets rid of his egotism. True knowledge is impossible without samādhi. In samādhi man becomes one with God. Then he can have no egotism.

"Do you know what it is like? Just at noon the sun is directly overhead. If you look around, then, you do not see your shadow. Likewise, you will not find the 'shadow' of ego after attaining Knowledge, samādhi.

The ego after God-vision

"But if you see in anyone a trace of 'I-consciousness' after the attainment of true Knowledge, then know that it is either the 'ego of Knowledge' or the 'ego of Devotion' or the 'servant ego'. It is not the 'ego of ignorance'.

"Again, jnāna and bhakti are twin paths. Whichever you follow, it is God that you will ultimately reach. The Jnāni looks on God in one way and the bhakta looks on Him in another way. The God of the Jnāni is full of brilliance, and the God of the bhakta full of sweetness."

Bhavanāth was seated near the Master, listening to these words.

BHAVANĀTH (to the Master): "Sir, I have a question to ask. I don't quite understand the Chandi. It is written there that the Divine Mother kill all beings. What does that mean?"

MASTER: "This is all Her lila, Her sportive pleasure. That question used to bother me too. Later I found out that all is māyā. Both creation and destruction are God's māyā."

Girish conducted Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees to the roof, where the meal was served. There was a bright moon in the sky. The devotees took their seats. The Master occupied a seat in front of them. All were in a joyous mood.

Sri Ramakrishna was beside himself with joy at the sight of Narendra. The beloved disciple sat in the front row. Every now and then the Master asked how he was 'getting along. He had hardly finished half his meal when he came to Narendra with some water-melon sherbet and curd from his own plate. Tenderly he said to the disciple, "Please eat this." Then he went back to his own place.

Saturday, May 9, 1885

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna sat in Balarām's drawing-room in a happy mood. Many devotees were present. Narendra, M., Bhavanāth, Purna, Paltu, the younger Naren, Girish, Ram, Binode, Dwija, and others sat around him. Balarām was not there. He had gone to Monghyr for a change of air. His eldest daughter had invited Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees and celebrated the occasion with a feast. The Master was resting after the meal.

Again and again the Master asked M.: "Am I liberal-minded? Tell me."

BHAVANĀTH (smiling): "Why do you ask him? He will only keep quiet." A beggar entered the room. He wanted to sing. The devotees listened to a song or two. Narendra liked his singing and asked him to sing more.

MASTER: "Stop! Stop! We don't want any more songs. Where is the money? (To Narendra) You may order the music, but who will pay?"

A DEVOTEE (smiling): "Sir, the beggar may think you are an amir, a wealthy aristocrat, the way you are leaning against that big pillow.(All laugh.)

MASTER (smiling): "He may also think I am ill."
The conversation drifted to Hazra and his egotism. For some reason he had had to go away from Dakshineswar.

NARENDRA: "Hazra now admits he was egotistic."

MASTER: "Don't believe him. He says so in order to come back to Dakshineswar. (To the devotees) Narendra always insists that Hazra is a grand person."

NARENDRA: "Even now I say so."

MASTER: "Why? You have heard so much about him, and still you think so?"

NARENDRA: "He has slight defects but many virtues."

Hazra's selfishness

MASTER: "I admit that he has devotion to his ideal. He said to me, 'You don't care for me now, but later you will be seeking my company.' A goswami came from Srerampore. He was a descendant of Advaita Goswami. He intended to spend a night or two at the temple garden. I asked him very cordially to stay. Do you know what Hazra said to me? He said, 'Send him to the temple officer.' What was in his mind was that the goswami might ask for milk or food, and that he might have to give him some from his own share. I said to Hazra: 'Now, you rogue! Even I prostrate myself before him because he is a goswami. And you, after leading a worldly life and indulging a great deal in "woman and gold", have so much pride because of a little japa! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?'

"One realizes God through sattva. Rajas and tamas take one away from Him. The scriptures describe sattva as white, rajas as red, and tamas as black. Once I asked Hazra: Tell me what you think of the people that come here. How much sattva does each one possess?' He said, 'Narendra has one hundred per cent and I have one hundred and ten per cent.' 'What about me?' I asked. And he said: 'You still have a trace of pink. You have only seventy five per cent, I should say.' (All laugh.)

"Hazra used to practise japa at Dakshineswar. While telling his beads, he would also try to do a little brokerage business. He has a debt of a few thousand rupees which he must clear up. About the brahmin cooks of the temple he remarked, 'Do you think I talk with people of that sort?'

"The truth is that you cannot attain God if you have even a trace of desire. Subtle is the way of dharma. If you are trying to thread a needle, you will not succeed if the thread has even a slight fibre sticking out.

"There are people who perform japa for thirty years and still do not attain any result. Why? A gangrenous sore requires very drastic treatment. Ordinary medicine won't cure it.

God's grace

"No matter how much *sādhanā* you practise, you will not realize the goal as long as you have desire. But this also is true, that one can fealize the goal in a moment through the grace of God, through His kindness. Take the case of a room that has been dark a thousand years. If somebody suddenly brings a lamp into it, the room is lighted in an instant.

"Suppose a poor man's son has fallen into the good graces of a rich person. He marries his daughter. Immediately he gets an equipage, clothes, furniture, a house, and other things."

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, how does one receive God's grace?"

MASTER: "God has the nature of a child. A child is sitting with gems in the skirt of his cloth. Many a person passes by him along the road. Many of them pray to him for gems. But he hides the gems with his hands and says, turning away his face, 'No, I will not give any away.' But another man comes along. He doesn't ask for the gems, and yet the child runs after him and offers him the gems, begging him to accept them.

"One cannot realize God without renunciation. Who will accept my words? I have been seeking a companion, a sympathetic soul who will under-stand my feelings. When I see a great devotee, I say to myself, 'Perhaps he will accept my ideal.' But later on I find that he behaves in a different way.

"A ghost sought a companion. One becomes a ghost if one dies from an accident on a Saturday or a Tuesday. So whenever the ghost found someone who seemed to be dying from an accident on either of these days, he would run to him. He would say to himself

that at last he had found his companion But no sooner would he run to the man than he would see the man getting up. The man, perhaps, had fallen from a roof and after a few moments regained consciousness.

"Once Mathur Babu was in an ecstatic mood. He behaved like a drunkard and could not look after his work. At this all said: 'Who will look after his estate if he behaves like that? Certainly the young priest has cast a spell upon him.'

"During one of Narendra's early visits I touched his chest and he became unconscious. Regaining consciousness, he wept and said: 'Oh, why did you do that to me? I have a father! I have a mother!' This 'I' and 'mine' spring from ignorance.

Unreality of all worldly relationships

"A guru said to his disciple: 'The world is illusory. Come away with me.' 'But, revered sir,' said the disciple, 'my people at home-my father, my mother, my wife-love me so much. How can I give them up?' The guru said: No doubt you now have this feeling of "I" and "mine" and say that they love you; but this is all an illusion of your mind. I shall teach you a trick, and you will know whether they love you truly or not.' Saying this, the teacher gave the disciple a pill and said to him: 'Swallow this at home. You will appear to be a corpse, but you will not lose consciousness. You will see everything and hear everything. Then I shall come to your house and gradually you will regain your normal state.'

"The disciple followed the teacher's instructions and lay on his bed like a dead person: The house was filled with loud wailing. His mother, his wife, and the others lay on the ground weeping bitterly. Just then a brahmin entered the house and said to them, 'What is the matter with you?' 'This boy is dead', they replied. The brahmin felt his pulse and said: 'How is that? No, he is not dead. I have a medicine for him that will cure him completely.' The joy of the relatives was unbounded; it seemed to them that heaven itself had come down into their house. 'But', said the brahmin, 'I must tell you something else. Another person must take some of this medicine first and then the boy must swallow the rest. But the other person will die. I see he has so many dear relatives here; one of them will certainly agree to take the medicine. I see his wife and mother crying bitterly. Surely they will not hesitate to take it.'

"At once the weeping stopped and all sat quiet. The mother said: 'Well, this is a big family. Suppose I die; then who will look after the family?' She fell into a reflective mood. The wife, who had been crying a minute before and bemoaning her ill luck, said: 'Well, he has gone the way of mortals. I have these two or three young children. Who will look after them if I die?'

"The disciple saw everything and heard everything. He stood up at once and said to the teacher: 'Let us go, revered sir. I will follow you.' (All laugh.)

"Another disciple said to his teacher: 'Revered sir, my wife takes great care of me. It is for her sake that I cannot give up the world.' The disciple practised hathayoga. The teacher taught him, too, a trick to test his wife's love. One day there was a great wailing

in his house. The neighbours came running and saw the hathayogi seated in a posture, his limbs paralysed and distorted. They thought he was dead. His wife fell on the ground, weeping piteously: 'Oh, what has befallen me? How have you provided for our future? Oh, friends, I never dreamt I should meet such a fate!'

"In the mean time the relatives and friends had brought a cot to take the corpse out. But suddenly a difficulty arose as they started to move it. Since the body was twisted and stiff, it could not be taken out through the door. A neighbour quickly brought an axe and began to chop away the door-frame. The wife was crying bitterly, when she heard the sound of the axe. She ran to the door. 'What are you doing, friends?' she asked, still weeping. The neighbour said, 'We can't take the body out; so we are chopping away the door-frame.'

"'Please', said the wife, 'don't do any such thing. I am a widow now; I have no one to look after me. I have to bring up these young children. If you destroy this door, I shall not be able to replace it. Friends, death is inevitable for all, and my husband cannot be called back to life. You had better cut his limbs.' The hathayogi at once stood up. The effect of the medicine had worn off. He said to his wife: 'You evil one! You want to cut off my hands and feet, do you?' So saying, he renounced home and followed his teacher. (All laugh.)

"Many women make a show of grief. Knowing beforehand that they will have to weep, they first take off their nose-rings and other ornaments, put them securely in a box, and lock it. Then they fall on the ground and weep, O friends, what has befallen us?'"

Narendra's scepticism

NARENDRA: "How can I believe, without proof, that God incarnates Him self as a man?"

GIRISH: "Faith alone is sufficient. What is the proof that these objects exist here? Faith alone is the proof."

A DEVOTEE: "Have philosophers been able to prove that the external world exists outside us? But they say we have an irresistible belief in it."

GIRISH (to Narendra): "You wouldn't believe, even if God appeared before you. God Himself might say that He was God born as a man, but perhaps you would say that He was a liar and a cheat."

The conversation turned to the immortality of the gods.

NARENDRA: "What is the proof of their immortality?"

GIRISH: "You wouldn't believe it even if the gods appeared before you."

NARENDRA: "That the immortals existed in the past requires proof."

M whispered something to Paltu.

PALTU (smiling, to Narendra): "What need is there for the immortals to be without beginning? To be immortal one need only be without end."

MASTER (smiling): "Narendra is the son of a lawyer, but Paltu of a deputy magistrate." (All laugh.)

All kept silent awhile.

JOGIN (smiling): "He: [meaning the Master] doesn't accept Narendra's words any more."

MASTER (smiling); "One day I remarked that the chatak bird doesn't drink any water except that which falls from the sky. Narendra said, 'The chatak drinks ordinary water as well.' Then I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, then are my words untrue?' I was greatly worried about it. Another day, later on, Narendra was here. Several birds were flying about in the room. He exclaimed, 'There! There!' 'What is there?' I asked. He said, 'There is your chatak!' I found they were only bats. Since that day I don't accept what he says. (All laugh.)

"At Jadu Mallick's garden house Narendra said to me, The forms of God that you see are the fiction of your mind.' I was amazed and said to him, 'But they speak too! 'Narendra answered, 'Yes, one may think so.' I went to the temple and wept before the Mother. 'O Mother,' I said, 'what is this? Then is this all false? How could Narendra say that?' Instantly I had a revelation. I saw Consciousness-Indivisible Consciousness-and a divine being formed of that Consciousness. The divine form said to me, 'If your words are untrue, how is that they tally with the facts? Thereupon I said to Narendra: 'You rogue! You created unbelief in my mind. Don't come here any more.'

The discussion continued. Narendra was arguing. He was then slightly Over twenty-two years of age.

Narendra (to Girish, M., and others): "How am I to believe in the Words of scripture? The Mahanirvana Tantra says, in one place, that unless a man attains the Knowledge of Brahman he goes to hell; and the same book says, in another place, that there is no salvation without the worship of Parvathi, the Divine Mother. Manu writes about himself in the Manusamhita; Moses describes his own death in Pentateuch.

"The Samkhya philosophy says that God does not exit, because there is no proof of His existence. Again, the same philosophy says that one must accept the Vedas and that they are eternal.

"But I don't say that these are not true. I simply don't understand them. Please explain them to me. People have explained the scriptures according to their fancy. Which explanation shall we accept? White light coming through a red medium appears red, through a green medium, green."

A DEVOTEE:' "The Gitā contains the words of God."

MASTER: "Yes, the Gitā is the essence of all scriptures. A sannyāsi may or may not keep with him another book, but he always carries a pocket Gitā."

A DEVOTEE: "The Gitā contains the words of Krishna."

NARENDRA: "Yes, Krishna or any fellow for that matter!"

Sri Ramakrishna was amazed at these words of Narendra.

MASTER: "This is a fine discussion. There are two interpretations of the scriptures: the literal and the real. 'One should accept the real meaning alone-what agrees with the words of God. There is a vast difference between the words written in a letter and the direct words of its writer. The scriptures are like the words of the letter; the words of God are direct words. I do not accept anything unless it agrees with the direct words of the Divine Mother."

The conversation again turned to Divine Incarnation.

NARENDRA: "It is enough to have faith in God. I don't care about what He is doing or what He hangs from. Infinite is the universe; infinite are the Incarnations."

As Sri Ramakrishna heard the words, "Infinite is the universe; infinite are the Incarnations", he said with folded hands, "Ah!"

M whispered something to Bhavanāth.

BHAVANĀTH: "M. says: 'As long as I have not seen the elephant, how can I know whether it can pass through the eye of a needle? I do not, know God; how can I understand through reason whether or not He can incarnate Himself as man?"

MASTER: "Everything is possible for God. It is He who casts the spell. The magician swallows the knife and takes it out again; he swallows stones and bricks."

A DEVOTEE: "The Brahmos say that a man should perform his worldly duties. He must not renounce them."

GIRISH: "Yes, I saw something like that in their paper, the Sulabha Samachar. But a man cannot even finish all the works that are necessary for him in order to know God, and still he speaks of worldly duties."

Sri Ramakrishna smiled a little, looked at M., and made a sign with his eye, as if to say, "What he says is right."

M understood that this question of performing duties was an extremely difficult one.

Purna arrived.

MASTER: "Who told you about our being here?"

PURNA: "Sarada."

MASTER (to the woman devotees): "Give him some refreshments."

Narendra's music

Narendra was preparing to sing. The Master and the devotees were eager to hear his music. Narendra sang:

Śiva, Thy ready thunderbolt rules over meadows, hills, and sky!
O God of Gods! O Slayer of Time! Thou the Great Void, the King of Dharma!
Śiva, Thou Blessed One, redeem me; take away my grievous sin.

He sang again:

Sweet is Thy name, O Refuge of the humble!
It falls like sweetest nectar on our ears
And comforts us, Beloved of our souls! . . .
Again:
Why, O mind, do you never call on Him
Who takes away all fear of danger?
Tricked by delusion you forget yourself,
Enamoured of the world's bleak wilderness.
Alas, what mockery is here!

Comrades and wealth you cannot always keep;
Take care lest you forget Him quite.
Give up the false, O mind! Adore the Real;
And all the grief will vanish from your life.
Keep my good counsel in your heart.

With sounding voice proclaim Lord Hari's name
And cast away your false desires,
If you would cross the ocean of this life;
Surrender to Him body, mind, and soul,
And worship Him with trusting love.

PALTU: "Won't you sing that one?"

NARENDRA: "Which one?"

PALTU: "'When I behold Thy peerless face.' "

Narendra sang:

When I behold Thy peerless face, beaming with love, a Lord,
What fear have I of earthly woe or of the frown of sorrow?
As the first ray of the dawning sun dispels the dark,
So too, Lord, when Thy blessed light bursts forth within the heart,
It scatters all our grief and pain with sweetest balm.
When on Thy love and grace I ponder, in my heart's deepest depths,
Tears of joy stream down my cheeks beyond restraining.
Hail, Gracious Lord! Hail, Gracious One! I shall proclaim Thy love.
May my life-breath depart from me as I perform Thy works!

At M.'s request Narendra sang again, M. and many of the devotees listening with folded hands:

Be drunk, O mind, be drunk with the Wine of Heavenly Bliss!
Roll on the ground and weep, chanting Hari's sweet name! . . .

Narendra sang again:

Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,
The Stainless One, Pure Spirit through and through.
How peerless is the light that in Him shines!
How soul-bewitching is His wondrous form!
How dear is He to all His devotees! . . .

He sang another song:

This universe, wondrous and infinite,
O Lord, is Thy handiwork;
And the whole world is a treasure-house
Full of Thy beauty and grace
The stars glisten innumerable,
Like gems on a necklace of gold;
How can the myriad suns and moons
Ever be numbered above?
The earth is glowing with grain and gold,
Thine ever brimming store;
Uncounted stars, O God, sing forth:
Blessed, blessed art Thou!

Then he sang:

Upon the tray of the sky blaze bright
The lamps of sun and moon;
Like diamonds shine the glittering stars
To deck Thy wondrous form. . . .

He continued:

Fasten your mind, O man, on the Primal Purusha,
Who is the Cause of all causes,
The Stainless One, the Beginningless Truth
As Prāna He pervades the infinite universe;
The man of faith beholds Him
Living, resplendent, the Root of all. . . .

At Narayan's request Narendra sang:

Come! Come, Mother! Doll of my soul! My heart's Delight!
In my heart's lotus come and sit, that I may see Thy face.
Alas! Sweet Mother, even from birth I have suffered much;
But I have borne it all, Thou knowest, gazing at Thee.
Open the lotus of my heart, dear Mother! Reveal Thyself there.

Then Narendra sang a song of his own choice:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Thy formless beauty sparkles;
Therefore the yogis meditate in a dark mountain cave. . . .

As Sri Ramakrishna heard this soul-enthralling song, he went into samādhi. Narendra again sang:

Be drunk, O mind, be drunk with the Wine 'Of Heavenly Bliss!

The Master was in samādhi. He was sitting on a pillow, dangling his feet, facing the north and leaning against the wall. The devotees were seated around him.

In an ecstatic mood Sri Ramakrishna talked to the Divine Mother. He said: "I shall take my meal now. Art Thou come? Hast Thou found Thy lodging and left Thy baggage there and then come out?" He continued: "I don't enjoy anybody's company now. Why should I listen to the music, Mother? That diverts part of my mind to the outside world."

The Master was gradually regaining consciousness of the outer world. Looking at the devotees he said: "Years ago I used to be amazed to see people keeping kai fish alive in a pot of water. I would say: 'How cruel these people are! They will finally kill the fish.' But later, as changes came over my mind, I realized that bodies are like pillow-cases. It doesn't matter whether they remain or drop off."

BHAVANĀTH: "Then may one injure a man without incurring sin? Kill him?"

MASTER: "Yes, it is permissible if one has achieved that state of mind. But not everyone has it. It is the state of Brahmajnana.

"By coming down a step or two from samādhi I enjoy bhakti and bhakta.

Vidyā-māyā and Avidyā-māyā

"There exist in God both vidyā and avidyā. Vidyā-māyā leads one to God, and Avidyā-māyā away from Him. Knowledge, devotion, compassion, and renunciation belong to the realm of vidyā. With the help of these a man comes near God. One step more and he attains God, Knowledge of Brahman. In that state he clearly feels and sees that it is God who has become everything. He has nothing to give up and nothing to accept. It is impossible for him to be angry with anyone.

"One day I was riding in a carriage. I saw two prostitutes standing on a verandah. They appeared to me to be embodiments of the Divine Mother Herself. I saluted them.

"When I first attained this exalted state I could not worship Mother Kāli or give Her the food offering. Haladhāri and Hriday told me that on account of this the temple officer had slandered me. But I only laughed; I wasn't in the least angry. Attain Brahmajnana and then roam about enjoying God's lila. A holy man came to a town and went about seeing the sights. He met another sādhu, an acquaintance. The latter said: 'I see you are gadding about. Where is your baggage? I hope no thief has stolen it.' The first sādhu said: 'Not at all. First I found a lodging, put my things in the room in proper order, and locked the door. Now I am enjoying the fun of the city.' "(All laugh.)

BHAVANĀTH: "These are very lofty words."

M (to himself): "Tasting God's lila after Brahmajnana! Climbing down to the ordinary plane of consciousness after the attainment of samādhi!"

Knowledge of Brahman

MASTER (to M. and the others): "Is it an easy thing to obtain the Knowledge of Brahman? It is not possible unless the mind is annihilated. The guru said to the disciple, 'Give me your mind and I shall give you Knowledge.' In this state one enjoys only spiritual talk and the company of devotees.

(To Ram) "You are a physician. You know that medicine works only when it mixes with the patient's blood and becomes one with it. Likewise, in the state of Brahmajnana one sees God both within and without. One sees that it is God Himself who has become the body, mind, life, and soul."

M (to himself): "Assimilation!"

MASTER: "A man attains Brahmajnana as soon as his mind is annihilated. With the annihilation of the mind dies the ego, which says 'I', 'I'. One also attains the knowledge

of Brahman by following the path of devotion. One also attains it by following the path of knowledge, that is to say, discrimination. The jnanis discriminate, saying, 'Neti, neti', that is, 'All this is illusory, like a dream.' They analyse the world through the process of 'Not this, not this'; it is māyā. When the world vanishes, only the jivas, that is to say, so many egos, remain.

"Each ego may be likened to a pot. Suppose there are ten pots filled with water, and the sun is reflected in them. How many suns do you see?"

A DEVOTEE: "Ten reflections. Besides, there certainly exists the real Sun."

MASTER: "Suppose you break one pot. How many suns do you see now?"

DEVOTEE: "Nine reflected suns. But there certainly exists the real sun."

MASTER: "All right. Suppose you break nine pots. How many suns do you see now?"

DEVOTEE: "One reflected sun. But there certainly exists the real sun."

MASTER (to Girish): "What remains when the last pot is broken?"

GIRISH: "That real sun, sir."

MASTER: "No. What remains cannot be described. What is remains. How will you know there is a real sun unless there is a reflected sun? 'I-consciousness' is destroyed in samādhi. A man climbing down from samādhi to the lower plane cannot describe what he has seen there." It was late in the evening. Lamps were burning in the drawing-room. Sri Ramakrishna was in a spiritual mood. The devotees sat around him.

MASTER (in the ecstatic mood): "There is no one else here; so I am telling you this. He who from the depth of his soul seeks to know God will certainly realize Him. He must. He alone who is restless for God and seeks nothing but Him will certainly realize Him.

"Those who belong to this place have already come. Those who will come from now on are outsiders. Such people will come now and then. The Divine Mother will tell them: 'Do this. Call on God in this way.'

"Why doesn't man's mind dwell on God? You see, more powerful than God is His Mahamaya, His Power of Illusion. More powerful than the judge is his orderly. (All laugh.)

The all-powerful māyā

"Rāma said to Nārada: 'I am very much pleased with your prayer. Ask a boon of Me.' Nārada replied, 'O Rāma, may I have pure devotion to Your Lotus Feet, and may I not be deluded by Your world-bewitching māyā!' Rāma said, 'Be it so: ask for something else.' Nārada replied, 'No, Rāma, I do not want any other boon.'

"Everyone is under the spell of this world-bewitching māyā. When God assumes a human body, He too comes under the spell. Rāma wandered about weeping for Sita. 'Brahman weeps entangled in the snare of the five elements.' But you must remember this: God, by His mere will, can liberate Himself from this snare."

BHAVANĀTH: "The guard of a railway train shuts himself of his own will in a carriage; but he can get out whenever he wants to.'

MASTER: 'The Isvarakotis-Divine Incarnations, for instance-can liberate themselves whenever they want to; but the jivakotis cannot. Jivas are imprisoned by 'woman and gold'. When the doors and windows of a room are fastened with screws, how can a man get out?"

BHAVANĀTH (smiling): "Ordinary men are like the third-class passengers on a railway train. When the doors of their compartments are locked, they have no way to get out."

GIRISH: "If a man is so strongly tied hand and foot, then what is his way?"

MASTER: "He has nothing to fear if God Himself, as the guru cuts the chain of māyā."

Chapter 41

AT RAM'S HOUSE

Saturday, May 23, 1885

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting in the drawing-room on the ground floor of Ram's house. He was surrounded by devotees and was conversing with them. Mahima sat in front of him, M. to his left. Paltu, Bhavanāth, Nityagopal, Haramohan, and a few others sat around him. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. The Master inquired after several devotees.

MASTER (to M.): "Hasn't the younger Naren arrived yet?"

Presently the younger Naren entered the room.

MASTER: "What about him?"

M: "Who, sir?"

MASTER: "Kishori. Isn't Girish Ghosh coming? What about Narendra?" A few minutes later Narendra arrived and saluted Sri Ramakrishna.

MASTER (to the devotees): "It would be fine if Kedār were here. He agrees with Girish. (To Mahima, smiling) He says the same thing."

Ram had arranged the kirtan. With folded hands the musician said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Sir, I can begin if you give the order."

The Master drank some water and chewed spices from a small bag. He asked M. to close the bag.

The musician started the kirtan. As Sri Ramakrishna heard the sound of the drum he went into an ecstatic mood. While listening to the prelude of the kirtan he plunged into deep samādhi. He placed his legs on the lap of Nityagopal, who was sitting near him. The devotee, too, was in an ecstatic mood. He was weeping. The other devotees looked on intently.

Nitya and Lila

Regaining partial consciousness, Sri Ramakrishna said: "From the Nitya to the Lila and from the Lila to the Nitya. (To Nityagopal) What is your ideal?"

NITYAGOPAL: "Both are good."

Sri Ramakrishna closed his eyes and said: "Is it only this? Does God exist only when the eyes are closed, and cease to exist when the eyes are opened? The Lila belongs to Him

to whom the Nitya belongs, and the Nitya belongs to Him to whom the Lila belongs. (To Mahima) My dear sir, let me tell you-"

MAHIMA: "Revered sir, both are according to the will of God."

MASTER: "Some people climb the seven floors of a building and cannot get down; but some climb up and then, at will, visit the lower floors.

"Uddhava said to the gopis: 'He whom you address as your Krishna dwells in all beings. It is He alone who has become the universe and its living beings.'

"Therefore I say, does a man meditate on God only when his eyes are closed? Doesn't he see anything of God when his eyes are open?"

MAHIMA: "I have a question to ask, sir. A lover of God needs Nirvāna some time or other, doesn't he?"

The seed of bhakti cannot be destroyed

MASTER: "It can't be said that bhaktas need Nirvāna. According to some schools there is an eternal Krishna and there are also His eternal devotees. Krishna is Spirit embodied, and His Abode also is Spirit embodied. Krishna is eternal and the devotees also are eternal. Krishna and the devotees are like the moon and the stars-always near each other. You yourself repeat: 'what need is there of penance if God is seen within and without?' Further, I have told you that the devotee who is born with an element of Vishnu cannot altogether get rid of bhakti.

Once I fell into the clutches of a Jnāni, who made me listen to Vedānta for eleven months. But he couldn't altogether destroy the seed of bhakti in me. No matter where my mind wandered, it would come back to the Divine Mother. Whenever I sang of Her, Nangta would weep and say, 'Ah! What is this?' You see, he was such a great Jnāni and still he wept. (To the younger Naren and the others) Remember the popular saying that if a man drinks the juice of the *Ālekh* creeper, a plant grows inside his stomach. Once the seed of bhakti is sown, the effect is inevitable: it will gradually grow into a tree with flowers and fruits.

"You may reason and argue a thousand times, but if you have the seed of bhakti within you, you will surely come back to Hari."

The devotees listened silently to the Master. Sri Ramakrishna asked Mahima, laughing, "What is the thing you enjoy most?"

MAHIMA (smiling): "Nothing, sir. I like mangoes."

MASTER (smiling): "All by yourself? Or do you want to share them with others?"

MAHIMA (smiling) : "I am not so anxious to give others a share. I may as well eat them all by myself."

Reality includes both Absolute and universe

MASTER: "But do you know my attitude? I accept both, the Nitya and the Lila. Doesn't God exist if one looks around with eyes open? After realizing Him, one knows that He is both the Absolute and the universe. It is He who is the Indivisible Satchidananda. Again, it is He who has become the universe and its living beings.

Futility of mere scholarship

"One needs *sādhanā*. Mere study of the scriptures will not do. I noticed that though Vidyāsāgar had no doubt read a great deal, he had not realized what was inside him; he was satisfied with helping boys get their education, but had not tasted the Bliss of God. What will mere study accomplish? How little one assimilates! The almanac may forecast twenty measures of rain; but you don't get a drop by squeezing its pages."

MAHIMA: "We have so many duties in the world. Where is the time for *sādhanā*?"

MASTER: "Why should you say such a thing? It is you who describe the world as illusory, like a dream.

"Rāma and Lakshmana wanted to go to Ceylon. But the ocean was before them. Lakshmana was angry. Taking his bow and arrow, he said: 'I shall kill Varuna. This ocean prevents our going to Ceylon.' Rāma explained the matter to him, saying: 'Lakshmana, all that you are seeing is unreal, like a dream. The ocean is unreal. Your anger is also unreal. It is equally unreal to think of destroying one unreal thing by means of another.'" Mahimacharan kept quiet. He had many duties in the world. He had lately started a school to help others.

MASTER (to Mahima): "Sambhu once said to me: 'I have some money. It is my desire to spend it for good works-for schools and dispensaries, roads, and so forth.' I said to him: ' It will be good if you can do these works in a selfless spirit. But it is extremely difficult to perform unselfish action. Desire for fruit comes from nobody knows where. Let me ask you something. Suppose God appears before you; will you pray to Him; then, for such things as schools and dispensaries and hospitals?' "

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, what is the way for worldly people?"

Advice to the worldly

MASTER: "The Company of holy men. Worldly people should listen to spiritual talk. They are in a state of madness, intoxicated with 'woman and gold'. A drunkard should be given rice-water as an antidote. Drinking it slowly, he gradually recovers his normal consciousness.

The real teacher

"A worldly person should also receive instructions from a sadguru, a real teacher. Such a teacher has certain signs. You should hear about Banāras only from a man who has been to Banāras and seen it. Mere book-learning will not do. One should not receive

instruction from a pundit who has not realized the world to be unreal. Only if a pundit has discrimination and renunciation is he entitled to instruct.

"Samadhyayi remarked that God was dry. Think of his speaking like that of Him who is the embodiment of sweetness! It sounds like the remark, 'My uncle's cow-shed is full of horses.' (All laugh.)

"Yes, a worldly person is in a state of intoxication. He always says to himself: 'It is I who am doing everything. All these-the house and family are mine.' Baring his teeth, he says: 'What will happen to my wife and children without me? How will they get along? Who will look after my wife and children?' Rākhāl said one day, 'What will happen to my wife?'"

HARAMOHAN: "Did Rākhāl say that?"

Go beyond knowledge and ignorance

MASTER: "What else could he do? He who has knowledge has ignorance also. 'How amazing!' Lakshmana said to Rāma. 'Even a sage like Vasishtha is stricken with grief because of the death of his sons!' 'Brother,' replied Rāma, 'he who has knowledge has ignorance also. Therefore go beyond both knowledge and ignorance.'

"Suppose a thorn has pierced a man's foot. He picks another thorn to pull out the first one. After extracting the first thorn with the help of the second, he throws both away. One should use the thorn of knowledge to pull out the thorn of ignorance. Then one throws away both the thorns, knowledge and ignorance, and attains vijnāna. What is vijnāna? It is to know God distinctly by realizing His existence through an intuitive experience and to speak to Him intimately. That is why Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Go beyond the three *Gunās*.'

"In order to attain vijnāna one has to accept the help of *Vidyā Māyā*. *Vidyā Māyā* includes discriminationthat is to say, God is real and the world illusory-and dispassion, and also chanting God's name and glories, meditation, the company of holy persons, prayer, and so forth. *Vidyā Māyā* may be likened to the last few steps before the roof. Next is the roof, the realization of God.

Nature of the worldly

"Worldly people are in a state of chronic intoxication-mad with 'woman and gold'; they are insensible to spiritual ideas. That is why I love the youngsters not yet stained by 'woman and gold'. They are 'good receptacles' and may become useful in God's work. But as for worldly people, you lose almost everything while trying to eliminate the worthless stuff in them. They are like bony fish-almost all bones and very little meat.

"Worldly people are like mangoes struck by hail. If you want to offer them to God, you have to purify them by sprinkling them with Ganges water. Even then they are seldom used in the temple worship. If you are to use them at all, you have to apply Brahmajnana, that is to say, you have to persuade yourself that it is God alone who has become everything."

A Theosophist gentleman arrived with Aswini Kumar Dutta and the son of Behari Bhaduri. The Mukherji brothers entered the room and saluted Sri Ramakrishna. Arrangements were being made for devotional music in the courtyard. At the first beat of the drum the Master left the room and went there. The devotees followed him. Bhavanāth introduced Aswini to the Master. The Master introduced him to M. Aswini and M. were talking together when Narendra arrived. Sri Ramakrishna said to Aswini, "this is Narendra."

Saturday, June 13, 1885

About three o'clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was resting in his room after the midday meal. A pundit was sitting on a mat on the floor. Near the north door of the room stood a brahmin woman who had recently lost her only daughter and was stricken with grief. Kishori, too, was in the room. M. arrived and saluted the Master. He was accompanied by Dwija and a few other devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna was not well. He had been suffering from an inflamed throat. These were the hot days of summer. M. was not keeping well either, and of late he had not been able to visit Sri Ramakrishna frequently.

MASTER (to M.): "How are you? It is nice to see you. The bel-fruit you sent me was very good."

M: "I am slightly better now, sir."

MASTER: "It is very hot. Take a little ice now and then. I have been feeling the heat very much myself; so I ate a great deal of ice-cream. That is why I have this sore throat. The saliva smells very bad.

Master's adherence to truth

"I have said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, make me well. I shall not eat ice-cream any more.' Next I said to Her that I wouldn't eat ice either. Since I have given my word to the Mother, I shall certainly not eat these things. But sometimes I become forgetful. Once I said that I wouldn't eat fish on Sundays; but one Sunday I forgot and ate fish. But I cannot consciously go back on my word. The other day I asked a devotee to bring my water-jug to the pine-grove. As he had to go elsewhere, another man brought the jug. But I couldn't use that water. I was helpless. I waited there until the first man brought water for me.

"When I renounced everything with an offering of flowers at the Lotus Feet of the Mother, I said: 'Here, Mother, take Thy holiness, take Thy unholiness. Here, Mother, take Thy dharma, take Thy adharma. Here, Mother, take Thy sin, take Thy virtue. Here, Mother, take Thy good, take Thy evil. And give me only pure bhakti.' But I could not say, 'Here, Mother, take Thy truth, take Thy falsehood.' "

A devotee had brought some ice. Again and again the Master asked M., "Shall I eat it?"

M: said humbly, "Please don't eat it without consulting the Mother:" Sri Ramakrishna could not take the ice.

MASTER: "It is the bhakta, and not the Jnāni, who discriminates between holiness and unholiness. Vijay's mother-in-law said to me: 'How little I have achieved of my spiritual ideal! I cannot take food from everybody.' I said to her: 'Is eating everybody's food a sign of jnāna? A dog eats anything and everything. Does that make it a Jnāni?'

(To M.) "Why do I eat a variety of dishes? In order not to become monotonous. Otherwise I should have to renounce the devotees.

"I said to Keshab: 'If I instruct you from a still higher standpoint, then you won't be able to preserve your organization. In the state of jnāna organizations and things like that become unreal, like a dream.'

"One time I gave up fish. At first I suffered from it; afterwards it didn't bother me much. If someone burns up a bird's nest, the bird flies about; it takes shelter in the sky. If a man truly realizes that the body and the world are unreal, then his soul attains samādhi.

"Formerly I had the state of mind of a Jnāni: I couldn't enjoy the company of men. I would hear that a Jnāni or a bhakta lived at a certain place; then, a few days later, I would learn that he was dead. Everything seemed to me impermanent; so I couldn't enjoy people's company. Later the Mother brought my mind down to a lower plane; She so changed my mind that I could enjoy love of God and His devotees."

Divine Incarnation

Next the Master began to talk about Divine Incarnation.

MASTER (to M.): "Do you know why God incarnates Himself as a man? It is because through a human body one can hear His words. He sports through it. He tastes divine bliss through a human body. But through His other devotees God manifests only a small part of Himself. A devotee is like something you get a little juice from after much sucking - like a flower you get a drop of honey from after much sucking. (To M.) Do you understand this?"

M: "Yes, sir. Very well"

Sri Ramakrishna began to talk to Dwija, who was about sixteen years old. His father had married a second time. Dwija often accompanied M. to Dakshineswar, and Sri Ramakrishna was fond of him. The boy said that his father opposed his coming to Dakshineswar.

MASTER: "And your brothers too? Do they speak slightingly of me?"

Dwija did not answer.

M. (to the Master): "Those who speak slightingly of you will be cured of it after getting a few more blows from the world."

MASTER (referring to Dwija's brothers): "They live with their step-mother. So they are getting blows."

All were silent a moment.

MASTER (to M.): "Introduce Dwija to Purna some time."

M: "Yes, I shall. (To Dwija) Go to Panihati."

MASTER: "I am asking everyone to send people to Panihati. (To M.) Won't you go?"

Sri Ramakrishna intended to visit the religious festival at Panihati; so he was asking the devotees to go too.

M: "Yes, sir, I want to go."

MASTER: "We shall engage a big boat; then it won't toss about. Will Girish Ghosh be there?"

Sri Ramakrishna looked steadily at Dwija.

Master: "Well, there are so many youngsters in the city; why does this boy come here? (To M,) Tell me what you think. Certainly he has inherited some good tendencies from his previous birth."

M: "Undoubtedly, sir."

MASTER: "There is such a thing as inborn tendencies. When a man has performed many good actions in his previous births, in the final birth he becomes guileless. In the final birth he acts somewhat like a madcap.
"To tell you the truth, everything happens by God's will. When He says 'Yea', everything comes to pass, and when He says 'Nay', everything comes to a standstill.

"Why is it that one man should not bless another? Because nothing can happen by man's will: things come to pass or disappear by God's will.

'The other day I went to Captain's house. I saw some young boys going along the road. They belong to a different class. I saw one of them, about nineteen or twenty years old, with his hair parted on the side. He was whistling as he walked along.

"I see some immersed in the thickest tamas. They play the flute and are proud of it.

(To Dwija) "Why should a man of Knowledge be afraid of criticism? His understanding is as immovable as the anvil in a blacksmith's shop. Blows from the hammer fall continually on the anvil but cannot affect it in the least.

"I saw X-'s father going along the street."

M: "He is a very artless man."

MASTER: "But he has red eyes."

Sri Ramakrishna told the devotees about his visit to Captain's house. Captain had criticized the young men who visited the Master. Perhaps Hazra had poisoned his mind.

MASTER: "I was talking to Captain. I said: 'Nothing exists except Purusha and Prakriti. Nārada said to Rāma, "O Rāma, all the men You see are parts of Yourself, and all the women are parts of Sita." '

"Captain was highly pleased. He said: 'You alone have the right perception. All men are really Rāma, being parts of Rāma; all women are really Sita, being parts of Sita.'

Master reprimands Captain

"Immediately after saying this he began to criticize the young devotees. He said: 'They study English books and don't discriminate about their food. It is not good that they should visit you frequently. It may do you harm. Hazra is a real man, a grand fellow. Don't allow those young people to visit you so much.' At first I said, 'What can I do if they come?' Then I gave him some mortal blows. His daughter laughed. I said to him: 'God is far, far away from the worldly-minded. But God is very near the man-nay, within a distance of three cubits-whose mind is free from worldliness.' Speaking of Rākhāl , Captain said, 'He eats with all sorts of people.' Perhaps he had heard it from Hazra. Thereupon I said to him: 'A man may practise intense austerity and japa, but he won't achieve anything if his mind dwells on the world. But blessed is the man who keeps his mind on God even though he eats pork. He will certainly realize God in due time. Hazra, with all his austerity and japa, doesn't allow an opportunity to slip by for earning money as a broker.'

"'Yes, yes!' said Captain. 'You are right.' I said to him further, 'A few minutes ago you said that all men were parts of Rāma and all women parts of Sita, and now you are talking like this!'

"Captain said: 'Yes, that's true. But you don't love everybody.'

"I said: 'According to the scriptures, water is God. We see water everywhere. But some water we drink, some we bathe in, and some we use for washing dirty things. Here sit your wife and daughter. I see them as embodiments of the Blessed Mother.'

"Thereupon Captain said, 'Yes, yes! That's true.' He wanted to apologize by touching my feet."

After speaking thus, Sri Ramakrishna laughed. Then he began to tell of Captain's many virtues.

MASTER: "Captain has many virtues. Every day he attends to his devotions. He himself performs the worship of the Family Deity. How many mantras he recites while bathing

the image! He is a great ritualist. He performs his daily devotions, such as worship, japa, *Ārati*, recital of the scriptures, and chanting of hymns.

"I scolded Captain and said: 'Too much reading has spoiled you. Don't read any more.'

"About my own spiritual state Captain said, 'Your soul, like a bird, is ready to fly.' There are two entities: jivatma, the embodied soul, and Paramatma, the Supreme Soul. The embodied soul is the bird. The Supreme Soul is like the Ākāśa; it is the Chidakasa, the Ākāśa of Consciousness. Captain said: 'Your embodied soul flies into the Ākāśa of Consciousness. Thus you go into samādhi.'

(Smiling) "He critisized the Bengalis. He said: 'The Bengalis are fools. They have a gem near them, but they cannot recognize it.'

"Captain's father was a great devotee. He was a *Subedar* in the English army. Even on the battle-field he would perform his worship at the proper time. With one hand he would worship Śiva and with the other he would wield his gun and sword.

(To M.) "But Captain is engaged in worldly duties day and night. Whenever I go to his house I see him surrounded by his wife and children. Besides, his men bring him their account books now and then. But at times his mind dwells on God also. It is like the case of a typhoid patient who is always in a delirium. Now and then he gets a flash of consciousness and cries out: 'I want a drink of water! I want a drink of water!' But while you are giving him the water, he becomes unconscious again and is not aware of anything. I said to Captain, 'You are a ritualist.' He said: 'Yes, I feel very happy while performing worship and things like that. Worldly people have no other way.'

"I said to him: ' but must one perform formal worship for ever? How long does a bee buzz about? As long as it hasn't lighted on a flower. While sipping honey it doesn't buzz.' 'But', he said, 'can we, like you, give up worship and other rituals?' Yet he doesn't always say the same thing. Sometimes he says that all this is inert, sometimes that all this is conscious. I say: 'What do you mean by inert? Everything is Chaitanya, Consciousness.'"

Sri Ramakrishna asked M. about Purna.

MASTER: "If I see Purna once more, then my longing for him will diminish. How intelligent he is! His mind is much drawn to me. He says, 'I too feel a strange sensation in my heart for you.' (To M.) They have taken him away from your school. Will that harm you?"

M: "If Vidyāsāgar tells me that Purna's relatives have taken him away from the school on my account, I have an explanation to give him."

MASTER: "What will you say?"

M: "I shall say that one thinks of God in holy company. That is by no means bad. Further, I shall tell him that the text-books prescribed by the school authorities say that one should love God with all one's soul" (The Master laughs.)

MASTER : "At Captain's house I sent for the younger Naren. I said to him:' where is your house? I want to see it.' 'Please do come', he said. But he became nervous as we were going there, lest his father should know about it. (All laugh.)

(To a visitor) "You haven't been here for a long time-about seven or eight months."

VISITOR: "About a year, sir."

MASTER: "Another gentleman used to come with you."

VISITOR: "Yes, sir. Nilmani Babu."

MASTER: "Why doesn't he come any more? Ask him to come some time. I want to see him. Who is this boy with you?"

VISITOR: "He comes from Assam."

MASTER: "Where is Assam? In which direction?"

Dwija spoke to the Master about Ashu. Ashu's father was arranging for his marriage, but Ashu had no wish to marry.

MASTER: "See, he doesn't want to marry. They are forcing him."

Sri Ramakrishna said to a devotee that he should show respect to his elder brother. He said: "The elder brother is like one's father. Respect him."

A pundit was sitting with the devotees. He came from upper India.

MASTER (smiling, to M.): "The pundit is a great student of the Bhagavata."

M. and the devotees looked at the pundit.

MASTER (to the pundit): "Well, sir, what is Yogamaya?"

The pundit gave some sort of explanation.

MASTER: "Why isn't Radhika called Yogamaya?"

The pundit also answered this question after a fashion.

Significance of Radhika

MASTER: "Radhika is full of unmixed sattva, the embodiment of prema. Yogamaya contains all the three *Gunās*-sattva, rajas, and tamas; but Radhika has nothing but pure sattva.(To M.) "Narendra now respects Radhika very much. He says that if anyone wants to know how to love Satchidananda, he can learn it from her.

"Satchidananda wanted to taste divine bliss for Itself. That is why It created Radhika. She was created from the person of Satchidananda Krishna. Satchidananda Krishna is the 'container', and He Himself, in the form of Radhika, is the 'contained'. He manifested Himself in that way in order to taste His own bliss, that is to say, in order to experience divine bliss by loving Satchidananda.

"Therefore it is written in the Vaishnava books that after her birth Radhika did not open her eyes. The idea is that she did not wish to see any human being. Yaśoda came with Krishna in her arms to see Radhika. Only then did she open her eyes, to behold Krishna. In a playful mood Krishna touched her eyes. (To the Assamese boy) Haven't you seen this? Small children touch others' eyes with their hands."

The pundit was about to take leave of Sri Ramakrishna.

PUNDIT: "I must go home."

MASTER (tenderly): "Have you earned anything?"

PUNDIT: "The market is very dull. I've earned nothing."

A few minutes later he saluted the Master and departed.

MASTER (to M.): "You see how great the difference is between worldly people and the youngsters? This pundit has been worrying about money day and night. He has come to Calcutta to earn money; otherwise his people at home will have nothing to eat. So he has to knock at different doors. When will he concentrate his mind on God? But the youngsters are untouched by 'woman and gold'; hence they can direct their mind to God whenever they desire.

"The youngsters do not enjoy worldly people's company. Rākhāl used to say, 'I feel nervous at the sight of the worldly-minded.' When I was first beginning to have spiritual experiences, I used to shut the doors of my room when I saw worldly people coming.

Master's boyhood reminiscences

"As a boy, at Kamarpukur, I loved Ram Mallick dearly. But afterwards, when he came here, I couldn't even touch him. Ram Mallick and I were great friends during our boyhood. We were together day and night; we slept together. At that time I was sixteen or seventeen years old. People used to say, 'If one of them were a woman they would marry each other.' Both of us used to play at his house. I remember those days very well. His relatives used to come riding in palanquins. Now he has a shop at Chanak. I sent for him many a time; he came here the other day and spent two days. Ram said he

had no children; he brought up his nephew, but the boy died. He told me this with a sigh; his eyes were filled with tears; he was grief-stricken for his nephew. He said further that since they had no children of their own, allhis wife's affection had been turned to the nephew. She was completely overwhelmed with grief. Ram said to her: 'You are crazy. What will you gain by grieving? Do you want to go to Banāras?' You see, he called his wife crazy. Grief for the boy totally 'diluted' him. I found he had no stuff in him. I couldn't touch him."

The brahmin lady still stood near the north door. She was a widow. Her only daughter had been married to a very aristocratic man, a landlord in Calcutta with the title of Raja. Whenever the daughter visited her she was escorted by liveried footmen. Then the mother's heart swelled with pride. Just a few days ago the daughter had died, and now she was beside herself with sorrow.
The brahmin lady listened to the account of Ram Mallick s grief for his nephew. For the last few days she had been running to the Master from her home at Baghbazar like an insane person. She was eager to know whether Sri Ramakrishna could suggest any remedy for her unquenchable grief. Sri Ramakrishna resumed the conversation.

MASTER: "A man came here the other day. He sat a few minutes and then said, 'Let me go and see the "moon-face" of my child.' I couldn't control myself and said: 'So you prefer your son's "moon-face" to God's "moon-face"! Get out, you fool!'

Magician and his magic
(To M.) "The truth is that God alone is real and all else unreal. Men, universe, house, and children-all these are like the magic of the magician. The magician strikes his wand and says: 'come delusion! Come confusion!' Then he says to the audience, 'Open the lid of the pot; see the birds fly into the sky.' But the magician alone is real and his magic unreal. The unreal exists for a second and then vanishes.

"Śiva was seated in Kailas. His companion Nandi was near Him. Suddenly a terrific noise arose. 'Revered Sir,' asked Nandi, 'what does that mean?' Śiva said: 'Ravana is born. That is its meaning.' A few moments later another terrific noise was heard. 'Now what is this noise?' Nandi asked. Śiva said with a smile, 'Now Ravana is dead. Birth and death are like magic: you see the magic for a second and then it disappears. God alone is real and all else unreal. Water alone is real; its bubbles appear and disappear. They disappear into the very water from which they rise.

"God is like an ocean, and living beings are its bubbles. They are born there and they die there. Children are like the few small bubbles around a big one.

"God alone is real. Make an effort to cultivate love for Him and find out the means to realize Him. What will you gain by grieving?"

All sat in silence. The brahmin lady said, "May I go home now? The Master said to her tenderly: "Do you want to go now? It is very hot. Why now? You can go later in a carriage with the devotees."

Because the day was so hot, a devotee gave the Master a new fan made of sandalwood. He was very much pleased and said: "Good! Good! Om Tat Sat! Kāli!" First he fanned the pictures of the gods and goddesses, and then he fanned himself. He said to M.: "See! Feel the breeze!" M. Was highly pleased.

Captain arrived with his children.

Sri Ramakrishna said to Kishori, "Please show the temples to the children." He began to talk to Captain. M., Dwija, and the other devotees were sitting on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch, facing the north. He asked Captain to sit in front of him on the same couch.

MASTER: "I was telling the devotees about you-your devotion, worship, and *Ārati*."

CAPTAIN (bashfully): "What do I know of worship and *Ārati*? How insignificant I am!"

Harmless ego

MASTER: "Only the ego that is attached to 'woman and. gold' is harmful. But the ego that feels it is the servant of God does no harm to anybody. Neither does the ego of a child, which is not under the control of any *guna*. One moment children quarrel, and the next moment they are on friendly terms. One moment they build their toy houses with great care, and immediately afterwards they knock them down. There is no harm in the 'I-consciousness' that makes one feel oneself to be a child of God or His servant. This ego is really no ego at all. It is like sugar candy, which is not like other sweets. Other sweets make one ill; but sugar candy relieves acidity. Or take the case of Om. It is unlike other sounds.

"With this kind of ego one is able to love Satchidananda. It is impossible to get rid of the ego. Therefore it should be made to feel that it is the devotee of God, His servant. Otherwise, how can one live? How intense was the love of the gopis for Sri Krishna! (To Captain) Please tell us something about the gopis. You read the Bhagavata so much."

CAPTAIN: "When Sri Krishna lived at Vrindāvan, without any of His royal splendour, even then the gopis loved Him more than their own souls. Therefore Sri Krishna said, 'How shall I be able to pay off my debt to the gopis, who surrendered to me their all-their bodies, minds, and souls?' "

Captain's words awakened intense love for Krishna in the Master's mind.

He exclaimed, "Govinda! Govinda! Govinda!" and was about to go into an ecstatic mood. Captain was amazed and said: "How blessed he is! How blessed he is!"

Captain and the devotees watched this love-ecstasy of Sri Ramakrishna. They sat quietly gazing at him, awaiting his return to the consciousness of the world.

MASTER: "Tell us more."

CAPTAIN: "Sri Krishna is unattainable by the yogis, by yogis like you; but He can be attained by lovers like the gopis. How many years did the yogis practise yoga for His vision! Yet they did not succeed. But the gopis realized Him with such ease!"

MASTER (smiling): "Yes, He ate from the hands of the gopis, wept for them, played with them, and made many demands on them."

A DEVOTEE: "Bankim has written a life of Krishna."

MASTER: "He accepts Krishna but not Radhika."

CAPTAIN: "I see he doesn't accept Krishna's lila with the gopis."

MASTER: "I also hear that Bankim says that one needs passions such as lust."

A DEVOTEE: "He has written in his magazine that the purpose of religion is to give expression to our various faculties: physical, mental, and spiritual."

CAPTAIN: "I see. He believes that lust and so forth are necessary. But he doesn't believe that Sri Krishna could enjoy His sportive pleasure in the world, that God could incarnate Himself in a human form and sport in Vrindāvan with Radha and the gopis."

MASTER (smiling): "But these things are, not written in the newspaper. How could he believe them?

"A man said to his friend, 'Yesterday, as I was passing through a certain part of the city, I saw a house fall with a crash.' 'Wait', said the friend. 'Let me look it up in the newspaper.' But this incident wasn't mentioned in the paper. Thereupon the man said, 'But the paper doesn't mention it.' His friend replied, 'I saw it with my own eyes.' 'Be that as it may, said the man, 'I can't believe it as long as it isn't in the paper.'

"How can Bankim believe that God sports about as a man? He doesn't get it from his English education. It is very hard to explain how God fully incarnates Himself as man. Isn't that so? The manifestation of Infinity in this human body only three and a half cubits tall!"

CAPTAIN: "Krishna is God Himself. In describing Him we have to use such terms as 'whole' and 'part'."

MASTER: "Whole and part are like fire and its sparks. An Incarnation of God is for the sake of the bhaktas and not of the jnanis. It is said in the Adhyātma Rāmāyana that Rāma alone is both the Pervading Spirit and everything pervaded. 'You are the Supreme Lord distinguished as the *Vachaka,* the signifying symbol, and the *Vachya*, the object signified.'"

CAPTAIN: "The 'signifying symbol' means the pervader, and the 'object signified' means the thing pervaded."

MASTER: "The pervader in this case is a finite form, It is God incarnating Himself as a human being."

Sri Ramakrishna was talking thus to Captain and the devotees when Jaygopal Sen and Trailokya of the Brahmo Samaj arrived. They saluted the Master and sat down. Sri Ramakrishna looked at Trailokya with a smile and continued the conversation.

"Wicked ego" must be killed

MASTER: "It is on account of the ego that one is not able to see God. In front of the door of God's mansion lies the stump of ego. One cannot enter the mansion without jumping over the stump.

"There was once a man who had acquired the power to tame ghosts. One day, at his summons, a ghost appeared. The ghost said: 'now tell me what you want me to do. The moment you cannot give me any work I shall break your neck.' The man had many things to accomplish, and he had the ghost do them all, one by one. At last he could find nothing more for the ghost to do. 'Now', said the ghost, 'I am going to break your neck.' 'Wait a minute', said the man. 'I shall return presently.' He ran to his teacher and said: 'Revered sir, I am in great danger. This is my trouble.' And he told his teacher his trouble and asked, 'What shall I do now?' The teacher said: ' do this. Tell the ghost to straighten this kinky hair.' The ghost devoted itself day and night to straightening the hair. But how could it make a kinky hair straight? The hair remained kinky.

"Likewise, the ego seems to vanish this moment, but it reappears the next. Unless one renounces the ego, one does not receive the grace of God.

"Suppose there is a feast in a house and the master of the house puts a man in charge of the stores. As long as the man remains in the store-room, the master doesn't go there; but when of his own wills he renounces the store-room and goes away, then the master locks it and takes charge of it himself.

"A guardian is appointed only for a minor. A boy cannot safeguard his property; therefore the king assumes responsibility for him. God does not take over our responsibilities unless we renounce our ego.

"Once Lakshmi and Narayana were seated in Vaikuntha, when Narayana suddenly stood up. Lakshmi had been stroking His feet. She said, 'Lord, where are You going?' Narayana answered: 'One of My devotees is in great danger. I must save him.' With these words He went out. But He came back immediately. Lakshmi said, 'Lord, why have You returned so soon?' Narayana smiled and said: The devotee was going along the road overwhelmed with love for Me. Some washermen were drying clothes on the grass, and the devotee walked over the clothes. At this the washermen chased him and were going to beat him with their sticks. So I ran out to protect him.' 'But why have You come back?' asked Lakshmi. Narayana laughed and said: 'I saw the devotee himself picking up a brick to throw at them. (All laugh.) So I came back.'

"I said to Keshab, 'You must renounce your ego.' Keshab replied, 'If I do, how can I keep my organization together?'

"I said to him: 'how slow you are to understand! I am not asking you to renounce the "ripe ego", the ego that makes a man feel he is a servant of God or His devotee. Give up the "unripe ego", the ego that creates attachment to "woman and gold". The ego that makes a man feels he is God's servant. His child is the "ripe ego". It doesn't harm one.'"

TRAILOKYA: "It is very difficult to get rid of the ego. People only think they are free from it."

MASTER: "Gauri would not refer to himself as 'I' lest he should feel egotistic. He would say 'this' instead. I followed his example and would refer to myself as 'this' instead of 'I'. Instead of saying, 'I have eaten,' I would say, 'This has eaten.' Mathur noticed it and said one day: 'What is this, revered father? Why should you talk that way? Let them talk that way. They have their egotism. You are free from it; you don't have to talk like them.'

"I said to Keshab, 'Since the ego cannot be given up, let it remain as the servant, the servant of God.' Prahlada had two moods. Sometimes he would feel that he was God. In that mood he would say, 'Thou art verily I, and I am verily Thou.' But when he was conscious of his ego, he felt that God was the Master and he was His servant. After a man is firmly established in the ideal of 'I am He', he can live as God's servant. He may then think of himself as the servant of God.

Signs of God-realization

(To Captain) "When a man attains the Knowledge of Brahman he shows certain characteristics. The Bhagavata describes four of them: the state of a child, of an inert thing, of a madman, and of a ghoul. Sometimes the knower of Brahman acts like a five-year-old child. Sometimes he acts like a madman. Sometimes he remains like an inert thing. In this state he cannot work; he renounces all action. You may say that jnanis like Janaka were active. The truth is that people in olden times gave responsibility to their subordinate officers and thus freed themselves from worry. Further, at that time men possessed intense faith."

Sri Ramakrishna began to speak about the renunciation of action. But he also said that those who felt they must do their duties should do them in a detached spirit.

MASTER: "After attaining Knowledge one cannot do much work."

TRAILOKYA: "Why so, sir? Pavahari Baba was a great yogi and yet he reconciled people's quarrels, even lawsuits."

MASTER: "Yes, yes. That's true. Dr. Durgacharan was a great drunkard. He used to drink twenty-four hours a day. But he was precise in his actions; he did not make any mistake in treating his patients. There is no harm in doing work after the attainment of bhakti. But it is very hard. One needs intense *tapasya*.

"It is God who does everything. We are His instruments. Some Sikhs said to me in front of the Kāli temple, 'God is compassionate.' I said, 'to whom is He compassionate?' 'Why, revered sir, to all of us', said the Sikhs. I said: 'We are His children. Does compassion to one's own children mean much? A father must look after his children; or do you expect the people of the neighbourhood to bring them up?' Well, won't those who say that God is compassionate ever understand that we are God's children and not someone else's?"

CAPTAIN: "You are right. They don't regard God as their own."

MASTER: "Should we not, then, address God as compassionate? Of course we should, as long as we practise *sādhanā*. After realizing God, one rightly feels that God is our Father or Mother. As long as we have not realized God, we feel that we are far away from Him, children of someone else.

"During the stage of *sādhanā* one should describe God by all His attributes. One day Hazra said to Narendra: 'God is Infinity. Infinite is His, splendour. Do you think He will accept your offerings of sweets and bananas or listen to your music? This is a mistaken notion of yours.' Narendra at once sank ten fathoms. So I said to Hazra, 'you villain! Where will these youngsters be if you talk to them like that?' How can a man live if he gives up devotion? No doubt God has infinite splendour; yet He is under the control of His devotees. A rich man's gate-keeper comes to the parlour where his master is seated with his friends. He stands on one side of the room. In his hand he has something covered with a cloth. He is very hesitant. The master asks him, 'Well, gate-keeper, what have you in your hand?' Very hesitantly the servant takes out a custard-apple from under the cover, places it in front of his master, and says, 'Sir, it is my desire that you should eat this.' The Master is impressed by his servant's devotion with great love he takes the fruit in his hand and says: 'Ah! This is a very nice custard-apple. Where did you pick it? You must have taken a great deal of trouble to get it.'

"God is under the control of His devotees. King Duryodhana was very attentive to Krishna and said to Him, 'Please have your meal here.' But the Lord went to Vidura's hut. He is very fond of His devotees. He ate Vidura's simple rice and greens as if they were celestial food.

"Sometimes a perfect Jnāni behaves like a ghoul. He does not discriminate about food and drink, holiness and unholiness. A perfect knower of God and a perfect idiot have the same outer signs. A perfect Jnāni perhaps does not utter the mantras while bathing in the Ganges. While worshipping, God, perhaps he offers all the flowers together at His feet. He doesn't utter the mantras, nor does he observe the rituals.

"A man cannot renounce action as long as he desires worldly enjoyment. As long as one cherishes a desire for enjoyment, one performs action.

"A bird sat absent-mindedly on the mast of a ship anchored in the Ganges. Slowly the ship sailed out into the ocean. When the bird came to its senses, it could find no shore in any direction. It flew toward the north hoping to reach land; it went very far and grew very tired but could find no shore. What could it do? It returned to the ship and sat on

the mast. After a long while the bird flew away again, this time toward the east. It couldn't find land in that direction either; everywhere it saw nothing but limitless ocean. Very tired, it again returned to the ship and sat on the mast. After resting a long while, the bird went toward the south and toward the west. When it found no sign of land in any direction, it came back and settled down on the mast. It did not leave the mast again, but sat there without making any further effort. It no longer felt restless or worried. Because it was free from worry, it made no further effort."

CAPTAIN: "Ah, what an illustration!"

Man's peace in God

MASTER: "Worldly people wander about to the four quarters of the earth for the sake of happiness. They don't find it anywhere; they only become tired and weary. When through their attachment to 'woman and gold' they only suffer misery, they feel an urge toward dispassion and renunciation. Most people cannot renounce 'woman and gold' without first enjoying it.

There are two sorts of people: those who stay in one place and those who go about to many places. There are some sadhakas who visit many sacred places. They cannot settle down in one spot; they must drink the water of many holy places. Thus roaming about, they satisfy their unfulfilled desires. And at last they build a hut in one place and settle down there. Then, free from worry and effort, they meditate on God.

"But what is there to enjoy in the world? 'Woman and gold'? That is only a momentary pleasure. One moment it exists and the next moment it disappears. '

Sincere yearning enables one to realize God

"The world is like an overcast sky that steadily pours down rain: the face of the sun is seldom seen. There is mostly suffering in the world. On account of the cloud of 'woman and gold' one cannot see the sun. Some people ask me: 'Sir, why has God created such a world? Is there no way out for us?' I say to them: 'why shouldn't there be a way out? Take shelter with God and pray to Him with a yearning heart for a favourable wind, that you may have things in your favour. If you call on Him with yearning, He will surely listen to you.'

"A man had a son who was on the point of death. In frenzy he asked remedies of different people. One of them said:' 'Here is a remedy: First it must rain when the star *Svati* is in the ascendant; then some of the rain must fall into a skull; then a frog must come there to drink the water, and a snake must chase it; and when the snake is about to bite the frog, the frog must hop away and the poison must fall into the skull. You should give the patient a little of the poison and rain-water from the skull.' The father set out eagerly to find the medicine when the star Svati was in the sky. It started raining. Fervently he said to God, 'O Lord, please get a skull for me.' Searching here and there, he at last found a skull with rain-water in it. Again he prayed to God, saying, 'O Lord, I beseech Thee, please help me find the frog and the snake.' Since he had great

longing, he got the frog and the snake also. In the twinkling of an eye he saw a snake chasing a frog, and as it was about to bite the frog, its poison fell into the skull.

"If one takes shelter with God and prays to Him with great longing, God will surely listen; He will certainly make everything favourable."

CAPTAIN: "What an apt illustration!"

MASTER: "Yes, God makes everything favourable. Perhaps the aspirant Doesn't marry. Thus he is able to devote his whole attention to God. Or perhaps his brothers earn the family's livelihood. Or perhaps a son takes on the responsibilities of the family. Then the aspirant will not have to bother about the world; he can give one hundred per cent of his mind to God.

"But one cannot succeed unless one renounces 'woman and gold'. Only by renunciation is ignorance destroyed. The sun's rays, falling on a lens, burn many objects. But if a room is dark inside, you cannot get that result: 'you must come out of the room to use the lens.

"But some people live in the world even after attaining jnāna. They see both what is inside and what is outside the room. The light of God illumines the world. Therefore with that light they can discriminate between good and bad, permanent and impermanent. The ignorant, who lead a worldly life without knowing God, are like people living in a house with mud walls.

With the help of a dim light they can see the inside of the house but nothing more. But those who live in the world after having attained Knowledge and realized God, are like people living in a glass house. They see the inside of the room and also all that is outside. The light from the sun of Knowledge enters strongly into the room. They perceive everything inside the room very clearly. They know what is good and what is bad, what is permanent and what is impermanent.

"God alone is the Doer, and we are all His instruments. Therefore it is impossible even for a Jnāni to be egotistic. The writer of a hymn to Śiva felt proud of his achievement; but his pride was dashed to pieces when Śiva's bull bared his teeth. He saw that each tooth was a word of the hymn. Do you understand the meaning of this? These words had existed from the beginning less past. The writer had only discovered them.

"It is not good to be a guru by profession. One cannot be a teacher without a command from God. He who says he is a guru is a man of mean intelligence. Haven't you seen a balance? The lighter side goes higher. He who is spiritually higher than others does not consider himself a guru. Everyone wants to be a teacher, but a disciple is hard to find."

Trailokya was seated on the floor, to the north of the small couch. He was going to sing. Sri Ramakrishna said to him, "Ah, how sweetly you sing!"

Trailokya sang to the accompaniment of a Tānpura:

I have joined my heart to Thee: all that exists art Thou;
Thee only have I found, for Thou art all that exists.
O Lord, Beloved of my heart! Thou art the Home of all;
Where indeed is the heart in which Thou dost not dwell?
Thou hast entered every heart: all that exists art Thou.
Whether sage or fool, whether Hindu or Mussalman,
Thou makest them as Thou wilt: all that exists art Thou.

Thy presence is everywhere, whether in heaven or in Kaaba;
Before Thee all must bow, for Thou art all that exists.
From earth below to the highest heaven, from heaven to deepest earth,

I see Thee wherever I look: all that exists art Thou.
Pondering, I have understood; I have seen it beyond a doubt;
I find not a single thing that may be compared to Thee.
To Jafar it has been revealed that Thou art all that exists.

He sang again:

Thou art my All in All, O lord! the Life of my life, the Essence of essence;
In the three worlds I have none else but Thee to call my own.
Thou art my peace, my joy, my hope;
Thou my support, my wealth, my glory;
Thou art my wisdom and my strength.
Thou art my home, my place of rest; my dearest friend, my next of kin;
My present and my future,
Thou; my heaven and my salvation.
Thou art my scriptures, my commandments;
Thou art my ever gracious Guru;
Thou the Spring of my boundless bliss.
Thou art the Way, and Thou the Goal;
Thou the Adorable One, O Lord!
Thou art the Mother tender-hearted;
Thou the chastising Father;
Thou the Creator and Protector;
Thou the Helmsman who dost steer
My craft across the sea of life.

While Sri Ramakrishna listened to the songs he was overwhelmed with emotion. Again and again he said: "Ah, Thou art all! Ah me! Ah me!"

"The music was over. It was six o'clock in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna went to the pine-grove, M. accompanying him. Sri Ramakrishna was laughing and talking.

Suddenly he said to M.: "Why haven't you eaten any refreshments? Why haven't the others eaten either?" He was eager for the devotees to take some refreshments.
Sri Ramakrishna was to go to Calcutta in the evening. While returning from the pine-grove he said to M., "I don't know who will take me to Calcutta in his carriage."
It was evening. A lamp was lighted in Sri Ramakrishna's room and incense was burnt. Lamps also were lighted in the different temples and buildings. The orchestra was playing in the Nahabat. Soon the evening service would begin in the temples.

Sri Ramakrishna sat on the small couch. After chanting the names of the different deities, he meditated on the Divine Mother. The evening service was over. Sri Ramakrishna paced the room, now and then talking to the devotees. He also consulted M. about his going to Calcutta.

Presently Narendra arrived. He was accompanied by Sarat and one or two other young devotees. They all saluted the Master.

At the sight of Narendra Sri Ramakrishna's love overflowed. He tenderly touched Narendra's chin as one touches a baby's to show one's love. He said in a loving voice, "Ah, you have come!"

The Master was standing in his room, facing the Ganges. Narendra and his young friends were talking to him, facing the east. The Master turned toward M. and said: "Narendra has come. How can I go to Calcutta now? I sent for Narendra. How can I go now? What do you think?"

M: "As you wish, sir. Let us put it off today."

MASTER: "All right. We shall go tomorrow, either by boat or by carriage. (To the other devotees) It is late. Go home now."

One by one the devotees saluted him and departed.

Chapter 42

CAR FESTIVAL AT BALARĀM'S HOUSE

Monday, July 13, 1885

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting in Balarām's drawing-room with the devotees. It was nine o'clock in the morning. Balarām was going to celebrate the Car Festival the following day. The Deity Jagannath was worshipped daily at his house. He had a small car which would be drawn along the verandah to celebrate the festival. The Master had been specially invited for the occasion.

Sri Ramakrishna and M. were talking together. Narayan, Tejchandra, Balarām, and other devotees were in the room. The Master was talking about Purna, a lad of fifteen. He was very eager to see the boy.

MASTER (to M.): Well, by which road will he come to see me? Please have Purna and Dwija meet each other.

"When two people are of the same age and have the same inner nature, I bring them together. There is a meaning in this. In this way both make progress. Have you noticed Purna's longing for God?"

M: "Yes, sir. One day I was riding on a tram. He saw me from the room of his house and ran down to the street. With great fervour he saluted me from the street."

MASTER (with tears in his eyes): "Ah! Ah! It is because you have helped him make the contact through which he will find out the supreme ideal of his life. One doesn't act like that unless one longs for God.

"Narendra, the younger Naren, and Purna-these three have a manly nature. It is not so with Bhavanāth. He has a womanly nature.

Master on Purna

"Purna is in such an exalted state that either he will very soon give up his body-the body is useless after the realization of God-or his inner nature will within a few days burst forth.

Purna's divine traits

"He has a divine nature-the traits of a god. It makes a person less fearful of men. If you put a garland of flowers round his neck or smear his body with sandal-paste or burn incense before him, he will go into samādhi; for then he will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that Narayana Himself dwells in his body, that it is Narayana who has assumed the body. I have come to know about it.

A few days after my first experience of the God-intoxicated state at Dakshineswar, a lady of a brahmin family arrived there. She had many good traits. No sooner was a garland put round her neck and incense burnt before her than she went into samādhi. A

few moments later she experienced great bliss; tears streamed from her eyes. I saluted her and said, 'Mother, shall I succeed?' 'Yes', she replied.

"I want to see Purna once more. But how will it be possible for me? It seems he is a part. How amazing! Not a mere particle, but a part very intelligent, too. I understand that he is very clever in his studies. Therefore I have hit it right.

"By dint of austerity, a man, may obtain God as his son. By the roadside on the way to Kamarpukur is Ranjit Raya's lake. Bhagavati, the Divine Mother, was born as his daughter. Even now people hold an annual festival there in the month of Chaitra, in honour of this divine daughter. I feel very much like going there.

Story of Ranjit Raya

"Ranjit Raya was the landlord of that part of the country. Through the power of his *tapasya* he obtained the Divine Mother as his daughter. He was very fond of her, and she too was much attached to him; she hardly left his presence. One day Ranjit Raya was engaged in the duties of his estate. He was very busy. The girl, with her childlike nature, was constantly interrupting him, saying: 'Father, what is this? What is that?' Ranjit Raya tried, with sweet words, to persuade her not to disturb him, and said: 'my child, please leave me alone. I have much work to do.' But the girl would not go away. At last, absent-mindedly, the father said, 'Get out of here!' On this pretext she left home. A pedlar of conch-shell articles was going along the road. From him she took a pair of bracelets for her wrists. When he asked for the price, she said that he could get the money from a certain box in her home. Then she disappeared. Nobody saw her again. In the mean time the pedlar came to the house and asked for the price of his bracelets. When she was not to be found at home, her relatives began to run about looking for her. Ranjit Raya sent people in all directions to search for her. The money owed to the pedlar was found in the box, as she had indicated. Ranjit Raya was weeping bitterly, when people came running to him and said that they had noticed something in the lake. They all ran there and saw an arm, with conch-shell bracelets on the wrist, being waved above the water. A moment afterwards it disappeared. Even now people worship her as the Divine Mother at the time of the annual festival. (To M.) All this is true.

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "Narendra now believes these things.

"Purna was born with an element of Vishnu. I worshipped him mentally with bel-leaves; but the offering was not accepted. Then I worshipped him with tulsi-leaves and sandal-paste. That proved to be all right. God reveals Himself in many ways: sometimes as man, sometimes in other divine forms made of Spirit. One must believe in divine forms. What do you say?"

M: "It is true, sir!"

Gopal Ma

MASTER: "The brahmani of Kamarhati sees many visions. She lives all by herself in a lonely room in a garden on the bank of the Ganges. She spends her time in japa. Gopala sleeps with her. (The Master gives a start.) It is not imagination, but fact. She saw that Gopala's palms were red. He walks with her. She suckles Him at her breast. They talk to each other. When Narendra heard the story he wept. Formerly I too used to see many visions, but now in my ecstatic state I don't see so many. I am gradually getting over my feminine nature; I feel nowadays more like a man. Therefore I control my emotion; I don't manifest it outwardly so much.

"The younger Naren has the nature of a man. Therefore in meditation his mind completely merges in the Ideal. He does not show emotion. Nitya-gopal has a feminine nature. Therefore while he is in a spiritual mood his body becomes distorted and twisted; it becomes flushed.

(To M.) "Well, people renounce grain by grain, but what a mood these youngsters are in!

"Binode said: 'I have to sleep with my wife. That makes me feel very bad.' It is bad for an aspirant to sleep with his wife, whether he has intercourse with her or not. There is the friction of the body and also the physical warmth.

"What a state Dwija is passing through! In my presence he only sways his body and fixes his glance on me. Is that a trifling thing? If a man gathers his whole, mind and fixes it on me, then, indeed, he achieves everything.

God dwelling in the Master

"But what am I? It is all He. I am the machine and He is its Operator. It is God alone who exists in this [meaning his body]. That is why so many people are feeling more and more attracted to it. A mere touch is enough to awaken their spirituality. This attraction, these pull, is the attraction of God and of none else.

"Tārak of Belgharia was going home from Dakshineswar. I dearly noticed that a flame-like thing came out of this [meaning his body] and followed him. A few days later Tārak came back to Dakshineswar. In a state of samādhi He Who dwells in this body placed his foot on Tārak's chest.

"Well, are there more youngsters like these?"

M: "Mohit is very nice. He came to you once or twice. He is studying enough books to pass two university examinations. He has great longing for God."

MASTER: "That maybe. But he doesn't belong to a high plane. His physical traits are not so good; he has a puggish face. But these other youngsters belong to a high plane.

Worries associated with human birth

"Many troubles and worries follow in the wake of a birth in a physical body. Further, if a person is cursed, he may have to be born seven times. One must be very careful. One has to assume a human body if one cherishes the slightest desire."

A DEVOTEE: "What are the desires of those who are Incarnations of God?"

MASTER (smiling): "I find that I have not got rid of all my desires. Once I saw a holy man with a shawl, and I too wanted to put on one like it. Even now I have that desire. I don't know whether I shall have to be born again for it."

BALARĀM (smiling): "Then will you be born again just for a shawl?" (All laugh.)

MASTER (smiling): "One has to keep a good desire so that one may give up the body meditating on it. There are four holy places for the sādhus to visit. They visit three and leave out one. Many of them leave out Puri, the place of Jagannath, so that they can give up their bodies meditating on Jagannath."

A man dressed in an ochre robe entered the room and greeted the Master. Privately he was in the habit of criticizing Sri Ramakrishna; so at the sight of him Balarām laughed. Sri Ramakrishna could read a man's mind. He said to Balarām: "Never mind. Let him say I am a cheat."

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Tejchandra.

MASTER: "I send for you so often. Why don't you come? If you practise meditation and prayer it will make me happy. I look on you as my own; that is why I send for you."

TEJCHANDRA: "Sir, I have to go to the office. I am very busy with my duties."

M. (smiling): "There was a marriage ceremony at his home and he got leave from his office for ten days."

MASTER: "Well, well! You say you have no leisure. You told me just now that you were going to renounce the world."

NARAYAN: "M. said to us one day that this world, is a wilderness."

MASTER (to M.): "Please tell them that story of the disciple who became unconscious after taking the medicine. His teacher arrived at the house and said he would revive if someone else swallowed a pill that he would prescribe. The disciple would get back his life, but the man who, swallowed the pill would die.

"Please tell the other one, too, of the hathayogi who thought that his wife and children were his very own, and who feigned death with his limbs stretched out. It will do them good to hear those stories."

It was noon. Sri Ramakrishna partook of the food that had been offered to the Family Deity, Jagannath. The Master often used to say that the food at Balarām's house was very pure. Afterwards he rested awhile.

Late in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna sat with the devotees in the drawing-room of Balarām's house. Chandra Babu, of the Kartabhaja sect, and a witty brahmin were there. The brahmin was something of a buffoon; his words made everybody laugh.

About six o'clock Girish's brother Atul and Tejchandra's brother arrived. Sri Ramakrishna was in samādhi. A few minutes later he said, still in the ecstatic mood: "Can one become unconscious by meditating on Consciousness? Can one lose one's mind by thinking of God? God is of the very nature of Knowledge; He is of the very nature of Eternity, Purity, and Consciousness.

Sri Ramakrishna said to the witty brahmin: "Why do you waste your time with these frivolous jokes about insignificant worldly things? Direct your mind to God. If a man can calculate about salt, he can also calculate about sugar candy."

BRAHMIN (smiling): "Please attract me."

MASTER: "What can I do? Everything depends on your effort. Your mind is your own. Give up this trifling buffoonery and go forward toward God. You can go farther and farther along that way. The brahmachari asked the wood-cutter to go forward. At first the wood-cutter found a sandal-wood forest; next, a silver-mine; next, a gold-mine; and then gems and diamonds."

BRAHMIN: "There is no end to this path."

MASTER: "Where you find peace, there is the end."
About a new visitor Sri Ramakrishna said: "I didn't find any substance in him. He seemed worthless."

It was dusk. Lamps were lighted in the room. Sri Ramakrishna was meditating on the Divine Mother and chanting Her name in his melodious voice. The devotees sat around him. Since Balarām was going to celebrate the Car Festival at his house the following day, Sri Ramakrishna intended to spend the night there.

After taking some refreshments in the inner apartments, Sri Ramakrishna returned to the parlour. It was about ten o'dock. The Master said to M., "Please bring my towel from the other room." A bed was made for Sri Ramakrishna in the adjoining small room. About half past ten Sri Ramakrishna lay down to sleep. It was summertime. He said to M., "You had better bring a fan." He asked the disciple to fan him. At midnight Sri Ramakrishna woke up. He said to M., "Don't fan me any more; I feel chilly."

Tuesday, July 14, 1885
It was the day of the Car Festival. Sri Ramakrishna left his bed very early in the morning. He was alone in the room, dancing and chanting the name of God. M. entered

and saluted the Master. Other devotees arrived one by one. They saluted the Master and took seats near him. Sri Ramakrishna was longing intensely for Purna. He was talking to M. about him.

MASTER: "Did you give Purna any instruction?"

M: "I asked him to read the life of Chaitanya. He is familiar with the incidents of his life. I told him further that you ask people to stick to the truth."

MASTER: "How did he take it when you said about me, 'He is an Incarnation of God'?"

M: "I said to him, 'Come with me If you want to see a person like Chaitanya.'"

MASTER: "Anything else?"

M: "Also that remark of yours that when an elephant enters a small pool there is a great splashing of water all around; likewise, in the case of a 'small receptacle', emotion overflows. "About his giving up of fish, I said to him: 'Why have you done that? Your family will make a great fuss about it.' "

MASTER: "That's good. One should keep one's feelings and emotions to oneself."

It was about half past six in the morning. M. was going to bathe in the Ganges, when suddenly tremors of an earthquake were felt. At once he returned to Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master stood in the drawing room. The devotees stood around him. They were talking about the earthquake. The shaking had been rather violent, and many of the devotees were frightened.

M: "You should all have gone downstairs."

MASTER: "Such is the fate of the house under whose roof one lives; and still people are so egotistic. (To M.) Do you remember the great storm of the month of Āświn?"

M: "Yes, sir. I was very young at that time-nine or ten years old. I was alone in a room while the storm was raging, and I prayed to God."

M. was surprised and said to himself: "Why did the Master suddenly ask me about the great storm of Āświn? Does he know that I was alone at that time earnestly praying to God with tears in my eyes? Does he know all this? Has he been protecting me as my guru since my very birth?"

MASTER: "It was quite late in the day at Dakshineswar when the storm broke, but somehow they managed to cook the meals. The trees were uprooted. You see, this is the fate of the house one lives in.

Nitya and Lila

"But when one attains Perfect Knowledge, then one finds that dying and killing are one and the same thing; that is to say, both are unreal. When one is dead, one has not really died; and when one has killed another, the man is not really dead. Both the Lila and the Nitya belong to the same Reality. In one form It is the Absolute, and in another, the Lila. Even though the Lila is destroyed, the Nitya always exists. Water is water, whether it is still or in waves; it is the same water when the waves quiet down."

Sri Ramakrishna sat in the drawing-room with the devotees. Mahendra Mukherji, Hari, the younger Naren, and many other devotees were there. Hari lived alone and studied Vedānta. He was about twenty-three years old, and unmarried. Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of him. He wanted Hari to visit him frequently. But since Hari loved solitude he did not often come to the Master.

MASTER (to Hari): "Well, I haven't seen you for a long time."

Essence of Vedānta & Absolute and Relative are correlatives

"You see, in one form He is the Absolute and in another He is the Relative. What does Vedānta teach? Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. Isn't that so? But as long as God keeps the 'ego of a devotee' in a man, the Relative is also real. When He completely effaces the ego, then what is remains. That cannot be described by the tongue. But as long as God keeps the ego, one must accept all. By removing the outer sheaths of the plantain-tree, you reach the inner pith. As long as the tree contains sheaths, it also contains pith. So too, as long as it contains pith, it also contains sheaths. The pith goes with the sheaths and the sheaths go with the pith. In the same way, when you speak of the Nitya, it is understood that the Lila also exists; and when you speak of the Lila, it is understood that the Nitya also exists.

Brahman and Śakti

"It is He alone who has become the universe, living beings, and thetwenty-four cosmic principles. When He is action less, I call Him Brahman; when He creates, preserves, and destroys, I call Him Śakti. Brahman and Śakti are not different from each other. Water is water, whether it is still or moving.

"It is not possible to rid oneself of 'I-consciousness' and as long as one is aware of this 'I-consciousness', one cannot speak of the universe and its living beings as unreal. You cannot get the correct weight of the bel-fruit if you leave out its shell and pits.

"The brick, lime, and brick-dust of which the stairs are made are the same brick, lime, and brick-dust of which the roof is made. The universe and its living beings exist on account of the Reality of Him who is known as Brahman.

Synthesis of the formless Reality and God with form

"The devotees-I mean the vijnanis-accept both God with form and the Formless, both the Personal God and the Impersonal. In a shoreless ocean-an infinite expanse of water-visible blocks of ice are formed here and there by intense cold. Similarly, under the

cooling influence, so to say, of the deep love of Its worshipper, the Infinite reduces Itself to the finite and appears before the worshipper as God with form. Again, as, on the rising of the sun, the ice melts away, so, on the awakening of Knowledge, God with form melts away into the same Infinite and Formless.

"As long as a man analyses with the mind, he cannot reach the Absolute. As long as you reason with your mind, you have no way of getting rid of the universe and the objects of the senses-form, taste, smell, touch, and sound. When reasoning stops, you attain the Knowledge of Brahman. Ātman cannot be realized through this mind; Ātman is realized through Ātman alone. Pure Mind, Pure Buddhi, Pure Ātman-all these are one and the same.
"Just think how many things you need to perceive an object. You need eyes; you need light; you need mind. You cannot perceive the object if you leave out anyone of these three. As long as the mind functions how can you say that the universe and the 'I' do not exist?

"When the mind is annihilated, when it stops deliberating pro and con, then one goes into samādhi, one attains the Knowledge of Brahman. You know the seven notes of the scale: sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni. One cannot keep one's voice on 'ni' very long."

Intimate Knowledge of God
Looking at the younger Naren, Sri Ramakrishna said: "What will you gain by merely being intuitively aware of God's existence? A mere vision of God is by no means everything. You have to bring Him into your room. You have to talk to Him.

"Some have heard of milk, some have seen milk, and some have drunk milk. Some have seen the king, but only one or two can bring the King home and entertain him." M. went to the Ganges to take his bath. It was ten o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna was still talking with the devotees. After finishing his bath, M. returned to Balarām's house. He saluted the Master and sat down near him.

Sri Ramakrishna was filled with intense spiritual fervour. Words of wisdom flowed from him. Now and then he narrated his profound mystical experiences to the devotees.

Master's spiritual experiences
MASTER: "I went to Benares with Mathur Babu. Our boat was passing the Manikarnika Ghat on the Ganges, when suddenly I had a vision of Śiva. I stood near the edge of the boat and went into samādhi. The boatman, fearing that I might fall into the water, cried to Hriday: 'Catch hold of him! Catch hold of him!' I saw Śiva standing on that Ghat, embodying in Himself all the seriousness of the world. At first I saw Him standing at a distance; then I saw Him approaching me. At last he merged in me.

"Another time, in an ecstatic mood, I saw that a sannyāsi was leading me by the hand. We entered a temple and I had a vision of Annapurna made of gold.
"God alone has become all this; but He manifests Himself more in certain things than in others.

(To M.) "Perhaps you do not believe in the salagram. 'Englishmen' do not believe in it. It doesn't matter whether you believe in it or not. A salagram should contain the mark of a disc and other signs; only then can it be worshipped as an emblem of God."

M: "Yes, sir. It is like the fuller manifestation of God in a man with good physical traits.'"

MASTER: "At first Narendra used to say that these were figments of my imagination; but now he accepts everything."

Sri Ramakrishna was describing the vision of God, when he went into samādhi. The devotees looked at him with fixed gaze. After a long time he regained consciousness of the world and talked to the devotees.

MASTER (to M.): "What do you think I saw? I saw the whole universe as a salagram, and in it I saw your two eyes."

In silent wonder M. and the devotees listened to these words about his inner experience. At this moment Sarada, another' young disciple of the Master, entered the room and saluted him.

MASTER (to Sarada): "Why don't you come to Dakshineswar? Why don't you see me when I come to Calcutta?"

SARADA: "Nobody tells me about it."

MASTER: "Next time I shall let you know. (To M., smiling) Make a list of these youngsters." (M. and the devotees laugh.)

SARADA: "My relatives at home want me to marry. (pointing to M.) How many times he has scolded me about marriage!"

MASTER: "Why should you marry just now? (To M.) Sarada is now in a very good state of mind. Formerly he had a hesitant look; now his face beams with joy." Sri Ramakrishna said to a devotee, "Will you kindly fetch Purna?"

Narendra arrived. Sri Ramakrishna asked a devotee to give him some refreshments. He was greatly pleased at the sight of Narendra. When he fed Narendra, he felt that he was feeding Narayana Himself. He stroked Narendra's body affectionately.

Spiritual fervour of Gopal Ma

Gopal Ma entered the room. She was a great devotee of Gopala and was blessed with many lofty spiritual visions. Sri Ramakrishna had asked Balarām to send a man to bring her from Kamarhati. As soon as she entered the room she said, "I am shedding tears of joy." With these words she bowed before the Master, touching the ground with her forehead.

MASTER: "What is this? You address me as 'Gopala' and still you salute me! Now go into the inner apartments and cook some curry for me. Put some spicy seasoning in it so that I may get the smell from here." (All laugh.

GOPAL MA: "What will they [meaning the members of the household] think of me?"

Before she left the room she said to Narendra in a very fervent voice, "My child, have I reached the goal, or have I farther to go?"

It was the day of the Car Festival; so there was some delay in the worship of the Family Deity. When the worship was finished Sri Ramakrishna was asked to have his meal. He went to the inner apartments. The woman devotees were anxious to see him.

Man and woman devotees

Sri Ramakrishna had many woman devotees, but he did not talk much about them to his man devotees. He would warn the men against visiting woman devotees. He would say: "Don't overdo it. Otherwise you will slip." To some of his man devotees he would say, "Don't go near a woman even if she rolls on the ground with devotion." The Master wanted the men to live apart from woman devotees; only thus would the two groups make progress. He did not like the woman devotees to caress the men as "Gopala"; for too much of this motherly affection was not good; it degenerated in time into a harmful relationship.

After his midday meal Sri Ramakrishna sat in the drawing-room with the devotees. It was one o'clock. A devotee brought Purna from his home. With great joy the Master exclaimed to M.: "Here he is! Purna has come." Narendra, the younger Naren, Narayan, Haripada, and other devotees were talking with the Master.

Free will

THE YOUNGER NAREN: "Sir, have we any free will?"

MASTER: "Just try to find out who this 'I' is. While you are searching for 'I', 'He' comes out. 'I am the machine and He is the Operator.' You have heard of a mechanical toy that goes into a store with a letter in its hand. You are like that toy. God alone is the Doer. Do your duties in the world as if you were the doer, but knowing all the time that God alone is the Doer and you are the instrument.

"As long as the *Upādhi* exists there is ignorance. 'I am a scholar', 'I am a Jnāni', 'I am wealthy', 'I am honourable', 'I am the master, father, and teacher' -all these ideas are begotten of ignorance. 'I am the machine and You are the Operator' - that is Knowledge. In the state of Knowledge all *Upādhis* are destroyed. When the log is burnt up entirely, there is no more sound; no heat either. Everything cools down. Peace! Peace! Peace! (To Narendra) Sing a little."

NARENDRA "I must go home. I have many things to do."

MASTER: "Yes, yes, my child! Why should you listen to us? 'The words of those who have gold in their ears are valuable; no one listens to him who hasn't even a rag round his waist.' (All laugh.) You frequent the garden house of the Guhas. I always hear about it. Whenever I ask, 'Where is Narendra today?' I am told, 'Oh, he has gone to the Guhas.' I should not have said all these things, but you have wrung them out of me."

Narendra kept quiet a few moments. Then he said: "There are no instruments to accompany me. Shall I just sing?"

MASTER: "My child, this is all we have. Please sing if it suits you. You must know how Balarām arranges things. "Balarām says to me, 'Please come to Calcutta by boat; take a carriage only if you must.' (All laugh.) You see, he has given us a feast today; so this afternoon he will make us all dance! (All laugh.) One day he hired a carriage for me from here to Dakshineswar. He said that the carriage hire was twelve *ānnās*. I said to him, 'Will the coachman take me to Dakshineswar for twelve *ānnās*?' 'Oh, that will be plenty', he replied. One side of the carriage broke down before we reached Dakshineswar. (All laugh.) Besides, the horse stopped every now and then; it simply would not go. Once in a while the coachman whipped the horse, and then it ran a short distance. (All laugh.) The program for the evening is that Ram will play on the drum and we shall all dance. Ram has no sense of rhythm. (All laugh.) Anyhow, that is Balarām's attitude-sing yourselves, dance yourselves, and make yourselves happy!" (All laugh.)

Other devotees were arriving. Mahendra Mukherji saluted the Master from a distance. The Master returned the salute. Then he salaamed to Mahendra like a Mussulman.

The Master said to a young devotee who sat next to him: "Why don't you tell him I have salaamed to him? He will appreciate it (All laugh.)

Many of the householder devotees were accompanied by their wives and other woman relatives. They wanted to salute the Master and watch his dancing before the car. Ram, Girish, and other devotees gradually assembled. Many young devotees were present.
Narendra sang:

Oh, when will dawn the blessed day
When Love will waken in my heart?
When will my tears flow uncontrolled
As I repeat Lord Hari's name,
And all my longing be fulfilled?
When will my mind and soul be pure?
Oh, when shall I at last repair
Unto Vrindāvan's sacred groves?
When will my worldly bonds fall off
And my imperfect sight be healed
By Wisdom's cool collyrium?
When shall I learn true alchemy
And, touching the Philosopher's Stone,
Transmute my body's worthless iron

Into the Spirit's purest gold?
When shall I see this very world
As God, and roll on Love's highway?
When shall I give up piety
And duty and the thought of caste?
When shall I leave behind all fear,
All shame, convention, worry, pride?
Oh, I shall smear my body then
With dust from the feet of devotees;
Across my shoulders I shall sling
Renunciation's pack, and drink
From my two hands a cooling draught
Of Jamunas life-renewing stream.
Oh, then I shall be mad with love;
I shall both laugh and weep for joy!
Then I shall swim, upon the Sea,
Of blessed Satchidananda;
Drunk with His love, I shall make all
As drunk as I! Oh, I shall sport
At Hari's feet for evermore!

He sang again:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Thy formless beauty sparkles;
Therefore the, yogis meditate in a dark mountain cave

Balarām had arranged for kirtan with Vaishnavcharan, the musician Vaishnavcharan sang:

O tongue, always repeat, the name of Mother Durga;
Who but your Mother Durga will save you in distress? . . .

When Sri Ramakrishna had heard a line or two of the song he went into samādhi. He stood up in that ecstatic mood, The younger Naren supported him. The Master's face was lighted with a smile. Gradually his body became motionless; his mind appeared to have gone to another realm. All the devotees in the room looked at him in amazement. The woman devotees watched the scene from behind the screen. After a long time he came down from samādhi, chanting the holy name of God.

As the Master sat down, Vaishnavcharan sang again:

O vina, sing Lord Hari's name!
Without the blessing of His feet
You cannot know the final Truth,
The name of Hari slays all grief:
Sing Hari's name! Sing Krishna's name! . . .

Then he sang:

O vina, forgetting to worship Hari,
I pass the days of my life in vain. . . .

The Car Festival

It was afternoon. In the mean time the small car of Jagannath, decorated with flowers, flags, and bunting, had been brought to the inner verandah. The images of Jagannath, Subhadra, and Balarama, were adorned with sandal-paste, flower garlands, robes and jewelry. Sri Ramakrishna left the room where the professional musicians were singing and came to the verandah, accompanied by the devotees. He stood in front of the car and pulled it by the rope. He began to sing and dance with the devotees in front of the car.

The Master sang:

Behold, the two brothers have come, who weep
while chanting Hari's name. . . .

He sang again:

See how all Nadia is shaking
Under the waves of Gaurānga's love! . . .

The music and dancing went on in the verandah as the car was pulled to and fro. A large crowd entered the house on hearing the loud music and the beating of the drums. Sri Ramakrishna was completely intoxicated with divine love. The devotees felt its contagion and danced with the Master in an ecstasy of love.

Afterwards Sri Ramakrishna returned to the drawing-room. M. and other devotees stroked his feet.

Filled with divine fervour, Narendra sang to the accompaniment of the Tānpura:

Come! Come, Mother! Doll of my soul! My heart's' Delight!
In my heart's lotus come and sit, that I may see Thy face

Then he sang:

Mother, Thou art our sole Redeemer,
Thou the Support of the three Gunās,
Higher than the most high.
Thou art compassionate, I know;
Who takest away our bitter grief.
Sandhya art Thou, and Gayatri;
Thou dost sustain this universe.
Mother, the Help art Thou
Of those that have no help but thee,
O Eternal Beloved of Śiva!
Thou art in earth, in water Thou;
Thou liest at the root of all.
In me, in every creature,

Thou hast Thy home; though clothed with form,
Yet art Thou formless Reality

He sang another song:

I have made Thee, O Lord, the Pole-star of my life;
No more shall I lose my way on the world's trackless sea.
Wherever I wander here, Thy brilliance shines undimmed;
With Thy serene and gracious light
Thou drivest all the tears out of my troubled soul.

In my heart's inmost shrine Thy face for ever beams;
If, for a moment even, I cannot find it there,
My soul is overwhelmed with woe;
And when my witless mind strays from the thought of Thee,
The vision of Thy face strikes me with deepest shame.

A devotee said to Narendra, "Will you sing that one - 'O Mother, Thou my Inner Guide, ever awake within my heart'?"

MASTER: "Oh, no! Why that song now? The proper thing now is to sing of divine bliss-a song like 'O Mother Syama, full of the waves of drunkenness divine'."

Narendra sang:

O Mother Syama, full of the waves of drunkenness divine!
Who knows how Thou dost sport in the world?
Thy fun and frolic and Thy glances put to shame the god of love.
O Wielder of the sword! O Thou of terrifying face!
The earth itself is shaken under Thy leaps and strides!

O Thou Abode of the three Gunās! O Redeemer! Fearsome One!
Thou who art the Consort of Śiva!
Many the forms Thou dost assume, fulfilling Thy bhaktas' prayers.
Thou dancest in the Lotus of the Heart,
O Mother, Eternal Consort of Brahman!

Full of divine ecstasy, Narendra sang again and again the lines:

Thou dancest in the Lotus of the Heart,
O Mother, Eternal Consort of Brahman!

Sri Ramakrishna was dancing, drunk with divine love, and he sang again and again, "O Mother, Eternal Consort of Brahman!"

After dancing a long time Sri Ramakrishna resumed his seat. He was very much pleased to see Narendra in a spiritual mood, singing with tears in his eyes.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening. The devotees still sat around the Master. Vaishnavcharan sang about Gaurānga:

The beautiful Gaurānga, the youthful dancer, fair as molten gold. . . .

Next he sang about Sri Krishna. Krishna had left His pastoral life in Vrindāvan and become the king of Mathura. A gopi met Him there and said:

O Hari, how shall we know You now?
In Mathura's royal splendour you have forgotten us.
Now, in your kingly robes, you ride an elephant;
Have you utterly forgotten how in Vrindāvan You tended cows?
O Hari, have you forgotten how you would steal the butter
From Braja's innocent gopi maids?

About eleven o'clock the devotees saluted the Master and were departing one by one.
MASTER: "You may all go. (Pointing to Narendra and the younger Naren) It will be enough if these two stay. (To Girish) Will you eat your supper at home? You may stay a few minutes if you want to. You want a smoke! But Balarām's servant is just like his master. Ask him for a smoke; he won't give it! (All laugh.) But don't go away without having your smoke."

Girish had brought with him a respectable friend. The latter observed all these things and left the place. Sri Ramakrishna said to Girish: "I say this to you and to everyone: Please do not force anybody to come here. Nothing happens except at the right time."

Before leaving, a devotee saluted the Master. He had a young boy with him. Sri Ramakrishna said to him affectionately, "It is getting late, and you have this boy with you." Narendra, the younger Naren, and a few other devotees stayed awhile and then took their leave.

Wednesday, July 15, 1885

It was four, o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna was in bed in the small room next to the drawing-room. M. was sitting on a bench on the outer verandah to the south of the room. A few minutes later Sri Ramakrishna came out to the verandah. M. saluted him.
MASTER: "I have already been up once. Well, shall we go to Dakshineswar this morning?"
M: "The Ganges is less choppy in the morning."

Day was gradually breaking. The devotees had not yet arrived. Sri Ramakrishna had washed his mouth and was chanting the names of God in his sweet voice. He stood near

the north door of the room. M. was by his side. A few minutes later Gopal Ma arrived and stood near him. One or two woman devotees were looking at the Master from behind the doors of the inner apartments. They were like the gopis of Vrindāvan looking at Sri Krishna, or the woman devotees of Nadia looking at Gaurānga from behind the screen.

After chanting the name of Rāma, Sri Ramakrishna chanted the name of Krishna: "Krishna! Krishna! Krishna of the gopis! Gopi! Gopi! Krishna, the Life of the cowherd boys of Vrindāvan! Krishna, the son of Nanda! Govinda! Govinda!"

Next he chanted the name of Gaurānga. Then he repeated, "Ālekh Niranjana", which is a name of God. Saying, "Niranjana", he wept. The devotees wept too. With tears in his eyes the Master said: "O Niranjan! O my child! Come! Eat this! Take this! When shall I make my life blessed by feeding you? You have assumed this human form for my sake."

He prayed to Jagannath in a very touching voice:

"O Jagannath, Lord of the Universe! O Friend of the world! O Friend of the poor! I am not, O Lord, outside Thy universe. Be gracious to me!"

While he sang in praise of Jagannath he was beside himself with divine love.

Now he chanted the name of Narayana . He danced and sang:

"O Narayana ! O Narayana ! Narayana ! Narayana !"

He danced and sang again:

Ah, friend! I have not found Him yet, whose love has driven me mad. . . .

Afterwards the Master sat in the small room with the devotees. He was completely stripped of his clothes, like a five-year-old child. M., Balarām, and a few other devotees were in the room.

MASTER: "One can see God's form. One sees God when all *Upādhis* disappear and reasoning stops. Then a man becomes speechless and goes into samādhi. Coming to the theatre, people indulge in all kinds of gossip. But the moment the curtain goes up, all conversation stops; the spectators become fully absorbed in what they see on the stage.

Master's love for young disciples

"I want to tell you something very secret. Why do I love boys like Purna and Narendra so much? Once, in a spiritual mood, I felt intense love for Jagannath, love such as a woman feels for her sweetheart. In that mood I was about to embrace Him; when I broke my arm. It was then revealed to me: 'You have assumed this human body. Therefore establish with human beings the relationship of friend, father, mother, or son.'

"I now feel for Purna and the other young boys as I once felt for Rāmlāla. I used to bathe Rāmlāla, feed Him, put Him to bed, and take Him wherever I went. I used to weep for Rāmlāla. Now I have the same feeling for these young boys. Look at Niranjan. He is not attached to anything. He spends money from his own pocket to take poor patients to the hospital. At the proposal of marriage he says, 'Goodness! That is the whirlpool of the Visalaks! I see him seated on a light. "Purna belongs to the realm of the Personal God. He was born with an element of Vishnu. Ah, what yearning he has!

(To M.) "Didn't you notice that he looked at you as if you were his spiritual brother, his very own? He said he would visit me again, at Captain's house.

Master's praise of Narendra

"Narendra belongs to a very high plane-the realm of the Absolute. He has a manly nature. So many devotees come here, but there is not one like him.

"Every now and then I take stock of the devotees. I find that some are like lotuses with ten petals, some like lotuses with sixteen petals, some like lotuses with a hundred petals. But among lotuses Narendra is a thousand-petalled one.

"Other devotees may be like pots or pitchers; but Narendra is a huge water-barrel.

"Others may be like pools or tanks; but Narendra is a huge reservoir like the Haldārpukur.

"Among fish, Narendra is a huge red-eyed carp; others are like minnows or smelts or sardines. Tārak of Belgharia may be called a bass.

"Narendra is a 'very big receptacle', one that can hold many things. He is like a bamboo with a big hollow space inside.

"Narendra is not under the control of anything. He is not under the control of attachment or sense pleasures. He is like a male pigeon. If you hold a male pigeon by its beak, it breaks away from you; but the female pigeon keeps still. Narendra has the nature of a man; so he sits on the right side in a carriage. Bhavanāth has a woman's nature; so I make him sit on the other side. I feel great strength when Narendra is with me in a gathering."

About eight o'clock in the morning Mahendra Mukherji arrived and saluted the Master. Haripada, Tulsiram and other devotees arrived one by one and saluted him. Baburam was laid up with fever and could not come.

MASTER (to M. and the others): "Hasn't the younger Naren come? Perhaps he thought I had left. (To Mukherji) How amazing! Even during his boyhood, on returning from school, he cried for God. Is it a small thing to cry for God? He is very intelligent, too. He is like a bamboo with a big hollow space inside. All of his mind is fixed on me.

Girish Ghosh said to me: The younger Naren went to Navagopal's house when a kirtan was going on. On entering the house he inquired about you and exclaimed, "Where is he?" He was totally unconscious of his surroundings and practically walked over the people.' He has no fear of his relatives' threats. Sometimes he spends three nights at a stretch at Dakshineswar."

MUKHERJI: "Hari became simply speechless at what you said yesterday. He said to me: 'Such wisdom can be found only in the philosophical systems of Samkhya, Yoga, and Vedānta. He is no ordinary person.'"

MASTER: "But I have never studied Samkhya or Vedānta.

Knowledge of God is the same as love of Him & Divine love leads to union with God.
Perfect Jnāna and perfect bhakti are one and the same thing. A man reasons, saying, 'Not this, not this'; he rejects the unreal. When his reasoning comes to an end, he attains the Knowledge of Brahman. Then he accepts what he rejected before. A man carefully climbs to the roof, rejecting the steps one by one. After reaching the roof he realizes that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof, namely, brick, lime, and brick-dust.

"He who is aware of the high is also aware of the low. After the attainment of knowledge one looks alike on high and low.

"While Prahlada dwelt on the plane of the Supreme Reality, he maintained the attitude of 'I am He'; but when he climbed down to the physical plane, he would look on himself as the servant of God.

"Hanuman also sometimes said, 'I am He', sometimes, 'I am the servant of God', sometimes, 'I am a part of God.'

"Why should a man cherish love of God in his heart? How else will he live? How else will he spend his days?

"To be sure, the ego does not disappear altogether. As long as the pot of 'I' persists, one cannot realize 'I am He.' In samādhi the ego totally disappears; then what is remains. Ramprasad says: 'O Mother, when I shall attain Knowledge, then You alone will know whether I am good or You are good.'

"As long as 'I-consciousness' exists, one should have the attitude of a bhakta; one should not say, 'I am God.' A man aware of his body should feel that he is not Krishna Himself, but His devotee. But if God draws the devotee to Himself, then it is different. It is like the master saying to his beloved servant: 'Come, take your seat near me. You are the same as I.'

"The waves are part of the Ganges, but the Ganges is not part of the waves.

"Śiva experiences two states of mind. When He is completely absorbed in His own Self, He feels, 'I am He.' In that union neither body nor mind functions. But when He is conscious of His separate ego, He dances, exclaiming, 'Rāma! Rāma!'

"That which is unmoving also moves. Just now you are still, but a few moments later the same you will be engaged in action.

"Jnāna and bhakti are one and the same thing. The difference is like this: one man says 'water', and another, 'a block of ice'.

Two kinds of samādhi

"Generally speaking there are two kinds of samādhi. First, sthita or jada samādhi: one attains it by following the path of knowledge-as a result of the destruction of the ego through reasoning. Second, bhava samādhi: one attains this by following the path of bhakti. In this second samādhi a trace of ego remains, like a line, in order to enable the devotee to enjoy God, to taste His Lila. But one cannot understand all this if one is attached to 'woman and gold'.

"I said to Kedār, 'You will never succeed if your mind dwells on "woman and gold".' I wanted to pass my hand over his chest, but I could not. He has knots and twists inside. It was like a room smelling of filth, which I could not enter. His attachment to the world is very deep; it is like a natural emblem of Śiva, whose root spreads as far as Benares. One will never succeed if one is attached to the world-to 'woman and gold'.

Master praises his young disciples

"The youngsters are yet untouched by 'woman and gold'. That is why I love them so dearly. Hazra says to me, 'You love a boy if he comes from a wealthy family or if he is handsome.' If that is so, then why do I love Harish, Lātu, and Narendra? Narendra hasn't a penny to buy salt to season his rice.

"The youngsters' minds are not yet coloured by worldliness. That is why they are so pure in heart. Besides, many of them are eternally perfect; they have been drawn to God from their very birth. It is like a garden in which, while cleaning it, you suddenly discover water-pipes. The water gushes forth without any effort on your part."

BALARĀM: "Sir, how was it possible for Purna to know all of a sudden that the world is illusory?"

MASTER: "He has inherited that knowledge from his previous births. In his past lives he practised many disciplines. It is the body alone that is small or grows big, and not the Ātman.

"Do you know what these youngsters are like? They are like certain plants that grow fruit first and then flowers. These devotees first of all have the vision of God; next they hear about His glories and attributes; and at last they are united with Him. Look at Niranjan. He always keeps his accounts clear. He will be able to go whenever he hears the call.

Respect for one's own mother

But one should look after one's mother as long as she is alive. I used to worship my mother with flowers and sandal-paste. It is the Mother of the Universe who is embodied as our earthly mother.

"As long as you look after your own body, you must look after your mother too. Therefore I said to Hazra: 'when you have a cold, you procure black pepper, sugar candy, and salt. As long as you feel you must look after your body, you must look after your mother too.'

"But it is quite different when you completely forget your body. Then God Himself assumes your responsibilities. A minor cannot look after himself; therefore a guardian is appointed for him. Chaitanyadeva, like a minor, could not look after himself."

M. went to the Ganges to bathe.

Master's spiritual experiences

Sri Ramakrishna was talking with the devotees in the small room in Balarām's house. Mahendra, Balarām, Tulasi, Haripada, Girish, and other devotees were sitting on the floor. M. returned from the Ganges. After saluting the Master he took a seat near him. Sri Ramakrishna was recounting to the devotees some of his spiritual experiences.

MASTER: "One day in the Kāli temple Haladhāri and Nangta were reading the Adhyātma Rāmāyana. Suddenly I had a vision of a river with woods on both sides. The trees and plants were green. Rāma and Lakshmana were walking along wearing their shorts. One day, in front of the kuthi, I saw Arjuna's chariot. Sri Krishna was seated in it as the charioteer. I still remember it. Another day, while listening to kirtan at Kamarpukur, I saw Gaurānga in front of me.

"At that time a naked person, emerging from my body, used to go about with me. I used to joke with him. He looked like a boy and was a paramahamsa. I can't describe to you all the divine forms I saw at that time. I was suffering then from indigestion, which would become worse when I saw visions; so I would try to shun these divine forms and would spit on the ground when I saw them. But they would follow me and obsess me like ghosts. I was always overwhelmed with divine ecstasy and couldn't tell the passing of day and night. On the day after such a vision I would have a severe attack of diarrhoea, and all these ecstasies would pass out through my bowels."

GIRISH (smiling): "I am examining your horoscope."

MASTER (smiling): "I was born on the second day of the bright fortnight of the moon. My horoscope shows the positions of the sun, the moon, and Mercury at the time of my birth. There are not many more details."

GIRISH: "You were born under Kumbha. Rāma and Krishna were born under Karkat and Brisha, and Chaitanya under Simha."

MASTER: "I had two desires: first, that I should be the king of the devotees, and second, that I should not be a dry sādhu."

GIRISH (smiling): "Why did you have to practise spiritual discipline?"

MASTER (smiling): "Even the Divine Mother had to practise austere *sādhanā* to obtain Śiva as Her husband. She practised the panchatapa. She would also immerse Her body in water in wintertime, and look fixedly at the sun. Krishna Himself had to practise much *sādhanā*. I had many mystic experiences, but I cannot reveal their contents. Under the bel-tree I had many flaming visions. There I practised the various sadhanas prescribed in the Tantra. I needed many articles-human skulls, and so forth and so on. The Brahmani used to collect these things for me. I practised a number of mystic postures.

"I had another strange experience: if I felt egotistic on a particular day, I would be sick the following day."

M. sat motionless as a picture on canvas, hearing about these unique visions of the Master. The other devotees also were spellbound. There was a dead silence in the room.

TULASI (pointing to M.): "He never laughs."

MASTER: "But he laughs inside. The surface of the river Phalgu is covered with sand; but if you dig into the sand, water comes up.

(To M.) "Don't you scrape your tongue? Scrape it every day."

BALARĀM: "Well, Purna has heard much about you from M."

MASTER: "Perhaps the account of my early spiritual experiences."

BALARĀM: "If Purna is perfect by nature, then what is M.'s function?"

MASTER: "A mere instrument."

It was nine o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna was about to leave for Dakshineswar. Arrangements were being made for his departure. A boat had been hired at Baghbazar. The devotees saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna went to the boat with one or two devotees. Gopal Ma accompanied them. She intended to spend the morning at Dakshineswar and go to Kamarhati in the afternoon. The camp cot generally used by Rākhāl at Dakshineswar had been sent to Calcutta for repair. It was put in the boat, and the boat left for Dakshineswar. According to the Hindu almanac the day was not auspicious. So Sri Ramakrishna decided to return to Balarām's house the next Saturday and start again for Dakshineswar on an auspicious day.

Chapter 43

VISIT TO NANDA BOSE'S HOUSE

Tuesday, July 28, 1885

IT WAS ABOUT THREE O'CLOCK in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in Balarām's drawing-room with the devotees. Among others, Binode, Rākhāl, the younger Naren, and M. were present. The Master had come to Balarām's house in the morning and had taken his midday meal there. At Balarām's house the Deity was worshipped as Jagannāth, and the members of the family partook of the food offered to the Deity; Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the food at Balarām's house was very pure.

Pictures at Nanda's house

Narayan and certain other devotees had remarked to the Master that Nanda Bose, an aristocrat of Baghbazar, had many pictures of gods and goddesses in his house. Hence Sri Ramakrishna intended to pay a visit to Nanda's house in the afternoon. A Brahmin woman devoted to the Master lived near by. She often came to see him at Dakshineswar. She was extremely sorrowful over the death of her only daughter, and the Master had agreed to go to her house. She had invited him with great earnestness. From her house the Master was to go to the house of Ganu's mother, another devotee.

The younger Naren had said to Sri Ramakrishna that he would not be able to visit him often on account of his having to prepare for his examinations.

MASTER (to the younger Naren): "I didn't send for you today."

THE YOUNGER NAREN (smiling): "What can be done about it now?"

MASTER: "Well, my child, I don't want to interfere with your studies. You may visit me when you have leisure."
The Master said these words as if he were piqued.

He was ready to go to Nanda Bose' house. A palanquin was brought for him, and he got into it repeating the name of God. He had put on a pair of black varnished slippers and a red-bordered cloth. As Sri Ramakrishna sat down in the palanquin, M. put the slippers by his side. He accompanied the palanquin on foot. Paresh joined them.

They entered the gate of Nanda's house, crossed the spacious square and stopped in front of the building. The members of the family greeted the Master. He asked M. to hand him the slippers and then got out of the palanquin and entered the large hall. It was a very spacious room. Pictures of gods and goddesses were hanging on all sides.

Nanda Bose and his brother Pasupati saluted Sri Ramakrishna. The devotees of the Master also arrived. Girish's brother Atul came, and Prasanna's father, who was a frequent visitor at Nanda's house, was there. Prasanna was a devotee of the Master.

The Master looked at the pictures. M. and a few other devotees stood around him. Pasupati was explaining the pictures to them.

The first picture was of Vishnu with four arms. At the very sight of it Sri Ramakrishna was overwhelmed with ecstasy; he sat down on the floor and remained a few minutes in that spiritual mood.

In the second picture Rāma was blessing Hanuman, with His hand on the devotee's head. Hanuman's gaze was fixed on Rāma's Lotus Feet. The Master looked at the picture a long time and exclaimed with great fervour, "Ah me! Ah me!"

The third picture was of Krishna standing with flute to His lips under the Kadamba tree.

The fourth was of Vāmana, the Dwarf, who was an Incarnation of Vishnu. The Master looked intently at this picture.

Next the Master looked at a picture of Nrisimha, and then at one of Krishna with a herd of cows. Krishna was tending the cows with His cowherd friends on the bank of the Jamuna at Vrindāvan. M. said, "A lovely picture!"

Sri Ramakrishna then saw pictures of Dhumavati, Shorasi, Bhuvanesvari, Tara, and Kāli. He said: "All these portray the terrible aspects of the Divine Mother. If one keeps these pictures, one should worship them. But you must be lucky, to be able to hang them like that on the wall."

At the sight of Annapurna's picture, Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed with great fervour, "Grand! Grand!"

The next picture was one of Rādhika as monarch. She was seated on a throne in the Nikunja grove, surrounded by her woman attendants. Sri Krishna guarded the entrance of the grove as her officer.

Next was Sri Krishna's picture. Then came a picture of Sarasvati, the goddess of learning and music. It was in a glass case. She was in an ecstatic mood, playing melodies on the Vina.

Master praises his host

After seeing the pictures, Sri Ramakrishna went to the master of the house and said: "I am very happy today. It is grand! You are a real Hindu. You have these pictures instead of English ones. I am surprised!"

Nanda Bose was seated. He said to the Master: "Please take a seat. Why are you standing?"

Sri Ramakrishna sat down. He said: "These are very large pictures. You are a real Hindu."

NANDA: "I have European pictures also."

MASTER (smiling): "They are not like these. I am sure you don't pay much attention to them."

A picture of Kasha's Nava-Vishnu hung on the wall. Suresh Mitra, a beloved householder disciple of the Master, had had it painted. In this picture Sri Ramakrishna was pointing out to Keshab that people of different religions proceed to the same goal by different paths.

MASTER: "That was painted for Surendra."

PRASANNA'S FATHER (smiling): "You too are in that picture."

MASTER (smiling): "Yes, it contains everything. This is the ideal of modern times."

As he spoke Sri Ramakrishna manifested great spiritual fervour. He was in an ecstatic mood, talking to the Divine Mother. A few minutes later he said, like a drunkard, "I am not unconscious." Looking at the house, he said: "It is a huge mansion. But what does it consist of? Bricks, timber, and clay."

A little later he said, "I am very happy to see these pictures of gods and goddesses." He added: "It is not good to keep pictures of the terrible aspects of the Divine Mother. If one does, one should worship them."

PASUPATI (smiling): "Well, things will go on as long as She keeps them going."

MASTER: "That is true. But one should think of God. It is not good to forget Him."

NANDA: "But how little we think of God!"

MASTER: "One thinks of God through His grace."

NANDA: "But how can we obtain God's grace? Has He really the power to bestow grace?"

Master's prayer

MASTER (smiling): "I see. You think as the intellectuals do: one reaps the results of one's actions. Give up these ideas. The effect of karma wears away if one takes refuge in God. I prayed to the Divine Mother with flowers in my hand: 'Here, Mother, take Thy sin; here, take Thy virtue. I don't want either of these; give me only real bhakti. Here, Mother, take Thy good; here, take Thy bad. I don't want any of Thy good or bad; give me only real bhakti. Here, Mother, take Thy dharma; here, take Thy adharma. I don't want any of Thy dharma or adharma; give me only real bhakti. Here, Mother, take Thy knowledge; here, take Thy ignorance. I don't want any of Thy knowledge or ignorance; give me only real bhakti. Here, Mother, take Thy purity; here, take Thy impurity. Give me only real bhakti.' "

NANDA "Can God violate law?"

MASTER: "What do you mean? He is the Lord of all. He can do everything. He who has made the law can also change it.

Nature of worldly enjoyment

"But you may very well talk that way. Perhaps you want to enjoy the world, and that is why you talk that way. There is a view that a man's inner spirit is not awakened unless he is through with enjoyment. But what is there to enjoy? The pleasures of 'woman and gold'? This moment they exist and the next moment they disappear. It is all momentary. And what is there in 'woman and gold'? It is like the hog plum-all stone and skin. If one eats it, one suffers from colic. Or like a sweetmeat. Once you swallow it, it is gone."

Is God partial?

Nanda remained silent a few minutes. Then he said: "Oh, yes. People no doubt talk that way. But is God partial? If things happen through God's grace, then I must say God is partial."

MASTER: "But God Himself has become everything-the universe and its living beings. You will realize it when you have Perfect Knowledge. God Himself has become the twenty-four cosmic principles: the mind, intellect, body, and so forth. Is there anyone but Himself to whom He can show partiality?"

NANDA: "Why has He assumed all these different forms? Why are some wise and some ignorant?"

MASTER: "It is His sweet will."

ATUL: "Kedār Bābu puts it nicely. Once a man asked him, 'Why has God created the world?' He replied, 'I was not present at the conference where God made the plans of His creation.'"

MASTER: "Oh! It is His sweet will"

So saying, the Master sang:

O Mother, all is done after Thine own sweet will:
Thou art in truth self-willed, Redeemer of mankind!
Thou workest Thine own work; men only call it theirs.
Thou it is that holdest the elephant in the mire;
Thou, that helpest the lame man scale the loftiest hill.
On some Thou dost bestow the bliss of Brahmanhood;
Yet others Thou dost hurl into this world below.
Thou art the Moving Force, and I the mere machine;
The house am I, and Thou the Spirit dwelling there;
I am the chariot, and Thou the Charioteer:
I move alone as Thou, O Mother, movest me.

Liberation for all

He continued: "The Divine Mother is full of bliss. Creation, preservation, and destruction are the waves of Her sportive pleasure. Innumerable are the living beings. Only one or two among them obtain liberation. And that makes Her happy.

Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best but one or two break free;
And Thou dost laugh and clap Thy hands, O Mother, watching them!
Some are being entangled in the world and some are being liberated from it.
How many are the boats, O mind,
That float on the ocean of this world!
How many are those that sink!"

NANDA: "It may be Her sweet will; but it is death to us."

MASTER: "But who are you? It is the Divine Mother who has become all this. It is only as long as you do not know Her that you say, 'I', 'I'.

"All will surely realize God. All will be liberated. It may be that some get their meal in the morning, some at noon, and some in the evening: but none will go without food. All, without any exception, will certainly know their real Self."

PASUPATI: "True, sir. It seems that it is God alone who has become everything."

Nature of "I"

MASTER: "Try to find out what this 'I' is. Is this 'I' the bones or flesh or blood or intestines? Seeking the 'I', you discover 'Thou'. In other words, nothing exists inside you but the power of God. There is no 'I', but only 'He'. (To Pasupati) You have so much wealth, but you have no egotism. It is not possible to rid oneself altogether of the ego; so, as long as it is there, let the rascal remain as the servant of God. (All laugh.) The ego that makes a man feel he is a devotee of God or a son of God or a servant of God is good. But the ego that makes a man attached to 'woman and gold' is the 'unripe ego'. That ego is to be renounced."

The head of the household and the others were very much pleased to hear this interpretation of the ego.

MASTER (to Pasupati): "There are two signs of knowledge: first, absence of pride, and second, a peaceful nature. You have both. Therefore you must have received the grace of God.

"Too much wealth makes one forget God. That is the very nature of wealth. Jadu Mallick has become very rich. Nowadays he doesn't talk of God. Formerly he used to enjoy spiritual talk a great deal.

"'Woman and gold' is a kind of wine. If a man drinks too much wine, he does not show his father and uncle the respect that is due to them. Very often he abuses them. A drunkard cannot distinguish between his superior and his inferior."

NANDA: "That is true, sir."

PASUPATI: "Sir, what do you think of Theosophy and Spiritualism? Are these true? What do you think of the solar plane, the lunar plane, the stellar plane?"

MASTER: "My dear sir, I don't know about these things. Why bother about them so much? You have come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Enjoy them. What is the use of your calculating how many mango-trees there are, how many millions of branches, how many billions of leaves? I have come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Let me enjoy them.

"Once a man's inner spirit is awakened, once he succeeds in knowing God, he doesn't feel the desire even to know about all this rubbish. How incoherently a delirious patient talks: 'I shall eat five seers of rice! I shall drink a whole tank of water!' 'Will you?' says the physician. 'All right! You will have them.' Saying this, the physician goes on with his smoke. But he pays attention to what the patient says when the patient is no longer delirious."

PASUPATI: "Will our delirium last for ever?"

MASTER: "Why should you think so? Fix your mind on God, and spiritual consciousness will be awakened in you."

PASUPATI (smiling): "Our union with God is only momentary. It doesn't last any longer than a pipeful of tobacco." (All Laugh.)

MASTER: "What if that is so? Union with God even for one moment surely gives a man liberation.

"Ahalyā said to Rāma, 'O Rāma, it doesn't matter if I am born as a pig or any other being; only bless me that my mind may dwell on Thy Lotus Feet and be filled with real devotion to Thee.'

"Nārada said to Rāma: 'O Rāma, I want from Thee no other favour. Please give me real love for Thee; and please bless me, that I may not come under the spell of Thy world-bewitching māyā.'

"When a man sincerely prays to God, he is able to fix his mind on God and develop real love for His Lotus Feet.

"Give up all such notions as: 'Shall we be cured of our delirium?', 'What will happen to us?', 'We are sinners!' (To Nanda) One must have this kind of faith: 'What? Once I have uttered the name of Rāma, can I be a sinner any more?'"

NANDA: "Is there no after-life? What about punishment for our sins?"

MASTER: "Why not enjoy your mangoes? What need have you to calculate about the after-life and what happens then, and things like that? Eat your mangoes. You need mangoes. You need devotion to God. "

God, the Wish-fulfilling Tree

NANDA: "But where is the mango-tree? Where do I get mangoes?"

MASTER: "Tree? God is the eternal and infinite Brahman. He does exist; there is no doubt about it. He is eternal. But you must remember this, that He is the Kalpataru.

Come, let us go for a walk, O mind, to Kāli, the Wish-fulfilling Tree,
And there beneath It gather the four fruits of life.

"You must go to the Kalpataru and pray. Only then will you obtain the fruits. Only then will the fruits fall from the tree. Only then will you be able to gather them. There are four fruits: dharma, artha, kama, and moksha. The jnanis seek the fruit of liberation; and the bhaktas, love of God, love without any motive behind it. They seek neither dharma nor artha nor kama.

About the after-life

"You ask about the after-life. According to the Gitā you will become in the next life what you think of in the hour of death. King Bharata was very much grieved over his pet deer; he died repeating the word 'deer'; therefore he was reborn as a deer. That is why day and night a man should practise worship, japa, meditation, and other spiritual exercises. Only then, by virtue of practice, will he be able to think of God in the hour of death. If one dies thus, thinking of God, one will acquire God's nature.

"Keshab Sen, too, asked me about the after-life. I said to him also, 'What need have you of all these calculations?' Then I said: 'As long as a man does not realize God, he will return to the world. The potter puts his clay jars and lids out in the sun to bake. If cattle trample them underfoot, he throws, away the baked ones. But he collects the soft ones, mixes them, with more clay, puts them on the wheel, and makes new vessels from them.' "

The master of the house had not yet shown any sign of serving Sri Ramakrishna with refreshments. Sri Ramakrishna himself said to Nanda: "You see, you should offer me something to eat. That is why the other day I said to Jadu's mother: 'Look here. Give me something to eat.' Otherwise it brings harm to the householder."

Nanda Bose ordered some sweets. Sri Ramakrishna began to eat them. Nanda and the others were watching the Master and his actions. After eating the sweets, Sri Ramakrishna wanted to wash his hands. The plate on which the sweets were served had been placed on the sheet covering the carpet; so the Master could not wash his hands in the plate. A servant brought a brass bowl for him to use. But Sri Ramakrishna would not

use it, since only rajasic people used such things. He asked the servant to take it away. The master of the house said to him, "Please wash your hands." Absent-mindedly Sri Ramakrishna said: "What? Shall I wash my hands?"

The Master walked to the south verandah. He asked M. to pour water into his hands. M. poured water from a jug. The Master dried his hands with his cloth and returned to the room; Then he was offered betel-leaf on a tray. But the other guests had already taken some from the same tray; the Master did not accept any.

NANDA (to the Master): "May I say something?"

MASTER (smiling): "What?"

NANDA: "Why didn't you eat any betel-leaf? Everything else you did was proper; this alone seems to be otherwise."

MASTER: "Before I eat anything I offer it to God. It is a notion of mine."

NANDA :"But the betel-leaf would have gone to God all the same."

MASTER: "There is the path of Jnāna, and there is also the path of bhakti. According to the Jnāni everything can be eaten by applying the Knowledge of Brahman; but the follower of bhakti keeps a little distinction."

NANDA: "But I still maintain that you did not act rightly."

MASTER (smiling): "It is just a notion of mine. What you say is also right. That too is supported by the scriptures."

Sri Ramakrishna was warning Nanda of flatterers.

MASTER: "Beware of flatterers. They are after their own selfish purpose.(To Prasanna's father) Do you live in this house?"

PRASANNA'S FATHER: "No, sir, I am a neighbour. Won't you have a smoke?"

MASTER (very humbly): "No, please enjoy yourself. I don't feel like smoking now."

Nanda's house was like a palace. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "Jadu hasn't such a big house. I told him so the other day."

NANDA :"He has built a new house at Jorashanko."

Sri Ramakrishna was encouraging Nanda.

MASTER (to Nanda): "Though you are a householder, still you have kept your mind on God. Is that a small thing? The man who has renounced the world will pray to Him as a

matter of course. Is there any credit in that? But blessed indeed is he who, while leading a householder's life, prays to God. He is like a man who finds an object after removing a stone weighing twenty maunds.

Nārada and Hanuman

"One should pray to God, establishing with Him an appropriate relationship. Hanuman's love for God was mixed with knowledge; but Nārada's love for God was pure and unadulterated.

"Rāma asked Hanuman, 'Hanuman, what attitude do you cherish toward Me when you worship Me?' Hanuman answered: 'Sometimes I see that You are the whole and I am a part; sometimes I see that You are the Master and I am Your servant. But Rāma, when I have the Knowledge of Reality, then I find that You are I and I am You.'

"Rāma said to Nārada, 'Ask a favour of Me.' Nārada said, 'O Rāma, grant me the boon that I may have genuine love for Thy Lotus Feet and that I may not come under the spell of Thy world-bewitching māyā!'"

Sri Ramakrishna was about to take his leave.

MASTER (to Nanda): "According to the Gitā a man who is honoured and respected by many people possesses a special power of God. You have divine power."

NANDA: "All men have the same power."

Different degrees of divine manifestation

MASTER (sharply): "You all say the same thing. Can all men ever possess power to the same degree? God no doubt dwells in all beings as the all-pervading Spirit, but the manifestations of His Power are different in different beings.

"Vidyāsāgar, too, said the same thing. He said, 'Has God given some more power and some less?' Thereupon I said to him: 'If there are not different manifestations of His Power, then why have we come to see you? Have you grown two horns on your head?'"

Sri Ramakrishna rose. The devotees followed him. Pasupati accompanied them to the door.

Visit to the Brahmani's house

The Master arrived at the house of the brahmin lady who was grief-stricken on account of her daughter's death. It was an old brick house. Entering the house, the Master passed the cowshed on his left. He and the devotees went to the roof, where they took seats. People were standing there in rows. Others were seated. They were all eager to get a glimpse of Sri Ramakrishna.

The brahmani had a sister; both of them were widows. Their brothers also lived in the house with their families. The brahmani had been busy all day making arrangements to receive Sri Ramakrishna. While the Master was at Nanda Bose's house she had been

extremely restless, going out of the house every few minutes to see if he was coming. He had promised to come to her place from Nanda's. Because of his delay she had thought perhaps he would not come at all.
Sri Ramakrishna was seated on a carpet. M., Narayan, Jogin, Devendra, and others were seated on a mat. A few minutes later the Younger Naren and some other devotees arrived. The brahmani's sister came to the Master and saluted him. She said, "Sister has just gone to Nanda Bose's house to inquire the reason for your delay in coming here. She will return presently."

A sound was heard downstairs and she exclaimed, "There she comes!" She went down. But it was not the brahmani.

Sri Ramakrishna sat there smiling, surrounded by devotees.

M. (to Devendra): "What a grand sight! All these people-young and old, men and women-standing in lines, eager to have a glimpse of him and hear his words."

DEVENDRA (to the Master): "M. says that this place is better than Nanda's. The devotion of these people is amazing."

Sri Ramakrishna laughed.

The brahmani's sister exclaimed, "Here comes sister!"

Brahmani's indescribable joy
The brahmani came and saluted the Master. She was beside herself with joy. She did not know what to say. In a half-choked voice she said: "This joy is too much for me. Perhaps I shall die of it. Tell me, friends, how shall I be able to live? I did not feel such a thrill even when Chandi, my daughter, used to visit the house accompanied by liveried footmen, with armed guards lining both sides of the street. Oh! Now I have no trace of my grief at her death. I was afraid he would not come. Then I thought that, if that happened, I should throw into the Ganges all the things I had arranged for his reception and entertainment. I should not speak to him any more. If he visited a place, I should go there, look at him from a distance, and then come away.

"Let me go and tell everybody how happy I am. Let me go and tell Yogin of my good luck."

Still overwhelmed with joy she said: "A labourer won a hundred thousand rupees in a lottery. The moment he heard the news he died of joy. Yes, he really and truly died. I am afraid the same thing is going to happen to me. Please bless me, friends, or else I shall certainly die."

M. was amazed to see the brahmani's sincere joy and her ecstatic mood. He was about to take the dust of her feet.

"What are you doing?" she exclaimed and saluted M.

The brahmani was extremely happy at the sight of the devotees. She said: "I am so happy to see you all here. I have brought the younger Naren; without him, who would there be to make us laugh?"

She was talking like this when her sister came up and said: "Come down, sister! How can I manage things if you stay here? Can I do it all by myself?"

But the brahmani was overwhelmed with joy. She could not take her eyes from the Master and the devotees.

After a while she very respectfully took Sri Ramakrishna to another room and offered him sweets and other refreshments. The devotees were entertained on the roof.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna was ready to leave. When he came to the door, the brahmani asked her sister-in-law to salute the Master. Next, one of her brothers took the dust of the Master's feet. Referring to him, she said: "He is one of my brothers. He is a fool" "No, no!" said the Master. "They are all good." A man showed the way with a light. At places it was dark. Sri Ramakrishna stood in front of the cow-shed. The devotees gathered around him. M. saluted the Master, who was about to go to the house of Ganu's mother.

Master's visit to Ganu's mother

Sri Ramakrishna was seated in the drawing-room of Ganu's mother's house. It was on the Street floor. The room was used by a concert party. Several young men played on their instruments now and then for the pleasure of the Master.

It was eight-thirty in the evening. Moonlight flooded the streets, the houses, and the sky. It was the first day after the full moon.

The brahmani, who had also come, was visiting the drawing-room and the inner apartments alternately. Every few minutes she would come to the door of the drawing-room and look at the Master. Some youngsters from the neighbourhood also looked at him through the windows. The people of the locality, young and old, came thronging to see the saint.

The younger Naren saw the boys in the street climbing the windows. He said to them: "Why are you here? Get away! Go home!" The Master said tenderly, "Let them stay." Every now and then he chanted: "Hari Om! Hari Om!"

The floor of the drawing-room was covered with a carpet. The young musicians sat on it and sang:

O Kesava, bestow Thy grace
Upon Thy luckless servants here!
O Kesava, who dost delight
To roam Vrindāvan's glades and groves! . . .

Master praises the music.
MASTER: "Ah, how sweet the music is! How melodious the violin is! How good the accompaniments are! (Pointing to a boy) He and the flutist seem to be a nice pair."

The orchestra went on playing. After it was over, Sri Ramakrishna said joyfully, "It is very fine indeed." Pointing to a young man, he said, "He seems to know how to play every instrument." He said to M., "They are all good people."

After the concert the young musician said to the devotees, "We should like to hear some of you sing." The brahmani stood near the door. She said: "None of them knows how to sing. Perhaps Mohin Babu can sing. But he will not sing before the Master."

A YOUNG MAN: "Why? I can sing even before my father."

THE YOUNGER NAREN (laughing): "But he has not yet advanced that far."

All laughed. A few minutes later the brahmani said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Please come inside."

MASTER: "Why?"

BRAHMANI: "The refreshments are served there. Please come."

MASTER: "Why not bring them here?"

BRAHMANI: "Ganu's mother requests you to bless the room with the dust of your feet. Then the room will be turned into Benares, and anyone dying in it will have no trouble hereafter."

Sri Ramakrishna went inside accompanied by the brahmani and the young men of the family. The devotees were strolling outside in the moonlight. M. and Binode were pacing the street south of the house and recalling the various incidents in the life of their beloved Master.

Sri Ramakrishna had returned to Balarām's house. He was resting in the small room to the west of the drawing-room. It was quite late, almost a quarter to eleven.

Sri Ramakrishna said to Jogin, "Please rub my feet gently." M. was sitting near by. While Jogin was rubbing his feet the Master said suddenly: "I feel hungry. I shall eat some farina pudding."

The brahmani had accompanied the Master and the devotees to Balarām's house. Her brother knew how to play the drums. Sri Ramakrishna said, "It will serve our purpose to send for her brother when Narendra or some other singer wants to sing."

Sri Ramakrishna ate a little pudding. Jogin and the other devotees left the room. M. was stroking the Master's feet. They talked together.

MASTER (referring to the brahmani and her relatives): "Ah! How happy they were!"

Martha and Mary

M: "How amazing! A similar thing happened with two women at the time of Jesus. They too were sisters, and devoted to Christ. Martha and Mary."

MASTER (eagerly); "Tell me the story."

M: "Jesus Christ, like you, went to their house with His devotees. At the sight of Him one of the sisters was filled with ecstatic happiness. It reminds me of a song about Gaurānga:

My two eyes sank in the sea of Gora's heavenly beauty
And did not come back to me again;
Down went my mind, as well, forgetting how to swim.

"The other sister, all by herself, was arranging the food to entertain Jesus. She complained to the Master, saying: 'Lord, please judge for Yourself-how wrong my sister is! She is sitting in Your room and I am doing all these things by myself.' Jesus said: 'Your sister indeed' is blessed. She has developed the only thing needful in human life: love of God."

MASTER: "Well, after seeing all this, What do you feel?"

Master about himself

M: "I feel that Christ, Chaitanyadeva, and yourself-all three are one and the same. It is the same Person that has become all these three."

MASTER: "Yes, yes! One! One! It is indeed one. Don't you see that it is He alone who dwells here in this way."

As he said this, Sri Ramakrishna pointed with his finger to his own body.

M: "You explained clearly, the other day, how God incarnates Himself on earth."

MASTER: "Tell me what I said."

M: "You told us to imagine a field extending to the horizon and beyond. It extends without any obstruction; but we cannot see it on account of a wall in front of us. In that wall there is a round hole. Through the hole we see a part of that infinite field."

MASTER: "Tell me what that hole is."

M: "You are that hole. Through you can be seen everything-that Infinite Meadow without any end."

Sri Ramakrishna was very much pleased. Patting M.'s back, he said: "I see you have understood that. That's fine!"

M: "It is indeed difficult to understand that. One cannot quite grasp how God, Perfect Brahman that He is, can dwell in that small body."

The Master quoted from a song:

Oh, no one at all has found out who He is;
Like a madman from door to door He roams,
Like a poor beggar He roams from door to door.

Master and Jesus

M: "You also told us about Jesus."

MASTER: "What did I say?"

M: "You went into samādhi at the sight of Jesus Christ's picture in Jadu Mallick's garden house. You saw Jesus come down from the picture and merge in your body."

Sri Ramakrishna was silent a few moments. Then he said to M.: "Perhaps there is a meaning in what has happened to my throat [referring to the sore in his throat]. This has happened lest I should make myself light before all; lest I should go to all sorts of places and sing and dance."

About Dwija

Sri Ramakrishna began to talk about Dwija.

MASTER: "He didn't come today. Why?"

M: "I asked him to come. He said he would. I don't know why he didn't."

MASTER: "He has great yearning. Well, he must be someone belonging to this. Isn't that so?"

M: "Yes, sir, it must be so. Otherwise, how could he have such yearning?"

Sri Ramakrishna lay down inside the mosquito curtain. M. fanned him. The Master turned on his side. He told M. how God incarnates Himself in a human body. He told him, further, about his, M.'s, spiritual ideal.

MASTER: "At the beginning I too passed through such states that I did not see divine forms. Even now I don't see them often."

M: "Among all the forms God chooses for His Lila, I like best His play as a human being."

MASTER: "That is enough. And you are seeing me."

Chapter 44

THE MASTER ON HIMSELF AND HIS EXPERIENCES

August 9, 1885

SRI RAMAKRISHNA was sitting in his room at Dakshineswar. Rākhāl, M., Dwija and his father, and other devotees were present. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

After returning from Vrindāvan Rākhāl had spent a few days at home. Now he was staying with the Master. Lātu, Harish, and Ramlal were also staying at the temple garden.

Beginning of Master's illness

Sri Ramakrishna was not well. It was the beginning of the illness subsequently diagnosed as the fatal cancer. But this did not disturb the serenity of his mind. Day and night he had only one thought, and that was the spiritual welfare of his disciples. He was guiding them toward the attainment of God. He encouraged them constantly to cultivate knowledge and devotion and warned them of the snares of "woman and gold". He was completely indifferent to his own illness and devoted himself whole-heartedly to the fulfilment of his earthly mission.

Dwija was about sixteen years old. After the death of his mother, his father had married a second time. Dwija often accompanied M. to Dakshineswar; but his father did not approve of it.

Dwija's father had for a long time been speaking of visiting Sri Ramakrishna. Today he had come to Dakshineswar. He was the manager of a business firm in Calcutta and had passed his examination in law.

MASTER (to Dwija's father): "Please don't mind your children's coming here.

Advice to the worldly-minded

"I ask people to live in the world after the awakening of their spiritual consciousness. After extracting gold through hard labour, a man may keep it under earth or in a box or under water. The gold is not affected.

"I ask people to live in the world in a spirit of detachment. If you break the jack-fruit after rubbing oil on your hands, its sticky juice will not smear them.

"If the 'unripe' mind dwells in the world, the mind gets soiled. One should first attain knowledge and then live in the world.

"If you put milk in water the milk is spoiled. But this will not happen if butter, churned from the milk, is put in water."

DWIJA'S FATHER: "That is true, sir."

Instructing Dwija's father

MASTER (smiling): "I know why you scold your children. You only threaten them. The brahmachari said to the snake; 'you are a fool indeed! I forbade you to bite but not to hiss. Your enemies would not have beaten you, if only you had hissed at them.' Your scolding of the children is really a hissing. (Dwija's father smiles.)

"A good son is a indication of his father's spiritual nature. If good water comes out when a reservoir is dug, it only indicates the virtue of the owner.

"A son is called Atmaja, 'the self reborn'. There is no difference between you and your son. In one way you yourself are reborn as your son. In one sense you are a worldly person, working in a business office and enjoying worldly life; in another sense you are a devotee of God, in the form of your son. I heard that you were a very worldly person; but now I find it isn't so. (Smiling) You know all this. I understand that you are very circumspect. Perhaps that is why you are nodding your assent to what I am saying. (Dwija's father smiles.)

"If your children visit this place, they will be able to know what you really are. How precious one's father is! If a person deceives his father and mother in order to seek religion, he gets only worthless trash.

Man's several debts

"A man is born with several debts: debts to his father, the devas, and the rishis. Besides, there is his debt to his mother. He also has a debt to his wife; She must be supported. If the wife is chaste, the husband must provide for her after his death.

"I could not live at Vrindāvan on account of my mother. When I remembered that my mother was living in the temple garden here at Dakshineswar, I could not feel peaceful at Vrindāvan.

"I ask people to live in the world and at the same time fix their minds on God. I don't ask them to give up the world. I say, 'Fulfil your worldly duties and also think of God.' "

DWIJA'S FATHER; "I tell my children that they should attend to their studies. I don't forbid them to come to you, but I don't want them to waste time in frivolities with the youngsters."

MASTER (referring to Dwija): "This boy must have been born with some good tendencies. Why are the two other brothers different from him? Why is he alone spiritually minded? Will you be able to compel him not to visit this place? Sooner or later everyone unfolds his inborn tendencies."

DWIJA'S FATHER: "Yes, that is true."

Sri Ramakrishna came down from the couch and sat on the floor beside Dwija's father. While talking with him he touched him now and then.

It was nearly evening. Sri Ramakrishna asked M. and the others to show Dwija's father the temples. He said to them, "I should have accompanied him myself if I were well." He asked someone to give sweets to the young men and said to Dwija's father: "Let the children have a little refreshment. It is customary." Dwija's father visited the temples and the images and took a stroll in the garden.

Sri Ramakrishna engaged happily in conversation with Bhupen, Dwija, M., and others on the southeast porch of his room. He playfully slapped Bhupen and M. on the back. He said to Dwija with a laugh, "How I talked to your father!"

Dwija's father returned to Sri Ramakrishna's room after dusk. He intended to leave shortly. He was feeling hot. Sri Ramakrishna fanned him himself. In a few minutes the father took leave of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna stood up to bid him farewell.

It was eight o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Mahimacharan. Rākhāl, M., and one or two companions of Mahimacharan were in the room. Mahimacharan was going to spend the night at the temple garden.

Mahima's estimate of the devotees

MASTER (to Mahima): "Well, how do you find Kedār? Has he only seen milk, or has he drunk it too?"

MAHIMA "Yes, he is enjoying bliss."

MASTER: "Nityagopal?"

MAHIMA "Very good. He is in a lofty state of mind."

MASTER: "Yes. Well, what about Girish Ghosh?"

MAHIMA "He too has developed nicely, but he belongs to another class."

MASTER: "And Narendra?"

MAHIMA "He is now in the state I was in fifteen years ago."

MASTER: "The younger Naren? How guileless he is!"

MAHIMA "Yes, quite guileless."

MASTER: "You are right. (Reflecting a little) Let me see who else. It will be sufficient for the youngsters who come here if they know only two things. If they know these, they will not have to practise much discipline and austerity. First, who I am, and second, who they are. Many of the youngsters belong to the inner circle.

"Those belonging to the inner circle will not attain liberation. I shall have to assume a human body again, in a northwesterly direction.

"I feel peace of mind when I see the youngsters. How can I feel joy at the sightof those who have begotten children and are engaged in lawsuits and are involved in 'woman and gold'? How could I live without seeing pure souled persons?"

Mahimacharan recited some texts from the scriptures. He also described various mystic rites of the Tantra.

MASTER: "Well, some say that my soul, going into samādhi, lies about like a bird in the Mahakasa, the Infinite Space.

Different kinds of samādhi

"Once a sādhu of Hrishikesh came here. He said to me: 'There are five kinds of samādhi. I find you have experienced them all. In these samādhis one feels the sensation of the Spiritual Current to be like the movement of an ant, a fish, a monkey, a bird, or a serpent.'

"Sometimes the Spiritual Current rises through the spine, crawling like an ant.

"Sometimes in samādhi the soul swims joyful in the ocean of divine ecstasy, like a fish.

"Sometimes, when I lie down on my side, I feel the Spiritual Current pushing me like a monkey and playing with me joyfully. I remain still.

That Current, like a monkey, suddenly with one jump reaches the Sahasrara. That is why you see me jump up with a start.

"Sometimes, again, the Spiritual Current rises like a bird hopping from one branch to another. The place where it rests feels like fire. It may hop from Muladhara to Svadhisthana, from Svadhisthana to the heart, and thus gradually to the head. "Sometimes, again, the Spiritual Current moves up like a snake. Going in a zigzag way, at last it reaches the head and I go into samādhi.

Awakening of Kundalini

"A man's spiritual consciousness is not awakened unless his kundalini is aroused."The kundalini dwells in the Muladhara. Then it is aroused, it passes along the Sushumna nerve, goes through the centres of Svadhisthana, Manipura, and so on, and at last reaches the head. This is called the movement of *Mahāvāyu*, the Spiritual Current. It culminates in samādhi.

"One's spiritual consciousness is not awakened by the mere reading of books. One should also pray to God. The kundalini is aroused if the aspirant feels restless for God. To talk of knowledge from mere study and heresay! What will that accomplish?

"Just before my attaning this state of mind, it had been revealed to me how the kundalini is aroused, how the lotuses of the different centres blossom forth, and how all this culminates in samādhi. This is a very secret experience. I saw a boy twenty-two or twenty-three years old, exactly resembling me, enter the Sushumna nerve and

commune with the lotuses touching them with his tongue. He bagan with the centre at the anus and passed through the centres at the sexual organ, naval, and so on. The different lotuses of those centres-four-petalled, six-petalled, ten-petalled, and so forth-had been drooping at his touch they stood erect.

"When he reached the heart-I distinctly remember it-and communed with the lotuses there, touching it with his tongue, the twelve-petalled lotus, which was hanging head down, stood erect and open its petals. Then he came to the sixteen-petalled lotus in the throat and two petalled lotus in the forehead. And last of all, the thousand-petalled lotus in the head blossomed. Since then I have been in this state."

Sri Ramakrishna came down to the floor and sat near Mahimacharan. M. and a few other devotees were near him. Rākhāl also was in the room.

MASTER (to Mahima): "For a long time I have wanted to tell you my spiritual experiences, but I could not. I feel like telling you today.

Master's intimate vision of God

"You say that by mere *sādhanā* one can attain a state of mind like mine. But it is not so. There is something special here [referring to himself]."

Rākhāl, M., and the others became eager to hear what the Master was going to say.

MASTER: "God talked to me. It was not merely His vision. Yes, He talked to me. Under the banyan-tree I saw Him coming from the ganges. Then we laughed so much! By way of playing with me He cracked my fingers. Then He talked. Yes, He talked to me.

"For three days I wept continuously. And He revealed to me what is in the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and the other scriptures.

Master's vision of māyā

"One day He showed me the māyā of Mahamaya. A small light inside a room began to grow, and at last it enveloped the whole universe.'

"Further, He revealed to me a huge reservoir of water covered with green scum. The wind moved a little of the scum and immediately the water became visible; but in the twinkling of an eye, scum from all sides came dancing in and again covered the water. He revealed to me that the water was like Satchidananda, and the scum like māyā. On account of māyā, Satchidananda is not seen. Though now and then one may get a glimpse of It, again māyā covers It.

Master saw devotees before their arrival

"God reveals the nature of the devotees to me before they arrive. I saw Chaitanya's party singing and dancing near the Panchavati, between the banyan-tree and the bakul-tree. I noticed Balarām there. If it weren't: for him, who would there be to supply me with sugar candy and such things? (Pointing to M.) And I saw him too.

"I had seen Keshab before I actually met him-I had seen him and his party in my samādhi. In front of me sat a roomful of men. Keshab looked like a peacock sitting with its tail spread out. The tail meant his followers. I saw a red gem on Keshab's head. That indicated his rajas. He said to his disciples, 'Please listen to what he [meaning the Master] is saying.' I said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, these people hold the views of "Englishmen". Why should I talk to them?' Then the Mother explained to me that it would be like this in the Kaliyuga.

"Keshab and his followers got from here [meaning himself] the names of Hari and the Divine Mother: That is why the Divine Mother took Vijay away from Keshab's party. But Vijay did not join the Adi Samaj.

(Pointing to himself) "There must be something special here. Long ago a young man named Gopal Sen used to visit me. He who dwells in me placed His foot On Gopal's chest. Gopal said in an ecstatic mood: 'you will have to wait here a long time. I cannot live any more with worldly people.' He took leave of me. Afterwards I heard that he was dead. Perhaps he was born as Nityagopal.

About Narendra

"I have had many amazing visions. I had a vision of the Indivisible Satchidananda. Inside It I Saw two groups with a fence between them. On one side were Kedār, Chuni, and other devotees who believe in the Personal God. On the other side was a luminous space like a heap of red brick-dust. Inside it was seated Narendra immersed in samādhi. Seeing him absorbed in meditation, I called aloud, 'Oh, Narendra!' He opened his eyes a little. I came to realize that he had been born, in another form, in Simla in a kayastha family. At once I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, entangle him in māyā; otherwise he will give up his body in samādhi.' Kedār, a believer in the Personal God, peeped in and ran away with a shudder.

Master about himself

"Therefore I feel that it is the Divine Mother Herself who dwells in this body and plays with the devotees. When I first had my exalted state of mind, my body would radiate light. My chest was always flushed. Then I said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, do not reveal Thyself outwardly. Please go inside.' That is why my complexion is so dull now. If my body were still luminous, people would have tormented me; a crowd would always have thronged here. Now there is no outer manifestation. That keeps weeds away. Only genuine devotees will remain with me now. Do you know why I have this illness? It has the same significance. Those whose devotion to me has a selfish motive behind it will run away at the sight of my illness.

"I cherished a desire. I said to the Mother, 'O Mother, I shall be the king of the devotees.'

"Again, this thought arose in my mind: 'He who sincerely prays to God will certainly come here. He must.' You see, that is what is happening now. Only people of that kind come.

"My parents knew who dwells inside this body. Father had a dream at Gaya. In that dream Raghuvir said to him, 'I shall be born as your son.'

"God alone dwells inside this body. Such renunciation of 'woman and gold!' Could I have accomplished that myself? I have never enjoyed a woman, even in a dream.

Totapuri

"Nangta instructed me in Vedānta. In three days I went into samādhi. At the sight of my samādhi under the madhavi vine, he was quite taken aback and exclaimed, 'Ah! What is this?' Then he came to know who resides in this body. He said to me, 'Please let me go.' At these words of Totapuri, I went into an ecstatic mood and said, 'You cannot go till I realize the Truth of Vedānta.'

"Day and night I lived with him. We talked only Vedānta. The Brahmani used to say to me: 'Don't listen to Vedānta. It will injure your devotion to God.'

Mathur Babu

"I said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, please get me a rich man. If You don't, how shall I be able to protect this body? How shall I be able to keep the sādhus and devotees near me?' That is why Mathur Babu provided for my needs for fourteen years.

"He who dwells in me tells me beforehand what particular class of devotees will come to me. When I have a vision of Gaurānga, I know that devotees of Gaurānga are coming. When I have a vision of Ran, the Saktas come.

"At the time of the evening service I used to cry out from the roof of the kuthi, weeping: 'Oh, where are you all? Come to me!' You see, they are all gathering here, one by one.

"God Himself dwells in this body. It is He who, of His own accord, is working with these devotees.

"What a wonderful state of mind some of the devotees have! The younger Naren gets kumbhaka without any effort, and samādhi too. Sometimes he stays in an ecstatic mood for two and a half hours; sometimes even more. How wonderful!

"I have practised all kinds of *sādhanā*: Jnāna yoga, karma yoga, and bhakti yoga. I have even gone through the exercises of hathayoga to increase longevity. There is another Person dwelling in this body. Otherwise, after attaining samādhi, how could I live with the devotees and enjoy the love of God? Koar Singh used to say to me: 'I have never before seen a person who has returned from the plane of samādhi. You are none other than Nanak.'

"I live in the midst of worldly people; on all sides I see 'woman and gold'. Nevertheless, this is the state of my mind: unceasing samādhi and bhava. That is the reason Pratap said, at the sight of my ecstatic mood: 'Good heavens! It is as if he were possessed by a ghost!' "

Rākhāl, M., and the others were speechless as they drank in this account of Sri Ramakrishna's unique experiences.

But did Mahimacharan understand the import of these words? Even after hearing them, he said to the Master, "These things have happened to you on account of your meritorious actions in your past births." Mahima still thought that Sri Ramakrishna was a sādhu or a devotee of God. The Master nodded assent to Mahima's words and said: "Yes, the result of past actions. God is like an aristocrat who has many mansions. Here [referring to himself] is one of His drawing-rooms. The bhakta is God's drawing-room."

It was nine o'clock in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch. It was Mahimacharan's desire to form a brahmachakra in the presence of the Master. Mahima formed a circle, on the floor, with Rākhāl, M., Kishori, and one or two other devotees. He asked them all to meditate. Rākhāl went into an ecstatic state. The Master came down from the couch and placed his hand on Rākhāl's chest, repeating the name of the divine Mother. Rākhāl regained consciousness of the outer world.

It was one o'clock in the morning, the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the moon. There was intense darkness everywhere. One or two devotees were pacing the concrete embankment of the Ganges. Sri Ramakrishna was up. He came out and said to the devotees, "Nangta told me that at this time, about midnight, one hears the Anāhata sound."

In the early hours of the morning Mahimacharan and M. lay down on the floor of the Master's room. Rākhāl slept on a camp cot. Now and then Sri Ramakrishna paced up and down the room with his clothes off, like a five-year-old child.

Monday, August 10

It was dawn. The Master was chanting the name of the Divine Mother. He went to the porch west of his room and looked at the Ganges; then he stopped in front of the pictures of different gods and goddesses in the room and bowed to them. The devotees left their beds, saluted Sri Ramakrishna, and went out.

The Master was talking to a devotee in the Panchavati. The latter had dreamt of Chaitanyadeva.

MASTER (in an ecstatic mood): "Ah me! Ah me!"

DEVOTEE: "But, sir, it was only a dream."

MASTER: "Is a dream a small thing?"

The Master's voice was choked. His eyes were filled with tears.

Sri Ramakrishna was told of a devotee who had divine visions even while he was awake. The Master said: "I am not surprised. Narendra, too, sees forms of God nowadays."

Mahimacharan went to one of the Śiva temples to the west of the courtyard and chanted hymns from the Vedas. He was alone.

It was eight o'clock in the morning. M. bathed in the Ganges and came to Sri Ramakrishna. The brahmani who was grief-stricken on account of her daughter's death also entered the room.

The Master asked the brahmani to give M. some prasad to eat.

BRAHMANI: "Please eat something yourself first; then he will eat.

MASTER (to M.): "Take some prasad of Jagannath first and then eat."

After eating the prasad, M. went to the Śiva temples and saluted the Deity. Then he returned to the Master's room and saluted him. He was ready to go to Calcutta.

MASTER (tenderly): "Go home safely. You have to attend to your duties."

Tuesday, August 11

Sri Ramakrishna was in his room at the temple garden. He had been observing silence since eight o'clock in the morning. Did he know the fatal nature of his illness? At his silence the Holy Mother wept. Rākhāl and Lātu also wept. The brahmani widow from Baghbazar arrived. She too was weeping at this strange mood of the Master. Now and then the devotees asked him whether he would remain silent for good. The Master answered them in the negative, by a sign.

At three o'clock in the afternoon Narayan arrived. Sri Ramakrishna said to him, "The Divine Mother will bless you," Narayan told the other devotees that the Master had spoken to him. A heavy weight was lifted from their breasts. They all came into the Master's room and sat on the floor.

MASTER (to the devotees): "The Mother showed me that all this is verily māyā. She alone is real, and all else is the splendour of Her māyā.

"Another thing was revealed to me. I found out how far the different devotees have progressed."

DEVOTEES: "Please tell us about it."

MASTER: "I came to know about all these devotees: Nityagopal, Rākhāl, Narayan? Purna, Mahima Chakravarty, and the others."

Sunday, August 16, 1885

The news of Sri Ramakrishna's illness had been reported to the devotees in Calcutta. They thought it was just a sore in his throat. Many devotees arrived at Dakshineswar to visit him. Among them were Girish, Ram, Nityagopal, Mahima, Kishori, and Pundit Shashadhar.

Sri Ramakrishna was in his usual happy mood. He was talking to the devotees.

MASTER: "I cannot tell the Mother about my illness. I feel ashamed to talk of it."

GIRISH: "God will cure you."

RAM: "Yes, you will be all right."

MASTER (smiling): "Yes, give me your blessing." (All laugh.)

Girish was a recent visitor to Dakshineswar. The Master said to him: "You have so many duties to perform. You have to face so many troubles. Come here only three times more.

(To Shashadhar) "Please tell us something about the *Ādyāśakti*."

SHASHADHAR: "What do I know, sir?"

MASTER (smiling): "A certain man had great respect for another man. The second man asked him to bring him a little fire for his tobacco. He answered humbly, 'Sir, am I fit to carry your fire?' He didn't bring the fire." (All laugh.)

SHASHADHAR: "The Primal Power alone is both the instrumental and the material cause of the universe. It is She who has created the universe and its living beings; further, She Herself has become all these. To give an example: the spider, as the instrumental cause, makes the web and, as the material cause, brings the web out of its own body."

Brahman and Śakti

MASTER: "It is also stated that He who is Purusha is also Prakriti; He who is Brahman is also Śakti. He is called Purusha or Brahman when He is inactive, that is to say, when He ceases to create, preserve, or destroy; and He is called Śakti or Prakriti when He engages in those activities. But He who is Brahman is none other than Śakti; He who is Purusha has verily become Prakriti. Water is water whether it moves or is still. A snake is a snake whether it wriggles along or stays still and coiled up.

"What Brahman is cannot be described. Speech stops there. In the kirtan the singers at first sing: 'My Nitai dances like a mata hati.' As they become more and more ecstatic, they can hardly utter the whole sentence. They sing only: 'Hati! Hati!' As their mood deepens they sing only: 'Ha! Ha!' At last they cannot sing even that; they become completely unconscious."

As the Master spoke these words, he himself became transfixed in samādhi. He was standing.

Regaining consciousness of the world, he said, "That which is beyond both kshara and akshara cannot be described."

The devotees sat in silence.

MASTER: "You cannot go into samādhi as long as your worldly experiences are not finished, or as long as you have duties to perform.

(To Shashadhar) "God is now making you perform such duties as delivering lectures. You must do these things now. You will have peace when your duties are finished. After completing her household duties, the mistress of the family goes for her bath. She will not come back then even if you shout after her."

Thursday, August 27, 1885

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room at Dakshineswar. It was five o'clock in the afternoon. There were two or three devotees with him. While with the devotees he never gave a thought to his physical illness, often spending the whole day with them talking and singing.

Doctor Madhu was treating Sri Ramakrishna. He frequently visited the Master at Dakshineswar, coming by country boat from Calcutta. The devotees were very much worried about the Master; it was their secret desire that the physician should see him daily. M. said to the Master, "Doctor Madhu is an experienced physician. It will be nice if he sees you every day."

Pundit Shyamapada of Antpur arrived. It was dusk. The pundit went to the bank of the Ganges to perform his evening worship; he had some amazing visions during the worship. He returned to the Master's room and sat on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna had just finished meditation and the chanting of the holy names. He was sitting on the small couch and M. on the foot-rug. Rākhāl, Lātu, and the others were in and out of the room.

Brahman is the innermost Reality

MASTER (to M, pointing to the pundit): "He is very nice. (To the pundit) Where the mind attains peace by practising the discipline of 'Neti, neti', there Brahman is.

"The king dwells in the inmost room of the palace, which has seven gates. The visitor comes to the first gate. There he sees a lordly person with a large retinue, surrounded on all sides by pomp and grandeur. The visitor asks his companion, 'Is he the king?' 'No', says his friend with a smile.

"At the second and the other gates he repeats the same question to his friend. He finds that the nearer he comes to the inmost part of the palace, the greater is the glory, pomp, and grandeur. When he passes the seventh gate he does not ask his companion whether it is the king; he stands speechless at the king's immeasurable glory. He realizes that he is face to face with the king. He hasn't the slightest doubt about it."

PUNDIT: "One sees God beyond the realm of māyā."

Futility of mere scholarship

MASTER: "But after realizing God one finds that He alone has become māyā, the universe, and all living beings. This world is no doubt a 'framework of illusion', unreal as

a dream. One feels that way when one discriminates following the process of 'Not this, not this'. But after the vision of God this very world becomes 'a mansion of mirth'.

"What will you gain by the mere study of scriptures? The pundits merely indulge in reasoning."

PUNDIT: "I hate the idea of being called a pundit."

MASTER: "That is due to the grace of God. The pundits merely indulge in reasoning. Some have heard of milk and some have drunk milk. After you have the vision of God you will find that everything is Narayana. It is Narayana Himself who has become everything."

The pundit recited a hymn to Narayana . Sri Ramakrishna was overwhelmed with joy.

PUNDIT (quoting from the Gitā.): "'with the heart concentrated by yoga, with the eye of evenness for all things, he beholds the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.' "

MASTER: "Have you read the Adhyātma Rāmāyana?"

PUNDIT: "Yes, sir, a little."

MASTER: "The book is filled with ideas of knowledge and devotion. The life of Savari and the hymn by Ahalyā are filled with bhakti.

'But you must remember one thing: God is very far away from the mind tainted with worldliness."

PUNDIT: "Yes, sir. God is far, far away from worldly intelligence. And God is very near, where that does not exist. I visited a certain Zamindār, one Mukherji of Uttarpara. He is now an elderly man; but he listens only to stories and novels."

MASTER: "It is further said in the Adhyātma Rāmāyana that God alone has become the universe and its living beings."
The pundit was delighted. He recited a hymn to that effect from the tenth chapter of the Bhagavata:

O Krishna! Krishna! Mighty Yogi! Thou art the Primal Supreme Purusha:
This universe, manifest and unmanifest, is Thy form, as the sages declare.
Thou alone art the soul, the sense-organs, the Lord dwelling in the bodies of all:
Thou art the subtle Great Prakriti, made of sattva, rajas, and tamas;
Thou alone art the Purusha, the Lord dwelling in the bodies of all.

As Sri Ramakrishna listened to the hymn he went into samādhi. He remained standing. The pundit was seated. The Master placed his foot on the pundit's lap and chest, and smiled.

The pundit clung to his feet and said, "O Guru! Please give me God Consciousness."

After the pundit had left the room Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "Don't you see that what I have said is coming to pass? Those who have sincerely practised meditation and japa must come here."

It was ten o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna ate a little farina pudding and lay down. He asked M. to stroke his feet. A few minutes later he asked the disciple to massage his body and chest gently. He enjoyed a short nap. Then he said to M.: "Now go to sleep. Let me see if I can sleep better when I am alone." He said to Ramlal, "He [meaning M.] and Rākhāl may sleep in the room."

Friday, August 28

It was dawn. Sri Ramakrishna was awake and meditating on the Divine Mother. On account of his illness the devotees were deprived of his sweet chanting of the Mother's name.

Divine Incarnations act like men

Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the small couch. He asked M., "Well, why have I this illness?"

M: "People will not have the courage to approach you unless you resemble them in all respects. But they are amazed to find that in spite of such illness you don't know anything but God."

MASTER (smiling): "Balarām also said, 'If even you can be ill, then why should we wonder about our illnesses?' Lakshmana was amazed to see that Rāma could not lift His bow on account of His grief for Sita. 'Even Brahman weeps, entangled in the snare of the five elements.'"

M: "Jesus Christ, too, wept like an ordinary man at the suffering of His devotees."

MASTER: "How was that?"

Jesus and Lazarus

M: 'There were two sisters, Mary and Martha. Lazarus was their brother. All three were devoted to Jesus. Lazarus died. Jesus was on His way to their house. One of the sisters, Mary, ran out to meet Him. She fell at His feet and said weeping, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died!' Jesus wept to see her cry.

"Then Jesus went to the tomb of Lazarus and called him by name. Immediately Lazarus came back to life and walked out of the tomb."

MASTER: "But I cannot do those things."

M: "That is because you don't want to. These are miracles; therefore you aren't interested in them. These things draw people's attention to their bodies. Then they do not think of genuine devotion. That is why you don't perform miracles.

Similarities between Christ and Sri Ramakrishna

But there are many similarities between you and Jesus Christ."

MASTER (smiling): "What else?"

M: "You don't ask your devotees to fast or practise other austerities. You don't prescribe hard and fast rules about food. Christ's disciples did not observe the sabbath; so the Pharisees took them to task. Thereupon Jesus said: 'They have done well to eat. As long as they are with the bridegroom they must make merry.

MASTER: "What does that mean?"

M: "Christ meant that as long as the disciples live with the Incarnation of God, they should only make merry. Why should they be sorrowful? But when He returns to His own abode in heaven, then will come the days of their sorrow and suffering."

MASTER (smiling): "Do you find anything else in me that is similar to Christ?"

M: "Yes, sir. You say: 'The youngsters are not yet touched by: "woman and gold"; they will be able to assimilate instruction. It is like keeping milk in a new pot: the milk may turn sour if it is kept in a pot in which curd has been made.' Christ also spoke like that."

MASTER: "What did He say?"

M: "'If new wine is kept in an old bottle, the bottle may crack. If an old cloth is patched with new cloth, the old cloth tears away.'

"Further, you tell us that you and the Mother are one. Likewise, Christ said, 'I and My Father are one.' "

MASTER (smiling): "Anything else?"

M: "You say to us, 'God will surely listen to you if you call on Him earnestly.' So also Christ said, 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you.'

MASTER: "Well, if God has incarnated Himself again, is it a fractional or a partial or a complete manifestation of God? Some say it is a complete manifestation."

M: "Sir, I don't quite understand the meaning of complete or partial or fractional Incarnation. But I have understood, as 'you explained it, the idea of a round hole in a wall."

MASTER: "Tell me about it."

M: "There is a round hole in the wall. Through it one is able to see part of the meadow on the other side of the wall. Likewise, through you one sees part of the Infinite God."

MASTER: "True. You can see five or six miles of the meadow at a stretch."

M. finished his bath in the Ganges and went to the Master's room. It was eight o'clock in the morning. He asked Lātu to give him the rice prasad of Jagannath. The Master stood near him and said: "Take this prasad regularly. Those who are devotees of God do not eat anything before taking the prasad."

M: "Yesterday I got some prasad of Jagannath from Balarām Babu's house. I take one or two grains daily."

M. saluted the Master and took his leave. Sri Ramakrishna said to him tenderly: "Come early in the morning tomorrow. The hot sun of the rainy season is bad for the health."

Monday, August 31, 1885

Sri Ramakrishna was resting in his room. It was about eight o'clock in the evening. Though ill and suffering, he constantly devoted himself to the welfare of the devotees. Sometimes he felt restless, like a child; but the next moment he forgot all about his illness and became filled with ecstatic love of God. His love for the devotees was like that of a mother for her children.

Purna's letter

Two days earlier, on Saturday night, he had received a letter from Purna. Purna had written: "I am feeling extremely happy. Now and then I cannot sleep at night for joy." After hearing the letter the Master had remarked: "I feel thrilled to hear this. Even later on, he will be able to keep this bliss. Let me see the letter." He had pressed the letter in the palm of his hand and said: "Generally I cannot touch letters. But this is a good letter." That same night, while the Master was in bed, he had suddenly become covered with perspiration. He had sat up in bed, saying, "It seems to me that I shall not recover from this illness." It had worried the devotees very much to hear this. The Holy Mother had come to the Temple Garden to wait on Sri Ramakrishna and was living in a room in the Nahabat. The devotees, with the exception of one or two, were not aware of her presence. A woman devotee staying with the Holy Mother had begun to pay frequent visits to Sri Ramakrishna in his room. After a few days Sri Ramakrishna had said to her: "You have been here some time. What will people think about it? You had better go home for a week or so."

Sri Ramakrishna lay in bed, on his side, with his back to the room. After dusk Gangadhar and M. arrived from Calcutta. Gangadhar sat at the feet of the Master, who was talking to M.

MASTER: "Two boys came here the other day. One of them was Subodh. He is Sankar Ghosh's great grandson. The other, Kshirode, is his neighbour. They are nice boys. I told

them I was ill and asked them to go to you for instruction. Please look after them a little."

M: "Yes, sir. They are our neighbours."

MASTER: "The other day, again, I woke up covered with perspiration. I don't understand this illness."

M: "We have decided to ask Bhagavan Rudra to see you once. He is an M.D. and an expert physician."

MASTER: "How much will he charge?"

M: "His regular fee is twenty or twenty-five rupees."

MASTER: "Then don't bother about him."

M: "But we shall pay him four or five rupees at the most."

MASTER: "Listen. Suppose you say this to him, 'Sir, please be kind enough to come and see him.' Hasn't he heard anything about this place?"

M: "Perhaps he has. He has almost agreed not to charge any fee. But we shall pay him a little. If we do that, he will come again."

MASTER: "Ask Dr. Nitai to come. He is a good physician. But what will the doctors do, I wonder? They press my throat and make my illness worse."

It was nine o'clock in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna ate a little farina pudding and had no difficulty in swallowing it. He said to M. cheerfully: "I was able to eat a little. I feel very happy."

Tuesday, September 1

Sri Ramakrishna was about to take his bath. A devotee was rubbing his Body with oil on the verandah south of his room. M. came there after finishing his bath in the Ganges and saluted the Master.

After bathing, Sri Ramakrishna wrapped himself in a towel and with folded hands saluted the deities in the temples from afar. He could not go to the temples because of his illness.

It was the sacred Janmasthami day, the birthday of Krishna. Ram and other devotees had brought new clothes for Sri Ramakrishna. He put them on and looked charming. Again he saluted the deities.

Gopal Ma brought her Gopala some food that she had prepared at her home at Kamarhati. She said to the Master sorrowfully, "But you won't eat any of it."

MASTER: "You see, I am ill."

GOPAL MA "That is my bad luck. Please take a little in your hand."

MASTER: "Please give me your blessing."

A devotee brought some sugar candy. Gopal Ma said, "Let me take it to the Holy Mother in the nahabat." The Master said: "No, keep it here. I give sweets to the devotees. Who wants to send a messenger a hundred times to the nahabat for sugar candy? Let it be kept here."

It was eleven o'clock in the morning. The devotees were gradually arriving from Calcutta. Balarām, Narendra, the younger Naren, NavaGopal, and a Vaishnava from katoa arrived. Rākhāl and Lātu were staying with Sri Ramakrishna. A Punjabi sādhu had been staying in the Panchavati for some days.

The younger Naren had a tumour on his forehead. Sri Ramakrishna was strolling in the Panchavati with the devotees. He said to the younger Naren: "Why don't you have your tumour operated on? It is not in the throat but only on the forehead. That is a simple thing. People have their orchitis operated on."

The Punjabi sādhu was going along the footpath in the garden. The Master said: "I don't attract him. He has the attitude of a Jnāni. I find him to be dry as wood."

Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees returned to the Master's room. The conversation turned to Shyamapada Bhattacharya.

BALARĀM: "Shyamapada said, 'When he, the Master, placed his foot on Narendra's chest, Narendra went into bhava; but I didn't have that experience' ".

MASTER: "Shall I tell you the truth about it? It is very difficult to gather the dispersed mind when it is attached to 'woman and gold'. The pundit told me he was called upon to act as arbiter to settle people's quarrels. Besides, he has to worry about his children. But the minds of Narendra and other youngsters are not scattered like that; they are not yet touched by 'woman and gold'.

"But Shyamapada is a grand person."

The Vaishnava from Katoa began to ask Sri Ramakrishna questions. He was squint-eyed.

About rebirth

VAISHNAVA: "Sir, is a man born again?"

MASTER: "It is said in the Gitā that a man is reborn with those tendencies that are in his mind at the time of his death. King Bharata thought of his deer at the time of death and was reborn as a deer."

VAISHNAVA: "I could believe in rebirth only if an eye-witness told me about it."

MASTER: "I don't know about that, my dear sir. I cannot cure my own illness, and you ask me to tell you what happens after death!

"What you are talking about only shows your petty mind. Try to cultivate love of God. You are born as a human being only to attain divine love. You have come to the orchard to eat mangoes; what need is there of knowing how many thousands of branches and millions of leaves there are in the orchard? To bother about what happens after death! How silly!"

Girish and Master

Girish Ghosh arrived in a carriage with one or two friends. He was drunk. He was weeping as he entered the room. He wept, as he placed his head on Sri Ramakrishna's feet.

Sri Ramakrishna affectionately patted him on the back. He said to a devotee, "Prepare a smoke for him."

Girish raised his head and said with folded hands: "You alone are the Perfect Brahman! If that is not so then everything is false.

"It is such a pity that I could not be of any service to you," He uttered these words with a tenderness that made several devotees weep.

Girish continued: "O Lord! Please grant me the boon that I may serve you for a year. Who cares for salvation? One finds it everywhere. I spit on it. Please tell me that you will accept my service for one year."

MASTER: "People around here are not good. Some may criticize you."

GIRISH: "I don't care. Please tell-"

MASTER: "All right. You may serve me when I go to your house."

GIRISH: "No, it is not that. I want to serve you here."

Girish was insistent. The Master said, "Well, that depends on God's will."

Referring to the Master's throat trouble, Girish said: "Please say, 'Let it be cured.' All right, I shall thrash it out. Kāli! Kāli!"

MASTER: "You will hurt me."

GIRISH: "O throat, be cured! (He blows at the throat like an exorciser.) Are you not all right? If you aren't cured by this time, you certainly will be if I have any devotion to your feet. Say that you are cured."

MASTER (sharply): "Leave me alone. I can't say those things. I can't ask the Divine Mother to cure my illness. "All right. I shall be cured if it is the will of God."

GIRISH: "You are trying to fool me. All depends on your will."

MASTER: "Shame! Never say that again. I look on myself as a devotee of Krishna, not as Krishna Himself. You may think as you like. You may look on your guru as God. Nevertheless, it is wrong to talk as you are talking. You must not talk that way again."

GIRISH: "Please say you will be cured."

MASTER: "Very well, if that pleases you."

Girish was still under the influence of drink. Now and then he said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Well, sir, how is it that you were not born this time with your celestial beauty?"

A few moments later he said, "I see, this time it will be the salvation of Bengal."

A devotee said to himself: "Why Bengal alone? It will be the salvation of the whole world."

Girish said addressing the devotees: "Does any of you understand why he is here? It is for the liberation of men. Their suffering has moved him to assume a human body."

The coachman was calling Girish. He got up and was going toward the man. The Master said to M.: "Watch him. Where is he going? I hope he won't beat the coachman!" M. accompanied Girish.

Presently Girish returned. He prayed to Sri Ramakrishna and said, "O God, give me purity that I may not have even a trace of sinful thought."

MASTER: "You are already pure. You have such faith and devotion! You are in a state of joy, aren't you?"

GIRISH: "No, sir. I feel bad. I have worries. That is why I have drunk so much liquor."

A few minutes afterwards Girish said: "Lord, I am amazed to find that I, even I, have been given the privilege of serving the Perfect Brahman. What austerities have I practised to deserve this privilege?"

Sri Ramakrishna took his midday meal. On account of his illness he ate very little.

The Master's natural tendency of mind was to soar into the plane of God-Consciousness. He would force his mind to be conscious of the body. But, like a child, he was incapable of looking after his body. Like a child he said to the devotees: "I have eaten a little. I shall rest now. You may go out for a little while." Sri Ramakrishna rested a few minutes. The devotees returned to the room.

GIRISH: "The guru and the Ishta. I like very much the form of the guru. I am not afraid of him. Why should it be so? I am afraid of ecstasy. At the sight of ecstasy I run away."

The guru and the Chosen Ideal

MASTER: "He who is the Ishta appears in the form of the guru. The aspirant practises meditation on a corpse. When he obtains the vision of his Chosen Ideal, it is really the guru who appears to him and says, 'This is that', that is to say, he points out to the disciple his Ishta. Uttering these words, the guru disappears into the form of the Ishta. The disciple no longer sees the guru. In the state of perfect Jnāna, who is the guru and who is the sishya? That creates a very difficult situation; there the teacher and the disciple do not see each other.' "

A DEVOTEE: "Guru's head and disciple's feet."

GIRISH (joyously): "Yes! Yes! It is true."

NAVAGOPAL: "But listen to its meaning. The disciple's head belongs to the guru; and the guru's feet belong to the disciple. Do you understand?"

GIRISH: "No, that is not the meaning. Haven't you seen the child climbing on the head of the father? That is why the disciple's feet are mentioned."

NAVAGOPAL: "But then the disciple must feel like a young baby."

Two classes of devotees kitten and young monkey

MASTER: "There are two classes of devotees. One class has the nature of the kitten. The kitten depends completely on its mother. It accepts whatever its mother does for it. The kitten only cries, 'Mew, mew!' It doesn't know what to do or where to go. Sometimes the mother puts the kitten near the heart, sometimes on the bed. Devotees of this class give God the power of attorney and thus become free of all worry. The Sikhs said to me that God was kind. I said to them: 'How is that? He is our Father and our Mother. Shouldn't parents bring up their children after begetting them? Do you mean to say that the neighbours will look after them?' Devotees of this class have an unwavering conviction that God is our Mother and our Father.

"There is another class of devotees. They have the nature of the young monkey. The young monkey clings to its mother with might and main. The devotees who behave like the young monkey have a slight idea of being the doer. They feel: 'we must go to the sacred places; we must practise japa and austerity; we must perform worship with sixteen articles as prescribed by the sastras. Only then shall we be able to realize God.' Such is their attitude.

"The aspirants of both classes are devotees of God. The farther you advance, the more you will realize that God alone has become everything. He alone does everything. He alone is the Guru and He alone is the Ishta. He alone gives us knowledge and devotion.

"The farther you advance, the more you will see that there are other things even beyond the sandal-wood forest-mines of silver and gold and precious gems. Therefore go forward.

Worldly man's obstacles

"But how can I ask people to go forward? If worldly people go too far, then the bottom will drop out of their world. One day Keshab was conducting a religious service. He said, 'O God, may we all sink and disappear in the river of bhakti!' When the warship was over I said to him: 'Look here. How can you disappear altogether in the river of bhakti? If you do, what will happen to those seated behind the screen? But do one thing: sink now and then, and come back again to dry land."(All laugh.)

Futility of argument

The Vaishnava from Katoa was arguing.

MASTER (to the Vaishnava): "Stop that sizzling noise! When butter containing water is heated over a fire, it makes that sound.

"If a man but once tastes the joy of God, his desire to argue takes wing. The bee, realizing the joy of sipping honey, doesn't buzz about any more. What will you achieve by quoting from books? The pundits recite verses and do nothing else.

"What will you gain by merely repeating 'siddhi'? You will not be intoxicated even by gargling with a solution of siddhi. It must go into your stomach; not until then will you be intoxicated. One cannot comprehend what I am saying unless one prays to God in solitude, all by oneself, with a longing heart."

Dr. Rākhāl arrived to examine Sri Ramakrishna. The Master said to him eagerly, "Come in and sit down."

The conversation with the Vaishnava continued.

MASTER: "Man should possess dignity and alertness. Only he whose spiritual consciousness is awakened possesses this dignity and alertness and can be called a man. Futile is the human birth without the awakening of spiritual consciousness.

"There are many men at Kamarpukur with big bellies and imposing moustaches. Yet the villagers go with palanquins and bring righteous and truthful persons from twenty miles away to arbitrate their quarrels. They do not bring mere pundits.

"Truthfulness is the *tapasya* of the Kaliyuga.'Truthfulness, submission to God, and looking on the wives of other men as one's own mother'-these are the means to realize God."

Like a child Sri Ramakrishna said to the physician, "Sir, please cure my throat."

DOCTOR: "Do you ask me to cure you?"

MASTER: "The physician is Narayana Himself. I honour everybody. You may say that if I look on all as Narayana then I should keep quiet. But I also accept the words of the 'Mahut Narayana'.

"The Pure Mind and the Pure Ātman are one and the same thing. Whatever comes up in the Pure Mind is the voice of God. God alone is the 'mahut Narayana.'

"Why should I not listen to God? He alone is the Master. As long as He keeps 'I-consciousness' in me, I shall obey His orders."

The doctor was going to examine Sri Ramakrishna's throat. The Master said, "Dr. Mahendra Sarkar pressed my tongue the way they press a cow's."

Like a child Sri Ramakrishna said to the physician, pulling at his shirt-sleeves again and again, "Sir! My dear sir! Please cure my throat." Looking at the laryngoscope, he said with a smile: "I know it. You will see the reflection in it."

Narendra sang. But on account of the Master's illness there was not much music.

September 2

After finishing his midday meal Sri Ramakrishna sat on the small couch and talked to Dr. Bhagavan Rudra and M. Rākhāl, Lātu, and other devotees were in the room. The physician heard all about the Master's illness. Sri Ramakrishna came down to the floor and sat near the doctor.

MASTER: "You see, medicine does not agree with me. My system is different.

Master's renunciation

"Well, what do you think of this? When I touch a coin my hand gets twisted; my breathing stops. Further, if tie a knot in the comer of my cloth, I cannot breathe. My breathing stops until the knot is untied."

The Master asked a devotee to bring a rupee. When Sri Ramakrishna held it in his hand, the hand began to writhe with pain. The Master's breathing also stopped. After the coin had been taken away, he breathed deeply three times and his hand relaxed. The doctor became speechless with wonder to see this strange phenomenon.

The doctor said to M., "Action on the nerves."

MASTER (to the doctor): "I get into another state of mind. It is impossible for me to lay up anything. One day I visited Sambhu Mallick's garden house. At that time I had been suffering badly from stomach trouble. Sambhu said to me: Take a grain of opium now and then. It will help you.' He tied a little opium in a corner of my cloth. As I was returning to the Kāli temple, I began to Vander about near the gate as if unable to find the way. Then I threw the opium away and at once regained my normal state. I returned to the temple garden.

"One day at Kamarpukur I picked some mangoes. I was carrying them home. But I could not walk; I had to stay standing in one place. Then I left the mangoes in a hollow. Only after that could I return home. Well, how do you explain that?"

DOCTOR: "There is a force behind it. Will-force."

M: "He [meaning the Master] says that it is God-force. You say that it is will-force."

MASTER (to the doctor): "Again, I get into such a state of mind that if someone says I am better, I at once feel much better. The other day the brahmani said: 'You are fifty per cent better.' At once I began to dance."

Sri Ramakrishna was much pleased with the physician. He said to him: "You have a very fine nature. There are two characteristics of knowledge: a peaceful nature and absence of pride."

M:. "The doctor has lost his wife."

MASTER (to the doctor): "I say that God can be realized if one feels drawn to Him by the intensity of these three attractions: the child's attraction for the mother, the husband's attraction for the chaste wife, and the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man. "Please cure me of my illness."

The doctor was going to examine the Master's throat Sri Ramakrishna was seated in a chair on the semicircular porch.

eferring to Dr. Sarkar, the Master said: "He is a villain. He pressed my tongue as if I were a cow."

DOCTOR: "He didn't hurt you purposely."

MASTER: "No, he pressed the tongue to make a thorough examination."

Sunday, September 20, 1885

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room, surrounded by devotees. Nava-Gopal, Haralal, Rākhāl, Lātu, and others were present. A goswami who was a musician was also there.

M. arrived with Dr. Rākhāl of Bowbazar. The physician began to examine the Master. He was a stout person and had rather thick fingers.

MASTER (smiling, to the physician): "Your fingers are like a wrestler's. Mahendra Sarkar also examined me. He pressed my tongue so hard that it hurt me. He pressed my tongue the way they press a cow's."

DOCTOR: "I shall not hurt you, sir."

The physician made out his prescription. Sri Ramakrishna was talking.

MASTER (to the devotees): "Well, people ask why, if I am such a holy person, I should be ill."

TĀRAK: "Bbagavan Das Babaji, too, was ill and bed-ridden a long time."

MASTER: "But look at Dr. Madhu. At the age of sixty he carries food to the house of his mistress; and he has no illness."

GOSWAMI: "Sir, your illness is for the sake of others. You take upon yourself the sins of those who come to you. You fall ill because you accept their sins."

A DEVOTEE: "You will soon be cured if only you say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please make me well.' "

Master could not ask God to cure him

MASTER: "I cannot ask God to cure my disease. The attitude of the servant-master relationship is nowadays less strong in me.

Once in a while, I say, 'O Mother, please mend the sheath of the sword a little.' But such prayers are also becoming less frequent. Nowadays I do not find my 'I'; I see that it is God alone who resides in this sheath."

The goswami had been invited to sing kirtan. A devotee asked, "Will there be any kirtan?" Sri Ramakrishna was ill, and all were afraid that the kirtan might throw his mind into ecstasy and thus aggravate the illness.

Sri Ramakrishna said: "Let there be a little singing. All are afraid of my going into ecstasy. Spiritual emotion hurts the throat."

The goswami began the kirtan. Sri Ramakrishna could not control himself.

He stood up and began to dance with the devotees. The physician watched the whole scene.

A hired carriage was waiting for Dr. Rākhāl. He and M. were ready to leave for Calcutta. They saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna said to M. affectionately, "Have you had your meal?"

Thursday, September 24, 1885

It was the night of the full moon. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small couch. He was very ill. M. and some other devotees were sitting on the floor.

MASTER (to M.): "Every now and then I think that the body is a mere pillow-case. The only real substance is the Indivisible Satchidananda.

"When I go into divine ecstasy this illness of the throat remains away from me. I am now somewhat in that mood and so I feel like laughing."

Some ladies of Dwija's family arrived. They saluted the Master and sat on one side. Pointing to one of the ladies, Sri Ramakrishna asked: "Who is this lady? Is it she who brought up Dwija? Why has Dwija bought an ektara?"

M: "It has two strings, sir."

MASTER: "Dwija's father is opposed to his views. Won't other people criticize him? It is wise for him to pray to God secretly."

A picture of Gaurānga and Nitai hung on the wall of the Master's room. It was a picture of the two brothers singing devotional songs with their companions at Navadvip.

RAMLAL (to the Master): "Then may I give him [meaning M.] the picture?"

MASTER: "Yes."

Sri Ramakrishna was then under Dr. Pratap's treatment. He awoke at midnight and felt extremely restless. Harish, his attendant was in the room. Rākhāl also was there. Ramlal was asleep on the verandah. The Master remarked later on: "I was feeling extremely restless. I felt like embracing Harish. They rubbed a little medicinal oil on my head. Then I began to dance."

Chapter 45

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AT SYAMPUKUR

October 18, 1885

THE DOCTORS HAD DEFINITELY diagnosed Sri Ramakrishna's illness as cancer. No proper arrangement for his treatment and nursing could be made at Dakshineswar. He needed the constant attention of a physician, which could not be given at the temple garden. Furthermore, the devotees who lived in Calcutta found it very inconvenient to attend on him daily at Dakshineswar. Therefore the older devotees had rented a small two-storey house in Baghbazar, Calcutta, and had brought the Master there. Sri Ramakrishna, however, had not liked the place and had gone to Balarām's house. In a few days a new house had been engaged in Syampukur, in the northern section of Calcutta, and the Master had been taken there. He had been placed under the treatment of Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarcar. The new building had two large rooms and two smaller ones on the second floor. One of the larger rooms was used as the parlour, and in the other the Master lived. Of the two smaller rooms, one was used as a sleeping-room by the devotees, and the other by the Holy Mother when she came there. Near the exit to the roof was a small, covered, square space, where the Holy Mother stayed during the day and prepared the Master's food.

It was Vijaya day, the fourth day of the worship of Durga, when the image is immersed in water. On that day the Divine Mother returns to Her heavenly abode at Mount Kailas, leaving gloom in the hearts of Her devotees. It was eight o'clock in the morning. The air was chilly. Though ill, Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on his bed. He was like a five year-old child who knows nothing but its mother. NavaGopal, M., and a few other devotees were present.

Master consoles Surendra

Surendra arrived and sat down. The Divine Mother had been worshipped at his house for the past three days. Sri Ramakrishna had not been able to go there on account of his illness, but he had sent some of his disciples. Surendra was in a very unhappy mood because on this day the image of the Mother was to be immersed in the water.

SURENDRA "I had to run away from home."

MASTER (to M.): "What if the image is thrown into the water? May Mother dwell in the heart!"

Surendra was disconsolate. He was crying to the Divine Mother and talking to Her. At this yearning of his beloved disciple Sri Ramakrishna could not control his tears. He looked at M. and said in a choked voice: "What bhakti! Ah, what great love he feels for God!"

MASTER (to Surendra): "Yesterday evening at seven or seven-thirty I saw your worship hall in a vision. I saw the divine image full of effulgence. This place and your hall were joined by a stream of light flowing between them."

SURENDRA "At that time I was crying to the Mother in the worship hall. My elder brothers had gone upstairs. I thought the Mother said, 'I will come again.' "It was about eleven o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna finished his meal. M. poured water into his hand for him to rinse his mouth.

MASTER (to M.): "Rākhāl has indigestion.

Praising the Gitā

It is best to take only sattvic food. Haven't you read about it in the Gitā? Don't you read the Gitā?"

M: "Yes, sir. The Gitā speak of temperance in eating Sattvic food, rajasic food, tamasic food; sattvic kindness, sattvic ego, and so on-all these are described in the Gitā."

MASTER: "Have you a copy of the book?"

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "It contains the essence of all the scriptures."

M: 'The Gitā describes various ways of realizing God. You too say that God can be reached by various paths: knowledge, devotion, work, and meditation."

Secret of karma-yoga

MASTER: "Do you know the meaning of karma yoga? It is to surrender to God the fruit of all action."

M: "Yes, sir, I have read that in the Gitā. It also says that there are three ways of performing action."

MASTER: "What are they?"

M: "First, one may perform karma to attain Jnāna; second, to teach others; third, under the impulse of one's nature."

After rinsing his mouth the Master chewed betel-leaf.

M. and Dr. Sarkar

Sri Ramakrishna was talking with M. about Dr. Sarkar. M. had been at the doctor's house the previous day to report the Master's condition.

MASTER: "What did you talk about?"

M: "There are many books in the doctor's room. I took out one to read, and now and then read a passage aloud to Dr. Sarkar. It was a book by Sir Humphry Davy. He wrote about the necessity of Divine Incarnation."

MASTER: "Indeed! What did you say to the doctor?"

M: "There was one passage that stated that Divine Truth must be made human truth to be appreciated by us; therefore Divine Incarnation is necessary."

MASTER: "Splendid! That's very good."

M: "The author gave the illustration of the sun: one cannot look at the sun, but one can look at its reflected rays."

MASTER: "Very fine. Anything else?"

M: "Another passage stated that real knowledge is faith."

MASTER: "That too is very good. If one has faith one has everything."

M: "The author dreamt of the Roman gods and goddesses."

MASTER: "Do such books really exist? Surely the author was inspired by God. Did you talk of anything else?"

M: "People like Dr. Sarkar speak of doing good to the world. So I told him what you had said about it."

MASTER (smiling): "What did I say?"

M: "About Sambhu Mallick. He had said to you: 'It is my desire to devote my money to the building of schools, hospitals, dispensaries, and the like. That will do good to many.' Thereupon you had said to him, 'Suppose God appears before you; will you then ask Him to build schools, hospitals, and dispensaries?' I told the doctor another thing."

MASTER: 'Those who are born to do work belong to a different class. What else did you say?"

M: "I said to the doctor: 'If your aim is to visit the image of Mother Kāli, what will you gain by spending all your time in giving alms to the poor by the roadside? First you had better somehow visit the image. Afterwards you may give alms to your heart's content."

MASTER: "Did you talk about anything else?"

M: "Yes. I told him that many of those who come to you have conquered lust. Thereupon the doctor replied, 'I too have conquered lust.' I said: 'You are a great man. It is no wonder that you have conquered lust. But the amazing thing is that under his influence

even insignificant creatures have conquered it.' Afterwards I told him what you had said to Girish."

MASTER (smiling): "What did I say?"

M: "You said to Girish, 'The doctor has not been able to surpass you.' You said that with reference to his calling you a Divine Incarnation."

MASTER: "Discuss the doctrine of Divine Incarnation with Dr. Sarkar. He who liberates others is an Incarnation of God. The scriptures speak of ten, of twenty-four, and also of innumerable Incarnations."

M: "Dr.Sarkar is keenly interested in Girish Ghosh. He always asks me whether Girish has given up drinking. He keeps a sharp eye on him."

MASTER: "Did you tell Girish about that?"

M: "Yes, sir, I did. And I also told him about giving up drinking."

MASTER: "What did he say?"

M: "He said: 'Since you all say so, I take your words as the words of the Master himself. But I won't promise anything.' "

MASTER (joyously): "Kalipada told me that he had altogether given up drinking."

It was afternoon. Dr. Sarkar arrived accompanied by his son Amrita and Hem. Narendra and other devotees were present.

Sri Ramakrishna was talking aside to Amrita. He asked him, "Do you meditate?" He further said to him: "Do you know!" what one feels in meditation? The mind becomes like a continuous flow of oil-it thinks of one object only, and that is God. It does not think of anything else."

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to the devotees.

MASTER (to the doctor): "Your son does not believe in the Incarnation of God. That's all right, It doesn't matter if he does not believe in it.

Master praises doctor's son

"Your son is a nice boy. Why shouldn't he be? Does a mango-tree of the fine 'Bombay' variety ever bear Sour mangoes? How firm his faith in God is! That man is a true man whose mind dwells on God. He alone is a man whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened and who is firmly convinced that God alone is real and all else illusory. He does not believe in Divine Incarnation; but what does that matter? It is enough if he believes that God exists, and that all this universe and its living beings are the manifestations of His Power-like a rich man and his garden.

On Divine Incarnation

"Some say that there are ten Divine Incarnations, some twenty-four, while others say that there are innumerable Incarnations. If you see anywhere a special manifestation of God's Power, you may know that God has incarnated Himself there. That is my opinion.

Absolute and Relative

"There is another view, according to which God has become all that you see. It is like a bel-fruit, which consists of three parts: seeds, shell, and flesh. That which is the Absolute has also its relative aspect, and that which is the Relative has also its absolute aspect. You cannot set aside the Absolute and understand just the Relative. And it is only because there is the Relative that you can transcend it step by step and reach the Absolute.

"So long as 'I-consciousness' exists, a man cannot go beyond the Relative. Through meditation he can negate the phenomena, following the process of 'Neti, neti', and reach the Absolute; but nothing can really be denied, as in the instance of the bel-fruit."

DOCTOR: "Quite true."

MASTER: "Kacha had been immersed in nirvikalpa samādhi. When his mind was coming down to the relative plane, someone asked him, 'What do you see now?' Kacha replied: 'I see that the universe is soaked, as it were, in God. Everything is filled with God. It is God alone who has become all that I see. I do not know what to accept and what to reject.'

"In my opinion one should realize both the Nitya and the Lila and then live in the world as the servant of God. Hanuman saw both the Personal God and the formless Reality. He then lived as a devotee of God, as His servant."

M. (to himself): "So we must accept both-the Absolute and the Relative. Since the introduction of the Vedānta philosophy in Germany, some of the European philosophers, too, have been thinking along that line. But the Master says that one cannot realize both the Nitya and the Lila without complete renunciation, that is to say, without totally giving up 'woman and gold'. Such a person must be a true renouncer; he must be totally detached from the world. Here lies the real difference between him and such European philosophers as Hegel"

Dr. Sarkar on Incarnation

In Dr. Sarkar's opinion, God created men and ordained that every soul should make infinite progress. He would not believe that one man was greater than another. That was why he did not believe in the doctrine of Divine Incarnation.

DOCTOR: "I believe in infinite progress. If that is not so, then what is the use of leading a mere five or six years' existence in the world? I would rather hang myself with a rope round my neck.

"Incarnation! What is that? To cower before a man who excretes filth! It is absurd. But if you speak of a man as the reflection of God's Light-yes, that I admit."

GIRISH (smiling): "But you have not seen God's Light."

Dr. Sarkar was hesitating before giving a reply. A friend who sat near him whispered something into his ear.

DOCTOR (to Girish): "You too have not seen anything but a reflection."

GIRISH: "I see It! I see the Light! I shall prove that Sri Krishna is an Incarnation of God or I shall cut out my tongue!"

Futility of discussion

MASTER: "All this is useless talk. It is like the ravings of a delirious patient. A delirious patient says, 'I shall drink a whole tank of water; I shall eat a whole pot of rice.' The physician says: 'Yes, yes. You will have all these. We shall give you whatever you want when you are convalescent.'

"When butter is heated it sizzles and crackles. But all sound comes to a stop when it is thoroughly boiled. As a man's mind is, so is his conception of God. I have seen in rich men's houses portraits of the Queen and other aristocrats. But the devotees keep in their houses pictures of gods and goddesses.

Go beyond knowledge and ignorance

"Lakshmana said, 'O Rāma, even a sage like Vasishthadeva was overcome with grief on account of the death of his sons!' 'Brother,' replied Rāma, 'whoever has knowledge has ignorance also. Whoever is conscious of light is also conscious of darkness. Therefore go beyond knowledge and ignorance.' One attains that state through an intimate knowledge of God. This knowledge is called vijnāna .

"When a thorn enters the sole of your foot you have to get another thorn. You then remove the first thorn with the help of the second Afterwards you throwaway both. Likewise, after removing the thorn of ignorance with the help of the thorn of knowledge, you should throwaway the thorns of both knowledge and ignorance.

"There are signs of Perfect Knowledge. One is that reasoning comes to an end. As I have just said, the butter sizzles and crackles as long as it is not thoroughly boiled."

Doctor: "But can one retain Perfect Knowledge permanently? You say that all is God. Then why have you taken up this profession of a paramahamsa? And why do these people attend on you? Why don't you keep silent?"

MASTER (smiling): "Water is water whether it is still or moves or breaks into waves.

The story of the "Māhut Narayana"

"I must tell you something else. Why should I not listen to the 'mahut Narayana'? The guru had taught his disciple that everything was Narayana. A mad elephant was coming toward the disciple, but he did not move away since he believed the guru's words. He thought that the elephant was Narayana. The mahut shouted to him: 'Get away! Get away!' But the disciple did not move. The elephant picked him up and threw him to the ground. The disciple was not quite dead; when his face was sprinkled with water he regained consciousness. Being asked why he had not moved away, he said: 'why should I? The guru said, "Everything is Narayana."' 'But, my child,' said the Guru, 'Why didn't you listen to the words of the mahut Narayana?'

"It is God who dwells within as the Pure Mind and Pure Intelligence. I am the machine and He is its Operator. I am the house and He is the Indweller. It is God who is the mahut Narayana."

DOCTOR: "Let me ask you something. Why do you ask me to cure your illness?"

MASTER: "I talk that way as long as I am conscious of the 'jar' of the 'ego'. Think of a vast ocean filled with water on all sides. A jar is immersed in it. There is water both inside and outside the jar; but the water does not become one unless the jar is broken. It is God who has kept this 'jar' of the 'ego' in me."

DOCTOR: "What is the meaning of 'ego' and all that you are talking about? You must explain it to me. Do you mean to say that God is playing tricks on us?"

GIRISH: "Sir, how do you know that He is not playing tricks?"

MASTER (smiling): "It is God who has kept this 'ego' in us. All this is His play, His Lila. A king has four sons. They are all princes; but when they play, one becomes a minister, another a police officer, and so on. Though a prince, he plays as a police officer.

(To the doctor) "Listen. If you realize Ātman you will see the truth of all I have said. All doubts disappear after the vision of God."

DOCTOR: "But is it ever possible to get rid of all doubts?"

MASTER: "Learn from me as much as I have told you. But if you want to know more, you must pray to God in solitude. Ask Him why He has so ordained.

"The son of the house can give a beggar only a small measure of rice. But if the beggar asks for his train fare, then the master of the house must be called."

The doctor remained silent.

Master reasons with Dr. Sarkar

MASTER: "Well, you love reasoning. All right. Let us reason a little. Listen. According to the Jnāni there is no Incarnation of God. Krishna said to Arjuna: 'You speak of Me as an

Incarnation of God. Let me show you something. Come with Me.' Arjuna had followed Sri Krishna a short distance, when Sri Krishna asked him, 'What do you see there?' Arjuna replied, 'A big tree with black berries hanging in bunches.' Krishna said, 'Those are not black berries. Go nearer and look at them.' Arjuna went nearer and saw that they were Krishnas hanging in bunches. 'Do you see now', said Krishna, 'how many Krishnas like Me have grown there?'

"Kavirdas said of Krishna, 'He danced like a monkey to the clapping of the gopis!'

"As you go nearer to God you see less and less of His *Upādhis*, His attributes. A devotee at first may see the Deity as the ten-armed Divine Mother; when he goes nearer he sees Her possessed of six arms; still nearer, he sees the Deity as the two-armed Gopala. The nearer he comes to the Deity, the fewer attributes he sees. At last, when he comes into the presence of the Deity, he sees only Light without any attributes.

"Listen a little to the Vedantic reasoning. A magician came to a king to show his magic. When the magician moved away a little, the king saw a rider on horseback approaching him. He was brilliantly arrayed and had various weapons in his hands. The king and the audience began to reason out what was real in the phenomenon before them. Evidently the horse was not real, nor the robes, nor the armour. At last they found out beyond the shadow of a doubt that the rider alone was there. The significance of this is that Brahman alone is real and the world unreal Nothing whatsoever remains if you analyse."

DOCTOR: "I don't object to this."

Illusion persists

MASTER: "But it is not easy to get rid of illusion. It lingers even after the attainment of Knowledge. A man dreamt of a tiger. Then he woke up and his dream vanished. But his heart continued to palpitate.

"Some thieves came to a field. A straw figure resembling a man had been put there to frighten intruders. The thieves were scared by the figure and could not persuade themselves to enter the field. One of them, however, approached and found that it was only a figure made of straw. He came back to his companions and said, 'There is nothing to be afraid of.' But still they refused to go; they said that their hearts were beating fast. Then the daring thief laid the figure on the ground and said, 'It is nothing, it is nothing.' This is the process of 'Neti, neti'."

DOCTOR: "These are fine words."

MASTER (smiling): "What kind of words?"

DOCTOR: "Fine."

MASTER: "Then give me a 'Thank you'." [The Master said the words "thank you" in English.]

DOCTOR: "Don't you know what is in my mind? I go to so much trouble to come and visit you!"

MASTER (smiling): "No, it is not that. Say something for the good of the ignorant. After the death of Ravana , his brother Bibhishana refused to be king of Ceylon! He said: 'O Rāma, I have obtained You. What shall I do with kingship?' Rāma said: 'Bibhishana, be king for the sake of the ignorant, for those who might ask what riches you have gained by serving Me so much. Be king to give them a lesson."

DOCTOR: "Are there such ignorant people here?"

MASTER (smiling): "Oh, yes! Here you will find oysters and snails as well as conchs." (All laugh.)

Doctor Sarkar, who was a homeopath, gave Sri Ramakrishna two globules of medicine. He said, "I am giving you these two globules: one is Purusha and the other is Prakriti." (All laugh,)

MASTER (smiling): "Oh yes, Purusha and Prakriti are always together. Haven't you observed pigeons? The male and female cannot live separately. Wherever Purusha is, there is Prakriti, and wherever Prakriti is, there is Purusha."

It was Vijaya day. Sri Ramakrishna asked Dr. Sarkar to have some refreshments. The devotees served him with sweets.

DOCTOR (while eating): "Now I say 'Thank you' for the sweets; but it is not for your teachings. Why should I give that 'Thank you' in words?"

MASTER (smiling): "The essential thing is to fix the mind on God and to practise meditation a little. What more shall I say? (Pointing to the younger Naren) Look at him. His mind totally merges in God. Those things I was telling you-"

DOCTOR: "Tell the others also."

MASTER: "No, a man should be given food according to his power of digestion. Can all understand what I told you? I cannot talk to everyone as I talked to you. Suppose a mother has bought a fish for the family. All her children have not the same power of digestion. For some she makes pilau and for others she makes stew. These latter have weak stomachs." (All laugh.)

Dr. Sarkar took his leave. It was Vijaya day, when people show their love and respect to their friends and elders with appropriate greetings. The devotees all prostrated themselves before Sri Ramakrishna and took the dust of his feet. Then they embraced one another. Their joy knew no bounds. The Master was seriously ill, but he made them all forget about his illness. The embracing and exchange of greetings continued a long time. The devotees also took light refreshments. The younger Naren, M., and a few other

devotees sat near Sri Ramakrishna. The Master talked to them joyfully. He spoke of Dr.Sarkar.

MASTER: "I shall not have to tell him very much. When the trunk of a tree is cut almost to the other side, the cutter steps aside. A little later the tree falls down of itself."

THE YOUNGER NAREN (smiling): "Here everything is principle!"

MASTER (to M.): "The doctor has already changed a great deal, hasn't he?"

M: "Yes, sir. When he comes here he loses his wits. He never talks about medicine. When we remind him of it, he says: 'Oh, yes, yes! I shall have to give the medicine.' "
Some of the devotees were singing in the parlour. They returned to the Master's room. Sri Ramakrishna said: "I heard your music; but why did you make mistakes in the rhythm? I once heard of a man who was an adept in discord. You sang like him." (All laugh.)

A young man, a relative of the younger Naren, arrived. He was bespectacled and foppishly dressed. Sri Ramakrishna spoke to the younger Naren.

MASTER: "You see, a young man was going along the road. He had put on a pleated shirt. And how he strutted! Now and again he would display the shirt by removing his scarf, and then look around to see if anyone was admiring him. But when he walked you could see that he was knock-kneed. (All laugh.) The peacock displays its feathers; but its feet are very dirty. (All laugh.) The camel is very ugly. Everything about it is ugly."

YOUNG MAN: "But it acts well."

MASTER: "Yes. But it browses on briars. It will continue to eat thorns though its mouth bleeds. The worldly man loses his children and still clamours for more."

October 22, 1885

It was Thursday evening, a few days after the Durga Puja. Sri Ramakrishna sat on his bed in his room on the second floor, with Dr.Sarkar, Ishan, and other devotees. Although Dr.Sarkar was a very busy physician, he would spend a long time-sometimes six or seven hours-in Sri Ramakrishna's company. He had great love for the Master and looked on the devotees as his own kith and kin. A lamp was burning in the room. Moonlight illumined the outside world.

Master praises the true householder

Addressing Ishan, a householder devotee, the Master said: Blessed indeed is the householder who performs his duties in the world, at the same time cherishing love for the Lotus Feet of God. He is indeed a hero. He is like a man who carries a heavy load of two maunds on his head and at the same time watches a bridal procession. One cannot lead such a life without great spiritual power. Again, such a man is like the mudfish, which lives in the mud but is not stained by it. Further, such a householder may be

compared to a waterfowl. It is constantly diving under water; yet, by fluttering its wings only once, it shakes off all trace of wet.

Advice to householders & Necessity of solitude

"But a man must practise some spiritual discipline in order to be able to lead a detached life in the world. It is necessary for him to spend some time in solitude-be it a year, six months, three months, or even one month. In that solitude he should fix his mind on God and pray with a longing heart for love of God. He should also say to himself: 'There is nobody in this world who is my own. Those whom I call my own are here only for two days. God alone is my own. He alone is my all in all. Alas, how shall I realize Him?'

"One can live in the world after acquiring love of God. It is like breaking the jack-fruit after rubbing your hands with oil; the sticky juice of the fruit will not smear them. The world is like water and the mind like milk. If you put milk in water it will mix with the water. But first keep the milk in a quiet place and let it turn into curd. Then from the curd extract butter. That butter you may keep in water; it will not mix with the water, but will float on it.

Example of Janaka

"Some members of the Brahmo Samaj said to me: 'Sir, our attitude toward the world is that of King Janaka. Like him, we want to enjoy the world in a detached spirit.' I said to them: 'To live in the world in a detached spirit is very difficult. By merely saying so you cannot be a King Janaka. How much austerity Janaka practised! How long he remained in one posture, with head down and feet up! You don't have to practise these extreme disciplines. But you need *sādhanā*, you should live in solitude. You may lead the life of a householder after having attained divine knowledge and love in solitude. Milk turns into curd only when it is not disturbed. The curd does not set if the milk is often moved from place to place or is too much disturbed.'

"On account of his detachment from the world Janaka was also known as the 'Videha', that is, one free from consciousness of the body. Though living in the world, he moved about as a jivanmukta, a free soul living in a body. But for most people freedom from body-consciousness is something very far off. Intense spiritual discipline is necessary. "Janaka was a great hero. He fenced with two swords, the one of knowledge and the other of work.

The householder Jnāni and the monk Jnāni

"You may ask, 'Is there any difference between the realizations of two jnanis, one a householder and the other a monk?' The reply is that the two belong to one class. Both of them are jnanis; they have the same experience. But a householder Jnāni has reason to fear. He cannot altogether get rid of his fear as long as he is to live in the midst of 'woman and gold'. If you constantly live in a room full of soot, you are sure to soil your body, be it ever so little, no matter how clever you may be.

"After extracting the butter, if you keep it in a new pot, then there is no chance of its getting spoiled. But if you keep the butter in a pot where curd has been kept, well, then it is doubtful whether it will keep its flavour. (Laughter.)

"When they parch rice, a few grains jump out of the frying-pan to the ground. These are white, like mallika flowers, without the slightest stain on them. But the grains that remain in the pan are also good, though not as immaculate as the fresh mallika flower. They are a little stained. In the same way, if a monk who has renounced the world attains divine wisdom, he appears as spotless as the white flower; but one who stays in the frying-pan of the world after attaining Knowledge may get a little blemish. (All laugh.)

"Once a bhairavi came to King Janaka's court. At the sight of the woman, the king bent his head and cast his eyes to the ground. At this the bhairavi said, 'O Janaka, even now you are afraid of a woman!' Through Perfect Knowledge a man becomes like a child five years old; he does not know the distinction between a man and a woman.

"Although a Jnāni living in the world may have a little blemish, yet this does not injure him. The moon undoubtedly has dark spots, but these do not obstruct its light.

Teaching others after realizing God

"After realizing God, some souls perform work in order to teach men. Janaka, Nārada, and others like them, belong to this group. But one must possess power in order to be able to teach others. The sages of old were busy attaining knowledge for themselves. But teachers like Nārada went about doing good to others. They were real heroes.

"A worthless stick floating on the water sinks under the weight of a bird; but a heavy and substantial log floating on the water can support a cow, a man, or even an elephant. A steamboat not only crosses the water itself but carries many human beings with it. Teachers like Nārada may be compared to the heavy log of wood or the steamboat.

"One man, after eating a tasty morsel, removes every trace of it by wiping his face carefully with a towel, lest anyone should know. (All laugh.) Another, again, having got a mango, not only enjoys it himself but shares it with others.

Knowledge and love of God

"Even after having attained Perfect Knowledge, teachers like Nārada retained love of God in their minds for the welfare of others."

DOCTOR: "Jnāna makes a man speechless. He closes his eyes and sheds tears. Then he needs bhakti."

MASTER: "Bhakti may be likened to a woman who has access to the inner court of a house. Jnāna can go only as far as the outer rooms."

DOCTOR: "All women are not allowed to enter the inner court, for instance, prostitutes. Hence the need of Jnāna."

MASTER: "A man may not know the right path, but if he has bhakti and the desire to know God, then he attains Him through the force of sheer bhakti. Once a sincere devotee set out on a pilgrimage to the temple of Jagannath in Puri. He did not know the way; he went west instead of south. He no doubt strayed from the right path, but he always eagerly asked people the way, and they gave him the right directions, saying, 'This is not the path; follow that one.' At last the devotee was able to get to Puri and worship the Deity. So you see, even if you are ignorant, someone will tell you the way if you are earnest."

DOCTOR: "But the devotee in his ignorance did lose his way."

MASTER: "Yes, such a thing happens, no doubt. But a man reaches the goal in the end."

A DEVOTEE: "Has God a form or is He formless?"

MASTER: "God has form and, again, He is formless. Once upon a time a sannyāsi entered the temple of Jagannath. As he looked at the holy image he debated within himself whether God had a form or was formless. He passed his staff from left to right to feel whether it touched the image. The staff touched nothing. He understood that there was no image before him; he concluded that God was formless. Next he passed the staff from right to left. It touched the image. The sannyāsi understood that God had form. Thus he realized that God has form and, again, is formless.

"But it is extremely difficult to understand this. Naturally the doubt arises in the mind: if God is formless, how then can He have form? Further, if He has a form, why does He have so many forms?"

DOCTOR: "God has created all these forms in the world; therefore He Himself has a form. Again, He has created the mind; therefore He is formless. It is possible for God to be everything."

Personal God and Impersonal Truth

MASTER: "These things do not become clear until one has realized God. He assumes different forms and reveals Himself in different ways for the sake of His devotees. A man kept a solution of dye in a tub. Many people came to him to have their clothes dyed. He would ask a customer, 'What colour should you like to have your cloth dyed?' If the customer wanted red, then the man would dip the cloth in the tub and say, 'Here is your cloth dyed red.' If another customer wanted his cloth dyed yellow, the man would dip his cloth in the same tub and say, 'Here is your cloth dyed yellow.' If a customer wanted his cloth dyed blue, the man would dip it in the same tub and say, 'Here is your cloth dyed blue.' Thus he would dye the clothes of his customers different colours, dipping them all in the same solution. One of the customers watched all this with amazement. The man asked him, 'Well? What colour do you want for your cloth?' The customer said, 'Brother, dye my cloth the colour of the dye in your tub.' (Laughter.)

Illustration of the chameleon

"Once a man went into a wood and saw a beautiful creature on a tree. Later he told a friend about it and said, 'Brother, on a certain tree in the wood I saw a red-coloured creature.' The friend answered: 'I have seen it too. Why do you call it red? It is green.' A third man said: 'Oh, no, no! Why do you call it green? It is yellow.' Then other persons began to describe the animal variously as violet, blue, or black. Soon they were quarrelling about the colour. At last they went to the tree and found a man sitting under it. In answer to their questions he said: 'I live under this tree and know the creature very well. What each of you has said about it is true. Sometimes it is red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow, sometimes blue, and so forth and so on. Again, sometimes I see that it has no colour whatsoever.'

"Only he who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature. He alone knows that God reveals Himself in different forms and different ways that He has attributes and, again, has none. Only the man who lives under the tree knows that the chameleon can assume various colours and that sometimes it remains colourless. Others, not knowing the whole truth, quarrel among themselves and suffer.

Illustration of ice and water

"Yes, God has form and, again, He has none. Do you know how it is? Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, is like a shoreless ocean. In the ocean visible blocks of ice are formed here and there by intense cold. Similarly, under the cooling influence, so to speak, of the bhakti of Its worshippers, the Infinite transforms Itself into the finite and appears before the worshipper as God with form. That is to say, God reveals Himself to His bhaktas as an embodied Person. Again, as, on the rising of the sun, the ice in the ocean melts away, so, on the awakening of Jnāna, the embodied God melts back into the infinite and formless Brahman."

DOCTOR: "Yes. When the sun is up, the ice melts; and what is more, the heat of the sun turns the water into invisible vapour."

MASTER: "Yes, that is true. As a result of the discrimination that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory, the aspirant goes into samādhi. Then, for him, the forms or attributes of God disappear altogether. Then he does not feel God to be a Person. Then he cannot describe in words what God is. And who will describe it? He who is to describe does not exist at all; he no longer finds his 'I'. To such a person Brahman is attributeless. In that state God is experienced only as Consciousness, by man's inmost consciousness. He cannot be comprehended by the mind and intelligence.

"Therefore people compare bhakti, love of God, to the cooling light of the moon, and janana, knowledge, to the burning rays of the sun. I have heard that there are oceans in the extreme north and extreme south where the air is so cold that it freezes the water into huge blocks of ice here and there. Ships cannot move there; They are stopped by the ice."

DOCTOR: "Then in the path of bhakti the aspirant meets with obstacles."

MASTER: "Yes, that is true. But it does not cause the devotee any harm. After all, it is the water of the Ocean of Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, that is frozen into ice. It will not injure you if you continue to reason, saying, for instance, that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. This reasoning will awaken in you Jnāna, which, like the sun, will melt the ice of divine forms back into the infinite Ocean of Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

"I-consciousness"

"In the samādhi that comes at the end of reasoning and discrimination, no such thing as 'I' exists. But it is extremely difficult to attain it; 'I-consciousness' lingers so persistently. That is why a man is born again and again in this world.

Parable of the cow

"The cow suffers so much because she says, 'Hamba! Hamba!', that is, 'I! I!' She is yoked to the plough all day long, rain or shine. Or she is slaughtered by the butcher. But even that doesn't put an end to her misery. The cobbler tans her hide to make shoes from it. At last the carder makes a string for his bow from her entrails and uses the string in carding; then it says, 'Tuhu! Tuhu!', that is, 'Thou! Thou!' Only then does the cow's suffering come to an end.

"Likewise, only when a man says: 'Not I! Not I! I am nobody. O Lord, Thou art the Doer and I am Thy servant; Thou art the Master', is he freed from all sufferings; only then is he liberated."

DOCTOR: "But one must fall into the hands of the carder." (All laugh.)

MASTER: "If this ego cannot be got rid of, then let the rascal remain as the servant of God. (All laugh.)

Harmless and injurious ego & "Ripe ego" and "unripe ego"

"A man may keep this ego even after attaining samādhi. Such a man feels either that he is a servant of God or that he is a lover of God. Sankaracharya retained the 'ego of Knowledge' to teach men spiritual life. The 'servant-ego', the 'Knowledge ego', or the 'devotee ego' may be called the 'ripe ego'. It is different from the 'unripe ego', which makes one feel: 'I am the doer. I am the son of a wealthy man. I am learned. I am rich. How dare anyone slight me?' A man with and 'unripe ego' cherishes such ideas. Suppose a thief has entered such a man's house and stolen some of his belongings. If the thief is caught, all the articles will be snatched away from him. Then he will be beaten. At last he will be handed over to the police. The owner of the stolen goods will say: 'what! This rogue doesn't know whose house he has entered!'

Childlike nature of perfect souls

"After realizing God, a man becomes like a child five years old. The ego of such a man may be called the 'ego of a child', the 'ripe ego'. The child is not under the control of any of the *Gunās*. He is beyond the three *Gunās*. He is not under the control of any of the *Gunās*-sattva, rajas, or tamas. Just watch a child and you will find that he is not under

the influence of tamas. One moment he quarrels with his chum or even fights with him, and the next moment he hugs him, shows him much affection, and plays with him again. He is not even under the control of rajas. Now he builds his play house and makes all kinds of plans to make it beautiful, and the next moment he leaves everything behind and runs to his mother. Again, you see him wearing a beautiful piece of cloth worth five rupees. After a few moments the cloth lies on the ground; he forgets all about it. Or he may carry it under his arm. If you say to the child: 'That's a beautiful piece of cloth. Whose is it?', he answers: 'Why, it is mine. My daddy gave it to me.' You may say, 'My darling, won't you give it to me?' and he will reply: 'Oh no, it is mine. My daddy gave it to me. I won't give it to you.' Some minutes later you may coax him with a toy or a music-box worth a penny, and he will give you the cloth. Again, a child five years old is not attached even to sattva. You may find him today very fond of his playmates in the neighbourhood; he doesn't feel happy for a moment without seeing them; but tomorrow, when he goes to another place with his parents, he finds new playmates; all his love is now directed to his new friends, and he almost forgets about his old ones. Further, a child has no pride of caste or family. If his mother says to him about a certain person, 'This man is your elder brother', he believes this to be one hundred per cent true. One of the two may have been born in a brahmin family and the other may belong to a low caste, say that of the blacksmiths, but they will take their meal from the same plate. A child is beyond all ideas of purity and impurity. He is not bound by social conventions. He doesn't hesitate to come out naked before others.

"Ego of old age"

"Then there is an 'ego of old age'. (Dr. Sarkar laughs.) An old man has many shackles: caste, pride, shame, hatred, and fear. Furthermore, he is bound by the ideas of worldly cleverness, calculating intelligence, and deceit. If he is angry with anybody, he cannot shake it off easily; perhaps he keeps the feeling as long as he lives. Again, there is the 'ego of scholarship' and the 'ego of wealth'. The 'ego of old age' is an 'unripe ego'.

Characteristics of tamas

(To the doctor) "There are a few men who cannot attain knowledge of God: men proud of their scholarship, proud of their education, or proud of their wealth. If you speak to such people about a holy man and ask them to visit him, they make all kinds of excuses and will not go. But in their heart of hearts they think: 'Why, we are big people ourselves. Must we go and visit someone else?'

"A characteristic of tamas is pride. Pride and delusion come from tamas.

"It is said in the Purana that Ravana had an excess of rajas, Kumbhakarna of tamas, and Bibhishana of sattva. That is why Bibhishana was able to receive the grace of Rāma. Another characteristic of tamas is anger. Through anger one loses one's wits and cannot distinguish between right and wrong. In a fit of anger Hanuman set fire to Lanka, without thinking for a moment that the fire might also burn down the hut where Sita lived.

"Still another feature of tamas is lust.

Turn your passions to God

Girindra Ghosh of PathuriaGhata once remarked, 'Since you cannot get rid of your passions-your lust, your anger, and so on-give them a new direction. Instead of desiring worldly pleasures, desire God. Have intercourse with Brahman. If you cannot get rid of anger, then change its direction. Assume the tamasic attitude of bhakti, and say: 'What? I have repeated the hallowed name of Durga, and shall I not be liberated? How can I be a sinner any more? How can I be bound any more?' If you cannot get rid of temptation, direct it toward God. Be infatuated with God's beauty. If you cannot get rid of pride, then be proud to say that you are the servant of God, you are the child of God. Thus turn the six passions toward God."

DOCTOR: "It is very hard to control the sense-organs. They are like restive horses, whose eyes must be covered with blinkers. In the case of some horses it is necessary to prevent them from seeing at all."

MASTER: "A man need not fear anything if but once he receives the grace of God, if but once he obtains the vision of God, if but once he attains Self-Knowledge. Then the six passions cannot do him any harm.

"Eternally perfect souls like Nārada and Prahlada did not have to take the trouble to put blinkers on their eyes. The child who holds his father's hand, while walking along the narrow balk in the paddy-field, may loosen his hold in a moment of carelessness and slip into the ditch. But it is quite different if the father holds the child's hand. Then the child never falls into the ditch."

DOCTOR: "But it is not proper for a father to hold his child by the hand."

MASTER: "It is not quite like that. Great sages have childlike natures. Before God they are always like children. They have no pride. Their strength is the strength of God, the strength of their Father. They have nothing to call their own. They are firmly convinced of that."

DOCTOR: "Can you make a horse move forward without first covering his eyes with blinkers? Can one realize God without first controlling the passions?"

Paths of knowledge and devotion

MASTER: "What you say is according to the path of discrimination. It is known as Jnāna yoga. Through that path, too, one attains God. The jnanis say that an aspirant must first of all purify his heart. First he needs spiritual exercises; then he will attain Knowledge.

"But God can also be realized through the path of devotion. Once the devotee develops love for the Lotus Feet of God and enjoys the singing of His name and attributes, he does not have to make a special effort to restrain his senses. For such a devotee the sense-organs come under control of themselves.

"Suppose a man has just lost his son and is mourning his death. Can he be in a mood to quarrel with others that very day, or enjoy a feast in the house of a friend? Can he, that very day, show his pride before others or enjoy sense pleasures?

"If the moth discovers light, can it remain in darkness any longer?"

DOCTOR (with a smile): "Of course it cannot. It would rather fly into the flame and perish."

MASTER: "Oh no, that's not so. A lover of God does not burn himself to death, like a moth. The light to which he rushes is like the light of a gem. That light is brilliant, no doubt, but it is also cooling and soothing. That light does not scorch his body; it gives him joy and peace.

Difficulty of path of knowledge

"One realizes God by following the path of discrimination and knowledge. But this is an extremely difficult path. It is easy enough to say such things as, 'I am not the body, mind, or intellect; I am beyond grief, disease, and sorrow; I am the embodiment of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute; I am beyond pain and pleasure; I am not under the control of the sense-organs', but it is very hard to assimilate these ideas and practise them. Suppose I see, my hand cut by a thorn and blood gushing out; then it is not right for me to say: 'Why, my hand is not cut by the thorn! I am all right.' In order to be able to say that, I must first of all burn the thorn itself in the fire of Knowledge.

"Many people think they cannot have knowledge or understanding of God without reading books. But hearing is better than reading, and seeing is better than hearing. Hearing about Benares is different from reading about it; but seeing Benares is different from either hearing or reading.

"Those actually engaged in a game of chess do not always judge the moves on the board correctly. The onlookers often judge the moves better than the players. Worldly people often think themselves very intelligent, but they are attached to the things of the world. They are the actual players and cannot understand their own moves correctly. But holy men, who have renounced everything, are unattached to the world; they are really more intelligent than worldly people. Since they do not take any part in worldly life, their position is that of onlookers, and so they see things more clearly."

DOCTOR (to the devotees): "If he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] had studied books he could not have acquired so much knowledge. Faraday communed with nature; that is why he was able to discover many scientific truths. He could not have known so much from the mere study of books. Mathematical formulas only throw the brain into confusion and bar the path of original inquiry."

MASTER: "There was a time when I lay on the ground in the Panchavati and prayed to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, reveal to me what the karmis have realized through their ritualistic worship, what the yogis have realized through yoga, and what the jnanis have

realized through discrimination.' How much I communed with the Divine Mother! How can I describe it all?

"Ah, what a state I passed through! Sleep left me completely."

The Master sang:

My sleep is broken; how can I slumber any more?
For now I am wide awake in the sleeplessness of yoga.
O Divine Mother, made one with Thee in yoga-sleep at last,
My slumber I have lulled asleep for evermore.
A man has come to me from a country where there is no night;
Rituals and devotions have all grown profitless for me.

He continued: "I have not read books. But people show me respect because I chant the name of the Divine Mother. Sambhu Mallick said about me, 'Here is a great hero without a sword or shield!'" (Laughter.)

The conversation turned to the performance of a drama by Girish Ghosh called The Life of Buddha. The doctor had seen the play and been much pleased with it.

DOCTOR (to Girish): "You are a very bad man. Must I go to the theatre every day?"

MASTER (to M.): "What does he say? I don't quite understand."

M: "The doctor liked the play very much."

Discussion about Divine Incarnation

MASTER (to Ishan): "Why don't you say something? (Pointing to the doctor) He does not believe that god can incarnate Himself in a human form."

ISHAN: "What shall I say, sir? I don't like to argue any more."

MASTER (sharply): "Why? Won't you say the right thing?"

ISHAN (to the doctor): "Our faith is shallow on account of our pride. It is said in the Ramayana that a crow named Bhushandi did not at first accept Rāma as an Incarnation of God. Once it incurred Rāma's displeasure. It travelled through the different worlds-the lunar, solar, and so forth-and through Mount Kailas, to escape Rāma's wrath. But it found that it could not escape. Then it surrendered itself to Him and took refuge at His feet. Rāma took the crow in His hand and swallowed it. Thereupon the crow found that it was seated in it's own nest in a tree. After its pride had thus been crushed, the bird came to realize that though Rāma looked like any other man, yet He contained in His stomach the entire universe-sky, moon, sun, stars, oceans, rivers, men, animals, and trees."

MASTER (to the doctor): "It is very difficult to understand that God can be a finite human being and at the same time the all-pervading Soul of the universe. The Absolute

and the Relative are His two aspects. How can we say emphatically with our small intelligence that God cannot assume a human form? Can we ever understand all these ideas with our little intellect? Can a one-seer pot hold four seers of milk?

"Therefore one should trust in the words of holy men and great souls, those who have realized God. They constantly think of God, as a lawyer of his lawsuits. Do you believe the story of the crow Bhushandi?"

DOCTOR: "I accept as much as I want to. All difficulties come to an end if only God reveals His true nature to the seeker. Then there can be no confusion. How can I accept Rāma as an Incarnation of God? Take the example of His killing Vali, the monkey chieftain. He hid Himself behind a tree, like a thief, and murdered Vali. This is how a man acts, and not God."

GIRISH: "But, sir, such an action is possible only for God."

DOCTOR: "Then take the example of His sending Sita into exile."

GIRISH: "This too, sir, is possible only for God, not for man."

ISHAN (to the doctor): "Why don't you believe in the Incarnation of God? Just now you said that God has form since He has created all these forms, and that God is formless since He has created the mind, which is without form. A moment ago you said that everything is possible for God."

MASTER (laughing): "It is not mentioned in his 'science' that God can take human form; so how can he believe it? (All laugh.)

"Listen to a story. A man said to his friend, 'I have just seen a house fall down with a terrific crash.' Now, the friend to whom he told this had received an English education. He said: 'Just a minute. Let me look it up in the newspaper.' He read the paper but could not find the news of a house falling down with a crash. Thereupon he said to his friend: 'Well, I don't believe you. It isn't in the paper; so it is all false.' "(All laugh.)

GIRISH (to the doctor): "You must admit that Krishna is God. I will not let you look on Him as a mere man. You must admit that He is either God or a demon."

MASTER: "Unless a man is guileless, he cannot so easily have faith in God. God is far, far away from the mind steeped in worldliness. Worldly intelligence creates many doubts and many forms of pride-pride of learning, wealth, and the rest. (Pointing to the doctor) But he is guileless.

"How guileless Keshab Sen was! One day he visited the Kāli temple at Dakshineswar. At about four in the afternoon he went around to the guesthouse, where the poor are fed, and asked when the beggars would be fed. He didn't know that it was too late in the day for the feeding of the poor. As a man's faith increases, so does his knowledge of God.

The cow that discriminates too much about food gives milk in dribblets. But the cow that gulps down everything-herbs, leaves, grass, husks, straw-gives milk in torrents. (All laugh.)

Childlike faith

"God cannot be realized without childlike faith. The mother says to her child, pointing to a boy, 'He is your elder brother.' And the child at once believes that the boy is one hundred per cent his brother. Again, the mother says that a bogy man lives in a certain room, and the child believes one hundred per cent that the bogy man lives in the room. God bestows His grace on the devotee who has this faith of a child. God cannot be realized by the mind steeped in worldliness."

DOCTOR (to the devotees): "It is not right, however, to make the cow yield milk by feeding her all sorts of things. One of my cows was fed that way. I drank its milk and the result was that I became seriously ill. At first I was at a loss to know the cause. After much inquiry I found out that the cow had been given the wrong things to eat, I was in a great fix. I had to go to Lucknow for a change to get rid of the illness. I spent twelve thousand rupees. (Roars of laughter.)

"It is very difficult always to find out the precise relationship between cause and effect. A child of seven months, in a wealthy family, had an attack of whooping-cough. I was called in for consultation. Even after much effort I could not find out the cause of the illness. At last I learnt that the child had been given the milk of an ass that had been drenched in the rain." (All laugh.)

MASTER (to the devotees): "How strange! It is like saying that a man has an acid stomach because he passed, in his coach, under a tamarind tree." (All laugh.)

DOCTOR (with a smile): "Let me tell you another. The captain of a ship had a bad headache. After consultation, the doctors on board had a blister applied to the side of the boat." (All laugh.)

MASTER (to the doctor): "For the seekers of God the constant company of holy men is necessary. The disease of worldly people has become chronic, as it were. They should carry out the instruction of holy men. What will they gain by merely listening to their advice? They must not only take the prescribed medicine, but also follow a strict diet. Diet is important."

DOCTOR: "Yes, it is the diet, more than anything else, that causes the cure.

MASTER: "There are three classes of physicians: superior, mediocre, and inferior. The inferior physician feels the patient's pulse, merely asks him to take medicine, and then goes away. He doesn't bother to find out whether the patient has followed his directions. The mediocre physician gently tries to persuade the patient to take the medicine. He says: 'Look here. How can you get well without medicine? Take the medicine, my dear. I am preparing It with my own hands.' But the superior physician follows a different

method. If he finds the patient stubbornly refusing to swallow the medicine, he presses the patient's chest with his knee and forces the medicine down his throat."

DOCTOR: "There is a form of treatment that does not require the physician to press the patient's chest with his knee. For instance, homeopathy."

MASTER: "There is no fear if a good physician presses the patient's chest with his knee.

Three classes of teachers

"Like the physicians, there are three classes of religious teachers. The inferior teacher is content with merely giving spiritual instruction; he doesn't bother about the student after that. The mediocre teacher explains the teaching again and again for the good of the student, that he may assimilate it; he persuades the student through love and kindness to follow it. But the superior teacher uses force, if necessary, on the stubborn student.

(To the doctor) "The renunciation of 'woman and gold' is meant for the sannyāsi. He must not look even at the picture of a woman. Do you know what a woman is to a man? She is like spiced pickle. The very thought of pickle brings water to the tongue; it doesn't have to be brought near the tongue.

Advice to householders

"But this renunciation is not meant for householders like you. It is meant only for sannyāsis. You may live among women, as far as possible in a spirit of detachment. Now and then you must retire into solitude and think of God. Women must not be allowed there. You can lead an unattached life to a great extent if you have faith in God and love for Him. After the birth of one or two children a married couple should live as brother and sister. They should then constantly pray to God that their minds may not run after sense pleasures any more and that they may not have any more children."

GIRISH (to the doctor, with a smile): "You have already spent three or four hours here. What about your patients?"

DOCTOR: "Well, my practice and patients! I shall lose everything on account of your paramahamsa!" (All laugh.)

MASTER: "There is a river called the 'Karmanasa'. It is very dangerous to dive into that river. If a man plunges into its waters he cannot perform any more action. It puts an end to his duties." (All laugh.) .

DOCTOR (to Girish, M., and the other devotees): "My friends, consider me as one of you. I am not saying this as a physician. But if you think of me as your own, then I am yours."

MASTER (to the doctor): "There is such a thing as love for love's sake. It is very good if one can grow such love. Prahlada loved God for the sake of love. A devotee like Prahlada

says: 'O God, I do not want wealth, fame, creature comforts, or any such thing. Please grant me the boon that I may have genuine love for Thy Lotus Feet."

DOCTOR: "You are right, sir. I have seen people bowing down before the image of Kāli They seek worldly objects from the Goddess, such as a job, the healing of disease, and so forth.

(To the Master) "The illness you are suffering from does not permit the patient to talk with people. But my case is an exception. You may talk with me when I am here." (All laugh.)

MASTER; "Please cure my illness. I cannot chant the name and glories of God."

DOCTOR; "Meditation is enough."

MASTER: "What do you mean? Why should I lead a monotonous life? I enjoy my fish in a variety of dishes: curried fish, fried fish, pickled fish, and so forth! Sometimes I worship God with rituals, sometimes I repeat His name, sometimes I meditate on Him, sometimes I sing His name and glories, sometime I dance in His name."

DOCTOR: "Neither am I monotonous."

MASTER: "Your son Amrita does not believe in the Incarnation of God. What is the harm in that? One realizes God even if one believes Him to be formless. One also realizes God if one believes that God has form.

Faith and self-surrender

Two things are necessary for the realization of God; faith and self-surrender. Man is ignorant by nature. Errors are natural to him. Can a one-seer pot hold four seers of milk? Whatever path you may follow, you must pray to God with a restless heart. He is the Ruler of the soul within. He will surely listen to your prayer if it is sincere. Whether you follow the ideal of the Personal God or that of the Impersonal Truth, you will realize God alone, provided you are restless for Him. A cake with icing tastes sweet whether you eat it straight or sidewise.

"Your son Amrita is a nice boy."

DOCTOR: "He is your disciple."

MASTER (with a smile): "There is not a fellow under the sun who is my disciple. On the contrary, I am everybody's disciple. All are the children of God. All are His servants. I too am a child of God. I too am His servant. 'Uncle Moon' is every child's uncle!"

Chapter 46

THE MASTER AND DR. SARKAR

Friday, October 23, 1885

IT WAS THE DAY of the full moon following the Durga Puja, the worship of the Divine Mother. At ten o'clock in the morning Sri Ramakrishna was talking to M., who was helping him with his socks.

MASTER (smiling): "Why can't I cut my woolen scarf into two pieces and wrap them around my legs like socks? They will be nice and warm."

M. Smiled. The previous evening Sri Ramakrishna had had a long conversation with Dr. Sarkar. Referring to it, the Master said laughingly, "I told him the story of the calf, and about egotism being the cause of all suffering."

The younger Naren reminded Sri Ramakrishna that he, the Master, had told the doctor about people's suffering from the threefold misery of the world and still bragging of their well-being. The disciple said, "That was very nice thing you said yesterday about the thorn, and also about burning it in the fire of Knowledge."

Master's visions

MASTER: "I had direct visions of those things. One day, I was passing back of the Kuthi when my whole body burst into flames, as it were, like the fire in a homa. Padmalochan once said to me, 'I shall convene an assembly of pundits and proclaim your spiritual experiences before all.' But he died shortly after."

The doctor and M.

At eleven o'clock M. went to Dr. Sarkar's house to report Sri Ramakrishna's condition. The doctor showed great eagerness to hear about him.

DOCTOR (laughing): "How well I told him yesterday that in order to be able to say 'Tuhu! Tuhu!', 'Thou! Thou!', one must fall into the hands of an expert carder!"

M: "It is true, sir. One cannot get rid of egotism without the help of a capable teacher. How well he spoke last night of bhakti! Bhakti, like a woman, can go into the inner court."

DOCTOR: "Yes, that is very nice. But still one cannot give up Jnāna."

M: "But he does not say that. He accepts both knowledge and love, the Impersonal Truth and the Personal God. He says that through the cooling influence of bhakti a part of the Reality takes the solid form of the Personal God; and with the rise of the sun of Jnāna, the ice of form melts again into the formless water of the Absolute. In other words, you realize God with form through bhaktiyoga, and the formless Absolute through Jnāna yoga.

"You must have noticed that he sees God so near him that he always converses with Him. When suffering from illness, he says to God, like a small child, 'Oh, Mother, it is hurting me!'

Influence of holy company

"How wonderful his power of observation is! He saw a fossil in the museum. At once he gave it as an example of the effect of companionship with holy persons. Just as an object is turned into stone by remaining near stone, so does a man become holy by living with a holy man."

DOCTOR: "Yesterday Ishan Babu talked of the Incarnation of God. What is that? To call man God!"

M: "Everyone has his own faith. What is the use of interfering with it?"

DOCTOR: "Yes, what is the use?"

M: "How the Master made us laugh when he told us about a certain man who refused to believe that a house had collapsed, because it was not published in the news paper!"

Doctor Sarkar remained silent. Sri Ramakrishna had said to him, "Your 'science' does not speak of God's Incarnation; therefore you say that God cannot incarnate Himself as man."

It was midday. Doctor Sarkar took M. with him in his carriage. He was going to visit Sri Ramakrishna after seeing his other patients.

A few days before, at Girish's invitation, Doctor Sarkar had seen his play about Buddha's life. He said to M.: "It would have been better to speak of Buddha as the Incarnation of Compassion. Why did he speak of him as an Incarnation of Vishnu?"

The doctor set M. down at the corner of Cornwallis Square.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon. One or two devotees were seated near Sri Ramakrishna. He became impatient, like a child. Repeatedly he asked the devotees, "When is the doctor coming?" "What time is it now?" Doctor Sarkar was expected in the evening.

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna was overwhelmed with a strange mood. He placed his pillow on his lap. Filled with maternal love, he began to caress it and hold it to his breast as if it were his child. He was in an ecstatic mood. His face was lighted with a childlike smile. He put on his cloth in a strange manner. The devotees looked at him in amazement.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna was in his normal mood. It was time for his meal. He ate a little boiled farina.

He was talking to M. about his mystic experiences.

Master's mystic experiences

MASTER (to M., aside): "Do you know what I saw just now in my ecstatic state? There was a meadow covering an area of seven or eight miles, through which lay the road to Sihore. I was alone in that meadow. I saw a sixteen year-old paramahamsa boy exactly like the one I had seen in the Panchavati.

"A mist of bliss lay all around. Out of it emerged a boy thirteen or fourteen years old. I saw his face. He looked like Purna. Both of us were naked. Then we began to run around joyfully in the meadow. Purna felt thirsty. He drank some water from a tumbler and offered me what was left. I said to him, 'Brother, I cannot take your leavings.' Thereupon he laughed, washed the glass, and brought me fresh water."

Sri Ramakrishna was again in samādhi. He regained consciousness and began to talk to M.

MASTER: "My mind is undergoing a change. I cannot take prasad any more. The Real and the Appearance are becoming one to me. Do you know what I saw just now? A divine form-a vision of the Divine Mother. She had a child in Her womb. She gave birth to it and the next instant began to swallow it; and as much of it as went into Her mouth became void. It was revealed to me that everything is void. The Divine Mother said to me, as it were: 'Come confusion! Come delusion! Come!'

This reminded M. of Sri Ramakrishna's saying that the magician alone is real and all else unreal.

MASTER: "Well, how is it that the other time I tried to attract Purna but failed? This weakens my faith a little."

M: "But to attract a person is to work a miracle."

MASTER: "Yes, a downright miracle."

About miracles

M: "You remember, one day we were returning to Dakshineswar in a carriage from Adhar's house, when a bottle broke. One of us said to you: 'Does this mean that any harm will befall us? What do you think?' You said: 'what do I care? Why should I bother about it? That would be miracle working.'"

MASTER: "Yes, people lay ailing children down on the ground where men chant the name of God, in order that they may be cured; or people cure disease through occult powers. All this is miracle-working. Only those whose spiritual experience is extremely shallow call on God for the healing of disease."

It was evening. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on his bed, thinking of the Divine Mother and repeating Her hallowed name. The devotees sat near him in silence. Lātu, Śaśi, Sarat, the younger Naren, Paltu, Bhupati, Girish, and others were present. Ramtaran of

the Star Theatre had come with Girish to entertain Sri Ramakrishna with his singing. A few minutes later Dr. Sarkar arrived.

DOCTOR (to the Master): "I was much worried about you last night at three o'clock. It was raining. I said to myself, 'Who knows whether or not the doors and windows of his room are shut?' "

"Really?" said Sri Ramakrishna. He was much pleased at the doctor's love and thoughtfulness for him.

Soul is different from body

MASTER: "As long as there is the body, one should take care of it. But I find that the body is quite separate from the Self. When a man rids himself entirely of his love for 'woman and gold', then he clearly perceives that the body is one thing and the Self another. When the milk inside the coconut is all dried up, then the kernel becomes separated from the shell; you feel the kernel rattling inside when you shake the coconut. Or it is just like a sword and its sheath. The sword is one thing and the sheath is another.

"Therefore I cannot speak much to the Divine Mother about the illness of the body."

GIRISH (to the devotees): "Pundit Shashadhar said to him [meaning the Master]: 'Please bring your mind to bear on the body during samādhi. That will cure your illness.' And he, the Master, saw in a vision that the body was nothing but a loose mass of flesh and bones."

MASTER: "Once, a long time ago, I was very ill. I was sitting in the Kāli temple. I felt like praying to the Divine Mother to cure my illness, but couldn't do so directly in my own name. I said to Her, 'Mother, Hriday asks me to tell You about my illness.' I could not proceed any farther. At once there flashed into my mind the Museum of the Asiatic Society, and a human skeleton strung together with wire. I said to Her, 'Please tighten the wire of my body like that, so that I may go about singing Your name and glories.' It is impossible for me to ask for occult powers.

"At first Hriday asked me-I was then under his control-to pray to the Mother for powers. I went to the temple. In a vision I saw a widow thirty or thirty-five years old, covered with filth. It was revealed to me that occult powers are like that filth. I became angry with Hriday because he had asked me to pray for powers."

Ramtaran began to sing:

Behold my vina, my dearly beloved,
My lute of sweetest tone;
If tenderly you play on it,
The strings will waken, at your touch,
To rarest melodies.
Tune it neither low nor high,

And from it in a hundred streams
The sweetest sound will flow;
But over-slack the strings are mute,
And over-stretched they snap in twain.

DOCTOR (to Girish): "Is it an original song?"

GIRISH: "No, it is an adaptation from Edwin Arnold."

Ramtaran sang from the play, The Life of Buddha:

We moan for rest, alas! but rest can never find;
We know not whence we come, nor where we float away.
Time and again we tread this round of smiles and tears;
In vain we pine to know whither our pathway leads,
And why we play this empty play.

We sleep, although awake, as if by a spell bewitched;
Will darkness never break into the light of dawn?
As restless as the wind, life moves unceasingly:
We know not who we are, nor whence it is we come;
We know not why we come, nor where it is we drift;
Sharp woes dart forth on every side.
How many drift about, now gay, now drowned in tears!
One moment they exist; the next they are no more.
We know not why we come, nor what our deeds have been,
Nor, in our bygone lives, how well we played our parts;

Like water in a stream, we cannot stay at rest;
Onward we flow for evermore.
Burst Thou our slumber's bars, O Thou that art awake!
How long must we remain enmeshed in fruitless dreams?
Are you indeed awake? Then do not longer sleep!
Thick on you lies the gloom fraught with a million woes.
Raise, dreamer, from your dream, and slumber not again!
Shine forth, O Shining One, and with Thy shafts of light
Slay Thou the blinding dark! Our only Saviour Thou!
We seek deliverance at Thy feet.

As Sri Ramakrishna listened to the song, he went into samādhi.

Ramtaran sang again:

Blow, storm! Rage and roar! . . .

When the song was over, Sri Ramakrishna said to the singer: "What is this? Why this decoction of bitter neem-leaves after the rice pudding? The moment you sang, *Shine*

forth, O Shining One, and with Thy shafts of light; Slay Thou the blinding dark!, I had a vision of the Sun. As He arose, the darkness vanished, and all men took refuge at His feet."

Ramtaran sang again:

O Mother, Saviour of the helpless, Thou the Slayer of sin!
In Thee do the three Gunās dwell-sattva, rajas, and tamas.
Thou dost create the world: Thou dost sustain it and destroy it;
Binding Thyself with attributes, Thou yet transcendest them;
For Thou, O Mother, art the All.
Kāli Thou art, and Tara, and Thou the Ultimate Prakriti;
Thou art the Fish, the Turtle, the Boar, and all other Avatars
Earth, water, air, and fire art Thou, and Thou the sky,
O Mother of the Absolute!

The Samkhya, Patanjala, Mimamsaka, and Nyaya
For ever seek to fathom Thee and know Thine inmost nature;
Vedānta and Vaiseshika are searching after Thee;
But none of them has found Thee out.
Though free of limitations, beginningless and without end,
Yet for Thy loving bhaktas' sake Thou wearest varying forms.
The terrors of this world Thou dost remove, and Thou dost dwell
Alike in present, past, and future.

Thou dost appear with form, to him who loves Thee as a Person;
Thou art the Absolute, to him who worships formless Truth.
Some there are who speak alone of the resplendent Brahman;
Even this, O Blissful Mother, is nothing else but Thee!
Each man, according to his measure, makes his image of the Truth,
Calling it the Highest Brahman.
Beyond this does Turiya shine, the Indescribable:
O Mother of all things, who dost pervade the universe,
Everyone of these art Thou!

Then he sang:

Dear friend, my religion and piety have come to an end:
No more can I worship Mother Syama; my mind defies control.
Oh, shame upon me! Bitter shame!
I try to meditate on the Mother with sword in hand,
Wearing Her garland of human heads;
But it is always the Dark One, wearing His garland of wild

wood - flowers
And holding the flute to His tempting lips,
That shines before my eyes.

I think of the Mother with Her three eyes, but alas! I see
Him alone with the arching eyes, and I forget all else!
Oh, shame upon me! Bitter shame!
I try to offer fragrant flowers at the Mother's feet,
But the ravishing thought of His graceful form unsettles my helpless mind,
And all my meditations meant for the Naked One are drawn away
By the sight of His yellow scarf.

Sri Ramakrishna was in an ecstatic mood, as he listened to the song. The musician sang again:

O Mother, who has offered these red hibiscus flowers at Thy feet?
I beg of Thee, O Mother, place one or two upon my head.
Then I shall cry aloud to Thee, "Oh, Mother! Mother!"
And I shall dance around Thee and clap my hands for joy,
And Thou wilt look at me and laugh, and tie the flowers in my hair.

The singing was over. Many of the devotees were in a rapturous mood. There was a deep silence in the room.

Guilelessness of the young devotees

The younger Naren was absorbed in meditation. He sat like a stump. Pointing him out to the doctor, Sri Ramakrishna said, "A very pure soul, unstained by the slightest touch of worldliness.

MANOMOHAN (to the doctor): "He (pointing to the Master) says of your son, 'I don't care for the father if I have the son.' "

DOCTOR: "Ah, you see! That is why I say that you forget everything else when you have the 'Son'."

MASTER (smiling): "I don't say that I do not want the Father."

DOCTOR: "Yes, I understand you. How can you save your face unless you say a few things like that?"

MASTER: "Your boy is quite guileless. One day Sambhu's face became red as he said, 'God will surely listen to a man's prayer if he prays to Him with sincerity.'

"Why am so fond of the boys? They are like unadulterated milk: only a little boiling is needed. Moreover It can be offered to the Deity. But milk adulterated with water needs much boiling. It consumes a large quantity of fuel.

"The boys are like fresh earthen pots, good vessels in which one can keep milk without any worry. Spiritual instruction arouses their inner consciousness without delay. But it is not so with the worldly-minded. One is afraid to keep milk in a pot that has been used for curd. The milk may turn sour.

"Your boy is still free from worldliness, untouched by 'woman and gold'."

DOCTOR: "That is because he is living on his father's earnings. I should love to see how free he would keep himself from worldliness if he had to earn his own livelihood."

MASTER: "Yes, yes. That is true. But God is far, far away from the worldly-minded. For those who have renounced the world He is in the palm of the hand.

(To Dr. Sarkar and Dr. Dukari) "But renunciation of 'woman and gold' is not meant for you. You may renounce these mentally. That is why I said to the goswamis: 'Why do you speak of renunciation?' That will not do for you. You have to attend the daily worship of Syamasundar.'

Hard rules for sannyāsis

"Total renunciation is for sannyāsis. They must not look even at the picture of a woman. To them a woman is poison. They must keep themselves at least ten cubits away from her; and if that is not possible, at least one cubit. And they must not talk much with a woman, no matter how devout she may be. Further, they should choose their dwelling at a place where they will never, or scarcely ever, see the face of a woman.

"Money, too, is like poison to a sannyāsi. If he keeps money with him, he has worries, pride, anger, and the desire for physical comforts. Money inflames his rajas, which brings tamas in its train. Therefore a sannyāsi must not touch 'gold'. 'Woman and gold' makes him forget God.

"For householders money is a means of getting food, clothes, and a dwelling place, worshipping the Deity, and serving holy men and devotees.

"It is useless to try to hoard money. With great labour the bees build a hive; but a man breaks it and takes the honey away."

DOCTOR: "Whom shall we hoard for?- For a wicked son, perhaps."

MASTER: "It is not a wicked son alone. Perhaps the wife is unchaste. She may have a secret lover. Perhaps she will give him your watch and chain!

"You should not renounce woman, completly. It is not harmful for a householder to live with his wife. But after the birth of one or two children, husband and wife should live as brother and sister.

"Woman and gold"
"It is attachment to 'woman and gold' that begets pride of learning, pride of money, and pride of social position.

"One cannot attain divine knowledge till one gets rid of pride. Water does not stay on the top of a mound; but into low land it flows in torrents from all sides."

DOCTOR: "But the water that flows into the low land from all sides contains good water and bad water, muddy water and ditch-water. Again, there are hollows on mountain-tops as well, as at Nainital and Manasoravar. These contain only Pure water from the sky."

MASTER; "Only pure water from the sky-that is good!"

DOCTOR: "Further, from an elevated place the water can be distributed on all sides."

MASTER (smiling): "A certain man came to possess a siddha mantra. He then went to the top of a hill and cried aloud. 'Repeat this mantra and you will realize God.'"

DOCTOR: "Yes."

MASTER: "But you must remember one thing. When his soul feels restless for God, a man forgets the difference between good water and ditch-water. In order to know God, he sometimes goes to good men, sometimes to imperfect men. Dirty water cannot injure an aspirant if God's grace descends on him. When God grants him Knowledge, He reveals to the aspirant what is good and what is bad.

"There may be hollows on the top of a hill, but they cannot exist on the hill of the 'wicked ego'. Only if it is an 'ego of Knowledge' or an 'ego of bhakti', does the pure water from the sky collect there.

"It is true that the water from a hill-top may flow in all directions, but that is possible only from the hill of the 'ego of Knowledge'.

Preaching without God's command
"One cannot teach men without the command of God. After attaining Knowledge, Sankaracharya retained the 'ego of Knowledge' in order to teach mankind. But to lecture without realizing God! What good will that do?

"I went to the Nandanbagan Brahmo Samaj. After the worship the preacher gave a lecture from the raised platform. He had written it at home. As he read from the manuscript he looked around. While meditating he opened his eyes from time to time to look at people.

Confusion of mere scholars

"The instruction of a man who has not seen God does not produce the right effect. He may say one thing rightly, but he becomes confused about the next.

"Samadhyayi delivered a lecture. He said: 'God is beyond words and mind; He is dry. Worship Him through the bliss of your love and devotion.' Just see, he thus described God, whose very nature is Joy and Bliss! What will such a lecture accomplish? Can it teach people anything? Such a lecturer is like the man who said, 'my uncle's cow-shed is full of horses.' Horses in the cow-shed! (All laugh.) From that you can understand that there were no horses at all."

DOCTOR (smiling): "Nor cows either!" (All laugh.)

In the mean time the devotees who had been in a rapturous state had regained their normal mood. The doctor was highly pleased with them and asked M. about them. M. introduced to him Paltu, the younger Naren, Bhupati, Sarat, Śaśi, and the other youngsters. About Śaśi, M. said, "He is going to appear for the B.A. examination."

The doctor was a little inattentive.

MASTER (to the doctor): "Look here! Listen to what he is saying."

The doctor heard from M. about Śaśi.

MASTER (to the doctor, pointing to M.): "He instructs the school-boys."

DOCTOR: "So I have heard."

MASTER: "I am unlettered and yet educated people come here. How amazing! You must admit that it is the play of God."

It was nine o'clock in the evening. The doctor had been sitting there since six o'clock, watching all these things.

GIRISH (to the doctor): "Well, sir, does it ever happen to you that, though you do not intend to come here, you are drawn as if by a subtle force? I feel that way; that is why I am asking you."

DOCTOR: "I don't know whether I feel that. But the heart alone knows the promptings of the heart. (To Sri Ramakrishna) Besides, there isn't much use in speaking about it."

October 24, 1885

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the second floor of the house at Syampukur. Dr. Sarkar, Narendra, Mahimacharan, M., and other devotees were in the room. Referring to the homeopathic system of medicine, the Master said to Dr. Sarkar, "This treatment of yours is very good."

DOCTOR: "According to homeopathy the physician has to check up the symptoms of the disease with the medical book. It is like Western music. The singer follows the score.

"Where is Girish Ghosh? Never mind. Don't trouble him. He didn't sleep last night."

Dr. Sarkar explains samādhi

MASTER: "Well, when I am in samādhi I feel intoxicated as if I were drunk with siddhi. What have you to say about that?"

DOCTOR (to M.): "In that state the nerve centres cease to function. Hence the limbs become numb. Again, the legs totter because all the energy rushes toward the brain. Life consists of the nervous system. There is a nerve centre in the nape of the neck called the medulla oblongata. If that is injured, one may die."

Mahima Chakravarty began to describe the Kundalini. He said: "The Sushumna nerve runs through the spinal cord in a subtle form. None can see it. That is what Śiva says."

DOCTOR: "Śiva examined man only in his maturity. But the Europeans have examined man in all stages of his life from the embryo to maturity. It is good to know comparative history. From the history of the Sonthals one learns that Kāli was a *Santhāl* woman. She was a valiant fighter. (All laugh.)

"Don't laugh, please. Let me tell you how greatly the study of comparative anatomy has benefited men. The difference between the actions of the pancreatic juice and bile was at first unknown. But later Claude Bernard examined the stomach, liver, and other paits of the rabbit and demonstrated that the action of bile is different from the action of the pancreatic juice. Therefore It stands to reason that we should watch the lower animals as well. The study of man alone is not enough.

"Similarly, the study of comparative religion is highly beneficial.

"Why do his [meaning the Master's] words go straight to our hearts? He has experienced the truths of different religions. He himself has practised the disciplines of the Hindu, Christian, Musslman, Sakta, and Vaishnava religions. The bees can make good honey only if they gather nectar from different flowers."

M. (to Dr. Sarkar): "He (pointing to Mahimacharan) has studied science a great deal"

DOCTOR (smiling): "What science? Do you mean Max Muller's Science of Religion?"

MAHIMA (to the Master): "You are ill. But what can the doctor do about it? When I heard of your illness, I thought that you were only going to pamper the doctor's pride."

MASTER (pointing to Dr. Sarkar): "But he is a very good physician. He is very learned too."

MAHIMA: "Yes, sir. He is a ship and we are only small boats."

Dr. Sarkar folded his hands in humility.

MAHIMIA: "But here in the Master's presence all are equal"

Narendra's music

Sri Ramakrishna asked Narendra to sing. Narendra sang:

I have made Thee, O Lord, the Pole-star of my life;
No more shall I lose my way on the world's trackless sea. . . .

Then he sang:

Ever insane with pride am I, and many the cravings of my heart! . . .

He sang again:

This universe, wondrous and infinite,
O Lord, is Thy handiwork;
And the whole world is a treasure house
Full of Thy beauty and grace.

Narendra continued:

O Father of the Universe, upon Thy lofty throne,
Thou dost enjoy the music of the worlds,
As Thy creation's praise they sweetly sing.
Behold, I too, though born of earth, have come with feeble voice
Before the portal of Thy House.
I seek alone Thy vision, Lord! I crave no other boon.
Here I have come to sing my song for Thee;
From a far comer of the mighty throng
Where sun and moon are hymning Thee, I too would sing Thy praise:
This is Thy lowly servant's prayer.

He sang another song:

O King of Kings, reveal Thyself to me!
I crave Thy mercy. Cast on me Thy glance!
At Thy dear feet I dedicate my life,
Seared in the fiery furnace of this world.
My heart, alas, is deeply stained with sin;
Ensnared in māyā, I am all but dead.
Compassionate Lord! Revive my fainting soul
With the life-giving nectar of Thy grace.

Again:

Be drunk, O mind, be drunk with the Wine of Heavenly Bliss!
Roll on the ground and weep, chanting Hari's sweet name! . . .

MASTER: "And sing that one- *'All that exists art Thou.'*

DOCTOR: "Ah!"

Narendra sang:

I have joined my heart to Thee: all that exists art Thou;
Thee only have I found, for Thou art all that exists. .. . .

The singing was over. Dr. Sarkar sat there almost spellbound. After a time, with folded hands, he said very humbly to Sri Ramakrishna: "Allow me to take my leave now. I shall come again tomorrow."

MASTER: "Oh, stay a little. Girish Ghosh has been sent for. (Pointing to Mahima) He is a scholar, yet he dances in the name of Hari. He has no pride. He went to Konnagar just because we were there. He is wealthy; he is free; he serves nobody. (Pointing to Narendra) What do you think of him?"

DOCTOR: "Excellent!"

MASTER (pointing to a devotee): "And him?"

DOCTOR: "Splendid!"

MAHlMA: "It can by no means be said that one knows philosophy unless one has read Hindu philosophy. The European philosophers do not know the twenty-four cosmic principles of the Samkhya philosophy. They cannot even grasp them."

Mahima's three paths

MASTER (smiling): "What are the three paths you speak of?"

MAHIMA: "The path of Sat, which is the path of knowledge. Next, the path of Chit, of yoga, of karma yoga, which includes the duties and functions of the four stages of life. Last, the path of Ānanda, the path of devotion and ecstatic love. You are an adept in all three paths; you can speak of them all with authority."

Sri Ramakrishna laughed.

Dr. Sarkar took his leave. It was evening, the first night after the full moon. Sri Ramakrishna stood up, lost in samādhi. Nityagopal stood beside him in a reverent attitude.

Sri Ramakrishna took his seat. Nityagopal was stroking his feet. Devendra, Kalipada, and many other devotees were seated by his side.

MASTER (to the devotees): "My mind tells me that Nityagopal's present state will undergo a change. His entire mind will be concentrated on me-on Him who dwells in me. Don't you see how Narendra's whole mind is being drawn toward me?" Many of the devotees were taking their leave. Sri Ramakrishna stood up.

On japa

Referring to japa, he said to a devotee: "Japa means silently repeating God's name in solitude. When you chant His name with single-minded devotion you can see God's form and realize Him. Suppose there is a piece of timber sunk in the water of the Ganges and fastened with a chain to the bank. You proceed link by link, holding to the chain, and you dive into the water and follow the chain. Finally you are able to reach the timber. In the same way, by repeating God's name you become absorbed in Him and finally realize Him."

KALIPADA (smiling, to the devotees): "Ours is a grand teacher! We are not asked to practise meditation, austerity, and other disciplines."

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna said, "This is troubling me." The Master's throat was hurting him. Devendra said, "Your words cannot fool us any more." He thought that the Master feigned illness to hoodwink the devotees.

Most of the devotees departed. It was arranged that a few of the younger men should stay to nurse the Master by turns. M. also was going to spend the night there.

Sunday, October 25,1885

It was about half past six in the morning when M. arrived at Syampukur and asked Sri Ramakrishna about his health. He was on his way to Dr. Sarkar to report the Master's condition. The Master said to M: 'Tell the doctor that during the early hours of the morning my mouth becomes filled with water and I cough. Also ask him if I may take a bath."

After seven o'clock M. came to Dr. Sarkar's house and told him about the Master's condition. The physician's old teacher and one or two friends were in the room. Dr. Sarkar said to his teacher, "Sir, I have been thinking of the Paramahamsa since three in the morning. I couldn't sleep at all. Even now he is in my mind."

One of the doctor's friends said to him: "Sir, I hear that some speak of the Paramahamsa as an Incarnation of God. You see him every day. How do you feel about it?"

DOCTOR: "I have the greatest regard for him as a man."

M. (to the doctor's friend): "It is very kind of Dr. Sarkar to treat him."

DOCTOR. "Kindness? What do you mean?"

M: "Not toward him, but toward us."

DOCTOR: "You see, you don't know my actual loss on account of the Paramahamsa, Every day I fail to see two or three patients. When the next day I go to their houses, of my own accord, I cannot accept any fee since I am seeing them without being called. How can I charge them for my visit?"

Dr. Sarkar on Mahima

The conversation turned to Mahima Chakravarty. He had been with the Master when Dr. Sarkar had visited him the previous Saturday. Pointing to the doctor, Mahima had said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Sir, you yourself have created this disease in order to pamper the doctor's pride."

M. (to the doctor): "Mahima Chakravarty used to come to your place to attend your lectures on medical science."

DOCTOR: "Is that so? How full of tamas he is! Didn't you notice it? I saluted him as 'God's Lower Third'. There exist in God sattva, rajas, and tamas. Tamas is the third and an inferior quality. Didn't you hear him say to the Paramahamsa, 'You yourself have created this disease in order to pamper the doctor's pride'?"

M: "Mahima Chakravarty believes that the Paramahamsa can cure his disease himself, if he wants to."

DOCTOR: "What? Cure that disease himself? Is that possible? We are physicians; we know what cancer is. We ourselves cannot cure it. And he to cure himself! Why, he doesn't know anything about cancer. (To his friends)The illness is no doubt incurable, but these gentlemen have been nursing him with sincere devotion."

M. requested the doctor to visit Sri Ramakrishna and returned home.

In the afternoon, about three o'clock, M. came to the Master and repeated the conversation he had had with Dr. Sarkar. He said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Today the doctor embarrassed me."

MASTER: "What happened?"

M: "Yesterday he heard here that you yourself had created this illness in order to pamper the doctor's pride."

MASTER: "Who made that remark?"

M: "Mahima Chakravarty."

MASTER: "What did the doctor say to you?'

M: "He described Mahima Chakravarty as 'God's Lower Third'. Now he admits that all the qualities-sattva, rajas, and tamas-exist in God. (The Master laughs.) Then he told me that he had waked at three in the morning and had been thinking of you ever since.

When I saw him it was eight o'clock. He said to me, 'Even now the Paramahamsa is in my mind.' "

MASTER (laughing): "You see, he has studied English. I cannot ask him to meditate on me; but he is doing it all the same, of his own accord."

M: "He also said about you, 'I have the greatest regard for him as a man.'

MASTER: "Did you talk of anything else?"

M: "I asked him, 'What is your suggestion today about the patient?' He said: 'Suggestion? Hang it! I shall have to go to him again myself. What else shall I suggest?' (Sri Ramakrishna laughs.) Further he said: 'You don't know how much money I am losing every day. Every day I miss two or three calls.' "

Vijay Goswami

There were many devotees, including Narendranath, in the room; Vijaykrishna Goswami arrived and respectfully took the dust of the Master's feet. Several Brahmo devotees came with him. Vijay had cut off his connection with the Brahmo Samaj and was practising spiritual discipline independently. Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of him on account of his piety and devotion. Though not a disciple of the Master, Vijay held him in very high respect. He had lived in Dāccā a long time. Recently he had visited many sacred places in upper India.

MAHIMA CHAKRAVARTY (to Vijay): "Sir, you have visited many holy places and new countries. Please tell us some of your experiences."

VIJAY: "What shall I say? I realize that everything is here where we are sitting now. This roaming about is useless. At other places I have seen two, five, ten, or twenty-five per cent of him [meaning the Master], at the most. Here alone I find the full one hundred per cent manifestation of God."

MAHIMA: "You are right, sir. Again, It is he [the Master] who makes us, roam about or remain in one place."

MASTER (to Narendra): "See what a change has come over Vijay's mind. He is an altogether different person. He is like thick milk from which all the water has been boiled off. You see, I can recognize a paramahamsa by his neck and forehead. Yes, I can recognize a paramahamsa."

MAHIMA (to Vijay): "Sir, you seem to eat less now. Isn't that so?"

VIJAY: "Perhaps you are right. (To the Master) I heard about your illness and have come to see you. Again, in Dāccā-"

MASTER: "What about Dāccā?"

Vijay did not reply and was silent a few moments.

VIJAY; "It is difficult to understand him [meaning the Master] unless he reveals himself. Here alone is the one hundred per cent manifestation of God."

MASTER: "Kedār said the other day, at other places we don't get anything to eat, but here we get a stomachful!'"

MAHIMA: "Why a stomachful? It overflows the stomach."

Master in ecstasy

VIJAY (to the Master, with folded hands): "I have now realized who you are. You don't have to tell me."

MASTER (in a state of ecstasy): "If so, then so be it!"

Saying, "Yes, I have understood", Vijay fell prostrate before the Master. He held the Master's feet on his chest and clung to them. The Master was in deep samādhi, motionless as a picture. The devotees were overwhelmed by this sight. Some burst into tears and some chanted sacred hymns. All eyes were riveted on Sri Ramakrishna. They viewed him in different ways, according to their spiritual unfoldment: some as a great devotee, some as a holy man, and some as God Incarnate.

Mahimacharan sang, with tears in his eyes:

"Behold, behold the embodiment of Love Divine!"

Now and then he chanted, as if enjoying a glimpse of Brahman:

The Transcendental, beyond the One and the many, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

NavaGopal was weeping. Bhupati sang:

Hallowed be Brahman, the Absolute, the Infinite, the Fathomless!
Higher than the highest, deeper than the deepest depths!
Thou art the Light of Truth, the Fount of Love, the Home of Bliss!
This universe with all its manifold and blessed modes
Is but the enchanting poem of Thine inexhaustible thought;
Its beauty overflows on every side.

O Thou Poet, great and primal, in the rhythm of Thy thought
The sun and moon arise and move toward their setting;
The stars, shining like bits of gems, are the fair characters
In which Thy song is written across the blue expanse of sky;

The year, with its six seasons, in tune with the happy earth,
Proclaims Thy glory to the end of time.

The colours of the flowers reveal Thy sovereign Beauty,
The waters in their stillness, Thy deep Serenity;
The thunder-clap unveils to us the terror of Thy Law.
Deep is Thine Essence, truly; how can a foolish mind perceive it?

Wondering, It meditates on Thee from yuga to yuga's end
Millions upon millions of suns and moons and stars
Bow down to Thee, O Lord, in rapturous awe!
Beholding Thy creation, men and women weep for joy;
The gods and angels worship Thee, O All-pervading Presence!
O Thou, the Fount of Goodness, bestow on us Thy Knowledge;
Bestow on us devotion, bestow pure love and perfect peace;
And grant us shelter at Thy hallowed feet!

Bhupati sang again:

Upon the Sea of Blissful Awareness waves of ecstatic love arise:
Rapture divine! Play of God's Bliss!
Oh, how enthralling! . . .

He sang a third song:

Here vanish my fear and my delusion, my piety, rituals, and good works;
Here vanish my pride of race and caste! Where am I? Where art Thou, O Hari?
Thou hast stolen my life and soul, and now, O Friend, Thou dost desert me:
Ah, what a fool I was to come here to the shore of this Sea of Love!
Full to the brim with heavenly bliss is filled this little soul of mine;
Premdas says: *Hearken, one and all! This in truth is the way of God!*

After a long time Sri Ramakrishna regained consciousness of the world.

MASTER (to M.): "Something happens to me in that state of intoxication. Now I feel ashamed of myself. In that state I feel as if I were possessed by a ghost. I cease to be my own self. While coming down from that state I cannot count correctly. Trying to count, I say, 'One, seven, eight', or some such thing."

NARENDRA: "It is because everything is one."

MASTER: "No, It is beyond one and two."

MAHIMA: "Yes, you are right. 'It is neither one nor two.'"

MASTER: "There reason withers away. God cannot be realized through scholarship. He is beyond the scriptures-the Vedas, Puranas, and Tantras. If I see a man with even one book in his hand, I call him a rajarshi though he is a Jnāni. But the brahmarshi has no outer sign whatsoever.

Use of scriptures

"Do you know the use of the scriptures? A man once wrote a letter to a relative, asking him to send five seers of sweetmeats and a piece of cloth.

The relative received the letter, read it, and remembered about the sweetmeats and the cloth. Then, he threw the letter away. Of what further use was it?"

VIJAY: "I see that the sweetmeat has been sent."

God's Incarnation as man

MASTER: "God incarnates Himself on earth in a human body. He is, no doubt, present everywhere and in all beings, but man's longing is not satisfied unless he sees God in a human form. Man's need is not satisfied without the Divine Incarnation. Do you know what it is like? By touching any part of a cow you undoubtedly touch the cow herself. Even by touching her horns you touch the cow. But the milk comes through the cow's udder."

MAHIMA: "If a man wants milk he must put his mouth to the udder. What will he get by sucking the horns?" (All laugh.)

VIJAY: "But a calf at first licks other parts of the cow."

MASTER (smiling): "True. But seeing the calf doing so, someone perhaps puts its mouth to the udder." (All laugh.)

The conversation was thus going on, when Dr. Sarkar came into the room and took a seat. He said to the Master: "I woke up at three this morning, greatly worried that you might catch cold. Oh, I thought many other things about you."

MASTER: "I have been coughing and my throat is sore. In the small hours of the morning my mouth was filled with water. My whole body is aching."

DOCTOR: "Yes, I heard all about it this morning."

Mahimacharan told of his trip to various parts of the country and said that in Ceylon no man laughed. Dr. Sarkar said, "It may be so; but I shall have to inquire about it." (All laugh.)

The conversation turned to the duties of life.

The duty of a physician

MASTER (to the doctor): "Many think that the duty of a physician is a very noble one. The physician is undoubtedly a noble man if he treats his patients free, out of compassion and moved by their suffering. Then his work may be called very uplifting. But a physician becomes cruel and callous if he carries on his profession for money. It is very mean to do such things as examine urine and stool in order to earn money, like a business man carrying on his trade."

DOCTOR: "You are right. It is undoubtedly wrong for a physician to perform his duties in that spirit. But I don't like to brag before you."

MASTER: "But the medical profession is certainly very noble if the physician devotes himself to the welfare of others in an unselfish spirit.

Cultivating holy company

"Whatever may be a householder's profession, It is necessary for him to live in the company of holy men now and then. If a man loves God, he will himself seek the company of holy men. I give the illustration of the hemp-smoker. One hemp-smoker loves the company of another hemp-smoker. At the sight of a person who does not smoke, he goes away with downcast eyes or hides himself in a comer; but his joy is unbounded if he meets a hemp addict. Perhaps they embrace each other. (All laugh.) Again, a vulture loves the company of another vulture."

DOCTOR: "It has also been noticed that a vulture runs away for fear of a crow. In my opinion one should serve all creatures, not men alone. Often I feed the sparrows with flour. I throw small pellets of flour to them and they come in swarms. They love to eat them."

MASTER: Bravo! That's grand. Holy men should feed other creatures. They feed ants with sugar."

DOCTOR: "Will there be no singing today?"

MASTER (to Narendra): "Why don't you sing a little?"

Narendra sings

Narendra sang to the accompaniment of the Tānpura and other instruments:

Sweet is Thy name, O Refuge of the humble!
It falls like sweetest nectar on our ears
And comforts us, Beloved of our souls!
The priceless treasure of Thy name alone
Is the abode of Immortality,
And he who chants Thy name becomes immortal.
Falling upon our ears, Thy holy name

Instantly slays the anguish of our hearts,
Thou Soul of our souls, and fills our hearts with bliss!

Narendra sang again:

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
What need have I of knowledge or reason?
Make me drunk with Thy love's Wine;
O Thou who stealest Thy bhaktas' hearts,
Drown me deep in the Sea of Thy love!
Here in this world, this madhouse of Thine,
Some laugh, some weep, some dance for joy:
Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Gaurānga,
All are drunk with the Wine of Thy love
O Mother, when shall I be blessed
By joining their blissful company?

A strange transformation came over the devotees. They all became mad, as it were, with divine ecstasy. The pundit stood up, forgetting the pride of his scholarship, and cried:

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
What need have I of knowledge or reason?

Vijay was the first on his feet, carried away by divine intoxication. Then Sri Ramakrishna stood up, forgetting all about his painful and fatal illness. The doctor, who had been sitting in front of him, also stood up. Both patient and physician forgot themselves in the spell created by Narendra's music. The younger Naren and Lātu went into deep samādhi. The atmosphere of the room became electric. Everyone felt the presence of God. Dr. Sarkar, eminent scientist that he was stood breathless, watching this strange scene. He noticed that the devotees who had gone into samādhi were utterly unconscious of the outer world. All were motionless and transfixed. After a while, as they came down a little to the plane of the relative world, some laughed and some wept. An outsider, entering the room, would have thought that a number of drunkards were assembled there.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna resumed his conversation, the devotees taking their seats. It was about eight o'clock in the evening.

MASTER: "You have just noticed the effect of divine ecstasy. What does your 'science' say about that? Do you think it is a mere hoax?"

Doctor suppresses his emotion

DOCTOR (to the Master): "I must say that this is all natural, when so many people have experienced it. It cannot be a hoax. (To Narendra)

When you sang the lines:

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love!
What need have I of knowledge or reason?

I could hardly control myself. I was about to jump to my feet. With great difficulty I suppressed my emotion. I said to myself, 'No, I must not display my feelings.' "

MASTER (with a smile, to the doctor): "You are unshakable and motionless, like Mount Sumeru. You are a very deep soul. Nobody could perceive the deep emotion of Rupa and Sanatana. If an elephant enters a small pool, there is a splashing of water on all sides. But this does not happen when it plunges into a big lake; hardly anyone notices it. Radha once said to her companion: 'Friend, you are weeping so much at our separation from Sri Krishna. But look at me. How stony my heart is! There is not a tear in my eyes.' Brinde, her friend, replied: 'yes, your eyes are dry. But there is a deep meaning in it. A fire of grief is constantly raging in your heart because of your separation from Krishna. No sooner do the tears gather in your eyes than they are dried up in the heat of that fire.'

DOCTOR: "Nobody can beat you in talk!" (Laughter.)

The conversation turned to other things. Sri Ramakrishna described to the doctor his ecstasies at Dakshineswar. He also told him how to control anger, lust, and the other passions.

DOCTOR: "I have heard the story that you were once lying on the ground unconscious in samādhi when a wicked man kicked you with his boots"

MASTER: "You must have heard it from M. The man was Chandra Haldar, a priest of the Kāli temple at KaliGhat; he often came to Mathur Babu's house. One day I was lying on the ground in an ecstatic mood. The room was dark. Chandra Haldar thought I was feigning that state in order to win Mathur's favour. He entered the room and kicked me several times with his boots. It left black marks on my body. Everybody wanted to tell Mathur Babu about it, but I forbade them."

DOCTOR: "This is also due to the will of God. Thus you have taught people how to control anger and practise forgiveness."

In the mean time Vijay had become engaged in conversation with the other devotees.

VIJAY: "I feel as if someone were always moving with me. He shows me what is happening even at a distance."

NARENDRA: "Like a guardian angel"

VIJAY: "I have seen him [meaning the Master] in Dāccā. I even touched his body."

MASTER (with a smile): "It must have been someone else."

NARENDRA: "I too have seen him many a time. (To Vijay) How can I say I do not believe your words?"

Chapter 47

THE MASTER'S TRAINING OF HIS DISCIPLES

Monday, October 26, 1885

IT WAS ABOUT TEN O'CLOCK in the morning when M. arrived at the Syampukur house on his way to Dr. Sarkar to report the Master's condition.

Dr. Sarkar had declared the illness incurable. His words cast gloom over the minds of the Master's devotees and disciples. With unflagging devotion and zeal they nursed the patient-their teacher, guide, philosopher, and friend. A band of young disciples, led by Narendra, was preparing to renounce the world and dedicate their lives to the realization of God and the service of humanity. People flocked to the Master day and night. In spite of the excruciating pain in his throat, he welcomed them all with a cheerful face. There seemed to be no limit to his solicitude for their welfare. His face beamed as he talked to them about God. Dr. Sarkar, seeing that conversation aggravated the illness, forbade him to talk to people. "You must not talk to others," the physician had said to the Master, "but you may make an exception in my case." The doctor used to spend six or seven hours in Sri Ramakrishna's company, drinking in every word that fell from his lips.

MASTER: "I am feeling much relieved. I am very well today. Is It because of the medicine? Then why shouldn't I continue it?"

M: "I am going to the doctor. I shall tell him everything. He will advise what is best."

MASTER: "I haven't seen Purna for two or three days. I am worried about him."

M. (to Kāli): "Why don't you see Purna and ask him to come?"

KĀLI: "I shall go immediately."

MASTER (to M.): "The doctor's son is a nice boy. Please ask him to come."

M. arrived at Dr. Sarkar's house and found him with two or three friends.

DOCTOR (to M.): "I was talking about you just a minute ago. You said you would come at ten; I have been waiting for you an hour and a half. Your delay has made me worry about him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna].

(To a friend) "Please sing that song."

The friend sang:

Proclaim the glory of God's name as long as life remains in you;
The dazzling splendour of His radiance floods the universe!
Like nectar streams His boundless love, filling the hearts of

men with joy:
The very thought of His compassion sends a thrill through every limb!
How can one fittingly describe Him? Through His abounding grace
The bitter sorrows of this life are all forgotten instantly.
On every side-on land below, in sky above, beneath the seas:
In every region of this earth-men seek Him tirelessly,
And as they seek Him, ever ask: Where is His limit, where His end?
True Wisdom's Dwelling-place is He, the Elixir of Eternal Life,
The Sleepless, Ever-wakeful Eye, the Pure and Stainless One:
The vision of His face removes all trace of sorrow from our hearts.

DOCTOR (to M.): "Isn't it a beautiful song? How do you like that line, 'Where is His limit, where His end?' "

M: "Yes, that's a very fine line. It fills the mind with the idea of the Infinite."

DOCTOR (tenderly, to M.): "It is already late in the morning. Have you taken your lunch? I finish mine before ten and then begin my professional calls; otherwise I don't feel well. Look here, I have been thinking of giving a feast to you all [meaning Sri Ramakrishna's devotees] one day."

M: "That will be fine, sir."

DOCTOR: "Where shall I arrange it? Here or at the Syampukur house? Whatever you suggest."

M: "It doesn't matter, sir. Wherever you arrange it we shall be very happy to dine with you."

The conversation turned to Kāli, the Divine Mother.

DOCTOR: "Kāli is an old hag of the Sonthals."

M. burst into loud laughter and said, "Where did you get that?"

DOCTOR: "Oh, I have heard something like that." (M. laughs.)

Dr. Sarkar on ecstasy

They began to talk about the ecstasy that Vijay and the others had experienced the previous day in the Master's room. The doctor also had been present on the occasion.

DOCTOR: "Yes, I witnessed that ecstasy. But is excessive ecstasy good for one?"

M: "The Master says that an excess of ecstasy harms no one, if it is the result of the contemplation of God. He further says that the lustre of a gem gives light and soothes the body; It does not burn."

DOCTOR: "Oh, the lustre of a gem! That's only a reflected light."

M: "He also says that a man does not die by sinking in the Lake of Immortality. God is that Lake. A plunge in that Lake does not injure a man; on the contrary it makes him immortal. Of course, he will become immortal only if he has faith in God."

DOCTOR: "Yes, that is true."

The doctor took M. in his carriage. He had to see a few patients on the way to Syampukur. They continued their conversation in the carriage. Dr. Sarkar referred to Mahima Chakravarty's pride.

Master's humility & M. and Dr. Sarkar

M: "He visits the Master. Even if he has a little pride, it will not last long. If one only sits in the Master's presence awhile, one's pride crumbles to pieces. It is because the Master himself is totally free from egotism. Pride cannot exist in the presence of humility. A celebrated man like Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyāsāgar showed great modesty and humility in the Master's presence. The Paramahamsa visited his house; it was nine o'clock in the evening when the Master took his leave. Vidyāsāgar came all the way from the library to the gate of his compound to see him off. He himself carried the light to show the way. As the Master's carriage started off, Vidysagar stood there with folded hands."

DOCTOR: "Well, what does Vidyāsāgar think of him?"

M: "That day he showed the Master great respect. But when I talked with him later, I found out that he didn't much care for what the Vaishnavas call emotion or ecstasy. He shares your views on such things."

DOCTOR: "Neither do I care very much for any such display of emotion as folding one's hands or touching others' feet with one's head. To me the head is the same as the feet. But if a man thinks differently of the feet, let him do whatever he likes."

M: "We know that you do not care for a display of feelings. Perhaps you remember that the Master now and then refers to you as a 'deep soul'. He said to you yesterday that when an elephant plunges into a small pool it makes a big splash, but when it goes into a big lake you see hardly a ripple. The elephant of emotion cannot produce any effect at all in a deep soul. The Master says that you are a 'deep soul'."

DOCTOR: "I don't deserve the compliment. After all, what is bhava? It is only a feeling. There are other aspects of feeling, such as bhakti. When it runs to excess, some can suppress It and some cannot."

M: "Divine ecstasy may or may not be explainable; but, sir, it cannot be denied that ecstasy, or love of God, is a unique thing. I have seen in your library Stebbing's book on Darwinism. According to Stebbing the human mind is wonderful, whether it be the result of evolution or of special creation. He gives a beautiful illustration from the theory of light. Light is wonderful, whether you know the wave theory of light or not."

DOCTOR: "Yes. Have you noticed further that Stebbing accepts both Darwin and God?"

The conversation again turned to Sri Ramakrishna.

DOCTOR: "I find that he is a worshipper of the Goddess Kāli."

Master's conception of Kāli

M: "But with him the meaning of Kāli is different. What the Vedas call the Supreme Brahman, he calls Kāli. What the Mussulmans call Allah and the Christians call God, he calls Kāli. He does not see many gods; he sees only one God. What the Brahma jnanis of olden times called Brahman, what the yogis call Ātman and the bhaktas call the Bhagavan, he calls Kāli.

Depth of Sri Ramakrishna's experiences

"In Sri Ramakrishna one finds all the attitudes and ideals of religion. That is why people of all sects and creeds enjoy peace and blessedness in his presence. Who can fathom his feeling and tell us the depth of his inner experience?"

DOCTOR: " 'All things to all men.' I don't approve of it although St. Paul says it."

M: "Who can understand the state of his mind? We have heard from him that unless one is engaged in the yarn trade, one cannot tell the difference between number forty and number forty-one yarn. Only a painter can appreciate another painter. The mind of a saint is very deep. One cannot understand all the aspects of Christ unless one is Christlike. Perhaps the deep realization of the Master is what Christ meant when He said: 'Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect.'"

DOCTOR: "What arrangements have you made about having him nursed?"

M: "At present one of the older devotees is assigned every day to look after him. It may be Girish Babu or Ram Babu or Balarām or Suresh Babu or Navagopal or Kāli Babu. It is that way."

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon when the doctor and M. entered the Master's room on the second floor. Sri Ramakrishna sat there, smiling as usual, completely forgetful of the fatal illness, which was eating his life away. Among the many devotees in the room were Girish, the younger Naren, and Sarat. Sometimes they were motionless, like the snake before its charmer, and sometimes they displayed great joy, like the bridal party with the bridegroom. The doctor and M. bowed low before the Master and sat on

the floor. At the sight of the doctor, the Master said, laughing, "Today I have been feeling very well."

Then the Master went on with his soul-enthralling conversation.

Futility of mere scholarship

MASTER: "What will mere scholarship accomplish without discrimination and renunciation? I go into a strange mood while thinking of the Lotus Feet of God. The cloth on my body drops to the ground and I feel something creeping up from my feet to the top of my head. In that state I regard all as mere straw. If I see a pundit without discrimination and love of God, I regard him as a bit of straw.

"One day Dr.Rāmnārāyan had been arguing with me, when suddenly I went into that mood. I said to him: 'What are you saying? What can you understand of God by reasoning? How little you can understand of His creation! Shame! You have the pettifogging mind of a weaver!' Seeing the state of my mind he began to weep and gently stroked my feet."

DOCTOR: "Ramnarayan did that because he is a Hindu. Besides, he is a believer in flowers and sandal-paste. He is an orthodox Hindu."

M. (to himself): "Dr. Sarkar says that he has nothing to do with gong and conch-shells!"

Master on Bankim

MASTER: "Bankim is one of your pundits. I met him once. I asked him, 'What is the duty of man?' And he had the impudence to say, 'Eating, sleeping, and sex gratification.' These words created in me a feeling of great aversion. I said: 'What are you saying? You are very mean. What you think day and night and what you do all the time come out through your lips. If a man eats radish, he belches radish.' Then we talked about God a great deal. There was also much devotional music in the room, and I danced. Then Bankim said to me, 'Sir, please come to our house once.' 'That depends on the will of God', I replied. 'There also', he said, 'you will find devotees of God.' I laughed and said: 'What kind of devotees are they? Are they like those who said, "Gopal! Gopal!"? ' "

DOCTOR: "What is the story of 'Gopal! Gopal!'? "

MASTER (with a smile): "There was a goldsmith who kept a jewellery shop. He looked like a great devotee, a true Vaishnava, with beads around his neck, rosary in his hand, and the holy marks on his forehead. Naturally people trusted him and came to his shop on business. They thought that, being such a pious man, he would never cheat them. Whenever a party of customers entered the shop, they would hear one of his craftsmen say, 'Kesava! Kesava!' Another would say, after a while, 'Gopal! Gopal!' Then a third would mutter, 'Hari! Hari!' Finally someone would say, 'Hara! Hara!' Now these are, as you know, different names of God. Hearing so much chanting of God's names, the customers naturally thought that this goldsmith must be a very superior person. But can you guess the goldsmith's true intention? The man who said 'Kesava! Kesava!' meant to ask, who are these?-'who are these customers?' The man who said 'Gopal! Gopal!'

conveyed the idea that the customers were merely a herd of cows. That was the estimate he formed of them after the exchange of a few words. The man who said 'Hari! Hari!' asked, 'Since they are no better than a herd of cows, then may we rob them?' He who said 'Hara! Hara!' gave his assent, meaning by these words, 'Do rob by all means, since they are mere cows!' (All laugh.)

"Once I went to a certain place with Mathur Babu. Many pundits came forward to argue with me. And you all know that I am a fool. (All laugh.) The pundits saw that strange mood of mine. When the conversation was over, they said to me: 'Sir, after hearing your words, all that we have studied before, our knowledge and scholarship, has proved to be mere spittle. Now we realize that a man does not lack wisdom if he has the grace of God. The fool becomes wise and the mute eloquent.' Therefore I say that a man does not become a scholar by the mere study of books.

Divine Knowledge is inexhaustible

"Yes, how true it is! How can a man who has the grace of God lack knowledge? Look at me. I am a fool. I do not know anything. Then who is it that utters these words? The reservoir of the Knowledge of God is inexhaustible. There are grain-dealers at Kamarpukur. When selling paddy, one man weighs the grain on the scales and another man pushes it to him from a heap. It is the duty of the second man to keep a constant supply of grain on the scales by pushing it from the big heap. It is the same with my words. No sooner are they about to run short than the Divine Mother sends a new supply from Her Inexhaustible storehouse of Knowledge.

Master's unique experience

"During my boyhood God manifested Himself in me. I was then eleven years old. One day, while I was walking across a paddy field, I saw something. Later on I came to know from people that I had been unconscious, and my body totally motionless. Since that day I have been an altogether different man. I began to see another person within me. When I used to conduct the worship in the temple, my hand, instead of going toward the Deity, would very often come toward my head, and I would put flowers there. A young man who was then staying with me did not dare approach me. He would say: 'I see a light on your face. I am afraid to come very near you.'

"You know I am a fool. I know nothing. Then who is it that says all these things? I say to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother, I am the machine and Thou art the Operator. I am the house and Thou art the Indweller. I am the chariot and Thou art the Charioteer. I do as Thou makest me do; I speak as Thou makest me speak; I move as Thou makest me move. It is not I! It is not I! It is all Thou! It is all Thou!' Hers is the glory; we are only Her instruments. Once Radha, to prove her chastity, carried on her head a pitcher filled with water. The pitcher had a thousand holes, but not a drop of water spilled. People began to praise her, saying, 'Such a chaste woman the world will never see again!' Then Radha said to them: Why do you praise me? Say: *Glory unto Krishna! Hail Krishna!* I am only His handmaid.'

"Once in that strange mood of mine I placed my foot on Vijay's chest. You know how greatly I respect him-and I placed my foot on his body! What do you say to that?"

DOCTOR: "But now you should be careful."

The will of God

MASTER (with folded hands): "What can I do? I become completely unconscious in that mood, then I do not know at all what I am doing."

DOCTOR: "You should be careful. No use folding your hands now and expressing regret!"

MASTER: "Can I do anything myself in that mood? What do you think of this state? If you think it is a hoax, then I should say that your study of 'science' and all that is bosh!"

DOCTOR: "Now listen, sir! Would I come to see you so often if I thought it all a hoax? You know that I neglect many other duties in order to come here. I cannot visit many patients, for I spend six or seven hours at a stretch here."

MASTER: "Once I said to Mathur Babu: 'Don't think that I have achieved my desired end because you, a rich man, show me respect. It matters very little to me whether you obey me or not.' Of course you must remember that a mere man can do nothing, it is God alone who makes one person obey another. Man is straw and dust before the power of God."

DOCTOR: "Do you think I shall obey you because a certain fisherman obeyed you? Undoubtedly I show you respect; I show you respect as a man."

MASTER: "Do I ask you to show me respect?"

Dr. Sarkar and Girish

GIRISH: "Does he ask you to show him respect?"

DOCTOR (to the Master): "What are you saying? Do you explain it as the will of God?"

MASTER: "What else can it be? What can a man do before the will of God? Arjuna said to Sri Krishna on the battle-field of Kurukshetra 'I will not fight. It is impossible for me to kill my own kinsmen.' Sri Krishna replied: 'Arjuna, you will have to fight. Your very nature will make you fight.' Then Sri Krishna revealed to Arjuna that all the men on the battlefield were already dead.

"Once some Sikhs came to the Kāli temple at Dakshineswar. They said: 'You see, the leaves of the Aśwattha tree are moving. That too is due to the will of God.' Without His will not even a leaf can move."

DOCTOR: "If everything is done by the will of God, then why do you chatter? Why do you talk so much to bring knowledge to others?"

MASTER: "He makes me talk; therefore I talk. 'I am the machine and He is the Operator.' "

DOCTOR: "You say that you are the machine. That's all right. Or keep quiet, knowing that everything is God."

GIRISH (to the doctor): "Whatever you may think, sir, the truth is that we act because He makes us act. Can anyone take a single step against the Almighty Will?"

Free will and God's will

DOCTOR: "But God has also given us free will. I can think of God, or not, as I like."

GIRISH: "You think of God or do some good work because you like to. Really it is not you who do these things, but your liking of them that makes you do so."

DOCTOR: "Why should that be so? I do these things as my duty."

GIRISH: "Even then it is because you like to do your duty."

DOCTOR: "Suppose a child is being burnt. From a sense of duty I rush to save it."

GIRISH: "You feel happy to save the child; therefore you rush into the fire. It is your happiness that drives you to the action. A man eats opium being tempted by such relishes as puffed rice or fried potatoes." (Laughter.)

MASTER: "A man must have some kind of faith before he undertakes a work. Further, he feels joy when he thinks of it. Only then does he set about performing the work. Suppose a jar of gold coins is hidden underground. First of all a man must have faith that the jar of gold coins is there. He feels joy at the thought of the jar. Then he begins to dig. As he removes the earth he hears a metallic sound. That increases his joy. Next he sees a corner of the jar. That gives him more joy. Thus his joy is ever on the increase. Standing on the porch of the Kāli temple, I have watched the ascetics preparing their smoke of hemp. I have seen their faces beaming with joy in anticipation of the smoke."

DOCTOR: "But take the case of fire. It gives both heat and light. The light no doubt illumines objects, but the heat burns the body. Likewise, it is not an unadulterated joy that one reaps from the performance duty. Duty has its painful side too."

M. (to Girish): "As the proverb goes: 'If the stomach gets food, then the back can bear a few blows from the host.' There is joy in sorrow also."

GIRISH (to the doctor): "Duty is dry."

DOCTOR: "Why so?"

GIRISH: "Then it is pleasant." (All laugh.)
M: "Again we come to the point that one likes opium for the sake of the relishes that are served with it."

GIRISH (to the doctor): "Duty must be pleasant; or why do you perform it?"

DOCTOR: "The mind is inclined that way."

M. (to Girish): "That wretched inclination draws the mind. If you speak of the compelling power of inclination, then where is free will?"

DOCTOR: "I do not say that the will is absolutely free. Suppose a cow is tied with a rope. She is free within the length of that rope, but when she feels the pull of the rope-"

MASTER: "Jadu Mallick also gave that illustration. (To the younger Naren) Is it mentioned in some English book?

God alone is the agent

(To the doctor) "Look here. If a man truly believes that God alone does everything, that He is the Operator and man the machine, then such a man is verily liberated in life. 'Thou workest Thine own work; men only call it theirs.' Do you know what it is like? Vedānta philosophy gives an illustration. Suppose you are cooking rice in a pot, with potato, egg-plant, and other vegetables. After a while the potatoes, eggplant, rice, and the rest begin to jump about in the pot. They seem to say with pride: 'We are moving! We are jumping!' The children see it and think the potatoes, egg-plant, and rice are alive and so they jump that way. But the elders, who know, explain to the children that the vegetables and the rice are not alive; they jump not of themselves, but because of the fire under the pot; if you remove the burning wood from the hearth, then they will move no more. Likewise the pride of man, that he is the doer, springs from ignorance. Men are powerful because of the power of God. All becomes quiet when that burning wood is taken away. The puppets dance well on the stage when pulled by a wire, but they cannot move when the wire snaps.

"A man will cherish the illusion that he is the doer as long as he has not seen God, as long as he has not touched the Philosopher's Stone. So long will he know the distinction between his good and bad actions. This awareness of distinction is due to God's māyā; and it is necessary for the purpose of running His illusory world. But a man can realize God if he takes shelter under His Vidyā-māyā and follows the path of righteousness. He who knows God and realizes Him is able to go beyond māyā. He who firmly believes that God alone is the Doer and he himself a mere instrument is a jivanmukta, a free soul though living in a body. I said this to Keshab Chandra Sen."

GIRISH (to the doctor): "How do you know that free will exists?"

DOCTOR: "Not by reasoning; I feel it."

GIRISH: "In that case I may say that others and I feel the reverse. We feel that we are controlled by another." (All laugh.)

Dr. Sarkar on duty

DOCTOR: "There are two elements in duty: first, the 'oughtness' of a duty; second, the happiness, which comes as an after-effect. But at the initial stage this happiness is not the impelling motive. I noticed in my childhood the great worry of the priest at the sight of ants in the sweets offered before the Deity. He did not, at the outset, feel joy at the thought of the sweets. First of all he worried about them."

M. (to himself): "It is difficult to say whether one feels happiness while performing the duty or afterwards. Where is the free will of a man if he performs an action, being impelled by a feeling of happiness?"

Pure love

MASTER: "What the doctor is speaking of is called love without any selfish motive. I do not want anything from Dr. Mahendra Sarkar; I do not need anything from him, but still I love to see him. This is love for love's sake. But suppose I get a little joy from it; how can I help it?

"Ahalyā once said to Rāma 'O Rāma, I have no objection to being born even as a pig. But please grant that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet. I do not want anything else.'

"Nārada went to Ayodhya to remind Rāma that He was to kill Ravana . At the sight of Rāma and Sita, he began to sing their glories. Gratified at Nārada's devotion, Rāma said: 'Nārada, I am pleased with your prayer. Ask a boon.' Nārada replied, 'O Rāma, if Thou must give me a boon, then grant that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet and that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching māyā. Rāma said, 'Ask something more.' 'No, Rāma,' answered Nārada, 'I do not want anything else. I want only pure love for Thy Lotus Feet, a love that seeks no return.'

"That is Dr. Sarkar's attitude. It is like seeking God alone, and not asking Him for wealth, fame, bodily comforts, or anything else. This is called pure love.

"There is an element of joy in it, no doubt; but it is not a worldly joy; it is the joy of bhakti and prema, devotion to God and ecstatic love of Him. I used to go to Sambhu Mallick's house. Once he said to me: 'You come here frequently. Yes, you come because you feel happy talking with me.' Yes, there is that element of happiness.

"But there is a state higher than this. When a man attains It, he moves about aimlessly, like a child. As the child goes along, perhaps he sees a grasshopper and catches it. The man of that exalted mood, too, has no definite aim.

(To the devotees) "Don't you understand the doctor's inner feeling? It is the prayer of a devotee to God for right purpose, that he may have no inclination for evil things.

"I too passed through that state. It is called Dāsya, the attitude of the servant toward his master. I used to weep so bitterly with the name of the Divine Mother on my lips that people would stand in a row watching me. When I was passing through that state, someone, in order to test me and also to cure my madness, brought a prostitute into my room. She was beautiful to look at, with pretty eyes. I cried, 'O Mother! O Mother!' and rushed out of the room. I ran to Haladhāri and said to him, 'Brother, come and see who has entered my room!' I told Haladhāri and everyone else about this woman. While in that state I used to weep with the name of the Mother on my lips. Weeping, I said to Her: O Mother, protect me! Please make me stainless. Please see that my mind is not diverted from the Real to the unreal.' (To the doctor) This attitude of yours is also very good. It is the attitude of a devotee, one who looks on God as his Master.

"When a man develops pure sattva, he thinks only of God. He does not enjoy anything else. Some are born with pure sattva as a result of their *Prārabdha* karma. Through unselfish action one finally acquires pure sattva. Sattva mixed with rajas diverts the mind to various objects. From it springs the conceit of doing good to the world. To do good to the world is extremely difficult for such an insignificant creature as man. But there is no harm in doing good to others in an unselfish spirit. This is called unselfish action. It is highly beneficial for a person to try to perform such action. But by no means all succeed, for it is very difficult. Everyone must work. Only one or two can renounce action. Rarely do you find a man who has developed pure sattva. Through disinterested action sattva mixed with rajas gradually turns into pure sattva.

"No sooner does a man develop pure sattva than he realizes God, through His grace.

"Ordinary people cannot understand pure sattva. Hem once said to me: 'Well, priest! The goal of a man's life is to acquire name and fame in the world. Isn't that true?' "

Tuesday, October 27, 1885

Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his room. Narendra and other devotees were with him. The Master was conversing with them. It was about ten o'clock in the morning.

NARENDRA "How strangely the doctor behaved yesterday!"

A DEVOTEE: "Yes, the fish swallowed the hook but the line broke."

MASTER (smiling): "But the hook is in its mouth. It will die and float on the water."

Narendra went out for a few minutes. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to M about Purna.

MASTER; "The devotee looking on himself as Prakriti likes to embrace and kiss God, whom he regards as the Purusha. I am telling this just to you. Ordinary people should not hear these things."

M: "God sports in various ways. Even this illness of ours is one of His sports. Because you are ill new devotees are coming to you."

MASTER (smiling): "Bhupati says, 'What would people have thought of you if you had just rented a house to live in, without being ill?' Well, what has happened to the doctor?"

M: "As regards God! he accepts for himself the attitude of a servant. He says, 'Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant.' But then he asks me, 'Why do you apply the idea of God to a man?' "

MASTER: "Just see! Are you going to him today?"

M: "I shall see him if it is necessary to report your condition."

MASTER: "How do you find this boy Bankim? If he cannot come here you may give him instruction. That will awaken his spiritual consciousness."

Narendra's poverty

Narendra entered the room and sat near Sri Ramakrishna. Since the death of his father he had been very much worried about the family's financial condition. He now had to support his mother and brothers. Besides, he was preparing himself for his law examination. Lately he had served as a teacher in the Vidyāsāgar School at Bowbazar. He wanted to make some arrangement for his family and thus get rid of all his worries. Sri Ramakrishna knew all this. He looked affectionately at Narendra.

MASTER (to M.): "Well, I said to Keshab, 'One should be satisfied with what comes unsought.' The son of an aristocrat does not worry about his food and drink. He gets his monthly allowance. Narendra, too, belongs to a high plane. Then why is he in such straitened circumstances? God certainly provides everything for the man who totally surrenders himself to Him."

M: "Narendra, too, will be provided for. It is not yet too late for him."

MASTER: "But a man who feels intense renunciation within doesn't calculate that way. He doesn't say to himself, 'I shall first make an arrangement for the family and then practise *sādhanā*.' No, he doesn't feel that way if he has developed intense dispassion. A goswami said in the course of his preaching, 'If a man has ten thousand rupees he can maintain himself on the income; then, free from worries, he can pray to God.'

"Keshab Sen also said something like that. He said to me: 'Sir, suppose a man wants, first of all, to make a suitable arrangement of his property and estate and then think of God; will It be all right for him to do so? Is there anything wrong about it?' I said to him: 'When a man feels utter dispassion, he looks on the world as a deep well and his relatives as venomous cobras. Then he cannot think of saving money or making arrangements about his property.' God alone is real and all else illusory. To think of the world instead of God!

"A woman was stricken with intense grief. She first tied her nose-ring in the corner of her cloth and then dropped to the ground, saying, 'Oh, friends, what a calamity has befallen me!' But she was very careful not to break the nose-ring."

All laughed. At these words Narendra felt as if struck by an arrow, and lay down on the floor. M. understood what was going through Narendra's mind and said with a smile: "What's the matter? Why are you lying down?"

The Master said to M., with a smile: "You remind me of a woman who felt ashamed of herself for sleeping with her brother-in-law and couldn't understand the conduct of those women who lived as mistresses of strangers. By way of excusing herself she said: 'After all, a brother-in-law is one's own. But even that kills me with shame. And how do these women dare to live with strangers?' "

M. himself had been leading a worldly life. Instead of being ashamed of his own conduct, he smiled at Narendra. That was why Sri Ramakrishna referred to the woman who criticized the conduct of immoral women, though she herself had illicit love for her brother-in-law.

A Vaishnava minstrel was singing downstairs. Sri Ramakrishna was pleased with his song and said that someone should give him a little money. A devotee went downstairs. The Master asked, "How much did he give the singer?" When he was told that the devotee had given only two pice, he said: "Just that much? This money is the fruit of his servitude. How much he had to flatter his master and suffer to earn it! I thought he would give at least four *ānnās*."

The younger Naren had promised to show Sri Ramakrishna the nature of electricity with an instrument. The instrument was exhibited.

It was about two o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees were sitting in the room. Atul brought with him a friend who was a munsiff. Bagchi, the famous painter from Shikadarpara, arrived. He presented the Master with several paintings. Sri Ramakrishna examined the pictures with great delight.

Bagchi had long hair like a woman's. Sri Ramakrishna said: "Many days ago a sannyāsi came to Dakshineswar who had hair nine cubits long. He used to chant the name of Radha. He was genuine."

Master in samādhi & Narendra's singing

A few minutes later Narendra began to sing. The songs were full of the spirit of renunciation. He sang:

O Lord, must all my days pass by so utterly in vain?
Down the path of hope I gaze with longing, day and night...

He sang again:

O Mother, Thou my inner Guide, ever awake within my heart;
Day and night Thou holdest me in Thy lap.
Why dost Thou show such tenderness to this unworthy child of Thine? . . .

Then he sang:

O gracious Lord, if like a bee
My soul cannot imbed itself
Deep in the Lotus of Thy Feet,
What comfort can I find in life?
What can I gain with wealth untold,
Neglecting Thee, supremest Wealth?
I take no pleasure in the sight
Of the most lovely infant's face,
If all its loveliness reveals
No trace of Thy dear features there.
Moonlight is meaningless to me
As darkest night, if Thy love's moon
Rise not in my sours firmament.
The purest wife's unspotted love
Is stained, if in it is not set
The priceless gem of love divine.
O Lord, whenever doubt of Thee,
Born of base error and neglect,
Assails my mind, I writhe in pain
As from a serpent's poisonous fangs!
What more, O Master, shall I say?
Thou art my heart's most precious Jewel,
The Home of Everlasting Joy.

It was half past five in the afternoon when Dr. Sarkar came to the Master's room at Syampukur, felt his pulse, and prescribed the necessary medicine. Many devotees were present, including Narendra, Girish, Dr. Dukari, the younger Naren, Rākhāl, M., Sarat, and Shyam Basu.

Dr. Sarkar talked a little about the Master's illness and watched him take the first dose of medicine. Then Sri Ramakrishna began to talk to Shyam Basu. Dr. Sarkar started to leave, saying, "Now that you are talking to Shyam Basu, I shall say good-bye to you."

The Master and a devotee asked the doctor if he would like to hear some songs.

DR. SARKAR (to the Master): "I should like it very much. But music makes you frisk about like a kid and cut all sorts of capers. You must suppress your emotion."

Dr. Sarkar took his seat once more, and Narendra began to sing in his sweet voice, to the accompaniment of the Tānpura and Mridanga:

This universe, wondrous and infinite,
O Lord, is Thy handiwork;
And the whole world is a treasure-house
Full of Thy beauty and grace. . .

He sang again:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Thy formless beauty sparkles;
Therefore the yogis meditate in a dark mountain cave.
In the lap of boundless dark, on Mahanirvanas waves upborne,
Peace flows serene and inexhaustible.
Taking the form of the Void, in the robe of darkness wrapped,
Who art Thou, Mother, seated alone in the shrine of samādhi?
From the Lotus of Thy fear-scattering Feet flash Thy love's lightnings;
Thy Spirit-Face shines forth with laughter terrible and loud!

Dr. Sarkar said to M., "This song is dangerous for him." Sri Ramakrishna asked M. what the doctor had said. M. replied, "The doctor is afraid that this song may throw your mind into samādhi."

In the mean time the Master had partially lost consciousness of the outer world. Looking at the physician, he said with folded hands: "No, no. Why should I go into samādhi?" Hardly had he spoken these words when he went into a deep ecstasy. His body became motionless, his eyes fixed, his tongue speechless. He sat there like a statue cut in stone, completely unconscious of the outer world. Turned inward were his mind, ego, and all the other organs of perception. He seemed an altogether different person.

Narendra continued his songs, pouring his entire heart and soul into them:

What matchless beauty! What a bewitching Face I behold!
The Sovereign of my soul has entered my lowly hut;
The springs of my love are welling forth on every side.
Tell me, my Beloved! O Thou, the Lord of my heart!
What treasure shall I lay before Thy Lotus Feet?
Take Thou my life, my soul; what more can I offer Thee?
Take everything that is mine. Deign to accept my all.

Narendra continued:

O gracious Lord, if like a bee
My soul cannot imbed itself
Deep in the Lotus of Thy Feet,
What comfort can I find in life? . . .

As the doctor heard the words, *"The purest wife's unspotted love",* his eyes were filled with tears. He cried out, "Ah me! Ah me!"

Narendra sang again:

Oh, when will dawn the blessed day
When Love will waken in my heart?
When will my tears flow uncontrolled

As I repeat Lord Hari's name,
And all my longing be fulfilled? . . .

In the midst of the singing Sri Ramakrishna had regained consciousness of the outer world. When Narendra finished the song, the Master continued his conversation, keeping them all spellbound. The devotees looked at his face in wonder. It did not show the slightest trace of the agonizing pain of his illness. The face shone with heavenly joy.

Addressing the doctor, the Master said: "Give up this false modesty. Why should you feel shy about singing the name of God? The proverb says very truly: 'One cannot realize God if one is a victim of shame, hatred, or fear.' Give up such foolish notions as: 'I am such a great man! Shall I dance crying the name of God? What will other great men think of me on hearing of this? They may say that the doctor, poor fellow, has been dancing uttering the name of Hari, and thus pity me.' Give up all these foolish notions."

DOCTOR: "I never bother about what people say. I don't care a straw about their opinions."

MASTER: "Yes, I know of your strong feeling about that. (All laugh.)

On knowledge and ignorance

"Go beyond knowledge and ignorance; only then can you realize God. To know many things is ignorance. Pride of scholarship is also ignorance. The unwavering conviction that God alone dwells in all beings is Jnāna, knowledge. To know Him intimately is vijnāna, a richer Knowledge if a thorn gets into your foot, a second thorn is needed to take it out. When it is out both thorns are thrown away. You have to procure the thorn of knowledge to remove the thorn of ignorance; then you must set aside both knowledge and ignorance. God is beyond both knowledge and ignorance. Once Lakshmana said to Rāma, 'Brother, how amazing it is that such a wise man as Vasishtha wept bitterly at the death of his sons!' Rāma said: 'Brother, he who has knowledge must also have ignorance. He who has knowledge of one thing must also have knowledge of many things. He who is aware of light is also aware of darkness.' Brahman is beyond knowledge and ignorance, virtue and vice, merit and demerit, cleanliness and uncleanliness."

Sri Ramakrishna then recited the following song of Ramprasad:

Come, let us go for a walk, O mind, to Kāli, the Wish-fulfilling Tree,
And there beneath it gather the four fruits of life.
When will you learn to lie, O mind, in the abode of Blessedness,
With Cleanliness and Defilement on either side of you?
Only when you have found the way
To keep your wives contentedly under a single roof,
Will you behold the matchless form of Mother Syama. . . .

SHYAM BASU: "Sir, what remains after one throws away both thorns?"

Brahman cannot be described

MASTER: "*Nitya–Śuddha–Buddha rupam,* the Eternal and Ever-pure Consciousness. How can I make it clear to you? Suppose a man who has never tasted ghee asks you, 'What does ghee taste like?' Now, how can you explain that to him? At the most you can say: 'What is ghee like? It is just like ghee!' A young girl asked her friend: 'Well, friend, your husband is here. What sort of pleasure do you enjoy with him?' The friend answered: 'My dear, you will know it for yourself when you get a husband. How can I explain it to you?'

"It is said in the Purana that Bhagavati, the Divine Mother, was once born as the daughter of King Himalaya. After Her birth She showed Her father Her many forms. The Lord of the mountains, after enjoying all these visions, said to the Divine Mother, 'May I have the vision of Brahman as It is described in the Vedas!' Then the Divine Mother answered, 'Father, if you want to have the vision of Brahman you must live in the company of holy men.'

"What Brahman is cannot be described in words. Somebody once said that everything in the world has been made impure, like food that has touched the tongue, and that Brahman alone remains undefiled. The meaning is this: All scriptures and holy books-the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and so forth-may be said to have been defiled because their contents have been uttered by the tongues of men; but what Brahman is no tongue has yet been able to describe. Therefore Brahman is still undefiled. One cannot describe in words the joy of play and communion with Satchidananda. He alone knows, who has realized it."

Egotism condemned

Addressing Dr. Sarkar, Sri Ramakrishna continued: "Look here. One cannot attain Knowledge unless one is free from egotism. There is a saying:

When shall I be free?
When 'I' shall cease to be.

'I' and 'mine'-that is ignorance. 'Thou' and Thine' that is Knowledge. A true devotee says: 'O God, Thou alone art the Doer; Thou alone doest all. I am a mere instrument; I do as Thou makest me do. All these-wealth, possessions, nay, the universe Itself-belong to Thee. This house and these relatives are Thine alone, not mine. I am Thy servant; mine is only the right to serve Thee according to Thy bidding.'

"Those who have read a few books cannot get rid of conceit. Once I had a talk with Kalikrishna Tagore about God. At once he said, 'I know all about that.' I said to him: 'Does a man who has visited Delhi brag about it? Does a gentleman go about telling everyone that he is a gentleman?' "

SHYAM: "But Kalikrishna Tagore has great respect for you."

MASTER: "Oh, how vanity turns a person's head! There was a scavenger woman in the temple garden at Dakshineswar. And her pride! And all because of a few ornaments. One

day a few men were passing her on the path and she shouted to them, 'Hey! Get out of the way, you people!' If a scavenger woman could talk that way, what can one say about the vanity of others?"

Master scolds Shyam Basu

SHYAM: "Sir, if God alone does everything, how is it that man is punished for his sins?"

MASTER: "How like a goldsmith you talk!"

NARENDRA: "In other words, Shyam Babu has a calculating mind, like a goldsmith, who weighs things with his delicate balance."

MASTER: "I say: O my foolish boy, eat the mangoes and be happy. What is the use of your calculating how many hundreds of trees, how many thousands of branches, and how many millions of leaves there are in the orchard? You have come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Eat them and be contented.

(To Shyam) "You have been born in this world as a human being to worship God; therefore try to acquire love for His Lotus Feet. Why do you trouble yourself to know a hundred other things? What will you gain by discussing 'philosophy'? Look here, one ounce of Liquor is enough to intoxicate you. What is the use of your trying to find out how many gallons of liquor there are in the tavern?"

DOCTOR: "Quite so. And what is more, the Wine in God's Tavern is beyond all measure. There is no limit to It."

MASTER (to Shyam): "Why don't you give your power of attorney to God? Rest all your responsibilities on Him. If you entrust an honest man with your responsibilities, will he misuse his power over you? God alone knows whether or not He will punish you for your sins."

DOCTOR: "God alone knows what is in His mind. How can a man guess it? God is beyond all our calculations."

MASTER (to Shyam): "That's the one theme of you Calcutta people. You all say, 'God is stained by the evil of inequality', because He has made one person happy and another miserable. What these rascals see in themselves they see in God, too.

"Hem used to come to the temple garden at Dakshineswar. Whenever he chanced to meet me, he would say: 'Well, priest, there is only one thing worth having in this world, and that is honour. Isn't that so?' Very few indeed say that the goal of human life is the realization of God."

SHYAM: "We hear a great deal about the subtle body. Can anyone show it to us? Can anyone demonstrate that the subtle body, when a man dies, leaves the gross body and goes away?"

MASTER: "True devotees don't care a rap about showing you these things. What do they care whether some fool of a big man respects them or not? The desire to have a big man under their control never enters their minds."

SHYAM: "What is the distinction between the gross body and the subtle body?"

MASTER: "The body consisting of the five gross elements is called the gross body. The subtle body is made up of the mind, the ego, the discriminating faculty, and the mind-stuff. There is also a causal body, by means of which one enjoys the Bliss of God and holds communion with Him. The Tantra calls it the Bhagavati Tanu, the Divine Body. Beyond all these is the Maha-karana, the Great Cause. That cannot be expressed by words.

"What is the use of merely listening to words? Do something! What will you achieve by merely repeating the word 'siddhi'? Will that intoxicate you? You will not be intoxicated even if you make a paste of siddhi and rub it all over your body. You must eat some of it. How can a man recognize yarns of different counts, such as number forty and number forty-one, unless he is in the trade? Those who trade in yarn do not find it at all difficult to describe a thread of a particular count. Therefore I say, practice a little spiritual discipline; then you will know all these-the gross, the subtle, the causal, and the Great Cause. While praying to God, ask only for love for His Lotus Feet.

"When Rāma redeemed Ahalyā from the curse, He said to her, 'Ask a boon of Me.' Ahalyā said, 'O Rāma, if You deign to grant me a boon, then please fulfill my desire that I may always meditate on Your Lotus Feet, even though I may be born in a pig's body.'

Master's prayer

"I prayed to the Divine Mother only for love. I offered flowers at Her Lotus Feet and said with folded hands: 'O Mother, here is Thy ignorance and here is Thy knowledge; take them both and give me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy holiness and here is Thy unholiness; take them both and give me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy virtue and here is Thy sin; here is Thy good and here is Thy evil; take them all and give me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy dharma and here is Thy adharma; take them both and give me only pure love for Thee.'

Pairs of opposites

"Dharma means good actions, like giving in charity. If you accept dharma, you have to accept adharma too. If you accept virtue, you have to accept sin. If you accept knowledge, you have to accept ignorance. If you accept holiness, you have to accept unholiness. It is like a man's being aware of light, in which case he is aware of darkness too. If a man is aware of one, he is aware of many too. If he is aware of good, he is aware of evil too.

"Blessed is the man who retains his love for the Lotus Feet of God, even though he eats pork. But if a man is attached to the world, even though he lives only on boiled vegetables and cereals, then-"

DOCTOR: "He is a wretch. But let me interrupt you here and say something. Buddha once ate pork and as a result had colic. To get rid of the pain he would take opium and thus become unconscious. Do you know the meaning of Nirvāna and such stuff? Buddha would become stupefied after eating opium. He would have no consciousness of the outer world. This is what they call Nirvāna!"

All laughed to hear this novel interpretation of Nirvāna. The conversation went on.

MASTER (to Shyam): "There is no harm in your leading the life of a householder. But do your duties in an unselfish spirit, fixing your mind on the Lotus Feet of God. You must have noticed that a man with a carbuncle on his back speaks to others in his usual way; perhaps he attends to his daily duties also; but his mind is always on the carbuncle. It is like that.

"Live in the world like an immoral woman. Though she performs her household duties, her mind is fixed on her sweetheart. (To the doctor) Do you understand that?"

DOCTOR: "Never having had such an experience myself, how can I understand?"

SHYAM: "Oh, yes! You understand a little." (All laugh.)

MASTER: "Moreover he has had long experience in that trade. Isn't that so?" (All laugh.)

SHYAM: "Sir, what do you think of Theosophy?"

MASTER: "The long and short of the matter is that those who go about making disciples belong to a very inferior level. So also do those who want occult powers to walk over the Ganges and to report what a person says in a far-off country and so on. It is very hard for such people to have pure love for God."

SHYAM: "But the Theosophists have been trying to re-establish the Hindu religion."

MASTER: "I don't know much about them."

SHYAM: "You can learn from Theosophy where the soul goes after death-whether to the lunar sphere or the stellar sphere or some other region."

MASTER: "That may be. But let me tell you my own attitude. Once a man asked Hanuman, 'What day of the lunar fortnight is it?' Hanuman replied: 'I know nothing about the day of the week, the day of the lunar fortnight, the position of the stars in the sky, or any such things. On Rāma alone I meditate.' That is my attitude too."

SHYAM: "The Theosophists believe in the existence of Mahatmas. Do you believe in them, sir?"

MASTER: "If you believe in my words, I say yes. But now please leave these matters alone. Come here again when I am a little better. Some way will be found for you to

attain peace of mind, if you have faith in me. You must have noticed that I don't accept any gift of money or clothes. We do not take any collection here. That is why so many people come. (Laughter.)

(To the doctor) "If you won't take offence, I shall tell you something. It is this: You have had enough of such things as money, honour, lecturing, and so on. Now for a few days direct your mind to God. And come here now and then. Your spiritual feeling will be kindled by hearing words about God."

After a little while, as the doctor stood up to take his leave, Girish Chandra Ghosh entered the room and bowed low before the Master. Dr. Sarkar was pleased to see him and took his seat again.

DOCTOR (pointing to Girish): "Of course he would not come as long as I was here. No sooner am I about to leave than he enters the room."

Girish and Dr. Sarkar began to talk about the Science Association established by the latter.

MASTER: "Will you take me there one day?"

DOCTOR: "If you go there you will lose all consciousness at the sight of the wondrous works of God."

MASTER: "Oh, indeed!"

DOCTOR (to Ginsh): "Whatever you may do, please do not worship him as God. You are turning the head of this good man."

GIRISH: "'What else can I do? Oh, how else shall I regard a person who has taken me across this ocean of the world, and what is still more, the ocean of doubt? There is nothing in him that I do not hold sacred. Can I ever look on even his excreta as filthy?"

DOCTOR: 'This question of excreta doesn't bother me. I too have no feeling of repugnance. Once a grocer's child was brought to my office for treatment. His bowels moved there. All covered their noses with cloths; but I sat by his side for half an hour without putting a handkerchief to my nose. Besides, I cannot cover my nose when the scavenger passes by me with a tub on his head. No, I cannot do that. I know very well that there is no difference between a scavenger and myself. Why should I look down on him? Can't I take the dust of his [meaning Sri Ramakrishna's] feet? Look here,"

The doctor saluted Sri Ramakrishna and touched the Master's feet with his forehead.

GIRISH: "Oh, the angels are saying, 'Blessed, blessed be this auspicious moment!' "

DOCTOR: "What is there to marvel at in taking the dust of a man's feet? I can take the dust of everybody's feet. Give me, all of you, the dust of your feet."

The doctor touched the feet of all the devotees.

NARENDRA (to the doctor): "We think of him [meaning the Master] as a person who is like God. Do you know, sir, what it is like? There is a point between the vegetable creation and the animal creation where it is very difficult to determine whether a particular thing is a vegetable or an animal. Likewise, there is a stage between the man-world and the God-world where it is extremely hard to say whether a person is a man or God."

DOCTOR: "Well, my dear young friend, one cannot apply analogies to things divine."

NARENDRA: "I don't say that he is God. What I am saying is that he is a godlike man."

Dr. Sarkar on expressing feelings

DOCTOR: "One should suppress one's feelings in such a matter. It is bad to give vent to them. Alas! No one understands my own feelings. Even my best friend thinks of me as a stern and cruel person. Even people like you will perhaps one day throw me out after beating me with your shoes."

MASTER: "Don't say such a thing! They love you so much! They await your coming as eagerly as the bridesmaids in the bridal chamber await the coming of the groom."

GIRISH: "Everyone has the greatest respect for you."

DOCTOR: "My son and even my wife think of me as a hard-hearted person. My only crime is that I do not display my feelings."

GIRISH: "In that case, sir, it would be wise for you to open the door of your heart, at least out of pity for your friends; for you see that your friends cannot otherwise understand you."

DOCTOR: "Will you believe me when I say that my feelings get worked up even more than yours? (To Narendra) I shed tears in solitude.

(To Sri Ramakrishna) "Well, may I say something? When you are in ecstasy you place your foot on others' bodies. That is not good."

MASTER: "Do you think I know at that time that I am touching another with my foot?"

DOCTOR: "You feel that it is not the right thing to do, don't you?"

MASTER: "How can I explain to you what I experience in samādhi? After coming down from that state I think, sometimes, that my illness may be due to samādhi. The thing is, the thought of God makes me mad. All this is the result of my divine madness. How can I help it?"

DOCTOR: "Now he accepts my view. He expresses regret for what he does. He is conscious that the act is sinful"

MASTER (to Narendra): "You are very clever. Why don't you answer? Explain it all to the doctor."

Cause of Master's illness

GIRISH (to the doctor): "Sir, you are mistaken. He is not expressing regret for touching the bodies of his devotees during samādhi. His own body is pure, untouched by any sin. That he touches others in this way is for their good. Sometimes he thinks that he may have got this illness by taking their sins upon himself.

"Think of your own case. Once you suffered from colic. Didn't you have regrets at that time for sitting up and reading till very late at night? Does that prove that reading till the late hours of the night is, in itself, a bad thing? He [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] too may be sorry that he is ill. But that does not make him feel that it is wrong on his part to touch others for their welfare."

Dr. Sarkar felt rather embarrassed and said to Girish: "I confess my defeat at your hands. Give me the dust of your feet." He saluted Girish.

DOCTOR (to Narendra): "Whatever else one may say about him [meaning Girish], one must admit his intellectual powers."

NARENDRA (to the doctor): "You may look at the thing from another standpoint. You can devote your life to scientific research without giving a thought to your health or comfort. But the Science of God is the grandest of all sciences. Isn't it natural for him to risk his health to realize Him?"

DOCTOR: "All religious reformers, including Jesus, Chaitanya, Buddha, and Mohammed, were in the end filled with egotism. They all said, 'Whatever I say is alone true.' How shocking!"

GIRISH (to the doctor): "Now, sir, you are committing the same mistake.

You are accusing them all of egotism. You are finding fault with them. For that very reason you too can be accused of egotism."

Dr. Sarkar remained silent.

NARENDRA (to the doctor): "We offer worship to him bordering on divine worship."

At these words the Master laughed like a child.

Chapter 48

IN THE COMPANY OF DEVOTEES AT SYAMPUKUR

Thursday, October 29, 1885

M. and Dr. Sarkar

IT WAS ABOUT TEN O'CLOCK in the morning when M. arrived at Dr. Sarkar's house in Sankharitola, Calcutta, to report Sri Ramakrishna's condition. M. and Dr. Sarkar became engaged in conversation.

DOCTOR: "You see, Dr. Behari Bhaduri always harps on the same thing. He says that Goethe's spirit came out of his body and that Goethe himself saw it. It must have been very amazing."

The aim of human life

M: "As Sri Ramakrishna says, what shall we gain from these discussions? We have been born in this world in order to cultivate devotion to the Lotus Feet of God. He tells us the story of a man who entered an orchard to eat mangoes. But instead of eating the fruit, he took out pencil and paper and began to jot down the number of trees, branches, and leaves in the orchard. A servant saw him and asked: 'What are you doing? Why have you come here?' The man said: 'I have come here to eat mangoes. I am now counting the trees, branches, and leaves in the orchard.' Thereupon the servant replied: 'If you have come here to eat mangoes, then enjoy them. What will you gain by counting the trees, branches, and leaves?' "

DOCTOR: "I see that the Paramahamsa has been able to extract the essence."

Then Dr. Sarkar told M. many stories about his homeopathic hospital. He showed M. the list of the patients who visited the hospital every day. He further remarked that at the beginning many medical practitioners had discouraged him about homeopathy and had even written against him in magazines.

M. and Dr. Sarkar got into the doctor's carriage. The doctor visited many patients. He entered a house of the Tagore family at Pathuriaghata and was detained there by the head of the family. Returning to the carriage, he began to talk to M.

DOCTOR: "I was talking to that gentleman about the Paramahamsa. We also talked about Theosophy and Colonel Olcott. The Paramahamsa is angry with the gentleman. Do you know why? Because he says he knows everything."

M: "No, why should the Master be angry? I heard that they once met each other. Paramahamsadeva was talking about God. The gentleman said, 'Oh, yes! I know all that!'

DOCTOR: "He has donated thirty-two thousand five hundred rupees to the Science Association."

They drove on, talking about Sri Ramakrishna's illness and the care that should be taken of him.

DOCTOR: "Do you intend to send him back to Dakshineswar?"

M: "No, sir. That would greatly inconvenience the devotees. They can always visit him if he is in Calcutta."

DOCTOR: "But it is very expensive here."

M: "The devotees don't mind that. All they want is to be able to serve him. As regards the expense, it must be borne whether he lives in Calcutta or at Dakshineswar. But if he goes back to Dakshineswar, the devotees won't always be able to visit him, and that will cause them great worry."

Dr. Bhaduri and Dr. Sarkar

Dr. Sarkar and M. arrived at Syampukur and found the Master sitting with the devotees in his room. Dr. Bhaduri also was there.

Dr. Sarkar examined the Master's pulse and inquired about his condition. The conversation turned to God.

DR. BHADURI: "Shall I tell you the truth? All this is unreal, like a dream."

Is the world a delusion?

DR. SARKAR: "Is everything delusion? Then whose is this delusion? And why this delusion? If all know it to be delusion, then why do they talk? I cannot believe that God is real and His creation unreal"

MASTER: "That is a good attitude. It is good to look on God as the Master and oneself as His servant. As long as a man feels the body to be real, as long as he is conscious of 'I' and 'you', it is good to keep the relationship of master and servant; it is not good to cherish the idea of 'I am He'.

"Let me tell you something else. You see the same room whether you look at it from one side or from the middle of the room."

DR. BHADURI (to Dr. Sarkar): "What I have just said you will find in the Vedānta. You must study the scriptures. Then you will understand."

DR. SARKAR: "Why so? Has he [meaning the Master] acquired all this wisdom by studying the scriptures? He too supports my view. Can't one be wise without reading the scriptures?"

MASTER: "But how many scriptures I have heard!"

DR. SARKAR: "A man may mistake the meaning if he only hears. In your case it is not mere hearing."

MASTER (to Dr. Sarkar): "I understand that you spoke of me as insane. That is why they (pointing to M. and the others) don't want to go to you."

DR. SARKAR (looking at M.): "Why Should I call you [meaning the Master] insane? But I mentioned your egotism. Why do you allow people to take the dust of your feet?"

M: "Otherwise they weep."

DR. SARKAR: "That is their mistake. They should be told about it."

M: "Why should you object to their taking the dust of his feet? Doesn't God dwell in all beings?"

DR. SARKAR: "I don't object to that. Then you must take the dust of everyone's feet."

M: "But there is a greater manifestation of God in some men than in others. There is water everywhere; but you see more of it in a lake, a river, or an ocean. Will you show the same respect to a new Bachelor of Science as you do to Faraday?"

DR. SARKAR: "I agree with that. But why do you call him God?"

M: "Why do we salute each other? It is because God dwells in everybody's heart. You haven't given much thought to this subject."

MASTER (to Dr. Sarkar): "I have already told you that some people reveal more of God than others. Earth reflects the sun's rays in one way, a tree in another way, and a mirror in still another way. You see a better reflection in a mirror than in other objects. Don't you see that these devotees here are not on the same level with Prahlada and others of his kind? Prahlada's whole heart and soul were dedicated to God."

Dr. Sarkar did not reply. All were silent.

MASTER (to Dr. Sarkar): "You see, you have love for this [meaning himself]. You told me that you loved me."

DR. SARKAR: "You are a child of nature. That is why I tell you all this. It hurts me to see people salute you by touching your feet. I say to myself, 'They are spoiling such a good man.' Keshab Sen, too, was spoiled that way by his devotees. Listen to me-"

Master sharply reprimands Dr. Sarkar

MASTER: "Listen to you? You are greedy, lustful, and egotistic."

DR. BHADURI (to Dr. Sarkar): "That is to say, you have the traits of a jiva, an embodied being. These are his traits: lust, egotism, greed for wealth, and a hankering after name and fame. All embodied beings have these traits."

DR. SARKAR (to the Master): "If you talk that way, I shall only examine your throat and go away. Perhaps that is what you want. In that case we should not talk about anything else. But if you want discussion, then I shall say what I think to be right."

All remained silent.

After a while the Master became engaged in conversation with Dr. Bhaduri.

Paths of negation and affirmation

MASTER: "Let me tell you the truth. He [meaning Dr. Sarkar] is now following the path of negation. Therefore he discriminates, following the process of 'Neti, neti', and reasons in this way: God is not the living beings; He is not the universe; He is outside the creation. But later he will follow the path of affirmation and accept everything as the manifestation of God.

"By taking off, one by one, the sheaths of a banana tree, one obtains the pith. The sheaths are one thing, and the pith is another. The sheaths are not the pith, and the pith is not the sheaths. But in the end one realizes that the pith cannot exist apart from the sheaths, and the sheaths cannot exist apart from the pith; they are part and parcel of one and the same banana tree. Likewise, it is God who has become the twenty-four cosmic principles; it is He who has become man.

Three classes of devotees

(To Dr. Sarkar) "There are three kinds of devotees: superior, mediocre, and inferior. The inferior devotee says, 'God is out there.' According to him God is different from His creation. The mediocre devotee says: 'God is the Antaryami, the Inner Guide. God dwells in everyone's heart. The mediocre devotee sees God in the heart. But the superior devotee sees that God alone has become everything; He alone has become the twenty-four cosmic principles. He finds that everything, above and below, is filled with God.

"Read the Gitā, the Bhagavata, and the Vedānta, and you will understand all this. Is not God in His creation?"

DR. SARKAR: "Not in any particular object. He is everywhere. And because He is everywhere, He cannot be sought after."

The conversation turned to other things. Sri Ramakrishna was always experiencing ecstatic moods, which the doctor said might aggravate his illness. Dr. Sarkar said to him: "You must suppress your emotion. My feelings, too, are greatly stirred up. I can dance much more than you."

THE YOUNGER NAREN (smiling): "What would you do if your emotion increased a little more?"

DR. SARKAR: "My power of control would also increase."

MASTER AND M: "You may say that now!"

M: "Can you tell us what you would do if you went into an ecstatic mood?"

The conversation turned to money.

MASTER (to Dr. Sarkar): "I don't think about it at all. You know that very well, don't you? This is not a pretence."

Absent-mindedness of worldly people

DR. SARKAR: "Even I have no desire for money-not to speak of yourself! My cash-box lies open."

MASTER: "Jadu Mallick, too, is absent-minded. When he takes his meals he sometimes becomes so absent-minded that he doesn't know whether the food is good or bad. When someone says to him, 'Don't eat that; it doesn't taste good', Jadu says: 'Eh? Is this food bad? Why, that's so!'"

Was the Master hinting that there was an ocean of difference between absent-mindedness due to the contemplation of God, and absent-mindedness due to preoccupation with worldly thoughts?

Pointing to Dr. Sarkar, Sri Ramakrishna said to the devotees, with a smile: "When a thing is boiled, it becomes soft. At first he was very hard. Now he is softening from inside."

DR. SARKAR: "When a thing is boiled, it begins to soften from the outside. I am afraid that won't happen to me in this birth." (All laugh.) .

Dr. Sarkar was about to take his leave. He was talking to Sri Ramakrishna.

DOCTOR: "Can't you forbid people to salute you by touching your feet?"

MASTER: "Can all comprehend the Indivisible Satchidananda?"

DR. SARKAR: "But shouldn't you tell people what is right?"

Different disciplines for different temperaments

MASTER: "People have different tastes. Besides, all have not the same fitness for spiritual life."

DR. SARKAR: "How is that?"

MASTER: "Don't you know what difference in taste is? Some enjoy fish curry; some, fried fish; some, pickled fish; and again, some, the rich dish of fish pilau. Then too, there is

difference in fitness. I ask people to learn to shoot at a banana tree first, then at the wick of a lamp, and then at a flying bird."

It was dusk. Sri Ramakrishna became absorbed in contemplation of God. For the time being he forgot all about his painful disease. Several intimate disciples sat near him and looked at him intently. After a long time he became aware of the outer world and said to M. in a whisper: "You see, my mind was completely merged in the Indivisible Brahman. After that I saw many things. I found that the doctor will have spiritual awakening. But it will take some time. I won't have to tell him much. I saw another person while in that mood. My mind said to me, 'Attract him too.' I shall tell you about him later."

Shyam Basu, Dr. Dukari, and a few other devotees arrived. Sri Ramakrishna talked to them.

SHYAM: "Ah, what a fine thing you said to us the other day!"

MASTER (smiling): "What was that?"

Jnāna, ajnāna, and vijnāna

SHYAM: "What remains with a man when he goes beyond jnāna and ajnāna, knowledge and ignorance."

MASTER (smiling): "It is vijnāna, special Knowledge of God. To know many things is ignorance. To know that God dwells in all beings is knowledge. And what is vijnāna? It is to know God in a special manner, to converse with Him and feel Him to be one's own relative.

"To know that there is fire in wood is knowledge. But to make a fire with that wood, cook food with that fire, and become healthy and strong from that food is vijnāna."

SHYAM (smiling): "And about the thorn?"

MASTER (smiling): "Yes. When a thorn gets into the sole of your foot, you procure a second thorn. After taking out the first thorn with the help of the second, you throw both thorns away. Likewise, you should procure the thorn of knowledge in order to remove the thorn of ignorance. After destroying ignorance, you should discard both knowledge and ignorance. Then you attain vijnāna."

Sri Ramakrishna was pleased with Shyam Basu. He was quite an elderly person and wanted to devote his time to contemplation. This was his second visit to the Master.

Master's advice to Shyam Basu

MASTER (to Shyam Basu): "Give up worldly talk altogether. Don't talk about anything whatever but God. If you see a worldly person coming near you, leave the place before he arrives. You have spent your whole life in the world. You have seen that it is all hollow. Isn't that so? God alone is Substance, and all else is illusory. God alone is real, and all else has only a two days existence. What is there in the world? The world is like a

pickled hog plum: one craves for it. But what is there in a hog plum? Only skin and pit. And if you eat it you will have colic."

SHYAM: "Yes, sir. Everything you have said is true."

Nature of the world

MASTER: "For many years you have devoted yourself to various worldly things. You will not be able to think of God and meditate on Him in this confusion of the world. A little solitude is necessary for you; otherwise your mind will not be steady. Therefore you must fix a place for meditation at least half a mile away from your house."

Shyam Basu remained silent a few moments. He appeared absorbed in thought.

MASTER (Smiling): "Besides, all your teeth are gone. Why should you bother so much about the Durga Puja? (All laugh.) A man used to celebrate the worship of Durga with the sacrifice of goats and with other ceremonies. He continued the worship many years and then stopped it. A friend asked him, 'Why don't you perform the Durga Puja any more?' 'Brother,' replied the man, 'my teeth are all gone. I have lost the power to chew goat-meat.'"

SHYAM: "Ah! How sweet these words are!"

MASTER (smiling): "This world is a mixture of sand and sugar. Like the ant, one should discard the sand and eat the sugar. He who can eat the sugar is clever indeed. Build a quiet place for thinking of God-a place for your meditation. Have it ready. I shall visit it."

SHYAM: "Sir, is there such a thing as reincarnation? Shall we be born again?"

MASTER: "Ask God about it. Pray to Him sincerely. He will tell you everything. Speak to Jadu Mallick, and he himself will tell you how many houses he has, and how many government bonds. It is not right to try to know these things at the beginning. First of all realize God; then He Himself will let you know whatever you desire."

SHYAM: "Sir, how much wrong, how many sinful things a man does in this world! Can he ever realize God?"

MASTER: "If a man practises spiritual discipline before his death and if he gives up his body praying to God and meditating on Him, when will sin touch him? It is no doubt the elephant's nature to smear his body with dust and mud, even after his bath. But he cannot do so if the mahut takes him into the stable immediately after his bath."

In spite of his serious illness the Master keenly felt the sorrow and suffering of men. Day and night he thought about their welfare. The devotees wondered at his compassion. The assurance of Sri Ramakrishna that no sin can touch a man if he gives up his body while praying to God was deeply impressed on their minds.

Friday, October 30, 1885

It was nine o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna was talking with M. in his room. No one else was present. M. was going to Dr. Sarkar to report his condition and bring him to examine the Master.

Master on Purna and Manindra

MASTER (to M., smiling): "Purna came this morning. He has such a nice nature! Manindra has an element of Prakriti, of womanliness. He has read the life of Chaitanya and understood the attitude of the gopis. He has also realized that God is Purusha and man is Prakriti, and that man should worship God as His handmaid. How remarkable!"

M: "It is true, sir."

Purna was then fifteen or sixteen years old. Sri Ramakrishna always longed to see him. But his relatives did not allow him to visit the Master. One night, before his illness, Sri Ramakrishna had been so eager to see Purna that he had suddenly left Dakshineswar and arrived at M.'s house in Calcutta. M. had brought Purna from his home to see Sri Ramakrishna. The Master had given the boy many instructions about prayer and had afterwards returned to Dakshineswar. Manindra was about the same age as Purna. The devotees addressed him as "khoka". He used to dance in ecstasy when he heard the chanting of God's name.

About half past ten M. arrived at Dr. Sarkar's house. He went up to the second floor and sat in a chair on the porch adjacent to the drawing-room. In front of Dr. Sarkar was a glass bowl in which some goldfish were kept. Now and then Dr. Sarkar threw some cardamom shells into the bowl. Again, he threw pellets of flour to the sparrows. M. watched him.

Dr. Sarkar on bhakti and jnāna

DOCTOR (smiling, to M.): "You see, these goldfish are staring at me like devotees staring at God. They haven't noticed the food I have thrown into the water. Therefore I say, what will you gain by mere bhakti? You need knowledge too. (M. smiles.) Look there at the sparrows! They flew away when I threw flour pellets to them. They were frightened. They have no bhakti because they are without knowledge. They don't know that flour is their food."

Dr. Sarkar and M. entered the drawing-room. There were shelves all around filled with books. The doctor rested a little. M. looked at the books. He picked up Canon Farrar's Life of Jesus and read a few pages. Dr. Sarkar told M. how the first homeopathic hospital was started in the teeth of great opposition. He asked M. to read the letters relating to it, which had been published in the "Calcutta Journal of Medicine" in 1876. Dr. Sarkar was much devoted to homeopathy.

M. picked up another book, Munger's New Theology. Dr. Sarkar noticed it.

Dr. Sarkar on faith

DOCTOR: "Munger has based his conclusions on nice argument and reasoning. It is not like your believing a thing simply because a Chaitanya or a Buddha or Jesus Christ has said so."

M. (smiling): "Yes, we should not believe Chaitanya or Buddha; but we must believe Munger!"

DOCTOR: "Whatever you say."

M: "We must quote someone as our authority; so it is Munger." (The doctor smiles.)

Dr. Sarkar got into his carriage accompanied by M. The carriage proceeded toward Syampukur. It was midday. They gossiped together. The conversation turned to Dr. Bhaduri, who had also been visiting the Master now and then.

M. (smiling): "Bhaduri said about you that you must begin all over again from the stone and brick-bat."

DR. SARKAR: "How is that?"

M: "Because you don't believe in the Mahatmas, astral bodies, and so forth. Perhaps Bhaduri is a Theosophist. Further, you don't believe in the Incarnation of God. That is why he teased you, saying that when, you died this time you would certainly not be reborn as a human being. That would be far off. You wouldn't be born even as an animal or bird, or even as a tree or a plant. You would have to begin all over again, from stone and brick-bat. Then, after many, many births, you might assume a human body."

DR. SARKAR: "Goodness gracious!"

M: "Bhaduri further said that the knowledge of your physical science was a false knowledge. Such knowledge is momentary. He gave an analogy. Suppose there are two wells. The one gets its water from an underground spring. The other has no such spring and is filled with rain-water. But the water of the second well does not last a long time. The knowledge of your science is like the rain-water. It dries up."

DR. SARKAR (with a smile): "I see!"

The carriage arrived at Cornwallis Street. Dr. Sarkar picked up Dr. Pratap Mazumdar. Pratap had visited Sri Ramakrishna the previous day. They soon arrived at Syampukur.

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room, on the second floor, with several devotees.

DR. SARKAR (to the Master): "I see you are coughing. (Smiling) But it is good to go to Kasi." (All laugh.)

MASTER (smiling): "But that will give me liberation. I don't want liberation; I want love of God!" (All laugh.)

Pratap was Dr. Bhaduri's son-in-law. Sri Ramakrishna was speaking to Pratap in praise of his father-in-law.

MASTER (to Pratap): "Ah, what a grand person he has become! He contemplates God and observes purity in his conduct. Further, he accepts both aspects of God-personal and impersonal."

M. was very eager to mention Dr. Bhaduri's remarks about Dr. Sarkar's being born again as a stone or brick-bat. He asked the younger Naren very softly whether he remembered those remarks of Dr. Bhaduri. Sri Ramakrishna overheard this.

MASTER (to Dr. Sarkar): "Do you know what Dr. Bhaduri said about you? He said that, because you didn't believe these things, in the next cycle you would have to begin your earthly life from a stone or brick-bat." (All laugh.)

DR. SARKAR (smiling): "Suppose I begin from a stone or brick-bat, and after many births obtain a human body; but as soon as I come back to this place I shall have to begin over again from a stone or brick-bat." (The doctor and all laugh.)

The conversation turned to the Master's ecstasy in spite of his illness.

PRATAP: "Yesterday I saw you in an ecstatic mood."

MASTER: "It happened of itself; but it was not intense."

DR. SARKAR: "Ecstasy and talking are not good for you now."

MASTER (to Dr. Sarkar): "I saw you yesterday in my samādhi. I found that you are a mine of knowledge; but it is all dry knowledge. You have not tasted divine bliss. (To Pratap, referring to Dr. Sarkar) If he ever tastes divine bliss, he will see everything, above and below, filled with it. Then he will not say that whatever he says is right and what others say is wrong. Then he will not utter sharp, strong, pointed words."

The devotees remained silent.

Advice to Dr. Sarkar

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna went into a spiritual mood and said to Dr. Sarkar: "Mahindra Babu, what is this madness of yours about money? Why such attachment to wife? Why such longing for name and fame? Give up all these, now, and direct your mind to God with whole-souled devotion. Enjoy the Bliss of God."

Dr. Sarkar sat still without uttering a word. The devotees also remained silent.

How a Jnāni should meditate

MASTER: "Nangta used to tell me how a Jnāni meditates. Everywhere is water; all the regions above and below are filled with water; man, like a fish, is swimming joyously in that water. In real meditation you will actually see all this.

"Take the case of the infinite ocean. There is no limit to its water: Suppose a pot is immersed in it: there is water both inside and outside the pot. The Jnāni sees that both inside and outside there is nothing but Paramatman. Then what is this pot? It is 'I-consciousness'. Because of the pot the water appears to be divided into two parts; because of the pot you seem to perceive an inside and an outside. One feels that way as long as this pot of 'I' exists. When the 'I' disappears, what is remains. That cannot be described in words.

"Do you know another way a Jnāni meditates? Think of infinite Ākāśa and a bird flying there, joyfully spreading Its wings. There is the Chidakasa, and Ātman is the bird. The bird is not imprisoned in a cage; it flies in the Chidakasa. Its joy is limitless."

The devotees listened with great attention to these words about meditation.After a time Pratap resumed the conversation.

PRATAP (to Dr. Sarkar): "When one thinks seriously, one undoubtedly sees everything as a mere shadow."

DR. SARKAR: "If you speak of a shadow, then you need three things: the sun, the object, and the shadow. How can there be any shadow without an object? And you say that God is real and the creation unreal. I say that the creation is real too."

PRATAP: "Very well. As you see a reflection in a mirror, so you see this universe in the mirror of your mind."

DR. SARKAR: "But how can there be a reflection without an object?"

NARENDRA: "Why, God is the object."

Dr. Sarkar remained silent.

MASTER (to Dr. Sarkar): "You said a very fine thing. No one else has said before that samādhi is the result of the union of the mind with God. You alone have said that.

"Shivanath said that one lost one's head by too much thinking of God. In other words, one becomes unconscious by meditating on the Universal Consciousness. Think of it! Becoming unconscious by contemplating Him who is of the very nature of Consciousness, and whose Consciousness endows the world with consciousness!

"And what does your 'science' say? This combined with this produces that; that combined with that produces this. One is more likely to lose consciousness by contemplating those things-by handling material things too much."

DR. SARKAR: "One can see God in those things."

M: "If so, one sees God more clearly in man, and still better in a great soul. In a great soul there is a greater manifestation of God."

DR. SARKAR: "Yes, in man, no doubt."

Losing consciousness in the thought of God

MASTER: "Losing consciousness by contemplating God-through whose Consciousness even inert matter appears to be conscious, and hands, feet, and body move! People say that the body moves of itself; but they do not know that it is God who moves it. They say that water scalds the hand. But water can by no means scald the hand; it is the heat in the water, the fire in the water, that scalds.

"Rice is boiling in a pot. Potatoes and egg-plant are also jumping about in the pot. The children say that the potatoes and egg-plant jump of themselves; they do not know that there is fire underneath. Man says that the sense-organs do their work of themselves; but he does not know that inside dwells He whose very nature is Consciousness."

Dr. Sarkar stood up. He was about to take his leave. Sri Ramakrishna also stood up.

DR. SARKAR: "People call on God when they are faced with a crisis. Is it for the mere fun of it that they say, 'O Lord! Thou, Thou!'? You speak of God because of that trouble in your throat. You have now fallen into the clutches of the cotton-carder. You had better speak to the carder. I am just quoting your own words."

MASTER: "There is nothing for me to say."

DR. SARKAR: "Why not? We lie in the lap of God. We feel free with Him. To whom should we speak about our illness if not to Him?"

MASTER: "Right you are. Once in a while I try to speak to Him about it, but I do not succeed."

DR. SARKAR: "Why should you even speak to Him? Does He not know of it?"

MASTER (smiling): "A Mussulman, while saying his prayers, shouted: 'O Allah! O Allah!' Another person said to him: 'You are calling on Allah. That's all right. But why are you shouting like that? Don't you know that He hears the sound of the anklets on the feet of an ant?'

Story of Vilwamangal

"When the mind is united with God, one sees Him very near, in one's own heart. But you must remember one thing. The more you realize this unity, the farther your mind is withdrawn from worldly things. There is the story of Vilwamangal in the Bhaktamala. He used to visit a prostitute. One night he was very late in going to her house. He had been detained at home by the sraddha ceremony of his father and mother. In his hands he

was carrying the food offered in the ceremony, to feed his mistress. His whole soul was so set upon the woman that he was not at all conscious of his movements. He didn't even know how he was walking. There was a yogi seated on the path, meditating on God with eyes closed. Vilwamangal stepped on him. The yogi became angry, and cried out: 'What? Are you blind? I have been thinking of God, and you step on my body!' 'I beg your pardon,' said Vilwamangal, 'but may I ask you something? I have been unconscious, thinking of a prostitute, and you are conscious of the outer world though thinking of God. What kind of meditation is that?' In the end Vilwamangal renounced the world and went away in order to worship God. He said to the prostitute: 'You are my guru. You have taught me how one should yearn for God.' He addressed the prostitute as his mother and gave her up."

DR. SARKAR: "To address a woman as mother is the Tantrik form of worship."

Stories of the Bhagavata scholars

MASTER: "Listen to a story. There was a king who used daily to hear the Bhagavata recited by a pundit. Every day, after explaining the sacred book, the pundit would say to the king, 'O King, have you understood what I have said?' And every day the king would reply, 'You had better understand it first yourself.' The pundit would return home and think: 'Why does the king talk to me that way day after day? I explain the texts to him so clearly, and he says to me, "You had better understand it first yourself." What does he mean?' The pundit used to practise spiritual discipline. A few days later he came to realize that God alone is real and everything else-house, family, wealth, friends, name, and fame-illusory. Convinced of the unreality of the world, he renounced it. As he left home he asked a man to take this message to the king: 'O King, I now understand.'

"Here is another story. A man needed a scholar of the Bhagavata to expound the sacred text to him every day. But it was very difficult to procure such a scholar. After he had searched a great deal, another man came to him and said, 'Sir, I have found an excellent scholar of the Bhagavata.' 'Very well,' said the man, 'bring him here.' The other man replied: 'But there is a little hitch. The scholar has a few ploughs and bullocks; he is busy with them all day. He must look after the cultivation of his land. He hasn't a moment's leisure. Thereupon the man who required the scholar said: 'I don't want a Bhagavata scholar who is burdened with ploughs and bullocks. I want a man who has leisure and can tell me about God.' (To Dr. Sarhar) Do you understand?"

Dr. Sarkar remained silent.

Uselessness of mere scholarship

MASTER: "Shall I tell you the truth? What will you gain by mere scholarship? The pundits hear many things and know many things-the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras. But of what avail is mere scholarship? Discrimination and renunciation are necessary. If a man has discrimination and renunciation, then one can listen to him. But of what use are the words of a man who looks on the world as the essential thing?

"What is the lesson of the Gitā? It is what you get by repeating the word ten times. As you repeat 'Gitā', 'Gitā', the word becomes reversed into 'tagi', 'tagi'-which implies renunciation. He alone has understood the secret of the Gitā who has renounced his attachment to 'woman and gold' and has directed his entire love to God. It isn't necessary to read the whole of the Gitā. The purpose of reading the book is served if one practises renunciation."

DR. SARKAR: "A man once explained the meaning of Radha to me. He said to me: 'Do you know the meaning of Radha? Reverse the word and it becomes "dhara." That's the meaning.' (All laugh.) Well, let us stop here for today."

Dr. Sarkar left. M. sat near Sri Ramakrishna and repeated the conversation he had had at Dr. Sarkar's house.

M: "Dr. Sarkar was feeding the goldfish with cardamom shells and the sparrows with flour pellets. He said to me: 'Did you notice? The fish didn't see the cardamom shells and therefore went away. First of all we want knowledge, and then bhakti. Did you notice those sparrows? They too flew away when I threw the pellets of flour. They have no jnāna; therefore they have no bhakti.' "

MASTER (smiling): "That knowledge means the knowledge of the physical world, the knowledge of 'science'."

M: "He said further: 'Must I believe a thing simply because a Chaitanya or a Buddha or a Christ has said it? That would not be proper.' A grandson has been born to him. He praised his daughter-in-law highly. He said, 'I don't notice her at all in the house; she is so quiet and bashful.' "

MASTER: "He has been thinking of this place [meaning himself]. His faith is growing. Is it possible to get rid of egotism altogether? Such scholarship! Such fame! And he has so much money! But he doesn't show disrespect for what I say."

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. The devotees were sitting quietly in the room. Many outsiders also were present. All sat in silence.

M. was seated very near Sri Ramakrishna, Now and then they exchanged a word or two in a low voice. The Master wanted to put on his coat. M. helped him.

MASTER (to M.): "You see, nowadays it is not necessary for me to meditate much. All at once I become aware of the Indivisible Brahman. Nowadays the vision of the Absolute is continuous with me."

M. did not reply. The room was full of men, all silent.

Presently Sri Ramakrishna spoke.

MASTER: "Well, all these people are sitting here without uttering a word. Their eyes are fixed on me. They are neither talking nor singing. What do they see in me?"

M. said to the Master: "Sir, they have already heard many things you have said. Now they are seeing what they can never see anywhere else-a man always blissful, of childlike nature, free from egotism, and intoxicated with divine love. The other day you were pacing the outer room of Ishan's house. We too were with you. A man came to me and said that he had never before seen such a happy person as you."

M. became silent. The room was still. A few minutes later Sri Ramakrishna spoke to M. in a whisper.

MASTER: "Well, how is the doctor coming along? Does he now receive well the ideas of this place?"

M: "How can an effective seed fail to sprout? It must germinate somehow or other. I feel like laughing when I remember what you said the other day."

MASTER: "What was that?"

M: "You said that Jadu Mallick was so absent-minded that while taking his meals he didn't know whether a particular dish was seasoned with salt or not. If anyone pointed out to him that a dish was not salted, he would say, in a surprised voice: 'Yes? Yes? I see it is not salted.' You told this to the doctor because he had said to you that he was always absent-minded. You meant that he became absent-minded thinking of worldly things and not because of contemplation of God."

MASTER: "Will he not pay attention to what I say?"

M: "Of course he will. But he forgets many of your instructions because of his numerous duties. Today, too, he made a nice remark when he said, To look on a woman as mother is a spiritual discipline of the Tantra.'"

MASTER: "What did I say to that?"

M: "You told him about that Bhagavata scholar who owned bullocks and ploughs. (The Master smiles.) Further, you told him about the king who said to the pundit of the Bhagavata, 'You had better understand it yourself first.' (The Master smiles.)

"Then you told him about the Gitā, whose essence is the renunciation of 'woman and gold', renunciation of the attachment to 'woman and gold'. You said to him, 'How can a worldly man who has not renounced "woman and gold" teach others?' Perhaps he didn't understand the drift of your words. He changed the subject."

Sri Ramakrishna was thinking about the welfare of his devotees. Purna and Manindra were two of his young devotees. He sent Manindra to talk to Purna.

It was evening. A lamp was burning in Sri Ramakrishna's room. The devotees and visitors were sitting at a distance. The Master was introspective. Those in the room were also thinking of God and sat in silence.

A few minutes afterwards Narendra entered the room with a friend, whom he introduced to the Master as an author. Sri Ramakrishna talked with him about the metaphysical significance of Radha and Krishna. The author said that Radha and Krishna were the Supreme Brahman. Vishnu, Śiva, Durga, and the other deities had sprung from them.

Different aspects of Radha

MASTER: "That is good. There are different aspects of Radha. In Her seductive aspect She was Chandravali. In Her aspect of love She participated in Sri Krishna's lila at Vrindāvan. Nandaghosh, Krishna's foster-father, had the vision of the Eternal Radha.

"First is the seductive Radha, then the Radha of love. If you go farther, you will see the Eternal Radha. It is like taking off the layers of an onion one by one. First the red layers, then the pink, then the white. Afterwards you don't find any more layers. Such is the nature of the Eternal Radha, Radha the Absolute. There the discrimination following the process of 'Not this, not this' comes to an end.

'There are two aspects of Radha-Krishna: the Absolute and the Relative. They are like the sun and its rays. The Absolute may be likened to the sun, and the Relative to the rays.

"A genuine bhakta dwells sometimes on the Absolute and sometimes on the Relative. Both the Absolute and the Relative belong to one and the same Reality. It is all one-neither two nor many."

AUTHOR: "Sir, why do they speak of the 'Krishna of Vrindāvan' and the 'Krishna of Mathura'?"

MASTER: "That is the view of the goswamis. But the scholars of upper India think differently. According to these scholars there is only Krishna, and no Radha. The Krishna of Dwaraka is not associated with Radha."

AUTHOR: "Sir, Radha and Krishna are themselves the Supreme Brahman."

MASTER: "That is good. But you must remember that everything is possible for God. He is formless, and again He assumes forms. He is the individual and He is the universe. He is Brahman and He is Śakti. There is no end to Him, no limit. Nothing is impossible for Him. No matter how high the kites and vultures soar, they can never strike against the ceiling of the sky.

Brahman is indescribable

If you ask me what Brahman is like, all I can say is that It cannot be described in words. Even when one has realized Brahman, one cannot describe It. If someone asks you what

ghee is like, your answer will be, 'Ghee is like ghee.' The only analogy for Brahman is Brahman. Nothing exists besides It."

Saturday, October 31, 1885
Hariballav

Hariballav Bose, a cousin of Balarām, came to see Sri Ramakrishna. He saluted the Master respectfully.

Hariballav was the government pleader at Cuttack. He did not approve of Balarām's visiting the Master, especially with the ladies of the family: Balarām had said to his cousin: "You had better meet him first. Then you can say whatever you like."

Presently the Master and Hariballav became engaged in conversation.

MASTER: "Can you tell me how I shall get well? Do you think this is a serious illness?"

HARIBALLAV: "Sir, the doctors can tell you better than I about that."

MASTER: "When the women take the dust of my feet, I say to myself that they are saluting God, who dwells inside me. I look at it in that way."

HARIBALLAV: "You are a holy man. All should take the dust of your feet. What harm is there in that?"

MASTER: "You may speak that way about sages like Dhruva, Prahlada, Nārada, or Kapila; but who am I? Please come again."

HARIBALLAV: "I shall certainly come, because you attract me. You don't have to urge me."

Hariballav was about to depart. He saluted Sri Ramakrishna and was going to take the dust of the Master's feet, when Sri Ramakrishna moved his feet away. But Hariballav persisted; he took the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet against the latter's wish.

When he stood up, the Master stood up too, to show him courtesy. The Master said to him: "Balarām feels unhappy because I don't go to his house. I thought of visiting you all there one day, but then I was afraid you might say to Balarām, 'Who asked him to come here?'"

HARIBALLAV: "Who has been telling you things? Please don't let such a thought enter your mind."

Hariballav departed.

MASTER (to M.): "He is a devotee of God; why else would he have forcibly taken the dust of my feet? I told you the other day that in samādhi I had seen Dr. Sarkar and another person. He is the other person. So he has come."

M: "Yes, sir. Undoubtedly he is a bhakta."

MASTER: "How guileless he is!"

M. went to Dr.Sarkar's house to report Sri Ramakrishna's condition. The doctor talked to M. about Sri Ramakrishna, Mahimacharan, and the other devotees.

DOCTOR: "Mahimacharan didn't bring the book he promised to show me. He said he had forgotten all about it. It is quite possible. I am forgetful too."

M: "He has read a great deal."

DOCTOR: "Then why is he in such a plight?"

Referring to the Master, the doctor said: "What will a man accomplish with mere bhakti? He needs jnāna too."

M. explains Master's conceptions of jnāna and bhakti

M: "Why, the Master says that bhakti comes after jnāna. But his conception of jnāna and bhakti is quite different from yours. When he says that one obtains bhakti after jnāna, he means that first comes the Knowledge of Reality and then bhakti; first the Knowledge of Brahman and then bhakti; first the Knowledge of God and then love for Him. When you speak of jnāna you mean the knowledge obtained through the senses. The jnāna Sri Ramakrishna speaks of cannot be verified by our standards. The Knowledge of Reality cannot be tested by the knowledge obtained through the senses. But your jnāna, the knowledge through the senses, can be verified."

The doctor remained silent. Then he referred to the subject of Divine Incarnation.

DOCTOR: "What is this idea of Divine Incarnation? What is this taking the dust of a man's feet?"

M: "Why, you say that during your experiments in the laboratory you go into ecstasy when you think of God's creation. Further, you feel the same emotion when you think of man. If that is so, why shouldn't we bow our heads before God? God dwells in the heart of man.

"According to Hinduism God dwells in all beings. You have not studied this subject much. Since God dwells in all beings, what is wrong in saluting a man?

"Sri Ramakrishna says that there is a greater manifestation of God in certain things than in others, as the sun is reflected better by water and by a mirror than by other objects. Water exists everywhere, but is most apparent in a river or lake. We bow down to God and not to man. God is God-not, man is God.

"God cannot be known through reasoning. All depends on faith. Of course, I am repeating to you what Sri Ramakrishna says."

Dr. Sarkar presented M. with one of his books, *The Physiological Basis of Psychology*. He wrote on the first page "As a token of brotherly regards."

Misra's visit

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room with the devotees. He was talking to a Christian devotee named Misra. Misra was born of a Christian family in northwestern India and belonged to the Quaker sect. He was thirty-five years old. Though clad in European dress he wore the ochre cloth of a sannyāsi under his foreign clothes. Two of his brothers had died on the day fixed for the marriage of one of them, and on that very day Misra had renounced the world.

MISRA: " 'It is Rāma alone who dwells in all beings.'"

Sri Ramkarishna said to the younger Naren, within Misra's hearing: "Rāma is one, but He has a thousand names. He who is called 'God' by the Christians is addressed by the Hindus as Rāma, Krishna, Isvara, and by other names. A lake has many ghats. The Hindus drink water at one ghat and call it 'jal'; the Christians at another, and call it 'water'; the Mussulmans at a third, and call it 'pani'. Likewise, He who is God to the Christians is Allah to the Mussulmans."

MISRA: "Jesus is not the son of Mary. He is God Himself. (To the devotees) Now he (pointing to Sri Ramakrishna) is as you see him-again, he is God Himself. You are not able to recognize him. I have seen him before, in visions, though I see him now directly with my eyes. I saw a garden where he was seated on a raised seat. Another person was seated on the ground, but he was not so far advanced.

"There are four door-keepers of God in this country: Tukaram in Bombay, Robert Michael in Kashmir, himself [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] in this part of the country, and another person in eastern Bengal."

MASTER: "Do you see visions?"

MISRA: "Sir, even when I lived at home I used to see light. Then I had a vision of Jesus. How can I describe that beauty? How insignificant is the beauty of a woman compared with that beauty!"

After a while Misra took off his trousers and showed the devotees the *Gerruā* loin-cloth that he wore underneath.

Presently Sri Ramakrishna went out on the porch. Returning to the room, he said to the devotees, "I saw him [meaning Misra] standing in a heroic posture." As he uttered these words he went into samādhi. He stood facing the west.

Regaining partial consciousness, he fixed his gaze on Misra and began to laugh. Still in an ecstatic mood, he shook hands with him and laughed again. Taking him by the hands, he said, "You will get what you are seeking."

MISRA (with folded hands): "Since that day I have surrendered to you my mind, soul, and body."

Sri Ramakrishna was laughing, still in an ecstatic mood.

The Master resumed his seat. Misra was describing his worldly life to the devotees. He told them how his two brothers were killed when the canopy came down at the time of the marriage.

Sri Ramakrishna asked the devotees to take care of Misra.

Dr.Sarkar arrived. At the sight of him Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi. When his ecstasy abated a little, he said, "First the bliss of divine inebriation and then the Bliss of Satchidananda, the Cause of the cause."

DOCTOR: "Yes."

MASTER: "I am not unconscious."

The doctor realized that the Master was inebriated with divine bliss. Therefore he said, "No, no! You are quite conscious."

Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said:

I drink no ordinary wine, but Wine of Everlasting Bliss,
As I repeat my Mother Kāli's name;
It so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk!
First my guru gives molasses for the making of the Wine;
My longing is the ferment to transform it.
Knowledge, the maker of the Wine, prepares it for me then;
And when it is done, my mind imbibes it from the bottle of the mantra,
Taking the Mother's name to make it pure.
Drink of this Wine, says Ramprasad, and the four fruits of life are yours.

Master blesses Dr. Sarkar

As the doctor listened to the words, he too became almost ecstatic. Sri Ramakrishna again went into a deep spiritual mood and placed his foot on the doctor's lap. A few minutes later he became conscious of the outer world and withdrew his foot. He said to the doctor: "Ah, what a splendid thing you said the other day! 'We lie in the lap of God. To whom shall we speak about our illness if not to Him?' If I must pray, I shall certainly pray to Him." As Sri Ramakrishna said these words, his eyes filled with tears. Again he went into ecstasy and said to the doctor, "You are very pure; otherwise I could not have put my foot on your lap." Continuing, he said: "'He alone has peace who has tasted the

Bliss of Rāma.' What is this world? What is there in it? What is there in money, wealth, honour, or creature comforts? 'O mind, know Rāma! Whom else should you know?' "

The devotees were worried to see the Master's repeated ecstasies in this state of ill health. He said, "I shall be quiet if someone sings that song- 'The Wine of Heavenly Bliss'."

Narendra was sent for from another room. He sang in his sweet voice:

Be drunk, O mind, be drunk with the Wine of Heavenly Bliss!
Roll on the ground and weep, chanting Hari's sweet name!
Fill the arching heavens with your deep lion roar,
Singing Hari's sweet name! With both your arms upraised,
Dance in the name of Hari and give His name to all!
Swim day and night in the sea of the bliss of Hari's love;
Slay desire with His name, and blessed be your life!

MASTER: "And that one-'Upon the Sea of Blissful Awareness'."

Narendra sang:

Upon the Sea of Blissful Awareness waves of ecstatic love arise:
Rapture divine! Play of God's Bliss!
Oh, how enthralling! . .

Narendra sang again:

Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,
The Stainless One, Pure Spirit through and through.
How peerless is the light that in Him shines!
How soul-bewitching is His wondrous form!
How dear is He to all His devotees!

Ever more beauteous in fresh-blossoming love
That shames the splendour of a million moons,
Like lightning gleams the glory of His form,
Raising erect the hair for very joy.

Worship His feet in the lotus of your heart;
With mind serene and eyes made radiant
With heavenly love, behold that matchless sight.
Caught in the spell of His love's ecstasy,
Immerse yourself for evermore, O mind,
In Him who is Pure Knowledge and Pure Bliss.

Dr. Sarkar listened to the songs attentively. When the singing was over, he said, 'That's a nice one- 'Upon the Sea of Blissful Awareness'."

At the sight of the doctor's joy, Sri Ramakrishna said: "The son said to the father, 'Father, you taste a little wine, and after that, if you ask me to give up drinking, I shall do so.' After drinking the wine, the father said: 'Son, you may give it up. I have no objection. But I am certainly not going to give it up myself!' (The doctor and the others laugh.)

"The other day the Divine Mother showed me two men in a vision. He [meaning the doctor] is one. She also revealed to me that he will have much knowledge; but it is dry knowledge. (Smiling, to the doctor) But you will soften."

Dr. Sarkar remained silent.

Friday, November 6, 1885

It was the day of the Kāli Puja, the worship of the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna's Chosen Ideal. At about nine o'clock in the morning the Master, clad in a new cloth, stood in the south room on the second floor of his temporary residence at Syampukur. He had asked M. to offer worship to Siddhesvari at Thanthania, in the central part of Calcutta, with flowers, green coconut, sugar, and other sweets. After bathing in the Ganges, M. had offered the worship and come barefoot to Syampukur. He had brought the Prasad with him. Sri Ramakrishna took off his shoes and with great reverence ate a little of the Prasad and placed a little on his head.

At the Master's request M. had purchased two books of songs by Ramprasad and Kamlakanta for Dr. Sarkar.

M: "Here are the books of songs by Ramprasad and Kamlakanta."

MASTER: "Force songs like these on the doctor:

How are you trying, O my mind, to know the nature of God?
Who is there that can understand what Mother Kāli is?
O mind, you do not know how to farm!
Fallow lies the field of your life.. .
Come, let us go for a walk, O mind, to Kāli, the Wish-fulfilling Tree. . . ."

M: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna was pacing the room with M. He had put on his slippers. In spite of his painful illness his face beamed with joy.

MASTER: "And this song is also very good: 'This world is a framework of illusion.' "

M: "Yes, sir."

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna gave a start. He put aside his slippers and stood still. He was in deep samādhi. It was the day of the Divine Mother's worship. Was that why he frequently went into samādhi? After a long while he sighed and restrained his emotion as if with great difficulty.

It was about ten o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on his bed, leaning against the pillow. The devotees sat around him. Ram, Rākhāl, Niranjan, Kalipada, M., and many others were present. Sri Ramakrishna was talking about his nephew Hriday.

About Hriday

MASTER: "Hriday is even now clamouring for land. He said to me one day while he was living with me at Dakshineswar, 'Give me a shawl, or I will sue you.' The Divine Mother removed him from Dakshineswar. He pestered the visitors for money. If he had stayed with me all these people could not have come. That is why the Mother removed him. R- also began to act that way. He became querulous. When he was asked to accompany me in a carriage he would hold back. He would be annoyed if the other youngsters came to me. If I went to Calcutta to see them, he would say: 'Why should you bother about them? Will they renounce the world?' If I wanted to offer refreshments to the other young boys, I would be afraid of R-and say to him, 'Take some yourself and then give it to them.' I came to know that he would not stay with me. Thereupon I Said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, don't remove him altogether, like Hriday.' Then I came to know that he was going to Vrindāvan. If R-had stayed with me at that time, all these youngsters could not have mixed with me. He left for Vrindāvan and these young boys began to visit me frequently."

R- (humbly): "Sir, that wasn't really in my mind."

RAM (to R-): "Do you think you understand your mind as well as he understands it?"

R- remained silent.

MASTER (to R-): "Why should you feel that way? I love you more than a father loves his son. . . . Now please keep quiet. . . You no longer have that attitude."

After a time the devotees went to another room. Sri Ramakrishna sent for R- and said to him, "Did you mind what I said?"

R-: "No, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: "It is the day of the Kāli Puja. It is good to make some arrangements for the worship. Please speak to the devotees about it."

M. went to the drawing-room and told the devotees what the Master had said. Kalipada and others busied themselves with the arrangements.

About two o'clock in the afternoon Dr. Sarkar arrived, accompanied by Professor Nilmani. The doctor listened to the report of the illness and prescribed medicine. Sri Ramakrishna said to him, "These two books have been purchased for you." M. handed him the books.

The doctor wanted to hear some songs. At the Master's bidding, M. and another devotee sang:

How are you trying O my mind, to know the nature of God?
You are groping like a madman locked in a dark room. . .

Then they sang:

Who is there that can understand what Mother Kāli is?
Even the six darsanas are powerless to reveal Her.
It is She, the scriptures say, that is the Inner Self
Of the yogi, who in Self discovers all his joy;
She that, of Her own sweet will, inhabits every living thing.
The macrocosm and microcosm rest in the Mother's womb;
Now do you see how vast it is? In the Muladhara
The yogi meditates on Her, and in the Sahasrara:
Who but Śiva has beheld Her as She really is?
Within the lotus wilderness She sports beside Her Mate, the Swan.
When man aspires to understand Her, Ramprasad must smile;
To think of knowing Her, he says, is quite as laughable
As to imagine one can swim across the boundless sea.
But while my mind has understood, alas! my heart has not;
Though but a dwarf, it still would strive to make a captive of the moon.

Again they sang:

O mind, you do not know how to farm!
Fallow lies the field of your life.
If you had only worked it well,
How rich a harvest you might reap! . . .

Then:

Come, let us go for a walk, O mind, to Kāli, the Wish-fulfilling Tree,
And there beneath It gather the four fruits of life. . . .

Dr. Sarkar said to Girish, "That song of yours is very nice-the one about the vina, in the Life of Buddha." At a hint from the Master, Girish and Kalipada sang together:

Behold my vina, my dearly beloved,
My lute of sweetest tone;
If tenderly you play on it,

The strings will waken, at your touch,
To rarest melodies. . .

They continued:

We moan for rest, alas! but rest can never find;
We know not whence we come, nor where we float away.
Time and again we tread this round of smiles and tears;
In vain we pine to know whither our pathway leads,
And why we play this empty play. . . .

They sang again:

Hold me fast, O Nitai! I feel as if I shall pass away!
Bestowing Hari's name on men,
I raised high waves in the river of my love,
And now upon its raging stream I am carried helplessly.
With grief my heart is laden down;
Alas! Nitai, to whom shall I speak of it?
Behold, I am swiftly borne away by the current of man's deep woe.

Then they sang:

Jagai! Madhai! Oh come and dance,
Chanting Hari's name with fervour! . . .

And finally:

Come one and all! Take Radha's love!
The high tide of her love flows by;
It will not last for very long.
Oh, come then! Come ye, one and all! . . .

Listening to these songs, two or three of the devotees-among them, Manindra and Lātu, went into a spiritual mood. Lātu was seated by Niranjan's side. When the singing was over, the Master spoke with the doctor. The previous day Dr. Pratap Mazumdar had prescribed *nux vomica* for the Master. Dr. Sarkar was annoyed to hear of it.

DOCTOR: "To give him *nux vomica!* Why, I am not dead yet"

MASTER (smiling): "Why should you die? God forbid! May your avidyā die."

DOCTOR: "I never have any avidyā!"

Dr. Sarkar understood avidyā to mean "Mistress".

MASTER (smiling): "Oh, no! I don't mean that! In the case of a sannyāsi, his mother, Avidyā, Ignorance, dies giving birth to a child, Viveka, Discrimination."

Hariballav arrived. Sri Ramakrishna said, "I feel very happy when I see you." Hariballav was a man of very humble nature; he sat on the bare floor and not on the mat. He began to fan the Master. He was the government lawyer at Cuttack. Professor Nilmani sat near them. Sri Ramakrishna did not want to offend him; casting his glance on the professor, he said, "Oh, what a grand day it is for me!"

A few minutes later Dr. Sarkar and Professor Nilmani took their leave. Hariballav also departed, saying that he would come again.

Worship of Kāli

It is the dark night of the new moon. At seven o'clock the devotees make arrangements for the worship of Kāli in Sri Ramakrishna's room on the second floor. Flowers, sandal-paste, vilwa-leaves, red hibiscus, rice pudding, and various sweets and other articles of worship are placed in front of the Master. The devotees are sitting around him. There are present, among others, Sarat, Śaśi, Ram, Girish, Chunilal, M., Rākhāl, Niranjan, and the younger Naren.

Sri Ramakrishna asks a devotee to bring some incense. A few minutes later he offers all the articles to the Divine Mother. M. is seated close to him. Looking at M., he says to the devotees, "Meditate a little." The devotees close their eyes.

Presently Girish offers a garland of flowers at Sri Ramakrishna's feet. M. offers flowers and sandal-paste. Rākhāl, Ram, and the other devotees follow him.

Niranjan offers a flower at Sri Ramakrishna's feet, crying: "Brahmamayi! Brahmamayi!" and prostrates himself before him, touching the Master's feet with his head. The devotees cry out, "Jai Ma!", "Hail to the Mother!"

Manifestation of the Divine Mother through the Master

In the twinkling of an eye Sri Ramakrishna goes into deep samādhi. An amazing transformation takes place in the Master before the very eyes of the devotees. His face shines with a heavenly light. His two hands are raised in the posture of granting boons and giving assurance to the devotees; it is the posture one sees in images of the Divine Mother. His body is motionless; he has no consciousness of the outer world. He sits facing the north. Is the Divine Mother of the Universe manifesting Herself through his person? Speechless with wonder, the devotees look intently at Sri Ramakrishna, who appears to them to be the embodiment of the Divine Mother Herself.

The devotees begin to sing hymns, one of them leading and the rest following in chorus.

Girish sings:

Who is this Woman with the thick black hair,
Shining amidst the assembly of the gods?
Who is She, whose feet are like crimson lotuses
Planted on Śiva's chest?
Who is She, whose toe-nails shine like the full moon,
Whose legs burn with the brightness of the sun?

Who is She, who now speaks soft and smiles on us,
And now fills all the quarters of the sky
With shouts of terrible laughter?

Again:

O Mother, Saviour of the helpless, Thou the Slayer of sin!
In Thee do the three Gunās dwell-sattva, rajas, and tamas;
Thou dost create the world;
Thou dost sustain it and destroy it;
Binding Thyself with attributes, Thou yet transcendest them;
For Thou, O Mother, art the All. . . .

Behari sings:

O Syama, Thou who dost sit upon a corpse!
I beg Thee, hear my heart's most fervent prayer:
As my last breath forsakes this mortal flesh,
Reveal Thyself within my heart!
Then, in my mind, from forest and from grove
I shall gather Thee red hibiscus flowers,
And, scenting them with the sandal-paste of Love,
Shall lay them at Thy Lotus Feet.

M. sings with the other devotees:

O Mother, all is done after Thine own sweet will;
Thou art in truth self-willed, Redeemer of mankind!
Thou workest Thine own work; men only call it theirs. . .

They sing again:

All things are possible, O Mother, through Thy grace;
Obstacles mountain high Thou makest to melt away.
Thou Home of Bliss! To all Thou givest peace and joy;
Why then should I be made to suffer fruitlessly,
Brooding on the success or failure of my deeds?

And again:

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,
Do not deprive Thy worthless child of bliss!
My mind knows nothing but Thy Lotus Feet.
The King of Death scowls at me terribly;
Tell me, Mother, what shall I say to him? . . .

They conclude:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Thy formless beauty sparkles;
Therefore the yogis meditate in a dark mountain cave. .

Gradually Sri Ramakrishna came back to the consciousness of the outer world. He asked the devotees to sing "O Mother Syama, full of the waves of drunkenness divine". They sang:

O Mother Syama, full of the waves of drunkenness divine!
Who knows how Thou dost sport in the world?
Thy fun and frolic and Thy glances put to shame the god of love. . . .

When this song was over, Sri Ramakrishna asked the devotees to sing "Behold my Mother playing with Śiva". The devotees sang:

Behold my Mother playing with Śiva, lost in an ecstasy of joy!
Drunk with a draught of celestial wine, She reels, and yet She does not fall. . . .

Master in deep ecstasy

Sri Ramakrishna tasted a little Pudding to make the devotees happy, but immediately went into deep ecstasy.

A few minutes later the devotees prostrated themselves before the Master and went into the drawing-room. There they enjoyed the Prasad.

It was nine o'clock in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna sent word to the devotees, asking them to go to Surendra's house to participate in the worship of Kāli.

They arrived at Surendra's house on Simla Street and were received very cordially. Surendra conducted them to the drawing-room on the second floor. The house was filled with a festive atmosphere and a veritable mart of joy was created with the songs and music of the devotees. It was very late at night when they returned to their homes after enjoying the sumptuous feast given by Surendra, the Master's beloved disciple.

Chapter 49

THE MASTER AT COSSIPORE

Wednesday, December 23, 1885

Master moved to Cossipore

ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, Sri Ramakrishna was moved to a beautiful house at Cossipore, a suburb of Calcutta. The house was situated in a garden covering about five acres of land and abounding in fruit trees and flowering plants. Here the final curtain fell on the Master's life.

At Cossipore he set himself with redoubled energy to the completion of the work of spiritual ministration he had begun long before at Dakshineswar. Realizing that the end of' his physical life was approaching, he gave away his spiritual treasures without stint to one and all. He was like one of those fruit-sellers who bring their fruit to the market-place, bargain at first about the prices, but then toward sunset, when the market is about to close, give away the fruit indiscriminately. Here his disciples saw the greatest manifestation of his spiritual powers.

Predicting his passing away

Here they saw the fulfilment of his prophecies about his own end: "I shall make the whole thing public before I go." "When people in large numbers come to know and whisper about the greatness of this body, then the Mother will take it back." "The devotees will be sifted into inner and outer circles toward the end." And so on. Here he predicted that a band of young disciples, with Narendranath as their leader, would in due course renounce the world and devote themselves to the realization of God and the service of humanity.

The main building at Cossipore had two storeys, with three rooms below and two above. The Master occupied the central hall of the upper storey; a small room to the left was used at night by his attendants. To the right of the hall was an open balcony where Sri Ramakrishna sometimes sat or walked. On the ground floor, a hall just below the Master's and a small room to the right of it were used by the devotees, and a small room to the extreme left was occupied by the Holy Mother. In the garden compound were some outbuildings, two reservoirs, and pleasant walks. Sri Ramakrishna breathed more freely in the open air of the new place.

The companion of devotees

Almost all the devotees had gathered by this time. They had started coming to him in 1881. By the end of 1884 Sarat and Śaśi had become known to the Master, and since their college examinations in the middle of 1885 they had been visiting him almost daily. Girish Ghosh had first met the Master in September 1884 at the Star Theatre. Since the beginning of the following December he had been a constant visitor. And it was during the latter part of December 1884 that Sarada Prasanna first visited the Master at the Dakshineswar temple. Subodh and Kshirode first visited him in August 1885.

The young devotees had taken up their quarters at the garden house to tend Sri Ramakrishna, although many of them visited their own homes every now and then. The householders came to see the Master almost every day, and some of them occasionally spent the night.

Master's love for devotees

On the morning of December 23 Sri Ramakrishna gave unrestrained expression to his love for the devotees. He said to Niranjan, "You are my father: I shall sit on your lap." Touching Kalipada's chest, he said, "May your inner spirit be awakened!" He stroked Kalipada's chin affectionately and said, "Whoever has sincerely called on God or performed his daily religious devotions will certainly come here." In the morning two ladies received his special blessing. In a state of samādhi he touched their hearts with his feet. They shed tears of joy. One of them said to him, weeping, "You are so kind!" His love this day really broke all bounds. He wanted to bless Gopal of Sinthi and said to a devotee, "Bring Gopal here."

It was evening. Sri Ramakrishna was absorbed in contemplation of the Mother of the Universe. After awhile he began to talk very softly with some of the devotees. Kāli, Chunilal, M., Navagopal, Śaśi, Niranjan, and a few others were present.

MASTER (to M.): "Buy a stool for me. What will it cost?"

M: "Between two and three rupees."

MASTER: "If a small wooden seat costs only twelve *ānnās*, why should you have to pay so much for a stool?"

M: "Perhaps it won't cost so much."

MASTER: "Tomorrow is Thursday. The latter part of the afternoon is inauspicious. Can't you come before three o'clock?"

M: "Yes, sir. I shall."

MASTER: "Well, can you tell how long it will take me to recover from this illness?"

M: "It has been aggravated a little and will take some days."

MASTER: "How long?"

M: "Perhaps five to six months."

Hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna became impatient, like a child, and said: "So long? What do you mean?"

M: "I mean, Sir, for complete recovery:"

Significance of the Master's illness

MASTER: "Oh, that! I am relieved. Can you explain one thing? How is it that in spite of all these visions, all this ecstasy and samādhi, I am so ill?"

M: "Your suffering is no doubt great; but it has a deep meaning."

MASTER: "What is it?"

M: "A change is coming over your mind. It is being directed toward the formless aspect of God. Even your 'ego of Knowledge is vanishing.' "

MASTER: "That is true. My teaching of others is coming to an end. I cannot give any more instruction. I see that everything is Rāma Himself. And sometimes I say to myself, 'Whom shall I teach?' You see, because I am living in a rented house many kinds of devotees are coming here. I hope I shall not have to put up a 'signboard', like Shashadhar or Krishnaprasanna Sen, announcing my lectures." (The Master and M. laugh.)

M: "There is yet another purpose in this illness. It is the final sifting of disciples. The devotees have achieved in these few days what they could not have realized by five years' *tapasya*. Their love and devotion are growing by leaps and bounds."

MASTER: "That may be true; but Niranjan went back home. (To Niranjan) Please tell me how you feel."

NIRANJAN: "Formerly I loved you, no doubt, but now it is impossible for me to live without you."

M: "One day I found out how great these young men were."

MASTER: "Where?"

M: "Sir, one day I stood in a corner of the house at Syampukur and watched the devotees. I clearly saw that every one of them had made his way here through almost insurmountable obstacles and given himself over to your service."
As Sri Ramakrishna listened to these words he became abstracted. He was silent a few moments. Presently he went into samādhi.

Regaining consciousness of the outer world, he said to M.: "I saw everything passing from form to formlessness. I want to tell you all the things I saw, but I cannot. Well, this tendency of mine toward the formless is only a sign of my nearing dissolution. Isn't that so?"

M. (wonderingly): "It may be."

MASTER: "Even now I am seeing the Formless Indivisible Satchidananda-just like that. . . But I have suppressed my feelings with great difficulty.

"What you said about the sifting of disciples was right: this illness is showing who belong to the inner circle and who to the outer. Those who are living here, renouncing the world, belong to the inner circle; and those who pay occasional visits and ask, 'How are you, sir?' belong to the outer circle.

"Didn't you notice Bhavanāth? The other day he came to Syampukur dressed as a bridegroom and asked me, 'How are you?' I haven't seen him since. I show him love for Narendra's sake, but he is not in my thought any more.

Different classes of devotees

(To M.) "When God assumes a human body for the sake of His devotees, many of His devotees accompany Him to this earth. Some of them belong to the inner circle, some to the outer circle, and some become the suppliers of His physical needs.

The great visions

"I experienced one of my first ecstasies when I was ten or eleven years old, as I was going through a meadow to the shrine of Viśālākśi. What a vision! I became completely unconscious of the outer world.

"I was twenty-two or twenty-three when the Divine Mother one day asked me in the Kāli temple, 'Do you want to be Akshara?' I didn't know what the word meant. I asked Haladhāri about it. He said, 'Kshara means jiva, living being; Akshara means Paramatman, the Supreme Soul.'

"At the hour of the evening worship in the Kāli temple I would climb to the roof of the kuthi and cry out: 'O devotees, where are you all? Come to me soon! I shall die of the company of worldly people!' I told all this to the 'Englishmen'. They said it was all an illusion of my mind. 'Perhaps it is', I said to myself, and became calm. But now it is all coming true; the devotees are coming.

Five suppliers of the Master's needs

"The Divine Mother also showed me in a vision the five suppliers of my needs; first, Mathur Babu, and second, Sambhu Mallick, whom I had not then met. I had a vision of a fair-skinned man with a cap on his head. Many days later, when I first met Sambhu, I recalled that vision; 1 realized that it was he whom I had seen in that ecstatic state. I haven't yet found out the three other suppliers of my wants. But they were all of a fair complexion. Surendra looks like one of them.

"When I attained this" state of God-Consciousness, a person exactly resembling myself thoroughly shook my Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna nerves. He licked with his tongue each of the lotuses of the six centres, and those drooping lotuses at once turned their faces upward. And at last the Sahasrara lotus became full-blown.

Master's foreseeing of the coming of devotees

"The Divine Mother used to reveal to me the nature of the devotees before their coming. I saw with these two eyes-not in a trance-the kirtan party of Chaitanya going from the banyan-tree to the bakul-tree in the Panchavati. I saw Balarām in the procession and

also, I think, yourself [meaning M.]. Chuni's spiritual consciousness and yours, too, have been awakened by frequent visits to me. In a vision I saw that Śaśi and Sarat had been among the followers of Christ.

"Under the banyan-tree in the Panchavati I had a vision of a child. Hriday said to me, 'Then a son will soon be born to you.' I said to him:

'But I regard all women as mother. How can I have a son?' That child is Rākhāl .

"I said to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, since You have placed me in this condition, provide me with a rich man. That is why Mathur served me for fourteen years. And in how many different ways! At my request he arranged a special store-room for the sādhus. He provided me with carriage and palanquin. And whatever I asked him to give to anyone, he gave. The Brahmani identified him with Prataprudra.

"Vijay had a vision of this form [meaning himself]. How do you account for it? Vijay said to me, 'I touched it exactly as I am touching you now.'

"Lātu counted thirty-one devotees in all. That's not many. But a few more are becoming devotees through Vijay and Kedār.

"It was revealed to me in a vision that during my last days I should have to live on pudding. During my present illness my wife was one day feeding me with pudding. I burst into tears and said, 'Is this my living on pudding near the end, and so painfully?' "

Monday, January 4 1886

It was the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the moon. At four o'clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room. He told M. that Ram Chatterji had come from the Kāli temple at Dakshineswar to inquire about his health. He asked M. whether it was now very cold at the temple garden.

Master and Narendra

Narendra arrived. Now and then the Master looked at him and smiled. It appeared to M. that that day the Master's love for his beloved disciple was boundless. He indicated to M. by a sign that Narendra had wept. Then he remained quiet. Again he indicated that Narendra had cried all the way from home.

No one spoke. Narendra broke the silence.

NARENDRA: "I have been thinking of going there today."

MASTER: "Where?"

NARENDRA: "To Dakshineswar. I intend to light a fire under the bel-tree and meditate."

MASTER: "No, the authorities of the powder-magazine will not allow it. The Panchavati is a nice place. Many sādhus have practised japa and meditation there. But it is very cold there. The place is dark, too."

Again for a few moments all sat in silence.

MASTER (to Narendra, smiling): "Won't you continue your studies?"

NARENDRA (looking at the Master and M.): "I shall feel greatly relieved if I find a medicine that will make me forget all I have studied."

The elder Gopal, who was also in the room, said, "I shall accompany Narendra."

Kalipada Ghosh had brought a box of grapes for Sri Ramakrishna; it lay beside the Master. The Master gave Narendra a few and poured the rest on the floor for the devotees to pick up.

Narendra's yearning for God

It was evening. Narendra was sitting in a room downstairs. He was smoking and describing to M. the yearning of his soul. No one else was with them.

NARENDRA: "I was meditating here last Saturday when suddenly I felt a peculiar sensation in my heart."

M: "It was the awakening of the Kundalini."

NARENDRA: "Probably it was. I clearly perceived the Ida and the Pingala nerves. I asked Hazra to feel my chest. Yesterday I saw him [meaning the Master] upstairs and told him about it. I said to him: 'All the others have had their realization; please give me some. All have succeeded; shall I alone remain unsatisfied?' "

M: "What did he say to you?"

NARENDRA: "He said: 'Why don't you settle your family affairs first and then come to me? You will get everything. What do you want?' I replied, 'It is my desire to remain absorbed in samādhi continually for three or four days, only once in a while coming down to the sense plane to eat a little food.' Thereupon he said to me: 'You are a very small-minded person. There is a state higher even than that. "All that exists art Thou" -it is you who sing that song.'"

M: "Yes, he always says that after coming down from samādhi one sees that it is God Himself who has become the universe, the living beings, and all that exists. The Isvarakotis alone can attain that state. An ordinary man can at the most attain samādhi; but he cannot come down from that state."

NARENDRA: "He [the Master] said: 'Settle your family affairs and then come to me. You will attain a state higher than samādhi.' I went home this morning. My people scolded

me, saying: 'Why do you wander about like a vagabond? Your law examination is near at hand and you are not paying any attention to your studies. You wander about aimlessly.'"

M: "Did your mother say anything?"

NARENDRA: "No. She was very eager to feed me. She gave me venison. I ate a little, though I didn't feel like eating meat."

M: "And then?"

NARENDRA: "I went to my study at my grandmother's. As I tried to read I was seized with a great fear, as if studying were a terrible thing. My heart struggled within me. I burst into tears: I never wept so bitterly in my life. I left my books and ran away. I ran along the streets. My shoes slipped from my feet-I didn't know where. I ran past a haystack and got hay all over me. I kept on running along the road to Cossipore."

Narendra remained silent a few minutes and then resumed.

NARENDRA: "Since reading the Viveka Chudāmani I have felt very much depressed. In it Sankaracharya says that only through great *tapasya* and good fortune does one acquire these three things: a human birth, the desire for liberation, and refuge with a great soul. I said to myself: 'I have surely gained all these three. As a result of great *tapasya* I have been born a human being; through great *tapasya*, again, I have the desire for liberation; and through great *tapasya* I have secured the companionship of such a great soul.' "

M: "Ah!"

His intense dispassion

NARENDRA: "I have no more taste for the world. I do not relish the company of those who live in the world-of course, with the exception of one or two devotees."

Narendra became silent again. A fire of intense renunciation was burning within him. His soul was restless for the vision of God. He resumed the conversation.

NARENDRA (to M.): "You have found peace, but my soul is restless. You are blessed indeed."

M. did not reply, but sat in silence. He said to himself, "Sri Ramakrishna said that one must pant and pine for God; only then may one have the vision of Him."

Immediately after dusk M. went upstairs. He found Sri Ramakrishna asleep.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening. Niranjan and Śaśi were sitting near the Master. He was awake. Every now and then he talked of Narendra.

MASTER: "How wonderful Narendra's state of mind is! You see, this very Narendra did not believe in the forms of God. And now you see how his soul is panting for God! You know that story of the man who asked his guru how God could be realized. The guru said to him: 'Come with me. I shall show you how one can realize God.' Saying this, he took the disciple to a lake and held his head under the water. After a short time he released the disciple and asked him, 'How did you feel?' 'I was dying for a breath of air!' said the disciple.

"When the soul longs and yearns for God like that, then you will know that you do not have long to wait for His vision. The rosy colour on the eastern horizon shows that the sun will soon rise."

This day Sri Ramakrishna's illness was worse. In spite of much suffering he said many things about Narendra-though mostly by means of signs.

At night Narendra left for Dakshineswar. It was very dark, being the night of the new moon. He was accompanied by one or two devotees. M. spent the night at the Cossipore garden. He dreamt that he was seated in an assembly of sannyāsis.

Tuesday, January 5, 1886

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on his bed and talking to M. No one else was in the room. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

MASTER: "If Kshirode makes a pilgrimage to Gangasagar, then please buy a blanket for him."

M: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna was silent a few minutes. Then he continued.

Devotees' detachment from the world

MASTER: "Well can you tell me what is happening to these youngsters? Some are running off to Puri, and some to Gangasagar. All have renounced their homes. Look at Narendra! When a man is seized with the spirit of intense renunciation, he regards the world as a deep well and his relatives as venomous cobras."

M: "Yes, sir. Life in the world is full of suffering."

MASTER: "Yes, it is the suffering of hell-and that from the very moment of birth! Don't you see what a trouble one's wife and children are?"

M: "Yes, sir. You yourself said: 'These youngsters have no relationship whatsoever with the world. They owe nothing to the world, nor do they expect anything from it. It is the sense of obligation that entangles a man in the world.' "

MASTER: "Don't you see how Niranjan is? His attitude toward the world is this: 'Here, take what is Thine, and give me what is mine.' That is all. He has no further relationship with the world. There is nothing to pull him from behind.

"'Woman and gold' alone is the world. Don't you see that if you have money you want to lay it by?"

M. burst out laughing. Sri Ramakrishna also laughed.

M: "One thinks a great deal before taking the money out. (Both laugh.) But once you said at Dakshineswar that it is quite different if one is able to live in the world free from the three *Gunās*."

MASTER: "Yes-like a child!"

M: "Yes, sir. But it is exceedingly difficult; it requires tremendous power."

Sri Ramakrishna remained silent.

M: "Yesterday they went to Dakshineswar to meditate. I had a dream."

MASTER: "What did you dream?"

M: "I dreamt that Narendra and some others had become sannyāsis. They were sitting around a lighted fire, I too was there. They were smoking tobacco and blowing out puffs of smoke. I told them that I could smell hemp."

MASTER: "Mental renunciation is the essential thing. That, too, makes one a sannyāsi."

Sri Ramakrishna kept silent a few minutes and then went on.

MASTER: "But one must set fire to one's desires. Then alone can one succeed."

M: "You said to the pundit of the Mārwāris from Burrabazar that you had the desire for bhakti. Isn't the desire for bhakti to be counted as a desire?".

MASTER: "No, just as Hinche greens are not to be counted as greens. Hinche restrains the secretion of bile.

"Well, all my joy, all my ecstasy-where are they now?"

M: "Perhaps you are now in the state of mind that the Gitā describes as beyond the three *Gunās*. Sattva, rajas, and tamas are performing their own functions, and you yourself are unattached-unattached even to sattva."

MASTER: "Yes, the Divine Mother has put me into the state of a child. Tell me, won't the body live through this illness?"

The Master and M. became silent. Narendra entered the room. He was going home to settle his family affairs.

Since his father's death Narendra had been in great distress about his mother and brothers. Now and then they had been threatened with starvation. Narendra was the family's only hope: they expected him to earn money and feed them. But Narendra could not appear for his law examination; he was passing through a state of intense renunciation. He was going to Calcutta that day to make some provision for the family. A friend had agreed to lend him one hundred rupees. That would take care of the family for three months.

NARENDRA: "I am going home. (To M.) I shall visit Mahimacharan on the way. Will you come with me?"

M. did not want to go. Looking at M., Sri Ramakrishna asked Narendra, "Why?"

NARENDRA: "I am going that way; so I shall stop at Mahima's place and have a chat with him."

Sri Ramakrishna looked at Narendra intently.

NARENDRA: "A friend who comes here said he would lend me a hundred rupees. That will take care of the family for three months. I am going home to make that arrangement."

Sri Ramakrishna remained silent and looked at M.

M. (to Narendra): "No; you go ahead. I shall go later."

Thursday, March 11, 1886

It was eight o'clock in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna was in the big hall on the second floor. Narendra, Śaśi, M., Sarat, and the elder Gopal were in the room. Sri Ramakrishna was lying down. Sarat stood by his bed and fanned him. The Master was speaking about his illness.

MASTER: "If some of you go to Dakshineswar and see Bholanath, he will give you a medicinal oil and also tell you how to apply it."

THE ELDER GOPAL: "Then we shall go for the oil tomorrow morning."

M: "If someone goes this evening he can bring the oil."

ŚAŚI: "I can go."

MASTER (pointing to Sarat): "He may go."

After a time Sarat set out for Dakshineswar to get the oil from Bholanath. The devotees, sitting around Sri Ramakrishna's bed, were silent. Suddenly the Master sat up. He spoke to Narendranath.

Brahman is beyond the *Gunās*

MASTER: "Brahman is without taint. The three *Gunās* are in Brahman, but It is Itself untainted by them.

"You may find both good and bad smells in the air; but the air itself is unaffected.

"Sankaracharya was going along a street in Benares. An outcaste carrying a load of meat suddenly touched him. 'What!' said Sankara. 'You have touched me!' 'Revered sir,' said the outcaste, 'I have not touched you nor have you touched me. The Ātman is above all contamination, and you are that Pure Ātman.'

Brahman and māyā

"Of Brahman and māyā, the Jnāni rejects māyā.

"Māyā is like a veil. You see, I hold this towel between you and the lamp. You no longer see the light of the lamp."

Sri Ramakrishna put the towel between himself and the devotees.

MASTER: "Now you cannot see my face any more. As Ramprasad said, 'Raise the curtain, and behold!'

"The bhakta, however, does not ignore māyā. He worships Mahamaya. Taking refuge in Her, he says: 'O Mother, please stand aside from my path. Only if You step out of my way shall I have the Knowledge of Brahman.' The jnanis explain away all three states-waking, dream, and deep sleep. But the bhaktas accept them all. As long as there is the ego, everything else exists. So long as the 'I' exists, the bhakta sees that it is God who has become māyā, the universe, the living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles."

Narendra and the other devotees sat silently listening.

MASTER: "But the theory of māyā is dry. (To Narendra) Repeat what I said."

NARENDRA: "Māyā is dry."

Sri Ramakrishna affectionately stroked Narendra's face and hands and said: "Your face and hands show that you are a bhakta. But the Jnāni has different features; they are dry.

Wicked ego and spiritualised ego

"Even after attaining Jnāna, the Jnāni can live in the world, retaining Vidyā-māyā, that is to say, bhakti, compassion, renunciation, and such virtues. This serves him, two

purposes: first, the teaching of men, and second, the enjoyment of divine bliss. If a Jnāni remains silent, merged in samādhi, then men's hearts will not be illumined. Therefore Sankaracharya kept the 'ego of Knowledge'. And further, a Jnāni lives as a devotee, in the company of bhaktas, in order to enjoy and drink deep of the Bliss of God.

"The 'ego of Knowledge' and the 'ego of Devotion' can do no harm; it is the 'wicked I' that is harmful. After realizing God a man becomes like a child. There is no harm in the 'ego of a child'. It is like the reflection of a face in a mirror: the reflection cannot call names. Or it is like a burnt rope, which appears to be a rope but disappears at the slightest puff. The ego that has been burnt in the fire of Knowledge cannot injure anybody. It is an ego only in name."

"Returning to the relative plane after reaching the Absolute is like coming back to this shore of a river after going to the other side. Such a return to the relative plane is for the teaching of men and for enjoyment-participation in the divine sport in the world."

Sri Ramakrishna was talking in a very low voice. Addressing the devotees, he said: "The body is so ill, but the mind is free from Avidyā-māyā. Let me tell you, there is no thought in my mind of Ramlal or home or wife. But I have been worrying about Purna, that kayastha boy. I am not in the least anxious about the others.

"It is God alone who has kept this Vidyā-māyā in me, for the good of men, for the welfare of the devotees.

No liberation for Divine Incarnations

"But if one retains Vidyā-māyā one comes back to this world. The Avatars keep this Vidyā-māyā. So long as a man has even the slightest desire, he must be born again and again. When he gets rid of all desires, then he is liberated. But the bhaktas do not seek liberation.

"If a person dies in Benares he attains liberation; he is not born again. Liberation is the goal of the jnanis."

NARENDRA: "The other day we went to visit Mahimacharan."

MASTER (smiling): "Well?"

NARENDRA: "I have never before met such a dry Jnāni."

MASTER (smiling): "What was the matter?"

NARENDRA: "He asked us to sing. Gangadhar sang:

Radha is restored to life by hearing her Krishna's name
She looks about; in front of her she sees a tamala tree.

"On hearing this song, Mahimacharan said: 'Why such songs here? I don't care for love and all that nonsense. Besides, I live here with my wife and children. Why all these songs here?' "

MASTER (to M.): "Do you see how afraid he is?"

Sunday, March 14, 1886

Sri Ramakrishna sat facing the north in the large room upstairs. It was evening. He was very ill. Narendra and Rākhāl were gently massaging his feet. M, sat near by. The Master, by a sign, asked him, too, to stroke his feet. M. obeyed.

The previous Sunday the devotees had observed Sri Ramakrishna's birthday with worship and prayer. His birthday the year before had been observed at Dakshineswar with great pomp; but this year, on account of his illness, the devotees were very sad and there was no festivity at all.

The Holy Mother busied herself day and night in the Master's service. Among the young disciples, Narendra, Rākhāl, Niranjan, Sarat, Śaśi, Baburam, Jogin, Lātu, and Kāli had been staying with him at the garden house. The older devotees visited him daily, and some of them occasionally spent the night there.

That day Sri Ramakrishna was feeling very ill. At midnight the moonlight flooded the garden, but it could wake no response in the devotees' hearts. They were drowned in a sea of grief. They felt that they were living in a beautiful city besieged by a hostile army. Perfect silence reigned everywhere. Nature was still, except for the gentle rustling of the leaves at the touch of the south wind. Sri Ramakrishna lay awake. One or two devotees sat near him in silence. At times he seemed to doze.

Master's great suffering

M. was seated by his side. Sri Ramakrishna asked him by a sign to come nearer. The sight of his suffering was unbearable. In a very soft voice and with great difficulty he said to M:

"I have gone on suffering so much for fear of making you all weep. But if you all say: 'Oh, there is so much suffering! Let the body die', then I may give up the body."

These words pierced the devotees' hearts. And he who was their father, mother, and protector had uttered these words! What could they say? All sat in silence. Some thought, "Is this another crucifixion-the sacrifice of the body for the sake of the devotees?"

It was the dead of night. Sri Ramakrishna's illness was taking a turn for the worse. The devotees wondered what was to be done. One of them left for Calcutta. That very night Girish came to the garden house with two physicians, Upendra and Navagopal.

The devotees sat near the Master. He felt a little better and said to them: "The illness is of the body. That is as it should be; I see that the body is made of the five elements."

Turning to Girish, he said: "I am seeing many forms of God. Among them I find this one also [meaning his own form]."

Monday, March 15, 1886

About seven o'clock in the morning Sri Ramakrishna felt a little better. He talked to the devotees, sometimes in a whisper, sometimes by signs. Narendra, Rākhāl, Lātu, M., Gopal of Sinthi, and others were in the room. They sat speechless and looked grave, thinking of the Master's suffering of the previous night.

His vision of unity

MASTER (to the devotees): "Do you know what I see right now? I see that it is God Himself who has become all this. It seems to me that men and other living beings are made of leather, and that it is God Himself who, dwelling inside these leather cases, moves the hands, the feet, the heads. I had a similar vision once before, when I saw houses, gardens, roads, men, cattle-all made of One Substance; it was as if they were all made of wax.

"I see that it is God Himself who has become the block, the executioner, and the victim for the sacrifice."

As he describes this staggering experience, in which he realizes in full the identity of all within the One Being, he is overwhelmed with emotion and exclaims, "Ah! What a vision!"

Immediately Sri Ramakrishna goes into samādhi. He completely forgets his body and the outer world. The devotees are bewildered. Not knowing what to do, they sit still.

Presently the Master regains partial consciousness of the world and says: "Now I have no pain at all. I am my old self again."

The devotees are amazed to watch this state of the Master, beyond pleasure and pain, weal and woe.

He casts his glance on Lātu and says: "There is Loto. He bends his head, resting it on the palm of his hand. I see that it is God Himself who rests his head on His hand."

Sri Ramakrishna looks at the devotees and his love for them wells up in a thousand streams. Like a mother showing her tenderness to her children he touches the faces and chins of Rākhāl and Narendra.

Master about himself

A few minutes later he says to M., "If the body were to be preserved a few days more, many people would have their spirituality awakened."

He pauses a few minutes.

"But this is not to be. This time the body will not be preserved."

The devotees eagerly await the Master's next words.

"Such is not the will of God. This time the body will not be preserved, lest, finding me guileless and foolish, people should take advantage of me, and lest I, guileless and foolish as I am, should give away everything to everybody. In this Kaliyuga, you see, people are averse to meditation and japa."

RĀKHĀL (tenderly): "Please speak to God that He may preserve your body some time more."

MASTER: "That depends on God's will."

NARENDRA: "Your will and God's will have become one."

Sri Ramakrisna remains silent. He appears to be thinking about something.

MASTER (to Narendra, Rākhāl , and the others): "And nothing will happen if I speak to God. Now I see that I and the Mother have become one. For fear of her sister-in-law, Radha said to Krishna, 'Please dwell in my heart.' But when, later on, she became very eager for a vision of Krishna-so eager that her heart pined and panted for her Beloved-He would not come out."

RĀKHĀL (in a low voice, to the devotees): "He is referring to God's incarnation as Gaurānga."

The devotees sit silently in the room. Sri Ramakrishna looks at them tenderly. Then he places his hand on his heart He is about to speak.

MASTER (to Narendra and the others): "There are two persons in this. One, the Divine Mother-"

He pauses. The devotees eagerly look at him to hear what he will say next.

MASTER: "Yes, One is She. And the other is Her devotee. It is the devotee who broke his arm, and it is the devotee who is now ill. Do you understand?"

The devotees sit without uttering a word.

MASTER: "Alas! To whom shall I say all this? Who will understand me?" Pausing a few moments, he says:

"God becomes man, an Avatār, and comes to earth with His devotees. And the devotee leave the world with Him."

RĀKHĀL : "Therefore we pray that you may not go away and leave us behind."

Sri Ramakrishna smiles and says:

"A band of minstrels suddenly appears, dances, and sings, and it departs in the same sudden manner. They come and they return, but none recognizes them."

The Master and the devotees smile.

After a few minutes he says:

"Suffering is inevitable when one assumes a human body.

"Every now and then I say to myself, 'May I not have to come back to earth again!' But there is something else. After enjoying sumptuous feasts outside, one does not relish cheap home cooking.

"Besides, this assuming of a human body is for the sake of the devotees."

Sri Ramakrishna looks at Narendra very tenderly.

Master teaches Narendra Brahmajnana

MASTER (to Narendra) : "An outcaste was carrying a load of meat. Sankaracharya, after bathing in the Ganges, was passing by. Suddenly the outcaste touched him. Sankara said sharply: 'What! You touched me!' 'Revered sir,' he replied, 'I have not touched you nor have you touched me. Reason with me: Are you the body, the mind, or the buddhi? Analyse what you are. You are the Pure Ātman, unattached and free, unaffected by the three *Gunās*-sattva, rajas, and tamas.'

"Do you know what Brahman is like? It is like air. Good and bad smells are carried by the air, but the air itself is unaffected."

NARENDRA: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "He is beyond the *Gunās* and māyā-beyond both the 'māyā of knowledge' and the 'māyā of ignorance'.'Woman and gold' is the 'māyā of ignorance'. Knowledge, renunciation, devotion, and other spiritual qualities are the splendours of the 'māyā of knowledge'.

"Ego of Knowledge"

Sankaracharya kept this 'māyā of knowledge'; and that you and these others feel concerned about me is also due to this 'māyā of knowledge'.

"Following the 'māyā of knowledge' step by step, one attains the Knowledge of Brahman. This 'māyā of knowledge' may be likened to the last few steps of the stairs. Next is the roof. Some, even after reaching the roof, go up and down the stairs; that is to say, some even after realizing God, retain the 'ego of Knowledge'. They retain this in order to teach others, taste divine bliss, and sport with the devotees of God."

NARENDRA: "Some people get angry with me when I speak of renunciation."

MASTER (in a whisper): "Renunciation is necessary.

(Pointing to his different limbs) "If one thing is placed upon another, you must remove the one to get the other. Can you get the second thing without removing the first?"

NARENDRA: "True, sir."

MASTER (in a whisper, to Narendra): "When one sees everything filled with God alone, does one see anything else?"

NARENDRA: "Must one renounce the world?"

MASTER: "Didn't I say just now: 'When one sees everything filled with God alone, does one see anything else?' Does one then see any such thing as the world?

"I mean mental renunciation. Not one of those who have come here is a worldly person. Some of them had a slight desire-for instance, a fancy for woman. (Rākhāl and M. smile.) And that desire has been fulfilled."

The Master looks at Narendra tenderly and becomes filled with love. Looking at the devotees, he says, "Grand!"

With a smile Narendra asks the Master, "What is grand?"

MASTER (smiling): "I see that preparations are going on for a grand renunciation."

Narendra and the devotees look silently at the Master. Rākhāl resumes the conversation.

RĀKHĀL (smiling, to the Master): "Narendra is now beginning to understand you rather well."

Sri Ramakrishna laughs and says: "Yes, that is so. I see that many others, too, are beginning to understand. (To M.) Isn't that so?"

M: "Yes, sir."

Narendra and M

Sri Ramakrishna turns his eyes to Narendra and M. and by a sign of his finger draws the attention of the devotees to them. He first points out Narendra and then M. Rākhāl understands the Master's hint and says to him with a smile, "Don't you mean that Narendra has the attitude of a hero, and he [meaning M.] that of a handmaid of God?"

Sri Ramakrishna laughs.

NARENDRA (smiling, to Rākhāl): "He [meaning M.] doesn't talk much and is bashful. Is that why you say he is a handmaid of God?"

MASTER (smiling, to Narendra): "Well, what do you think of me?"

NARENDRA: "You are a hero, a handmaid of God, and everything else."

These words fill Sri Ramakrishna with divine emotion. He places his hand on his heart and is about to say something.

He says to Narendra and the other devotees:

"I see that all things-everything that exist-have come from this."

He asks Narendra by a sign, "What did you understand?"

NARENDRA: "All created objects have come from you."

The Master's face beams with joy. He says to Rākhāl, "Did you hear what he said?" Sri Ramakrishna asks Narendra to sing. Narendra intones a hymn. His mind is full of renunciation. He sings:

Unsteady is water on the lotus petal;
Just as unsteady is the life of man.
One moment with a sādhu is the boat
That takes one across the ocean of this world. . . .

Narendra has hardly finished one or two lines, when Sri Ramakrishna says to him by a sign: "What are you singing? That is a very insignificant attitude, a very commonplace thing."

Now Narendra sings about the love of Krishna, impersonating one of His handmaids:

How strange, O friend, are the rules of life and death!
The Youth of Braja has Red away,
And this poor maid of Braja soon will die.
Madhava is in love with other maids
More beautiful than I.
Alas! He has forgotten the milkman's artless daughter.
Who would ever have guessed, dear friend, that He,
A Lover so tender, so divine,
Could be a beggar simply for outward charm?
I was a fool not to have seen it before;
But carried away by His beauty,
I yearned alone to hold His two feet to my breast.

Now I shall drown myself in the Jamuna's stream,
Or take a draught of poison, friend!
Or I shall bind a creeper round my neck,

Or hang myself from a young tamala tree;
Or, failing all of these,
Destroy my wretched self by chanting Krishna's name.

Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees are greatly moved by the song. The Master and Rākhāl shed tears of love. Narendra is intoxicated with the love of the gopis of Braja for their Sweetheart, Sri Krishna, and sings:

O Krishna! Beloved! You are mine.
What shall I say to You, O Lord?
What shall I ever say to You?
Only a woman am I,
And never fortune's favourite;
I do not know what to say.
You are the mirror for the hand,
And You are the flower for the hair.
O Friend, I shall make a flower of You
And wear You in my hair;
Under my braids I shall hide You, Friend!
No one will see You there.
You are the betel-leaf for the lips,
The sweet collyrium for the eyes;
O Friend, with You I shall stain my lips,
With You I shall paint my eyes.
You are the sandal-paste for the body;
You are the necklace for the neck.
I shall anoint myself with You,
My fragrant Sandal-paste,
And soothe my body and my soul.
I shall wear You, my lovely Necklace,
Here about my neck,
And You will lie upon my bosom,
Close to my throbbing heart.
You are the Treasure in my body;
You are the Dweller in my house.
You are to me, O Lord,
What wings are to the flying bird,
What water is to the fish.

Chapter 50

THE MASTER AND BUDDHA

Friday, April 9, 1886

IT WAS FIVE ’CLOCK in the afternoon. Narendra, Kāli, Niranjan, and M. were talking downstairs in the Cossipore garden house.

NIRANJAN (to M.): "Is it true that Vidyāsāgar is going to open a new school? Why don't you try to secure employment there for Naren?"

NARENDRA: "I have had enough of service under Vidyāsāgar."

Narendra's visit to Bodh-Gaya

Narendra had just returned from a visit to Bodh-Gaya, where he had gone with Kāli and Tārak. In that sacred place he had been absorbed in deep meditation before the image of Buddha. He had paid his respects to the Bodhi-tree, which is an offshoot of the original tree under which Buddha attained Nirvāna.

Kāli said, "One day at Gaya, at Mesh Babu's house, Narendra sang many classical songs to the accompaniment of the Mridanga."

Sri Ramakrishna sat on his bed in the big hall upstairs. It was evening. M. was alone in the room, fanning the Master. Lātu came in a little later.

MASTER (to M.): "Please bring a chaddar for me and a pair of slippers.

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER (to Lātu): "The chaddar will cost ten *ānnās*, and then the slippers. What will be the total cost?"

LĀTU: "One rupee and ten *ānnās*."

Sri Ramakrishna asked M., by a sign, to note the price.

Narendra entered the room and took a seat. Śaśi, Rākhāl, and one or two other devotees came in. The Master asked Narendra to stroke his feet. He also asked him whether he had taken his meal.

MASTER (smiling, to M.): "He went there [referring to Bodh-Gaya]."

Buddha's doctrines

M. (to Narendra): "What are the doctrines of Buddha?"

NARENDRA: "He could not express in words what he had realized by his *tapasya*. So people say he was an atheist."

MASTER (by signs): "Why atheist? He was not an atheist. He simply could not express his inner experiences in words.

The meaning of Buddha

☐Do you know what 'Buddha' means? It is to become one with Bodha, Pure Intelligence, by meditating on That which is of the nature of Pure Intelligence; it is to become Pure Intelligence Itself."

NARENDRA: "Yes, sir. There are three classes of Buddhās: Buddha, Arhat, and Bodhisattva."

MASTER: "This too is a sport of God Himself, a new *lila* of God.

"Why should Buddha be called an atheist? When one realizes Svarupa, the true nature of one's Self, one attains a state that is something between *Asti*, is, and *Nāsti*, is not."

NARENDRA (to M:): "It is a state in which contradictions meet. A combination of hydrogen and oxygen produces cool water; and the same hydrogen and oxygen are used in the oxyhydrogen blowpipe.

"In that state both activity and non-activity are possible; that is to say, one then performs unselfish action.

"Worldly people, who are engrossed in sense-objects, say that everything exists*Asti*. But the Mayavadis, the illusionists, say that nothing exists *Nāsti*. The experience of a Buddha is beyond both 'existence' and 'non-existence'. "

MASTER: "This 'existence' and 'non-existence' are attributes of Prakriti. The Reality is beyond both."

The devotees remained silent a few moments.

MASTER (to Narendra): "What did Buddha preach?"

NARENDRA: "He did not discuss the existence or non-existence of God. But he showed compassion for others all his life.

"A hawk pounced upon a bird and was about to devour it. In order to save the bird, Buddha gave the hawk his own flesh."

Narendra's enthusiasm about Buddha

Sri Ramakrishna remained silent. Narendra became more and more enthusiastic about Buddha.

NARENDA: "How great his renunciation was! Born a prince, he renounced everything! If a man has nothing, no wealth at all, what does his renunciation amount to? After attaining Buddhahood and experiencing Nirvāna, Buddha once visited his home and exhorted his wife, his son, and many others of the royal household to embrace the life of renunciation. How intense his renunciation was! But look at Vyāsa's conduct! He forbade his son Sukadeva to give up the world, saying, 'My son, practise religion as a householder.' "

Sri Ramakrishna was silent. As yet he had not uttered a word.

NARENDRA: "Buddha did not care for Śakti or any such thing. He sought only Nirvāna. Ah, how intense his dispassion was! When he sat down under the Bodhi-tree to meditate, he took this vow: 'Let my body wither away here if I do not attain Nirvāna.' Such a firm resolve!

"This body, indeed, is the great enemy. Can anything be achieved without chastising it?"

ŚAŚI: "But it is you who say that one develops sattva by eating meat. You insist that one should eat meat."

NARENDRA: "I eat meat, no doubt, but I can also live on rice, mere rice, even without salt."

After a few minutes Sri Ramakrishna broke his silence. He asked Narendra, by sign, whether he had seen a tuft of hair on Buddha's head.

NARENDRA: "No, sir. He seems to have a sort of crown; his head seems to be covered by strings of rudraksha beads placed on top of one another."

MASTER: "And his eyes?"

NARENDRA: "They show that he is in samādhi."

Master about himself

Sri Ramakrishna again became silent. Narendra and the other devotees looked at him intently. Suddenly a smile lighted his face and he began to talk with Narendra. M. was fanning him.

MASTER (to Narendra): "Well, here you find everything-even ordinary red lentils and tamarind. Isn't that so?"

NARENDRA: "After experiencing all those states, you are now dwelling on a lower plane."

M. (to himself): "Yes, after realizing all those ideals, he is now living as a bhakta, a devotee of God."

MASTER: "Someone seems to be holding me to a lower plane."

Master's vision of God

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna took the fan from M.'s hand and said: "As I see this fan, directly before me, in exactly the same manner have I seen God. And I have seen- " With these words he placed his hand on his heart and asked Narendra, by a sign, "Can you tell me what I said?"

NARENDRA: "I have understood."

MASTER: "Tell me."

NARENDRA: "I didn't hear you well"

Sri Ramakrishna said again, by a sign, "I have seen that He and the one who dwells in my heart are one and the same Person."

NARENDRA: "Yes, yes! Soham-I am He."

MASTER: "But only a line divides the two-that I may enjoy divine bliss."

NARENDRA (to M.): "Great souls, even after their own liberation, retain the ego and experience the pleasure and pain of the body that they may help others to attain liberation.

"It is like coolie work. We perform coolie work under compulsion, but great souls do so of their own sweet pleasure."

Again all fell into silence. After a time Sri Ramakrishna resumed the conversation.

MASTER (to Narendra and the others): "The roof is clearly visible; but it is extremely hard to reach it."

NARENDRA: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "But if someone who has already reached it drops down a rope, he can pull another person up.

Different kinds of samādhi

"Once a sādhu from Hrishikesh came to Dakshineswar. He said to me: 'How amazing! I find five kinds of samādhi manifested in you.'

"Just as a monkey climbs a tree, jumping from one branch to another, so also does the *Mahāvāyu*, the Great Energy, rise in the body, jumping from one centre to another, and one goes into samādhi. One feels the rising of the Great Energy, as though it were the movement of a monkey.

"Just as a fish darts about in the water and roams in great happiness, so also does the *Mahāvāyu* move upward in the body, and one goes into samādhi. One feels the rising of the Great Energy, as though it were the movement of a fish.

"Like a bird hopping from one branch to another, the *Mahāvāyu* goes up in the tree of the body, now to this branch and now to that. One feels the rising of the Great Energy, as though it were the movement of a bird.

"Like the slow creeping of an ant, the *Mahāvāyu* rises from centre to centre. When it reaches the Sahasrara one goes into samādhi. One feels the rising of the Great Energy, as though it were the movement of an ant.

"Like the wriggling of a snake, the *Mahāvāyu* rises in a zigzag way along the spinal column till it reaches the Sahasrara, and one goes into samādhi. One feels. the rising of the Great Energy, as though it were the movement of a snake."

RĀKHĀL (to the other devotees): "Let us stop here. He has already talked a great deal. It will aggravate his illness."

Monday, April 12, 1886

About five o'clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the bed in his room in the Cossipore garden house. Śaśi and M. were with him. He asked M., by a sign, to fan him. There was a fair in the neighbourhood in celebration of the last day of the Bengali year. A devotee, whom Sri Ramakrishna had sent to the fair to buy a few articles, returned. "What have you bought?" the Master asked him.

DEVOTEE: "Candy for five pice, a spoon for two pice, and a vegetable-knife for two pice."

MASTER: "What about the penknife?"

DEVOTEE: "I couldn't get one for two pice."

MASTER (eagerly): "Go quickly and get one!"

M. was pacing the garden. Narendra and Tārak returned from Calcutta. They had visited
Girish Ghosh's house and other places.

TĀRAK: "We have eaten a great deal of meat and other heavy stuff today."

NARENDRA: "Yes, our minds have come down a great deal. Let us practise *tapasya*. (To M.) What slavery to body and mind! We are just like coolies-as if this body and mind were not ours but belonged to someone else."

In the evening lamps were lighted in the house. Sri Ramakrishna sat on his bed, facing the north. He was absorbed in contemplation of the Mother of the Universe. A few minutes later Fakir, who belonged to the priestly family of Balarām, recited the Hymn of

Forgiveness addressed to the Divine Mother. Śaśi, M., and two or three other devotees were in the room. After the recital Sri Ramakrishna, with folded hands, very respectfully bowed to the Deity.

M. was fanning Sri Ramakrishna. The Master said to him by signs, "Get a stone cup for me that will hold a quarter of a seer of milk-white stone." He drew the shape of the cup with his finger.

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "When eating from other cups I get the smell of fish."

Tuesday, April 13, 1886
It was about eight o'clock in the morning. M. had spent the night at the garden house.

After taking his bath in the Ganges he prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna. Ram had just come. He saluted the Master and took a seat. He had brought a garland of flowers, which he offered to the Master. Most of the devotees were downstairs; only one or two were in the Master's room.

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Ram.

MASTER: "How do you find me?"

RAM: "In you one finds everything. "Presently there will be a discussion about your illness."

The Master smiled and asked Ram by a sign, "Will there really be a discussion about my illness?"

Sri Ramakrishna's slippers were not comfortable. Dr. Rajendra Dutta intended to buy a new pair and had asked for the measurement of his feet. The measurement was taken.

"Sri Ramakrishna asked M., by a sign, about the stone cup. M. at once stood up. He wanted to go to Calcutta for the cup.

MASTER: "Don't bother about it now."

M: "Sir, these devotees are going to Calcutta. I will go with them."

M. bought the cup in Calcutta and returned to Cossipore at noon. He saluted the Master and placed the cup near him. Sri Ramakrishna took the cup in his hand and looked at it. Dr. Rajendra Dutta, Dr. Sreenāth, Rākhāl, Haldār, and several others came in. Rākhāl, Śaśi, and the younger Naren were in the room. The physicians heard the report of the Master's illness. Dr. Sreenath had a copy of the Gitā in his hand.

DR. SREENATH (to his friends): "Everything is under the control of Prakriti. Nobody can escape the fruit of past action. This is called *Prārabdha*."

Power of God's name

MASTER: "Why, if one chants the name of God, meditates on Him, and takes refuge in Him-"

DR. SREENATH: "But, sir, how can one escape *Prārabdha*, the effect of action performed in previous births?"

MASTER: "No doubt a man experiences a little of the effect; but much of it is cancelled by the power of God's name. A man was born blind of an eye. This was his punishment for a certain misdeed he had committed in his past birth, and the punishment was to remain with him for six more births. Be, however, took a bath in the Ganges, which gives one liberation. This meritorious action could not cure his blindness, but it saved him from his future births."

DR. SREENATH: "But, sir, the scriptures say that nobody can escape the fruit of karma."

Dr. Sreenāth was ready to argue with the Master.

MASTER (to M.): "Why don't you tell him that there is a great difference between the Isvarakoti and an ordinary man? An Isvarakoti cannot commit sin. Why don't you tell him that?"

M. remained silent and then said to Rākhāl, "You tell him."

After a few minutes the physicians left the room. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Rākhāl Haldar.

HALDAR: "Dr. Sreenath studies Vedānta. He is a student of the Yoga-vasishtha."

MASTER: "A householder should not hold the view that everything is illusory, like a dream."

Referring to a man named Kalidas, a devotee said, "He too discusses Vedānta, but he has lost all his money in lawsuits."

MASTER (smiling): "Yes, one proclaims everything to be māyā, and still one goes to court! (To Rākhāl) Mukherji of Janai, too, talked big. But at last he came to his senses. If I were well I should have talked a little more with Dr. Sreenath. Can one obtain jnāna just by talking about it?"

HALDAR: "You are right, sir. I have seen enough of jnāna. Now all I need in order to live in the world is a little bhakti. The other day I came to you with a problem on my mind, and you solved it."

MASTER (eagerly): "What was it?"

HALDAR: "Sir, when that boy (pointing to the younger Naren) came in, you said he had controlled his passions."

MASTER: "Yes, it is true. He is totally unaffected by worldliness. He says he doesn't know what lust is. (To M.) Just feel my body. All the hair is standing on end."

The Master's hair actually stood on end at the thought of a pure mind totally devoid of lust. He always said that God manifests Himself where there is no lust.

Rākhāl Haldar took his leave.

Sri Ramakrishna was seated with the devotees. A crazy woman had been troubling everybody in order to see the Master. She had assumed toward him the attitude of a lover and often ran into the garden house and burst into the Master's room. She had even been beaten by the devotees; but that did not stop her.

ŚAŚI: "If she comes again I shall shove her out of the place!"

MASTER (tenderly): "No, no! Let her come and go away."

RĀKHĀL : "At the beginning I too used to feel jealous of others when they visited the Master. But he graciously revealed to me that my guru is also the Guru of the Universe. Has he taken this birth only for a few of us?"

ŚAŚI: "I don't mean that. But why should she trouble him when he is ill? And she is such a nuisance!"

RĀKHĀL : "We all give him trouble. Did we all come to him after attaining perfection? Haven't we caused him suffering? How Narendra and some of the others behaved in the beginning! How they argued with him!"

ŚAŚI: "Whatever Narendra expressed in words he carried out in his actions."

RĀKHĀL: "How rude Dr. Sarkar has been to him! No one is guiltless, if it comes to that."

MASTER (to Rākhāl, tenderly): "Will you eat something?"

RĀKHĀL: "Not now. Later on."

Sri Ramakrishna asked M., by a sign, whether he was going to have his meal there.

RĀKHĀL (to M.): "Please take your meal here. He is asking you to."

Sri Ramakrishna was seated completely naked. He looked like a five-year-old boy. Just then the crazy woman climbed the stairs and stood near the door.

M. (in a low voice, to Śaśi): "Ask her to salute him and go away. Don't make any fuss." Śaśi took her downstairs.

It was the first day of the Bengali year. Many woman devotees arrived. They saluted Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. Among them were the wives of Balarām and Manomohan, and the brahmani of Baghbazar. Several of them had brought their children along.

Some of the women offered flowers at the Master's feet. Two young girls, nine or ten years of age, sang a few songs.

First they sang:

We moan for rest, alas! but rest can never find;
We know not whence we come, nor where we float away.
Time and again we tread this round of smiles and tears;
In vain we pine to know whither our pathway leads,
And why we play this empty play. . . .

Then:

There comes Radha, and there see your Krishna,
With arching eyes and the flute at His lips.. . .

And finally:

O tongue, always repeat the name of Mother Durga!
Who but your Mother Durga will save you in distress? . . .

Sri Ramakrishna said by a sign: "That's good! They are singing of the Divine Mother." The Brahmani of Baghbazar had the nature of a child. Sri Ramakrishna told Rākhāl , by a sign, to ask her to sing. The devotees smiled as the brahmani sang:

O Hari, I shall sport with You today;
For I have found You alone in the Nidhu wood. . .

The woman devotees went downstairs.

It was afternoon. M. and a few other devotees were seated near the Master. Narendra came in. He looked, as the Master used to say, like an unsheathed sword.

Narendra sat down near the Master and within his hearing expressed his utter annoyance with women. He told the devotees what an obstacle women were in the path of God-realization.

Sri Ramakrishna made no response. He listened to Narendra.

Narendra said again: "I want peace. I do not care even for God."

Sri Ramakrishna looked at him intently without uttering a word. Now and then Narendra chanted, "Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, the Infinite."

It was eight o'clock in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna sat on his bed. A few devotees sat on the floor in front of him. Surendra arrived from his office. He carried in his hands four oranges and two garlands of flowers. Now he looked at the Master and now at the devotees. He unburdened his heart to Sri Ramakrishna.

Surendra's faith

SURENDRA (looking at M, and the others): "I have come after finishing my office work. I thought, 'What is the good of standing on two boats at the same time?' So I finished my duties first and then came here. Today is the first day of the year; it is also Tuesday, an auspicious day to worship the Divine Mother. But I didn't go to Kalighat. I said to myself,' 'It will be enough if I see him who is Kāli Herself, and who has rightly understood Kāli.' "

Sri Ramakrishna smiled.

SURENDRA: "It is said that a man should bring fruit and flowers when visiting his guru or a holy man. So I have brought these. . . . . (To the Master) I am spending all this money for you. God alone knows my heart. Some people feel grieved to give away a penny; and there are people who spend a thousand rupees without feeling any hesitation. God sees the inner love of a devotee and accepts his offering."

Sri Ramakrishna said to Surendra, by a nod, that he was right.

SURENDRA: "I couldn't come here yesterday. It was the last day of the year. But I decorated your picture with flowers."

Sri Ramakrishna said to M., by a sign, "Ah, what devotion!"

SURENDRA: "As I was coming here I bought these two garlands for four *ānnās*.

Almost all the devotees took their leave. The Master asked M. to stroke his legs and fan him.

Friday, April 16, 1886

The moon was shining brilliantly, flooding the garden paths, the trees, and the water of the lake with its white rays. Girish, M., Lātu, and a few other devotees were seated on the steps leading to the lake. The house stood to the west of the lake. A lamp burnt in the Master's room on the second floor. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on his bed. There were several devotees in the room.

A few minutes later Girish and M. were strolling along a garden path lined with flowering plants and fruit-trees.

M: "How beautiful this moonlight is! Perhaps nature has had the same laws from time out of mind."

GIRISH: "How do you know that?"

M: "There is no change in the uniformity of nature. European scientists have been discovering new stars through the telescope. There are mountains on the moon; they have seen them."

GIRISH: "It is difficult to be sure of that. It is hard for me to believe it."

M: "Why? The mountains have been observed through the telescope."

GIRISH: "How can you be sure that they have been rightly observed? Suppose there are other things between the moon and the earth. Light passing through them may conjure up such visions."

Narendra, Rākhāl, Niranjan, Sarat, Śaśi, Baburam, Kāli, Jogin, Lātu, and a few other young devotees had been living at the Cossipore garden house in order to nurse Sri Ramakrishna. That evening Narendra, Kāli, and Tārak had gone to Dakshineswar. They were going to spend the night in the Panchavati, meditating on God.

Girish, Lātu, and M. went to Sri Ramakrishna's room and found him sitting on the bed. Śaśi and one or two devotees had been tending the Master. Baburam, Niranjan, and Rākhāl also entered the room. It was a large room. Some medicines and a few other accessories were kept near the bed. One entered the room by a door at the north end.

Since Sri Ramakrishna had to be tended all night, the devotees stayed awake by turns. The devotee who tended him fixed Sri Ramakrishna's mosquito net and then either lay on a mat on the floor or spent the night sitting up. Since Sri Ramakrishna got very little sleep on account of his illness, his attendant, too, slept very little.

Master's love for Girish

That evening Sri Ramakrishna was somewhat better. The devotees saluted the Master and sat down on the floor. The Master asked M. to bring the lamp near him. He greeted Girish cordially.

MASTER (to Girish): "Are you quite well? (To Lātu) Prepare a smoke for him and give him a betel-leaf."

A few minutes afterwards he asked Lātu to give Girish some refreshments. Lātu said that they had been sent for.

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting up. A devotee offered him some garlands of flowers. Sri Ramakrishna put them around his neck one by one. Was he thus worshipping God who dwelt in his heart? The devotees looked at him wonderingly. He took two garlands from his neck and gave them to Girish.

Every now and then Sri Ramakrishna asked whether the refreshments had been brought.

M. was fanning the Master. On the bed was a sandal-wood-fan, the offering of a devotee. The Master gave it to M., who continued to fan him with it. He also gave M. two garlands.

M. had lost a son aged seven or eight about a year and a half before. The child had seen the Master many a time. Lātu was telling Sri Ramakrishna about M.

LĀTU: "M. wept bitterly last night at the sight of some books that had belonged to his dead child. His wife is almost mad with grief. She sometimes treats her other children violently. She creates a scene at home because he spends the night here now and then."

Sri Ramakrishna seemed worried to hear of this.

GIRISH: "It is nothing to be wondered at. Even after receiving the instruction of the Bhagavad Gitā, Arjuna fainted from grief at the death of his son Abhimanyu."

Girish was given the refreshments on a tray. Sri Ramakrishna took a grain and Girish accepted the rest as Prasad. He sat in front of the Master and began to eat. He needed water to drink. There was an earthen jug in the southeast corner of the room. It was the month of April, and the day was hot. Sri Ramakrishna said, "There is some nice water here."

The Master was so ill that he had not enough strength even to stand up. And what did the disciples see to their utter amazement? They saw him leave the bed, completely naked, and move toward the jug! He himself was going to pour the water into a tumbler. The devotees were almost frozen with fear. The Master poured the water into a glass. He poured a drop or two into his hand to see whether it was cool. He found that it was not very cool; but since nothing better could be found, he reluctantly gave it to Girish.

Girish was eating the sweets. The devotees were sitting about, and M. was fanning Sri Ramakrishna.

GIRISH (to the Master): "Deben Babu has decided to renounce the world."

On account of his illness Sri Ramakrishna could hardly talk. Touching his lips with his finger, he asked Girish, by signs, "Who will feed his wife and children?"

GIRISH: "I don't know."

The other devotees remained silent. Girish began talking again while he ate the refreshments.

GIRISH: "Sir, which is wiser-to renounce the world regretfully, or to call on God, leading a householder's life?"

MASTER (to M.): "Haven't you read the Gitā? One truly realizes God if one performs one's worldly duties in a detached spirit, if one lives in the world after realizing that everything is illusory.

"Those who regretfully renounce the world belong to an inferior class.

"Do you know what a householder Jnāni is like? He is like a person living in a glass house. He can see both inside and outside."

Again there was silence in the room.

MASTER (to M.): "The refreshments are hot and good."

M. (to Girish): "Yes, they were bought from Fagu's shop. The place is famous."

MASTER (smiling) "Yes, famous."

GIRISH: "They are really nice.

(To the Master) "Sir, my mind is now on a very lofty plane. Why does it come down again?"

Nature of the mind

MASTER: "That always happens when one leads a worldly life. sometimes the householder's mind goes up; sometimes it goes down. Sometimes he feels a great deal of devotion; sometimes he feels less. This happens because he lives in the midst of 'woman and gold'.

Monks and householders

Sometimes a householder contemplates God or chants His name, and sometimes he diverts his mind to 'woman and gold'. He is like an ordinary fly, which now sits on a sweetmeat and now on filth or rotting sores.

"But it is quite different with sannyāsis. They are able to fix their minds on God alone, completely withdrawing them from 'woman and gold'. They can enjoy the Bliss of God alone. A man of true renunciation cannot enjoy anything but God. He leaves any place where people talk of worldly things; he listens only to spiritual talk. A man of true renunciation never speaks about anything but God. The bees light only on flowers, in order to sip honey; they do not enjoy anything else."

Girish went to the small terrace to rinse his hands.

MASTER (to M.): "A man needs the grace of God to fix his whole mind on Him. Well, Girish has eaten a great many sweets. Tell him not to eat anything else tonight." Girish returned to the room and sat in front of the Master. He was chewing a betel-leaf.

About Rākhāl

MASTER (to Girish): "Rākhāl has now understood what is good and what is bad, what is real and what is unreal. He lives with his family, no doubt, but he knows what it means. He has a wife. And a son has been born to him. But he has realized that all these are illusory and impermanent. Rākhāl will never be attached to the world.

"He is like a mudfish. The fish lives in the mud, but there is not the slightest trace of mud on its body."

GIRISH: "Sir, I don't understand all this. You can make everyone pure and unattached if you want to. You can make everyone good, whether he is a worldly man or a sannyāsi. The Malaya breeze, I believe, turns all trees into sandal-wood."

MASTER: "Not unless there is substance in them. There are a few trees, the cotton-tree for instance, which are not turned into sandal-wood."

GIRISH: "I don't care."

MASTER: "But this is the law."

GIRISH: "But everything about you is illegal."

The devotees were listening to this conversation in great amazement. Every now and then, the fan in M.'s hand stopped moving.

MASTER: "Yes, that may be true. When the river of bhakti overflows, the land all around is flooded with water to the depth of a pole.

"When a man is inebriated with divine love, he doesn't abide by the injunctions of the Vedas. He picks *Durva* grass for the worship of the Deity, but he doesn't clean it. He picks whatever he lays his hands on. While gathering tulsi-leaves he even breaks the branches. Ah! what state of mind I passed through!

(To M.) "When one develops love of God, one needs nothing else."

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "But a devotee must assume toward God, a particular attitude. God in His Incarnation as Rāma demonstrated Śānta, Dāsya, Vātsalya, and sakhya. But Krishna demonstrated Madhur, besides all these.

Radha's love for Krishna

"Radha cherished the attitude of Madhur toward Krishna. Her love was romantic. But in the case of Sita it was the pure love of a chaste wife for her husband. There was no romance in her love.

"But all this is the lila of God. He demonstrates different ideals to suit different times."

The crazy woman

A crazy woman used to accompany Vijay Goswami to the Kāli temple at Dakshineswar and sing for Sri Ramakrishna. Her songs were about Kāli. She also used to sing the songs of the Brahmo Samaj. The devotees called her *"Pagli"* and tried to keep her away from the Master.

MASTER (to Girish and the others): *"Pagli* cherishes the attitude of Madhur toward me. One day she came to Dakshineswar. Suddenly she burst out crying. 'Why are you crying?' I asked her. And she said, 'Oh, my head is aching!' (All laugh.) Another day I was eating when she came to Dakshineswar. She suddenly said, 'Won't you be kind to me?' I had no idea of what was passing through her mind and went on eating. Then she said, 'Why did you push me away mentally?' I asked her, 'What is your attitude?' She said, 'Madhur.' 'Ah!' I said. 'But I look on all women as manifestations of the Divine Mother. All women are mothers to me.' There upon she said, 'I don't know all that.' Then I called Ramlal and said to him: 'Ramlal, listen to her! What is she talking about this 'pushing away mentally?' Even now she keeps up that attitude."

GIRISH: "Blessed indeed is *Pagli*! May be she is crazy. May be she is beaten by the devotees. But she meditates on you twenty-four hours a day. No matter how she meditates on you, no harm can ever befall her.

"Sir, how can I express my own feelings about it? Think what I was before, and what I have become now by meditating on you! Formerly I was indolent; now that indolence has turned into resignation to God. Formerly I was a sinner; now I have become humble. What else can I say?"

The devotees remained silent. Rākhāl expressed his sympathy for *Pagli*.

He said: 'We all feel sorry for her. She causes so much annoyance, and for that she suffers, too."

NIRANJAN (to Rākhāl): "You feel that way for her because you have a wife at home. But we could kill her."

RĀKHĀL (sharply): "Such bragging! How dare you utter such words before him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna]?"

MASTER (to Girish): "'Woman and gold' alone is the world. Many people regard money as their very life-blood. But however you may show love for money, one day, perhaps, every bit of it will slip from your hand.

"In our part of the country the farmers make narrow ridges around their paddy-fields. You know what those ridges are. Some farmers make ridges with great care all the way around their fields. Such ridges are destroyed by the rush of the rain-water. But some farmers leave a part of the ridge open and put sod there. The water flows through the sod, leaving the field covered with silt after the rain. They reap a rich harvest.

Good use of money

"They alone make good use of their money who spend it for the worship of God or the service of holy men and devotees. Their money bears fruit.

"I cannot eat anything offered by physicians. I mean those who traffic in human suffering. Their money is blood and pus."

Sri Ramakrishna mentioned two physicians in this connection.

GIRISH: "Dr. Rajendra Dutta is a generous person. He doesn't accept a penny from anybody. He gives away money in charity."

Saturday, April 17, 1886

It was the night of the full moon. For some time Narendra had been going to Dakshineswar daily. He spent a great deal of time in the panchavati in meditation and contemplation. This day he returned from Dakshineswar in the evening. Tārak and Kāli were with him.

It was eight o'clock in the evening. Moonlight and the south wind added to the charm of the garden house. Many of the devotees were meditating in the room downstairs. Referring to them, Narendra said to M., "They are shedding their *Upādhis* one by one."

A few minutes later M. came into Sri Ramakrishna's room and sat down on the floor. The Master asked him to wash his towel and the spittoon. M. washed them in the reservoir.

Master's anxiety about M.'s wife

Next morning Sri Ramakrishna sent for M. After taking his bath in the Ganges and saluting the Master, he had gone to the roof. Sri Ramakrishna asked M. to bring his grief-stricken wife to the garden house, where she could have her meal.

The Master said to M., by a sign: "Ask her to come. Let her stay here a couple of days. She may bring the baby."

M: "Yes, sir. It would be fine if she developed intense love of God."

Sri Ramakrishna again answered by signs: "Oh, grief pushes out devotion. And, he was such a big boy!

"Krishnakishore had two sons. They were of the same age as Bhavanāth, and each had two university degrees. They both died. And Krishnakishore, Jnāni that he was, could not at first control himself. How lucky I am that I have none!

"Arjuna was a great Jnāni; and Krishna was his constant companion. Nevertheless, he was completely overwhelmed with grief at the death of his son Abhimanyu.

"Why doesn't Kishori come?"

A DEVOTEE: "He comes to the Ganges every day for his bath."

MASTER: "But why doesn't he come here?"

DEVOTEE: "I shall ask him to come, sir."

MASTER: "Why doesn't Harish come?"

Two young girls aged nine and ten, who belonged to M.'s family, sang several songs about the Divine Mother for the Master. They had sung for him when he had visited M.'s house at Syampukur. The Master was very much pleased with their songs. After they had finished, they were sent for by the devotees to sing for them downstairs.

MASTER (to M.): "Don't teach the girls any more songs. It is different if they sing spontaneously. But they will lose their modesty by singing before anyone and everyone. It is very necessary for women to be modest."

Flowers and sandal-paste were placed before the Master in a flower-basket. He sat on his bed and worshipped himself with these offerings. Sometimes he placed flowers and sandal-paste on his head, sometimes on his throat, sometimes on his heart, and sometimes on his navel.

Manomohan of Konnagar came in and took a seat after saluting the Master. Sri Ramakrishna was still busy with the worship of his inner Self. He put a garland of flowers on his own neck. After a while he seemed to be pleased with Manomohan and gave him some flowers. M., too, received a flower.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning. The Master and M: were talking. Śaśi was also in the room.

MASTER (to M.): "What were Narendra and Śaśi talking about? What did they discuss?"

M. (to Śaśi): "What were you talking about?"

ŚAŚI: "Was it Niranjan that told you about it?"

MASTER: "What were you discussing? I heard 'God', 'Being', 'Non-being', and so forth."

ŚAŚI (smiling): "Shall I call Narendra?"

MASTER: "Yes."

Narendra came in and took a seat.

MASTER (to M.): "Ask him something. (To Narendra) Tell us what you were talking about."

NARENDRA: "I have indigestion. What's there to tell you about?"

MASTER: "You will get over your indigestion."

M. (smiling): 'Tell us about the experience of Buddha."

NARENDRA: "Have I become a Buddha, that you want me to talk about him?"

M: "What does Buddha say about the existence of God?"

NARENDRA: "How can you say that God exists? It is you who have created this universe.

Don't you know what Berkeley says about it?"

M: "Yes, I do. According to him, *esse is percipi*. The world exists as long as the sense-organs perceive it."

MASTER: " 'Nangta used to say, The world exists in mind alone and disappears in mind alone.' But as long as 'I-consciousness' exists, one should assume the servant-and-master relationship with God."

NARENDRA (to M:): "How can you prove by reasoning that God exists? But if you depend on faith, then you must accept the relationship of servant and Master. And if you accept that-and you can't help it-then you must also say that God is kind.

"You think only of the suffering in the world-why do you forget that God has also given you so much happiness? How kind He is to us! He has granted us three very great things: human birth, the yearning to know God, and the companionship of a great soul."

All were silent.

MASTER (to Narendra): "I feel very clearly that there is Someone within me.

Dr. Rajendralal arrived and took a seat. He had been treating the Master with homeopathic medicine. When the talk about medicine was over, Sri Ramakrishna pointed out Manomohan to the doctor.

RAJENDRA: "He is a distant relative of mine."

Narendra went downstairs. He was singing to himself:

Lord, Thou hast lifted all my sorrow with the vision of Thy face,
And the magic of Thy beauty has bewitched my mind;
Beholding Thee, the seven worlds forget their never-ending woe;
What shall I say, then, of myself, a poor and lowly soul?
. . .

Narendra had a little indigestion. He said to M.: "If one follows the path of bhakti, then the mind comes down a little to the body. Otherwise, who am I? Neither man nor God. I have neither pleasure nor pain."

It was about nine o'clock in the evening. Surendra and a few other devotees entered Sri Ramakrishna's room and offered him garlands of flowers. Baburam, Lātu, and M. were also in the room. Sri Ramakrishna put Surendra's garland on his own neck. All sat quietly.

Suddenly the Master made a sign to Surendra to come near him. When the disciple came near the bed, Sri Ramakrishna took the garland from his neck and put it around Surendra's. Surendra saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna asked him, by a sign, to rub his feet. Surendra gave them a gentle massage.

Several devotees were sitting on the bank of the reservoir in the garden, singing to the accompaniment of drum and cymbals. Sri Ramakrishna sent them word through Lātu to sing the name of Hari.

M., Baburam, and several others were still sitting in the Master's room. They heard the devotees singing:

There dances my Gora, chanting Hari's name! . . .

When the Master heard the song he made a sign to Baburam and M. to join them. He also asked them to dance.

A few minutes later Sri Ramakrishna sent another devotee to the singers to ask them to sing the following improvised lines: "Ah, my Gora even knows how to dance!" "How can I describe my Gora's moods?" "My Gora dances with both his hands upraised."

The music was over. Surendra was almost in an ecstatic mood. He sang:

Crazy is my Father, crazy is my Mother,
And I, their son, am crazy too!
Syama is my Mother's name.
My Father strikes His cheeks and makes a hollow

sound:
Ba-ba-bom! Ba-ba-bom!
And my Mother, drunk and reeling,
Falls across my Father's body!
Syama's streaming tresses hang in vast disorder;
Bees are swarming numberless
About Her crimson Lotus Feet.
Listen, as She dances, how Her anklets ring!

Chapter 51

THE MASTER'S LOVE FOR HIS DEVOTEES

Wednesday, April 21, 1886

Narendra and M. & Narendra's scepticism

M. AND NARENDRA were strolling in the garden of the house at Cossipore. Narendra was very much worried, because he had not yet been able to solve the financial difficulties of his family.

NARENDRA: "I don't care for the job at the Vidyāsāgar School. I have been thinking of going to Gaya. I have been told that a Zamindār there needs the services of a manager for his estate. There is no such thing as God."

M. (smiling): "You may say that now, but later on you will talk differently. Scepticism is a stage in the path of God-realization. One must pass through stages like this and go much farther; only thus can one realize God. That is what the Master says."

NARENDRA: "Has anybody seen God as I see that tree?"

M: "Yes, our Master has seen God that way."

NARENDRA: "It may be his hallucination."

M: "Whatever a person experiences in a particular state is real for him in that state. Suppose you are dreaming that you have gone to a garden. As long as the dream lasts, the garden is real for you. But you think of it as unreal when your mind undergoes a change, as, for instance, when you awake. When your mind attains the state in which one sees God, you will know God to be real."

NARENDRA: "I want truth. The other day I had a great argument with Sri Ramakrishna himself."

M. (smiling): "What happened?"

NARENDRA: "He said to me, 'Some people call me God.' I replied, 'Let a thousand people call you God, but I shall certainly not call you God as long as I do not know it to be true.' He said, 'Whatever many people say is indeed truth; that is dharma.' Thereupon I replied, 'Let others proclaim a thing as truth, but I shall certainly not listen to them unless I myself realize it as truth.' "

M. (smiling): "Your attitude is like that of Western savants-Copernicus and Berkeley, for instance. The whole world said it was the sun that moved, but Copernicus did not listen. Everybody said the external world was real, but Berkeley paid no heed. Therefore Lewis says, 'Why was Berkeley not a philosophical Copernicus?' "

NARENDRA: "Can you give me a History of Philosophy?

M: "By whom? Lewis?"

NARENDRA: "No, Uberweg. I must read a German author."

M: "You just said, 'Has anybody seen God as I see that tree?' Suppose God comes to you as a man and says, 'I am God.' Will you believe it then? You certainly remember the story of Lazarus. After his death, Lazarus said to Abraham, 'Let me go back to the earth and tell my friends and relatives that hell and the after-life exist.' Abraham replied: 'Do you think they will believe you? They will say it is a charlatan who is telling them such things.' The Master says that God cannot be known by reasoning. By faith alone one attains everything-knowledge and super-knowledge. By faith alone one sees God and becomes intimate with Him."

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was in bed. Ramlal, who had come from Dakshineswar, was massaging his feet. Gopal of Sinthi and M. were in the room.

Sri Ramakrishna asked M. to shut the windows and massage his feet. At the Master's request Purna had come to the Cossipore garden in a hired carriage. M. was to pay the carriage hire. Sri Ramakrishna made a sign to Gopal, asking whether he had obtained the money from M. Gopal answered in the affirmative.

Devotees about the Master

At nine o'clock in the evening Surendra, Ram, and the others were about to return to Calcutta. It was the sultry month of April and Sri Ramakrishna's room became very hot during the day; so Surendra had brought some straw screens to keep the room cool.

SURENDRA: "Why, nobody has hung up these straw screens. Nobody here pays attention to anything."

A DEVOTEE (smiling): "The devotees here are now in the state of Brahmajnana. They feel, 'I am He.' The world is unreal to them. When they come down to a lower plane and regard God as the Master and themselves as His servants, they will pay attention to the service of Sri Ramakrishna." (All laugh.)

Thursday, April 22, 1886

In the evening Rākhāl , Śaśi, and M. were strolling in the garden at Cossipore.
M: "The Master is like a child-beyond the three *Gunās*."

ŚAŚI AND RĀKHĀL: "He himself has said that."

RĀKHĀL: "He sits in a tower, as it were, from which he gets all information and sees everything; but others cannot go there and reach him."

M: "He said, 'In such a state of mind one sees God constantly.' In him there is not the slightest trace of worldliness. His mind is like dry fuel, which catches fire quickly."

ŚAŚI: "He described the different kinds of intelligence to Charu. The right intelligence is that through which one attains God; but the intelligence that enables one to become a deputy magistrate or a lawyer, or to acquire a house, is a mean intelligence. It is like thin and watery curd, which merely soaks flattened rice but does not add any flavour to it. It is not like thick, superior curd. But the intelligence through which one attains God is like thick curd."

M: "Ah, what wonderful words!"

Bliss of Brahman and bliss of the world

ŚAŚI: "Kāli said to the Master: 'What's the good of having joy? The Bhils are joyous. Savages are always singing and dancing in a frenzy of delight.' "

RĀKHĀL: "He [meaning the Master] replied to Kāli: 'What do you mean? Can the Bliss of Brahman be the same as worldly pleasure? Ordinary men are satisfied with worldly pleasure. One cannot enjoy the Bliss of Brahman unless one completely rids oneself of attachment to worldly things. There is the joy of money and sense experience, and there is the Bliss of God-realization. Can the two ever be the same? The rishis enjoyed the Bliss of Brahman.' "

Master on Buddha

M: "You see, Kāli nowadays meditates on Buddha; that is why he speaks of a state beyond Bliss."

RĀKHĀL: "Yes, Kāli told the Master about Buddha. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: 'Buddha is an Incarnation of God. How can you compare him to anybody else? As he is great, so too is his teaching great.' Kāli said to him: 'Everything, indeed, is the manifestation of God's Power. Both worldly pleasure and the Bliss of God are the manifestation of that Power.' "

M: "What did the Master say to that?"

RĀKHĀL: "He said: 'How can that be? Is the power to beget a child the same as the power through which one realizes God?'"

Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room on the second floor. Narendra, Rākhāl , Śaśi, Surendra, M., Bhavanāth, and other devotees were present. Dr. Mahendra Sarkar and Dr. Rajendra Dutta were also there to examine him. His condition was growing worse.

On "woman and gold"

The house-rent was between sixty and sixty-five rupees. Surendra bore most of the expenses and had rented the house in his name. The other householder devotees contributed financial help according to their power. A cook and a maid had been engaged to look after the members of the house-hold.

MASTER (to Dr. Sarkar and the others): "The expenses are mounting."

DR. SARKAR (pointing to the devotees): "But they are ready to bear them. They do not hesitate to spend money. (To Sri Ramakrishna) Now, you see, gold is necessary."

MASTER (to Narendra): "Why don't you answer?"

Narendra remained silent. Dr. Sarkar resumed the conversation.

DR. SARKAR: "Gold is necessary, and also woman."

RAJENDRA: "Yes, his [meaning Sri Ramakrishna's] wife has been cooking his meals."

DR. SARKAR (to the Master): "Do you see?"

MASTER (smiling): "Yes-but very troublesome!"

DR. SARKAR: "If there were no troubles, then all would become paramahamsas."

MASTER: "If a woman touches me I fall ill. That part of my body aches as if stung by a horned fish."

DR. SARKAR: "I believe that. But how can you get along without woman?"

MASTER: "My hand gets all twisted up if I hold money in it; my breathing stops. But there is no harm in spending money to lead a spiritual life in the world-if one spends it, for instance, in the worship of God and the service of holy men and devotees.

"A man forgets God if he is entangled in the world of māyā through a woman. It is the Mother of the Universe who has assumed the form of māyā, the form of woman. One who knows this rightly does not feel like leading the life of māyā in the world. But he who truly realizes that all women are manifestations of the Divine Mother may lead a spiritual life in the world. Without realizing God one cannot truly know what a woman is."

Sri Ramakrishna had, felt a slight improvement as a result of the homeopathic treatment.

RAJENDRA (to the Master): "After getting rid of this illness you must begin to practise medicine as a homeopath. Otherwise, what's the use of this human life?" (All laugh.)

NARENDRA: "Nothing like leather!" (All laugh.)

A few minutes later the physicians took their leave. Sri Ramakrishna and M. were engaged in conversation. The Master was telling M. how he felt about woman.

MASTER (to M.): "They say I cannot get along without 'woman and gold'. They don't understand the state of my mind.

Sri Ramakrishna and woman

"If I touch a woman my hand becomes numb; it aches. If in a friendly spirit I approach a woman and begin to talk to her, I feel as if a barrier had been placed between us. It is impossible for me to cross that barrier.

"If a woman enters my room when I am alone, at once I become like a child and regard her as my mother."

As M. listened to these words, he became speechless with wonder at Sri Ramakrishna's exalted state of mind. Bhavanāth and Narendra were sitting at a distance, talking together.

Encouraging Bhavanāth

Bhavanāth had married and was trying to find a job; so he could not visit Sri Ramakrishna frequently at Cossipore. He had said to M.: "I understand that Vidyāsāgar wants to start a new school. I have to earn my livelihood. Will it be possible for me to secure a job in that school?" The Master was much worried about Bhavanāth's being entangled in worldly life. Bhavanāth was twenty-three or twenty four years old.

MASTER (to Narendra): "Give him a lot of courage."

Narendra and Bhavanāth smiled. Sri Ramakrishna said to Bhavanāth, by signs: "Be a great hero. Don't forget yourself when you see her weeping behind her veil. Oh, women cry so mucheven when they blow their noses! (Narendra, Bhavanāth, and M. laugh.)

"Keep your mind firm on God. He who is a hero lives with a woman but does not indulge in physical pleasures. Talk to your wife only about God."

A few minutes later Sri Ramakrishna said to Bhavanāth, by a sign, "Take your meal here today."

BHAVANĀTH: "Yes, sir. I am quite all right. Don't worry about me."

Surendra came in and took a seat. The devotees offered garlands of flowers to the Master every evening. Sri Ramakrishna put these garlands around his neck. Surendra sat quietly in the room. Sri Ramakrishna was in a very happy mood and gave him two garlands. Surendra saluted the Master and put them around his neck.

All sat in silence and looked at Sri Ramakrishna. Surendra saluted the Master again and stood up. He was about to leave. He asked Bhavanāth to hang the straw screens over the windows.

Hirananda

Hirananda came in with two of his friends. He was a native of Sindh, about twenty-two hundred miles from Calcutta. After finishing his college education in Calcutta in 1883, he had returned to Sindh and taken charge of editing two papers, the Sindh Times and the Sindh Sudhar. While studying in Calcutta he had often visited Keshab Chandra Sen and

had come to know him intimately. He had met Sri Ramakrishna at the Kāli temple at Dakshineswar and had spent an occasional night there with the Master. Hearing of Sri Ramakrishna's illness, he now came to Calcutta from Sindh to see him. The Master himself had been very eager to see Hirananda.

Sri Ramakrishna pointed to Hirananda and said to M., by signs: "A very fine boy. Do you know him?"

M: "Yes, sir."

MASTER (to Hirananda and M.): "Please talk a little. I want to hear you both."

When M. remained silent, Sri Ramakrishna asked him: "Is Narendra here? Call him."

Narendra entered the room and sat near the Master.

MASTER (to Narendra and Hirananda): "I want to hear you two talk."

Hirananda was silent a few moments and then after great hesitation began the conversation.

Narendra argues with Hirananda

HIRANANDA (to Narendra): "Why does a devotee of God suffer?" His words were sweet as nectar. Everyone in the room could feel that his heart was filled with love.

NARENDRA: "The plan of the universe is devilish. I could have created a better world."

HIRANANDA: "Can one feel happiness without misery?"

NARENDRA: "I am not making a plan for a universe, but simply giving my opinion of the present plan.

"But all these problems are solved if we have faith only in one thing, and that is Pantheism. All doubts disappear if one believes that everything is God. God alone is responsible for all that happens."

HIRANANDA: "Very easy to say that."

Narendra sang Sankara's Six Stanzas on Nirvāna:

Om I am neither mind, intelligence, ego, nor chitta,
Neither ears nor tongue nor the senses of smell and sight;
Nor am I ether, earth, fire, water, or air:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

I am neither the Prāna nor the five vital breaths,
Neither the seven elements of the body nor its five sheaths,
Nor hands nor feet nor tongue, nor the organs of sex and voiding:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

Neither loathing nor liking have I, neither greed nor delusion;
No sense have I of ego or pride, neither dharma nor moksha;
Neither desire of the mind nor object for its desiring:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

Neither right nor wrongdoing am I, neither pleasure nor pain,
Nor the mantra, the sacred place, the Vedas, the sacrifice;
Neither the act of eating, the eater, nor the food:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

Death or fear I have none, nor any distinction of caste;
Neither father nor mother nor even a birth have I;
Neither friend nor comrade, neither disciple nor guru:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

I have no form or fancy; the All-pervading am I;
Everywhere I exist, yet I am beyond the senses;
Neither salvation am I, nor anything that may be known:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

HIRANANDA: "Good!"

SRI RAMAKRISHNA (to Hirananda, by a sign): "Give him an answer."

HIRANANDA: "It is all the same, whether you look at a room from a corner or look at it from the middle. It is the same God-Consciousness that one feels, whether one says, 'O God, I am Thy servant', or, 'I am He.' One may enter a room by several doors."

Narendra's spirit of renunciation

All sat in silence. Hirananda said to Narendra, "Please sing some more."

Narendra sang the Five Stanzas on the Kaupina:

Roaming ever in the grove of Vedānta,
Ever pleased with his beggar's morsel,
Ever walking with heart free from sorrow,
Blest indeed is the wearer of the loin-cloth.

Sitting at the foot of a tree for shelter,
Using the palms of his hands for eating,
Wrapped in a garment fine or ugly,
Blest indeed is the wearer of the loin-cloth.

Satisfied fully by the Bliss within him,
Curbing wholly the cravings of his senses,
Contemplating day and night the Absolute Brahman,
Blest indeed is the wearer of the loin-cloth.

When Sri Ramakrishna heard the line, *"Contemplating day and night the Absolute Brahman",* he said in a very low voice, "Ah!" Then, by a sign, he said to the devotees, "This is the characteristic of the yogi."

Narendra finished the hymn:

Witnessing the changes of mind and body,
Naught but the self within him beholding,
Thinking not of outer, of inner, or of middle,
Blest indeed is the wearer of the loin-cloth.

Chanting "Brahman", the Word of redemption,
Meditating only on "I am Brahman",
Living on alms and wandering freely,
Blest indeed is the wearer of the loin-cloth.

Again Narendra sang:

Meditate on Him, the Perfect, the Embodiment of Bliss;
Meditate on Him, the Formless, the Root of the Universe,
The Hearer behind the ear, the Thinker behind the mind,
The Speaker behind the tongue, Himself beyond all words:
He is the Life of life, the Ultimate, the Adorable!

MASTER (to Narendra): "And that one *'All that exists art Thou.'* "

Narendra sang:

I have joined my heart to Thee: all that exists art Thou;
Thee only have I found, for Thou art, all that exists.

O Lord, Beloved of my heart! Thou art the Home of all;
Where indeed is the heart in which Thou dost not dwell?
Thou hast entered every heart: all that exists art Thou.
Whether sage or fool, whether Hindu or Mussulman,
Thou makest them as Thou wilt: all that exists art Thou.
Thy presence is everywhere, whether in heaven or in Kaaba;
Before Thee all must bow, for Thou art all that exists.
From earth below to the highest heaven, from heaven to deepest earth,
I see Thee wherever I look: all that exists art Thou.
Pondering, I have understood; I have seen it beyond a doubt;
I find not a single thing that may be compared to Thee.
To Jafar it has been revealed that Thou art all that exists.

As the Master listened, to the line, *"Thou hast entered every heart",* he said by a sign: "God dwells in everybody's heart. He is the Inner Guide."

As Narendra sang the line, *"I see Thee wherever I look: all that exists art Thou",* Hirananda said to him: "Yes, 'All that exists art Thou.' Now you say: 'Thou! Thou! Not I, but Thou!'"

NARENDRA: Give me a one and I'll give you a million. Thou art I; I am Thou. Nothing exists but I "

Narendra recited a few verses from the Ashtāvakra Samhitā. The room again became silent.

MASTER (to Hirananda, pointing to Narendra): "He seems to be walking with an unsheathed sword in his hand. (To M., pointing to Hirananda) How quiet! Like a cobra, quiet before the charmer, with its hood spread."

Sri Ramakrishna fell into an inward mood. Hirananda and M. were seated near him. There was complete silence in the room. The Master's body was being racked with indescribable pain. The devotees could not bear the sight of this illness; but somehow the Master made them forget his suffering. He sat there, his face beaming as if there were no trace of illness in his throat. The devotees had placed flowers and garlands before him as their loving offerings. He picked up a flower and touched with it first his head, then his throat, heart, and navel. To the devotees he seemed a child playing with flowers.

Sri Ramakrishna used to tell the devotees that his divine visions and moods were accompanied by the rising of a spiritual current inside his body.

Now he talked to M.

MASTER: "I don't remember when the current went up. Now I am in the mood of a child. That is why I am playing with the flowers this way.

Master's exalted vision

Do you know what I see now? I see my body as a frame made of bamboo strips and covered with a cloth. The frame moves. And it moves because someone dwells inside it.

"Again, I see the body to be like a pumpkin with the seeds scooped out. Inside this body there is no trace of passion or worldly attachment. It is all very clean inside, and- "

It became very painful for Sri Ramakrishna to talk further. He felt very weak. M. quickly guessed what the Master wanted to tell the devotees, and said, "And you are seeing God inside yourself."

MASTER: "Both inside and outside. The Indivisible Satchidananda-I see It both inside and outside. It has merely assumed this sheath [meaning his body] for a support and exists both inside and outside. I clearly perceive this."

M. and Hirananda listened intently to these words about his exalted state of God-Consciousness. A few moments later Sri Ramakrishna looked at them and resumed the conversation.

MASTER: "You all seem to me to be my kinsmen. I do not look on any of you as a stranger.

"I see you all as so many sheaths, and the heads are moving.

"I notice that when my mind is united with God the suffering of the body is left aside.

"No I perceive only this: the Indivisible Satchidananda is covered with skin, and this sore in the throat is on one side of it."

The Master again fell silent. A few minutes later he said: "The attributes of matter are superimposed on Spirit, and the attributes of Spirit are superimposed on matter. Therefore when the body is ill a man says, 'I am ill.' "

Hirananda wanted to understand what the Master had just said; so M. told him, "Then hot water scalds the hand, people say that the water scalds; but the truth is that it is the heat that scalds."

Master and Hirananda

HIRANANDA (to the Master): "Please tell us why a devotee of God suffers."

MASTER: "It is the body that suffers."

Sri Ramakrishna seemed about to say something more. Hirananda and M. eagerly awaited his words.

Sri Ramakrishna said, "Do you understand?"

M. said to Hirananda, in a whisper: "The body suffers for the purpose of teaching men. His life is like a book of reference. In spite of so much physical suffering, his mind is one hundred percent united with God."

HIRANANDA: "Yes, it is like Christ's crucifixion. But still the mystery remains-why should he, of all people, suffer like this?"

M: "The Master says it is the will of the Divine Mother. This is how She is sporting through his body."

The two devotees were talking in whispers. Sri Ramakrishna asked Hirananda, by a sign, what
M. was talking about. Since Hirananda could not understand the sign, Sri Ramakrishna repeated it.

HIRANANDA: "He says that your illness is for the teaching of men."

MASTER: "But that's only his guess.

(To M. and Hirananda) "My mood is changing. I think that I should not say to everyone, 'May your spiritual consciousness be awakened.' People are so sinful in the Kaliyuga; if I awaken their spiritual consciousness I shall have to accept the burden of their sins."

M. (to Hirananda): "He will not awaken people's spiritual consciousness except at the right time. When a person is ready, he will awaken his spiritual consciousness."

Friday, April 23, 1886

It was Good Friday. Hirananda had taken his midday meal at the Cossipore garden house. About one o'clock in the afternoon he was stroking Sri Ramakrishna's feet. M. sat near by. Lātu and one or two other devotees were going in and out of the room. It was the Master's earnest desire that Hirananda should stay for some time at the Cossipore garden house.

While massaging the Master's feet, Hirananda conversed with him. He spoke in a very sweet voice, as if trying to console a child.

HIRANANDA: "Why should you worry so much? You can enjoy peace of mind if you have faith in the physician. You are a child."

MASTER (to M.): "How can I have faith in the doctor? Dr. Sarkar said that I would not recover."

HIRANANDA: "But why should you worry so much about that? What is to happen must happen."

M. (to Hirananda, aside): "He is not worrying about himself. The preservation of his body is for the welfare of the devotees."

It was a sultry day and the room became very hot at noontime. The straw screens had been hung over the windows. Hirananda adjusted them. The Master looked at him.

MASTER (to Hirananda): "Please don't forget to send the pajamas."

Hirananda had told Sri Ramakrishna that he would feel more comfortable if he wore the pajamas used in Sindh. Sri Ramakrishna was reminding him of them.

Hirananda had not eaten well. The rice had not been well cooked. The Master felt very sorry about it and asked him again and again whether he would have some refreshments. On account of his illness he could hardly talk; but still he repeated the question. He said to Lātu, "Did you too eat that rice?'

Sri Ramakrishna could hardly keep the cloth on his body. He was almost always naked, like a child. Hirananda had brought with him one or two of his Brahmo friends. Therefore every now and then the Master pulled the cloth to his waist.

MASTER (to Hirananda): "Will you take me for an uncivilized person if I don't cover my body with my cloth?"

HIRANANDA: "What difference does that make with you? You are but a child."

MASTER (pointing to a Brahmo devotee): "But he feels that way"

Hirananda was about to take his leave. In a very few days he was going to start for Sindh.

MASTER (to Hirananda): "Suppose you don't go to Sindh."

HIRANANDA (smiling): "But there is nobody there to do my work. I have my duties."

MASTER: "How much do you earn?"

HIRANANDA (smiling): "My work doesn't bring me a large salary."

MASTER: "Still, how much?"

Hirananda laughed.

MASTER: "Why don't you live here?"

Hirananda did not reply.

MASTER: "Suppose you give up the job."

Hirananda said nothing. He was ready to take his leave.

MASTER: "When will you see me again?"

HlRANANDA: "I shall leave for Sindh on Monday, the day after tomorrow I shall see you that morning."

Hirananda left.

M. was seated by the Master's side.

MASTER (to M.): "He is a fine young man, isn't he?"

M: "Yes, sir. He has a very sweet nature."

MASTER: "He said that Sindh is twenty-two hundred miles from Calcutta; and he has come all that way to see me."

M: "True, Sir. That would be impossible without real love."

MASTER: "He wants very much to take me to Sindh."

M: "The journey is very painful. It takes four or five days by train."

MASTER: "He has three university degrees."

M: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna was tired. He wanted to take a little rest. He asked M. to open the shutters of the windows and spread the straw mat over his bed. M. was fanning him. Sri Ramakrishna became drowsy.

After a short nap Sri Ramakrishna said to M., "Did I sleep?"

M: "A little."

Narendra, Sarat, and M. were talking downstairs.

NARENDRA: "How amazing it is! One learns hardly anything though one reads books for many years. How can a man realize God by practising *sādhanā* for two or three days? Is it so easy to realize God? (To Sarat) You have obtained peace. M., too, has obtained it. But I have no peace."

It was afternoon. Many devotees were sitting in the Master's room. Narendra, Sarat, Śaśi, Lātu, Nityagopal, Girish, Ram, M., and Suresh were present.

Kedār came in. This was his first visit to the Master for some time. While staying in Dāccā, in connection with his official duties, he had heard of Sri Ramakrishna's illness. On entering Sri Ramakrishna's room he took the dust of the Master's feet on his head and then joyously gave it to the others. The devotees accepted it with bowed heads. As he offered it to Sarat, the latter himself took the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet. M. smiled. The Master also smiled, looking at M. The devotees sat without uttering a word. Sri Ramakrishna seemed about to go into an ecstatic mood. Now and then he breathed heavily as if trying to suppress his emotion. He said to Kedār, by a sign, "Argue with Girish."

Girish said to Kedār: "Sir, I beg your pardon. At first I did not know who you were. That is why I argued with you. But now it is quite different."

Sri Ramakrishna smiled.

The Master drew Kedār's attention to Narendra and said: "He has renounced everything. (To the devotees) Kedār once said to Narendra, 'You may reason and argue now, but in the end you will roll on the ground, chanting Hari's name.' (To Narendra) Take the dust of Kedār's feet."

KEDĀR (to Narendra): "Take the dust of his [meaning the Master's] feet. That will do."

Surendra was seated behind the other devotees. The Master looked at him with a smile and said to Kedār, "Ah, how sweet his nature is!" Kedār understood the Master's hint and went toward Surendra.

Surendra was very sensitive. Some of the devotees had been collecting funds from the householder devotees to meet the expenses of the Cossipore garden house. Surendra felt piqued at this. He was bearing most of the expenses himself.

SURENDRA (to Kedār): "How can I sit near all these holy people? A few days ago some of them [referring to Narendra] put on the ochre robe of the sannyāsi and went on a pilgrimage to Buddha-Gaya. They wanted to see bigger sādhus there."

Sri Ramakrishna was trying to console Surendra. He said: "You are right. They are mere children. They don't know what is good."

SURENDRA (to Kedār): "Doesn't our gurudeva know our inner feeling? He does not care for money. It is our inner attitude that pleases him."

Sri Ramakrishna with a nod of his head approved Surendra's words.

The devotees had brought various food offerings for the Master and placed them in front of him. Sri Ramakrishna put a grain on his tongue and gave the plate to Surendra. He

asked Surendra to distribute the Prasad to the devotees. Surendra went downstairs with the offerings.

MASTER (to Kedār): "You had better go downstairs and explain it all to Surendra. See that they don't get into any hot arguments."

M. was fanning Sri Ramakrishna. The Master said to him, "Won't you eat anything?" He sent M. downstairs.

Girish and M.

It was about dusk. Girish and M. were strolling near the small reservoir in the garden. '

GIRISH: "I understand that you are writing something about the Master. Is it true?"

M: "Who told you that?"

GIRISH: "I have heard about it. Will you give it to me?"

M: "No, I won't part with it unless I feel it is right to do so. I am writing it for myself, not for others."

GIRISH: "What do you mean?"

M: "You may get it when I die."

It was evening. A lamp was lighted in the Master's room. Amrita Basu, a Brahmo devotee, came in. Sri Ramakrishna had expressed his eagerness to see him. M. and a few other devotees were there. A garland of jasmine lay in front of the Master on a plantain-leaf. There was perfect silence in the room. A great yogi seemed to be silently communing with God. Every now and then the Master lifted the garland a little, as if he wanted to put it around his neck.

AMRITA (tenderly): "Shall I put it around your neck?"

Sri Ramakrishna accepted the garland. He had a long conversation with Amrita. When the latter was about to take his leave, the Master said, "Come again."

AMRITA: "Yes, sir. I like to come very much. But I live at a great distance; so I cannot always come."

MASTER: "Do come, and take the carriage hire from here."

The devotees were amazed at the Master's tender love for Amrita.

Master's kindness to M. and his wife

The next day M. came to the garden house accompanied by his wife and a son. The boy was seven years old. It was at the Master's request that he brought his wife, who was almost mad with grief owing to the death of one of her sons.

That day the Master several times allowed M.'s wife the privilege of waiting on him. Her welfare seemed to occupy his attention a great deal. In the evening the Holy Mother came to the Master's room to feed him. M.'s wife accompanied her with a lamp. The Master tenderly asked her many questions about her household. He requested her to come again to the garden house and spend a few days with the Holy Mother, not forgetting to ask her to bring her baby daughter. When the Master had finished his meal M.'s wife removed the plates. He chatted with her a few minutes.

About nine o'clock in the evening Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his room with the devotees. He had a garland of flowers around his neck. He told M. that he had requested his wife to spend a few days at the garden house with the Holy Mother. His kindness touched M.'s heart.

M. was fanning him. The Master took the garland from his neck and said something to himself. Then in a very benign mood he gave the garland to M.

Chapter 52

AFTER THE PASSING AWAY

SRI RAMAKRISHNA passed away on Sunday, August 15, 1886, plunging his devotees and disciples into a sea of grief. They were like men in a shipwreck. But a strong bond of love held them together, and they found assurance and courage in each other's company. They could not enjoy the friendship of worldly people and would talk only of their Master. "Shall we not behold him again?" -this was the one theme of their thought and the one dream of their sleep. Alone, they wept for him; walking in the streets of Calcutta, they were engrossed in the thought of him. The Master had once said to M., "It becomes difficult for me to give up the body, when I realize that after my death you will wander about weeping for me." Some of them thought: "He is no longer in this world. How surprising that we still enjoy living! We could give up our bodies if we liked, but still we do not." Time and again Sri Ramakrishna had told them that God reveals Himself to His devotees if they yearn for Him and call on Him with whole-souled devotion. He had assured them that God listens to the prayer of a sincere heart.

The young unmarried disciples of the Master, who belonged to his inner circle, had attended on him day and night at the Cossipore garden house. After his passing away most of them returned to their families against their own wills. They had not yet formally renounced the world. For a short while they kept their family names. But Sri Ramakrishna had made them renounce the world mentally. He himself had initiated several of them into the monastic life, giving them the ochre cloths of sannyāsis.

Baranagore Monastery

Two or three of the Master's attendants had no place to go. To them the large-hearted Surendra said: "Brothers, where will you go? Let us rent a house. You will live there and make it our Master's shrine; and we house-holders shall come there for consolation. How can we pass all our days and nights with our wives and children in the world? I used to spend a sum of money for the Master at Cossipore. I shall gladly give it now for your expenses." Accordingly he rented a house for them at Baranagore, in the suburbs of Calcutta, and this place became gradually transformed into Math, or, monastery.

For the first few months Surendra contributed thirty rupees a month. As the other members joined the monastery one by one, he doubled his contribution, which he later increased to a hundred rupees. The monthly rent for the house was eleven rupees. The cook received six rupees a month. The rest was spent for food.

First members

The younger Gopal brought the Master's bed and other articles of daily use from the garden house at Cossipore. The brahmin who had been cook at Cossipore was engaged for the new monastery. The first permanent member was the elder Gopal. Sarat spent the nights there. In the beginning Sarat, Śaśi, Baburam, Niranjan, and Kāli used to visit the monastery every now and then, according to their convenience. Tārak, who had

gone to Vrindāvan following the Master's death, returned to Calcutta after a few months and soon became a permanent member of the monastery. Rākhāl, Jogin, Lātu, and Kāli were living at Vrindāvan with the Holy Mother when the monastery was started. Kāli returned to Calcutta within a month, Rākhāl after a few months, and Jogin and Lātu after a year. The householder devotees frequently visited the monastic brothers and spent hours with them in meditation and study.

After a short time Narendra, Rākhāl, Niranjan, Sarat, Śaśi, Baburam, Jogin, Tārak, Kāli, and Lātu renounced the world for good. Sarada Prasanna and Subodh joined them some time later. Gangadhar, who was very much attached to Narendra, visited the Math regularly. It was he who taught the brothers the hymn sung at the evening service in the Śiva temple at Benares. He had gone to Tibet to practise austerity; now, having returned, he lived at the monastery. Hari and Tulasi, at first only visitors at the monastery, soon embraced the monastic life and thus completed the list of the Master's sannyāsi disciples.

Surendra's magnanimity

Surendra was indeed a blessed soul. It was he who laid the foundation of the great Order later associated with Sri Ramakrishna's name. His devotion and sacrifice made it possible for those earnest souls to renounce the world for the realization of God. Through him Sri Ramakrishna made it possible for them to live in the world as embodiments of his teaching, the renunciation of "woman and gold" and the realization of God.

The brothers lived at the Math like orphan boys. Sometimes they would not have the money to pay their house-rent; sometimes they would have no food in the monastery. Surendra would come and settle all these things. He was the big brother of the monks. Later on, when they thought of his genuine love, the members of this first Math shed tears of gratitude.

Ascetic zeal of the young sannyāsis

The new monastery became known among the Master's devotees as the Baranagore Math. Narendra, Rākhāl, and the other young disciples were filled with intense renunciation. One day Rākhāl's father came to the Math and asked Rākhāl to return home. "Why do you take the trouble to come here?" Rākhāl said to him. "I am very happy here. Pleased pray to God that you may forget me and that I may forget you too." The young disciples said to each other: "We shall never return to the worldly life. The Master enjoined upon us the renunciation of 'woman and gold'. How can we go back to our families?"

Śaśi had taken charge of the daily worship in the Math. The Master's relics had been brought from Balarām's house and Sri Ramakrishna was worshipped daily in the worship hall. Narendra supervised the household. He was the leader of the monastery. He would often tell his brother disciples, "The selfless actions enjoined in the Gitā are worship, japa, meditation, and so on, and not worldly duties." The brothers at the Math depended

on him for their spiritual inspiration. He said to them, "We must practise *sādhanā*; otherwise we shall not be able to realize God."

He and his brother disciples, filled with an ascetic spirit, devoted themselves day and night to the practice of spiritual discipline. Their one goal in life was the realization of God. They followed to their hearts' content the injunctions prescribed in the Vedas, Puranas, and Tantras for an ascetic life. They spent their time in japa and meditation and study of the scriptures. Whenever they would fail to experience the Divine Presence, they would feel as if they were on the rack. They would practise austerity, sometimes alone under trees, sometimes in a cremation ground, sometimes on the bank of the Ganges. Again, sometimes they would spend the entire day in the meditation room of the monastery in japa and contemplation; sometimes they would gather to sing and dance in a rapture of delight. All of them, and Narendra particularly, were consumed with the desire to see God. Now and then they would say to each other, "Shall we not starve ourselves to death to see God?"

Monday, February 21, 1887

Narendra, Rākhāl, Niranjan, Sarat, Śaśi, Kāli, Baburam, Tārak, and Sarada Prasanna were living in the monastery. All day the members had been fasting in observance of the Sivaratri. Sarat, Kāli, Niranjan, and Sarada were planning to go to Puri, the following Saturday, on a pilgrimage to the sacred Jagannath. Jogin and Lātu were at Vrindāvan and had not yet seen the new place.

Narendra had gone to Calcutta that morning to look after a lawsuit in which his family had been involved since the death of his father. At nine o'clock in the morning M. arrived at the Math. Tārak saw him and began to sing in praise of Śiva, Rākhāl joining him:

> *There Śiva dances, striking both His cheeks; and they resound, Ba-ba-bom!*
> *Dimi-dimi-dimi! sounds His drum; a garland of skulls from His neck is hanging!*
> *In His matted locks the Ganges hisses; fire shoots from His mighty trident!*
> *Round His waist a serpent glitters, and on His brow the moon Is shining!*

Rākhāl and Tārak danced as they sang. Narendra had recently composed the song.

Śaśi finished the morning worship in the shrine. Sarat then sang about Śiva to the accompaniment of the Tānpura.

Narendra had just arrived from Calcutta. He had not yet taken his bath. Kāli asked him, "What about the lawsuit?" "Why should you bother about it?" Narendra replied sharply.

Renunciation of "woman and gold"

Narendra was smoking and talking to M. and the others. He said: "Nothing can be achieved in spiritual life without the renunciation of 'woman and gold'. 'Woman' is the doorway to hell. All people are under the control of women. The cases of Śiva and Krishna are quite different. Śiva turned His Consort into His servant. Sri Krishna, no doubt, led a house-holder's life. But how unattached He was! How quickly He renounced Vrindāvan and the gopis!"

RĀKHĀL: "And how He renounced Dwaraka, too, where He was king!"

Narendra took his bath in the Ganges and returned to the monastery. He carried his wet cloth and towel in his hand. Sarada prostrated himself before Narendra. He too had been fasting on account of the Sivaratri. He was going to the Ganges for his bath. Narendra entered the worship room and prostrated himself before the picture of Sri Ramakrishna, who was daily worshipped there as the Deity. For a few minutes he was absorbed in meditation.

The devotees assembled in a room and began to converse. The talk turned to Bhavanāth. Narendra said, "People like him live like worms in the world."

Śiva festival at the Math

It was afternoon. Arrangements were being made to worship Śiva in the evening. Leaves of the bel-tree were gathered for the worship. Bel-wood was chopped for the homa.

In the evening Śaśi, who was in charge of the worship at the monastery, burnt incense before the pictures of the various gods and goddesses.

The worship of Śiva was to take place under the bel-tree in the monastery compound. The Deity was to be worshipped four times, during the four watches of the night. The brothers assembled under the bel-tree. Bhupati and M. were present also. One of the young members of the Math was in charge of the worship. Kāli was reading from the Gitā. Now and then he argued with Narendra.

KĀLI: "I alone am everything. I create, preserve, and destroy."

NARENDRA: "How is it possible for me to create? Another power creates through me. Our various actions-even our thoughts-are caused by that power."

M. (to himself): "The Master used to say: 'As long as a man feels that it is he who meditates, he is under the jurisdiction of the *Ādyāśakti*. Śakti must be acknowledged.'"

Kāli reflected in silence a few moments and then said: "The actions you are talking about are illusory. There is not even any such thing as thought. The very idea of these things makes me laugh."

NARENDRA: "The 'I' that is implied in 'I am He' is not this ego. It is that which remains after one eliminates mind, body, and so on."

After completing the recital of the Gitā, Kāli chanted, "Śāntih! Śāntih! Śāntih!"

Narendra and the other devotees stood up and circled round and round the tree, singing and dancing. Now and then they chanted in chorus: "Śiva Guru! Śiva Guru!"

It was midnight, the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the moon. Pitch darkness filled all the quarters. Men, birds, and animals were all hushed into silence. The young sannyāsis were clad in *Gerruā* robes. The words "Śiva Guru", chanted in their full-throated voices, rose into the infinite sky like the rumblings of rain-clouds and disappeared in the Indivisible Satchidananda.

The worship was over. The sun, about to rise, was painting the eastern horizon crimson. In this sacred twilight, the conjunction of night and day, the holy Brahmamuhurta, the young worshippers finished their baths in the Ganges.

It was morning. The devotees went to the shrine room, prostrated themselves before the Deity, and gradually assembled in the big hall. Narendra was clad in a new ochre cloth. The bright orange colour of his apparel blended with the celestial lustre of his face and body, every pore of which radiated a divine light. His countenance was filled with fiery brilliance and yet touched with the tenderness of love. He appeared to all as a bubble that had risen up in the Ocean of Absolute Existence and Bliss and assumed a human body to help in the propagation of his Master's message. All eyes were fixed on him. Narendra was then just twenty-four years old, the very age at which the great Chaitanya had renounced the world.

Balarām had sent fruit and sweets to the monastery for the devotees' breakfast. Rākhāl, Narendra, and a few others partook of the refreshments. After eating one or two morsels some of them cried out, "Blessed indeed is Balarām!" All laughed.

Narendra now began to joke like a child. He was imitating Sri Ramakrishna. He put a sweet into his mouth and stood still, as if in samādhi. His eyes remained unwinking. A devotee stepped forward and pretended to hold him up by the hand lest he should drop to the ground. Narendra closed his eyes. A few minutes later, with the sweetmeat still in his mouth, he opened his eyes and drawled out, "I--am--all--right." All laughed loudly.

Refreshments were now given to everyone. M. looked on at this wonderful mart of happiness.

The devotees shouted joyfully, "Jai Guru Mahārāj"!

Monday, March 25, 1887

M. arrived at the Baranagore Math to visit his brother disciples. Devendra accompanied him. M. had been coming to the monastery very frequently and now and then had spent a day or two. The previous week he had spent three days at the Math. He was very eager to observe the spirit of intense renunciation of these young men.

It was evening. M. intended to spend the night in the monastery. Śaśi lighted the lamp in the worship room and chanted the name of God. Next he burnt incense before all the pictures of gods and goddesses in the various rooms. The evening service began. Śaśi conducted the worship. The members of the Math, with M. and Devendra, stood with folded hands and sang the hymn of the *Ārati.*

Narendra's reminiscences of the Master

When the worship was over, Narendra and M. became engaged in conversation. Narendra was recalling his various meetings with Sri Ramakrishna.

NARENDRA: "One day, during one of my early visits, the Master in an ecstatic mood said to me, 'You have come!' 'How amazing!' I said to myself. 'It is as if he had known me a long time.' Then he said to me, 'Do you ever see light?' I replied: 'Yes, sir. Before I fall asleep I feel something like a light revolving near my forehead.' "

M: "Do you see it even now?"

NARENDRA:"I used to see it frequently. In Jadu Mallick's garden house the Master one day touched me and muttered something to himself. I became unconscious. The effect of the touch lingered with me a month, like an intoxication.

"When he heard that a proposal had been made about my marriage, he wept, holding the feet of the image of Kāli. With tears in his eyes he prayed to the Divine Mother: 'O Mother, please upset the whole thing! Don't let Narendra be drowned.'

"After my father's death my mother and my brothers were starving. When the Master met Annada Guha one day, he said to him: 'Narendra's father has died. His family is in a state of great privation. It would be good if his friends helped him now with money.'

"After Annada had left I scolded him. I said, 'Why did you say all those things to him?' Thus rebuked, he wept and said, 'Alas! for your sake I could beg from door to door.'

"He tamed us by his love. Don't you think so?"

M: "There is not the slightest doubt about it. His love was utterly unselfish."

NARENDRA: "One day when I was alone with him he said something to me. Nobody else was present. Please don't repeat it to anyone here,"

M: "No, I shall not. What did he say?"

NARENDRA: "He said: 'It is not possible for me to exercise occult powers; but I shall do so through you. What do you say?' 'No,' I replied, 'you can't do that.'

"I used to laugh at his words. You must have heard all these things from him. I told him that his visions of God were all hallucinations of his mind.

"He said to me: 'I used to climb to the roof of the kuthi and cry: "O devotees, where are you all? Come to me, O devotees! I am about to die. I shall certainly die if I do not see you." And the Divine Mother told me, "The devotees will come." You see, everything is turning out to be true.'

"What else could I say? I kept quiet.

"One day he closed the door of his room and said to Devendra Babu and Girish Babu, referring to me, 'He will not keep his body if he is told who he is.'"

M: "Yes, we have heard that. Many a time he repeated the same thing to us, too. Once you came to know about your true Self in nirvikalpa samādhi at the Cossipore garden house. Isn't that true?"

NARENDRA: "Yes. In that experience I felt that I had no body. I could see only my face. The Master was in the upstairs room. I had that experience downstairs. I was weeping. I said, 'What has happened to me?' The elder Gopal went to the Master's room and said, 'Narendra is crying.'

"When I saw the Master he said to me: 'Now you have known. But I am going to keep the key with me.'

"I said to him, 'What is it that happened to me?'

"Turning to the devotees, he said: 'He will not keep his body if he knows who he is. But I have put a veil over his eyes.'

"One day he said to me, 'You can see Krishna in your heart if you want.' I replied, 'I don't believe in Krishna or any such nonsense!' (Both M. and Narendra laugh.)

Narendra's foreknowledge of things

"I have noticed a peculiar thing. Some men, objects, or places make me feel as if I had seen them before, in a previous birth. They appear familiar to me. One day I went to Sarat's house in Calcutta, on Amherst Street. Immediately I said to Sarat: 'This house seems familiar to me. It seems to me that I have known the rooms, the passages, and the rest of the house for many, many days.

"I used to follow my own whims in everything I did. The Master never interfered. You know that I became a member of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj."

M: "Yes, I know that."

NARENDRA: "The Master knew that women attended the meetings of the Brahmo Samaj. A man cannot meditate with women sitting in front of him; therefore he criticized the meditation of the Brahmo Samaj. But he didn't object to my going there. But one day he said to me, 'Don't tell Rākhāl about your being a member of the Brahmo Samaj, or he too will feel like becoming one.'"

M: "You have greater strength of mind. That is why the Master didn't prevent your going to the Samaj."

NARENDRA: "I have attained my present state of mind as a result of much suffering and pain. You have not passed through any such suffering. I now realize that without trials and tribulations one cannot resign oneself to God and depend on Him absolutely.

Narendra's ego

"Well, X- is so modest and humble! He is totally self-effacing. Can you tell me how I can develop humility?"

M: "Speaking about your ego, the Master said, 'Whose ego is it?'"

NARENDRA: "What did he mean?"

M: "A friend one day said to Rādhika: 'You are egotistic. That is why you insulted Krishna.' Whereupon another friend said to the first: 'Yes, Rādhika is egotistic, no doubt. But whose ego is it?' What she meant was that Radha was egotistic because she regarded Krishna as her Lord. It was Krishna Himself who kept that ego in Radha.

"What the Master meant was that it is God alone who has kept this ego in you, so that He may accomplish many things through you.

NARENDRA: "But my ego loudly proclaims to all that I have no suffering."

M. (smiling): "You may loudly proclaim it, if that be your sweet will."

The conversation turned to other devotees.

NARENDRA: "The Master said about Vijay Goswami, 'He is knocking at the door.' "

M: "That is to say, he has not yet entered the room. At Syampukur Vijay said to the Master, 'I saw you at Dāccā in this tangible form, in this very body.' You were there too."

NARENDRA: "Devendra Babu and Ram Babu want to renounce the World. They are trying hard. Ram Babu told me privately that he would give up the world after two years."

M: "After two years? After making provision for his children?"

NARENDRA: "Besides, he will rent his present house and buy a small house. Other relatives will arrange his daughter's marriage."

About Nityagopal

M: "Gopal is in an exalted state of mind, isn't he?"

NARENDRA: "What do you mean?"

M: "So much emotion, so much weeping and such exaltation in the name of God!"

NARENDRA: "Does mere emotion make a man spiritually great? Youngsters like Kāli, Sarat, Śaśi, and Sarada are more spiritual than Gopal. How great their renunciation is! Gopal does not accept the Master, does he?"

M: "That is true. The Master remarked that Gopal did not belong to the circle of his devotees. But I saw him show great reverence for Sri Ramakrishna."

NARENDRA: "What did you see?"

M: "At that time I was just becoming acquainted with Sri Ramakrishna. One day after the meeting of the devotees in his room had broken up, I came out and saw Gopal on the foot-path, kneeling with folded hands before the Master. The moon was shining brightly overhead. It was the red path sprinkled with brick-dust, just outside the long verandah north of the Master's room. Nobody else was there. It appeared to me that Gopal had taken shelter at Sri Ramakrishna's feet and the Master was encouraging him."

NARENDRA: "I didn't see it."

M: "Further, the Master used to say, 'Gopal is in the state of a paramahamsa.' But I also distinctly remember his forbidding Gopal to be intimate with woman devotees. Many a time he warned him about it."

NARENDRA: "Speaking to me about Gopal, the Master asked why, if Gopal was a real Paramahamsa, he should hanker after money.'He doesn't belong to this place', the Master said.'Those who are my own will always come here.' He used to be angry with T - because he was Gopal's constant companion and didn't come to the Master more often. 'Gopal has spiritual realizations, no doubt,' the Master said to me, 'but he has attained them all of a sudden, without the necessary preparations. He is not one of my own. If he is, why haven't I wept for him?'

"Some are proclaiming Gopal as the reincarnation of Nityananda. But times without number the Master said to me: 'In me alone are embodied Advaita, Chaitanya, and Nityananda. I am all these three.'"

Friday, April 8, 1887

About eight o'clock in the morning two devotees, one a householder and the other a monk, were conversing in a room in the Barangore monastery, when M. came in. The devotees were of the same age-twenty-four or twenty-five years old. M. intended to spend three days at the monastery. He went to the shrine and saluted the Deity. After visiting Narendra, Rākhāl, and the other brothers, he at last came into the room where the two devotees were engaged in conversation. The householder devotee wanted to renounce the world, The monk was trying to persuade him not to do so.

MONK: "Why don't you finish the few duties you have in the world? Very soon they will be left behind,

"A man was told that he would go to hell. He asked a friend, 'What is hell like?' Thereupon the friend began to draw a picture of hell on the ground with a piece of chalk. No sooner was the picture drawn than the man rolled over it and said, 'Now I have gone through hell!'"

HOUSEHOLDER: "I don't relish worldly life, Ah, how happy you are here!"

MONK: "Why don't you renounce the world, if you want to? Why do you talk about it so much? But I repeat, why don't you enjoy the fun once for all?"

Śaśi finished the regular worship in the worship hall. About eleven the brothers of the Math returned from the Ganges after taking their baths. They put on clean cloths, went to the shrine, prostrated themselves before the Deity, and meditated there a little while.

After the food was offered to the Deity they had their meal. M. ate with them.

It was evening. Incense was burnt before the pictures of gods and goddesses and the evening service was performed. Rākhāl, Śaśi, the elder Gopal, and Harish were seated in the big hall. M. also was there.

Rākhāl's reminiscences of the Master

Rākhāl warned one of the brothers to be careful about the food to he offered to the Master in the shrine.

RĀKHĀL (to Śaśi and the others): "One day I ate part of his [meaning the Master's] refreshments before he took them. At this he said: 'I cannot look at you. How could you do such a thing?' I burst into tears."

THE ELDER GOPAL: "One day at Cossipore I breathed hard on his food. At this he said, 'Take that food away.' "

M. and Narendra were pacing the verandah and recalling old times.

NARENDRA: "I did not believe in anything."

M:" You mean the forms of God?"

NARENDRA: "At first I did not accept most of what the Master said. One day he asked me, 'Then why do you come here?' I replied, 'I come here to see you, not to listen to you.' "

M: "What did he say to that?"

NARENDRA: "He was very much pleased."

Saturday, April 9, 1887
The Master and Narendra

The members of the Math were resting a little after their meal. Narendra and M. sat under a tree in the garden to the west of the monastery. It was a solitary place and no one else was present. Narendra was recounting to M. his various experiences with Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra was about twenty-four years old, and M. thirty-two.

M: "You must remember vividly your first visit to him."

NARENDRA: "Yes. It was at the temple garden at Dakshineswar, in his own room. That day I sang two songs."

Narendra sang them for M.:

Let us go back once more, O mind, to our own abode!
Here in this foreign land of earth
Why should we wander aimlessly in stranger's guise?
These living beings round about, and the five elements;
Are strangers to you, all of them; none is your own.
Why do you thus forget yourself,
In love with strangers, O my mind?
Why do you thus forget your own?

Ascend the path of Truth, O mind! Unflaggingly climb,
With Love as the lamp to light your way.
As your provision for the journey, bring with you
The virtues, carefully concealed; for, like two highwaymen,
Greed and delusion wait to rob you of your wealth.
And keep beside you constantly,
As guards to shelter you from harm,
Calmness of mind and self-control.

Companionship with holy men will be for you
A welcome rest-house by the road;
There rest your weary limbs awhile, asking your way,
If ever you should be in doubt, of him who watches there.
If anything along the path should frighten you,
Then loudly shout the name of the Lord;
For He is Ruler of that road,
And even Death must bow to Him.

O Lord, must all my days pass by so utterly in vain?
Down the path of hope I gaze with longing, day and

night.
Thou art the Lord of all the worlds, and I but a beggar here;
How can I ask of Thee to come and dwell within my heart?
My poor heart's humble cottage door is standing open wide;
Be gracious, Lord, and enter there but once, and quench its thirst!

M: "What did he say after listening to your songs?"

NARENDRA: "He went into samādhi. He said to Ram Babu: 'Who is this boy? How well he sings!' He asked me to come again."

M: "Where did you see him next?"

NARENDRA: "At Rājmohan's house. The third visit was at Dakshineswar again. During that visit he went into samādhi and began to praise me as if I were God. He said to me, 'O Narayana, you have assumed this body for my sake.' But please don't tell this to anybody else."

M: "What else did he say?"

NARENDRA: "He said: 'You have assumed this body for my sake. I asked the Divine Mother, "Mother, unless I enjoy the company of some genuine devotees completely free from 'woman and gold', how shall I live on earth?" '

Then he said to me, 'You came to me at night woke me up, and said, "Here I am!"' But I did not know anything of this. I was sound asleep in our Calcutta house."

M: "In other words, you may be both present and absent at the same time. It is like God, who is both formless and endowed with form."

NARENDRA: "But you must not tell this to anyone else. At Cossipore he transmitted his power to me."

M: "Didn't it happen when you used to meditate before a lighted fire under a tree at the Cossipore garden house?"

NARENDRA: "Yes. One day, while meditating, I asked Kāli to hold my hand. Kāli said to me, 'When I touched your body I felt something like an electric shock coming to my body.'

"But you must not tell this to anybody here. Give me your promise."

M: "There is a special purpose in his transmission of power to you. He will accomplish much work through you. One day the Master, wrote on a piece of paper, 'Naren will teach people.'"

NARENDRA: "But I said to him, 'I won't do any such thing.' Thereupon he said, 'Your very bones will do it.' He has given me charge of Sarat. Sarat is now yearning for God; the Kundalini is awakened in him."

M: "He must be careful that dead leaves do not accumulate there. Perhaps you remember what the Master used to say: 'In a lake the fish make holes so that they may rest there. But if dead leaves accumulate in the holes, the fish do not go there.' "

NARENDRA: "The Master used to call me Narayana."

M: "Yes, I know he did."

NARENDRA: "When he was ill he would not allow me to pour water to wash his hands. At Cossipore he said: 'Now the key is in my hands. He will give up his body when he knows who he is.'"

M; "Didn't he say it when you were in nirvikalpa samādhi?"

NARENDRA: "Yes. At the time it seemed to me I had no body. I felt only my face.

"I was studying law at home to prepare for the examinations. Suddenly I said to myself, 'What am I doing?' "

M: "Didn't it happen when the Master was at Cossipore?"

NARENDRA: "Yes. Like an insane person I ran out of our house. He asked me, 'What do you want?' I replied, 'I want to remain immersed in samādhi.' He said: 'What a small mind you have! Go beyond samādhi! Samādhi is a very trifling thing.' "

M: "Yes, he used to say that vijnāna is the stage after jnāna. It is like going up and down the stairs after reaching the roof."

NARENDRA: "Kāli has a craving for knowledge. I scold him for that. Is knowledge so easy to get? Let his bhakti first mature. The Master told Tārak at Dakshineswar that emotion and bhakti are by no means the last word."

M: "What other things did he say about you?"

NARENDRA: "Once I said to him, The forms of God and things like that, which you see in your visions, are all figments of your imagination.' He had so much faith in my words that he went to the Divine Mother in the temple and told Her what I had said to him. He asked Her, 'Are these hallucinations, then?' Afterwards he said to me, 'Mother told me that all these are real.'

"Perhaps you remember that he said to me, 'When you sing, He who dwells here (touching his heart), like a snake, hisses as it were, and then, spreading His hood, quietly holds Himself steady and listens to your music.'

"He has no doubt said many things about me; but what have I realized?"

M: "Now you have put on the garb of Śiva; you cannot touch money. Do you remember the Master's story?"

NARENDRA: "Please tell it to me."

M: "A Bahurupi disguised himself as Śiva and visited a house. The master of the house wanted to give him a rupee, but he did not accept it. Then the mendicant went home, removed his disguise, came back to the gentleman, and asked for the rupee. 'Why didn't you accept it before?' he was asked. He said: 'I was impersonating Śiva, a sannyāsi. I couldn't touch money that time.' "

When Narendra heard the story he laughed a long while.

M: "You have now put on the garb of a physician, as it were. You have become the guardian of these young men. Yours is the entire responsibility. You have to bring up the brothers of the monastery."

NARENDRA: "Whatever spiritual disciplines we are practising here are in obedience to the Master's command. But it is strange that Ram Babu criticizes us for our spiritual practices. He says: 'We have seen him. What need have we of any such practice?' "

M: "Let people act according to their faith."

NARENDRA: "But the Master asked us to practise *sādhanā*."

Master's love for Narendra

Narendra was again telling M. about the Master's love for him.

NARENDRA: "How many times he prayed to the Divine Mother for my sake! After my father's death, when I had no food at home and my mother and sisters and brothers were starving too, the Master prayed to the Divine Mother to give me money."

M: "Yes, I know that. You once told me."

NARENDRA: "But I didn't get any money. The Master told me what the Divine Mother had said to him: 'He will get simple food and clothing. He will eat rice and *dāl.'*

"He loved me so much! But whenever an impure idea crept into my mind he at once knew about it. While going around with Annada, sometime I found myself in the company of evil people. On those occasions the Master could not eat any food from my hands. He could raise his hand only a little, and could not bring it to his mouth. On one

such occasion, while he was ill, he brought his hand very close to his mouth, but it did not go in. He said to me, 'You are not yet ready.'

"Now and then I feel great scepticism. At Baburam's house it seemed to me that nothing existed-as if there were no such thing as God."

M: "The Master used to say that he too had passed through that mood."

Both M. and Narendra remained silent. Then M. said: "You are all indeed blessed! You think of the Master day and night."

NARENDRA: "But how little it is! We don't yet feel like giving up the body because we haven't realized God."

It was night. Niranjan had just returned from Puri The members of the Math, and M., greeted him with great joy. Niranjan was telling them his experiences. He was then about twenty-five years old.

The evening worship was over. Some of the brothers were meditating. But many of them assembled in the big hall around Niranjan. They were talking. After nine o'clock Śaśi offered food to the Deity.

The members of the Math finished their supper, which consisted of home-made bread, a little vegetable, and a little hard molasses.

Saturday, May 7, 1887

It was the full-moon day of the month of Vaiśākh. Narendra and M. were seated on a couch in M.'s study in Calcutta. They were talking. Just before Narendra's arrival, M. had been studying The Merchant of Venice, Comus, and Blackie's Self-culture, which he taught at school.

Narendra and the other brothers of the monastery were full of yearning for God-realization. A fire of intense renunciation raged in their hearts.

NARENDRA: "I don't care for anything. You see, I am now talking with you, but I feel like getting up this minute and running away."

Narendra sat in silence a few minutes. Then he said, "I shall fast to death for the realization of God."

M: "That is good. One can do anything for God."

NARENDRA: "But suppose I cannot control my hunger."

M: "Then eat something and begin over again."

Narendra remained silent a few minutes.

NARENDRA: "It seems there is no God. I pray so much, but there is no reply-none whatsoever.

"How many visions I have seen! How many *mantrās* shining in letters of gold! How many visions of the Goddess Kāli! How many other divine forms! But still I have no peace. "Will you kindly give me six pice?"

Narendra asked for the money to pay his carriage hire to the Barangore Math. Just then Satkari arrived in a carriage. Of the same age as Narendra, he dearly loved the members of the monastery. He lived near the Math and worked in Calcutta. The carriage was his own. Narendra returned the money to M. and said that he would go with Satkari in his carriage. He asked M. to give them some refreshments.

M. accompanied the two friends to the Barangore Math. He wanted to see how the brothers spent their time and practised *sādhana.* He wanted to see how Sri Ramakrishna, the Master, was reflected in the hearts of the disciples. Niranjan was not at the Math. He had gone home to visit his mother, the only relative he had in the world. Baburam, Sarat, and Kāli had gone to Puri. They intended to spend a few days there.

Prasanna's austere *sādhanā*

Narendra was in charge of the members of the monastery. Prasanna had been practising austere *sādhanā* for the past few days. Once Narendra had told him of his desire to fast to death for the realization of God. During Narendra's absence in Calcutta, Prasanna had left the monastery for an unknown destination. When Narendra heard about it, he said to the brothers, "Why did Raja allow him to go?" But Rākhāl had not been in the monastery at the time, having gone to the Dakshineswar temple for a stroll.

NARENDRA: "Just let Raja come back to the monastery! I shall scold him. Why did he allow Prasanna to go away? (To Harish) I am sure you were lecturing him then, standing with your feet apart. Couldn't you prevent his going away?"

Harish replied in a very low voice, "Brother Tārak asked him not to go, but still he went away."

NARENDRA (to M.): "You see what a lot of trouble I am in! Here, too, I am involved in a world of māyā. Who knows where this boy has gone?"

Rākhāl returned from Dakshineswar. Bhavanāth had accompanied him.

Narendra told Rākhāl about Prasanna's going away from the monastery. Prasanna had left a letter for Narendra. This was the substance of the letter: "I am going to Vrindāvan on foot. It is very risky for me to live here. Here my mind is undergoing a change. Formerly I used to dream about my parents and other relatives. Then I dreamt of woman, the embodiment of māyā. I have suffered twice; I had to go back to my relatives at home. Therefore I am going far away from them. The Master once told me, 'Your people at home are apt to do anything; never trust them.' "

Rākhāl said: "These are the reasons for his going away. Once he remarked: 'Narendra often goes home to look after his mother, brothers, and sisters. And he supervises the family's lawsuit. I am afraid that I too may feel like going home, following his example.'"

Narendra remained silent.

Rākhāl was talking to them about making pilgrimages. He said: "We have achieved nothing by staying here. The Master always exhorted us to realize God. Have we succeeded?"

Rākhāl lay down. The other devotees were either lying down or sitting.

RĀKHĀL: "Let us go to the Narmada."

NARENDRA: "What will you achieve by wandering about? Can one ever attain jnāna, that you are talking about it so much?"

A DEVOTEE: "Then why have you renounced the world?"

NARENDRA: "Must we live with Shyam because we have not seen Ram? Must we go on begetting children because we have not realized God? What are you talking about?"

Narendra went out, returning after a few minutes. Rākhāl was still lying down.

A member of the monastery who was also lying down said teasingly, feigning great suffering on account of his separation from God: "Ah! Please get me a knife. I have no more use for this life. I can't stand this pain any more!"

NARENDRA (feigning seriousness): "It is there. Stretch out your hand and take it."

Everybody laughed.

The conversation again turned to Prasanna.

NARENDRA: "Even here we are involved in māyā. Why have we become sannyāsis, I wonder?"

RĀKHĀL: "I have read in a book that sannyāsis should not live together. The author has described a city of sannyāsis."

ŚAŚI: "I don't care about sannyās or any such thing. There is no place where I cannot live."
They were talking of Bhavanāth, whose wife had been seriously ill.

Narendra said to Rākhāl: "I understand that his wife has been snatched from the jaws of death. Is that why he went to Dakshineswar to enjoy the fresh air?"

Ram Babu intended to build a temple in the garden at Kankurgachi, where some of Sri Ramakrishna's ashes were buried.

NARENDRA (to Rākhāl): "Ram Babu has made M. one of the trustees of the garden."

M. (to Rākhāl): "But I don't know anything about it."
It was dusk. Śaśi burnt incense before the picture of Sri Ramakrishna in the worship room and then before the pictures of gods and goddesses in the other rooms.

The evening worship began. The members of the Math and the other devotees stood with folded hands near the door of the shrine and witnessed the *Ārati*. Then they all sang in chorus the following hymn to Śiva, to the accompaniment of bell and gong:

Jaya Śiva Omkara, Bhaja Śiva Omkara,
Brahma Vishnu Sadasiva,
Hara Hara Hara Mahadeva!

Narendra had introduced this song for the evening worship. It is sung in the temple of Śiva in Benares.

It was eleven o'clock at night when their supper was over. The brothers prepared a bed for M., and all went to sleep.

It was midnight. M. was wide awake. He said to himself: "Everything is as it was before. The same Ayodhya only Rāmā is not there." M. silently left his bed. It was the full-moon night of Vaiśākh, the thrice-blessed day of the Buddhists, associated with Buddha's birth, realization, and passing away. M. was walking alone on the bank of the Ganges, contemplating the Master.

It was Sunday. M. had arrived the day before and was planning to stay till Wednesday. The householder devotees generally visited the monastery on Sundays.

The Yoga-vāsishta was being studied and explained. M. had heard a little about the teachings of this book from Sri Ramakrishna. It taught the absolute identity of Brahman and the soul, and the unreality of the world. The Master had forbidden him and the other householder devotees to practise spiritual discipline following the method of the Advaita Vedānta, since the attitude of the oneness of the soul and God is harmful for one still identified with the body. For such a devotee, the Master used to say, it was better to look on God as the Lord and oneself as His servant.

The conversation turned to the Yoga-vāsishta.

M: "Well, how is Brahmajnana described in the Yoga-vāsishta?"

RĀKHĀL: "Hunger, thirst, pain, pleasure, and so on, are all māyā. The annihilation of the mind is the only means to the realization of Brahman."

M: "What remains after the annihilation of the mind is Brahman. Is that not true?"

RĀKHĀL: "Yes."

M: "Sri Ramakrishna used to say that Nangta taught him that way. Have you found in the book that Vasishtha asked Rāma to lead a householder's life?"

RĀKHĀL: "I haven't yet found anything like that in the book. Rāma is not even admitted by the author to be an Incarnation of God."

Presently Narendra, Tārak, and another devotee returned from the bank of the Ganges. They had intended to go to Konnagar, on the other side of the river, but had been unable to find a ferry-boat. They sat down. The conversation about the Yoga-vāsishta went on.

NARENDRA (to M.): "There are many nice stories in the book. Do you know the incident of Lila?"

M: "Yes, I have read the book here and there. Lila had attained Brahmajnana."

NARENDRA: "Yes. Do you remember the story of Indra and Ahalyā, and the story of how King Viduratha became a chandala?"

M: "Yes, I remember."

NARENDRA: "What a wonderful description of the forest!"

Narendra and the other devotees were going to the Ganges to bathe. M. accompanied them. The sun was very hot; so M. took his umbrella. Sarat, a devotee from Barangore, was going with them to take his bath. He often visited the monastery.

M. (to Sarat): "It is very hot."

NARENDRA: "Is that your excuse for taking the umbrella?"

M. laughed.

The members of the monastery were clad in *Gerruā*.

M. (to Narendra): "It is really very hot. One is liable to get a sunstroke."

NARENDRA: "I see that your body is the obstacle in your path of renunciation. Isn't that so? I mean you, Devendra Babu-"

M. laughed and said to himself, "Is it merely the body?"

After bathing, the devotees returned to the monastery. They washed their feet and entered the worship room. Saluting the Deity, they offered flowers.

Narendra was a little late in coming to the worship room. He found that there was no flower on the tray. There were only a few bel-leaves. He sprinkled the leaves with sandal-paste and offered them to Sri Ramakrishna. He rang the bell, saluted the Deity again, and joined the other brothers in the big hall, which was known as the room of the "Dānās".

The members of the Math called themselves the "Dānās" and the "Daityās", which mean the "ghosts" and the "demons", the companions of Śiva. They took these names because of their utter indifference to worldly pleasures and relationships.

The southernmost room of the second floor was used for meditation, contemplation, and study, and was known as Kāli Tapasvi's room, since Kāli used to shut himself in there most of the day. North of this room was the worship room, and north of that, again, was the room where the offerings for the worship were prepared. From this room the devotees used to watch the evening worship. North of the "offering room" was the room of the "Dānās", a very long hall where the members of the Math used to assemble. Here the householder devotees and visitors were received. North of this hall was a small room where the devotees took their meals. East of the worship room and of Kāli Tapasvi's room ran a long verandah, at the south-west corner of which was the library of a society of Barangore. Between Kāli Tapasvi's room and this library was a staircase; and north of the dining room was another staircase, leading to the roof.

Narendra and the other members of the Math often spent their evenings on this roof. There they devoted a great deal of time to discussion of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sankaracharya, Ramanuja, and Jesus Christ, and of Hindu philosophy, European philosophy, the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras.

Narendra, who had a beautiful voice, used to sing in the room of the "Dānās" and teach music to Sarat and a few others. Kāli used to take lessons on the instruments. Many, many happy hours they spent together in that hall, dancing and singing.

Narendra was sitting with the devotees in the room of the "Dānās". The conversation turned to religious preaching.

Vidyāsāgar's reluctance about preaching

M. (to Narendra): "Vidyāsāgar says that he does not speak about God to anyone for fear of being caned."

NARENDRA: "For fear of being caned? What does he mean?"

M: "This is what Vidyāsāgar says: 'Suppose that after death we all go to God. The emissaries of Death will have sent Keshab Sen there too. Keshab Sen, no doubt, committed sins while he lived on earth. When that is proved, perhaps God will say, "Give him twenty-five stripes." Then suppose I am taken to God. I used to go to Keshab Sen's

Brahmo Samaj in my earthly life. I too have committed many sins; so I too am ordered to be caned. Then suppose I say to God that I acted in that sinful way because I listened to Keshab's preaching. Thereupon God will ask His emissaries to bring Keshab back. When he is brought, the Almighty Lord will say to him: "Did you really preach that way? You yourself knew nothing about spiritual matters and yet you had the hardihood to teach others about God! Emissaries! Give him twenty-five stripes more." ' " Everybody laughed.

M: "Therefore Vidyāsāgar says: 'I cannot take care of my own self, should I be foolish enough to get an additional caning for misleading others? I myself do not understand God. How shall I lecture to others about Him?' "

NARENDRA: "How has he-who could not understand God-understood other things?"

M: "What other things?"

NARENDRA: "He says that he has not understood God. But how, then, can he understand charity and doing good to others? How can he understand about the school? How can he understand about educating boys by establishing schools? How can he understand that it is right to enter the world, marry, and beget children?

"He who rightly understands one thing understands everything else."

M. (to himself): "Yes, Sri Ramakrishna, too, said that he who knows God knows everything else. Further, he said to Vidyāsāgar that leading a worldly life, establishing schools, and so on are the outcome of rajas. The Master also said that Vidyāsāgar's philanthropy was due to the influence of sattva on rajas. Such rajas is not harmful."

After their meal the brothers of the monastery rested. M. and Chunilal were conversing. Chunilal told M. of his first visit to Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. He also told him how at one time he had felt disgusted with the world, had renounced it, and had wandered about in holy places. A few minutes later Narendra came and sat by them. He asked the younger Gopal to prepare a smoke for him. The latter had been meditating. Narendra said to him: "I say! Prepare a smoke. What do you mean by this meditation?

First of all prepare yourself for spiritual life by serving God and holy men; then you will be able to meditate. First of all karma, and then meditation." Everybody laughed.

There was a big plot of wooded land to the west of the monastery compound. M. was seated alone under a tree, when suddenly Prasanna appeared. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon.

M: "Where have you been all these days? Everyone has been so worried about you. Have you seen the brothers? When did you arrive?"

PRASANNA: "Just now. Yes, I have seen them."

M: "You left a note saying that you were going to Vrindāvan. We were terribly worried about you. How far did you go?"

PRASANNA: "Only as far as Konnagar."

Both of them laughed.

M: "Sit down. Tell me all about it. Where did you stop first?"

PRASANNA: "At the Dakshineswar temple garden. I spent one night there."

M. (smiling): "What is Hazra's present mood?"

PRASANNA: "Hazra asked me, 'What do you think of me?'"

Both laughed.

M. (smiling): "What did you say?"

PRASANNA: "I said nothing."

M: "Then?"

PRASANNA: "Then he asked me whether I had brought tobacco for him."

Both laughed.

PRASANNA: "He wanted me to wait on him." (Laughter.)

M: "Where did you go next?"

PRASANNA; "By degrees I got to Konnagar. I spent the night in the open. I intended to proceed farther and asked some gentlemen whether I could procure enough money there for a railway ticket to the up-country."

M: "What did they say?"

PRASANNA: "They said, 'You may get a rupee or so; but who will give you the whole fare?'"

Both laughed.

M: "What did you take with you?"

PRASANNA: "Oh, one or two pieces of cloth and a picture of the Master. I didn't show the picture to anybody."

About Śaśi

Śaśi's father came to the Math. He wanted to take his son home. During Sri Ramakrishna's illness Śaśi had nursed the Master for nine months with unswerving zeal. He had won a scholarship in the Entrance Examination for his academic ability and had studied up to the B.A., but he had not appeared at the examination. His father, a poor brahmin, was a devout Hindu and spent much of his time in spiritual practice. Śaśi was his eldest son. His parents had hoped that, after completing his education, he would earn money and remove the family's financial difficulties. But Śaśi had renounced the world for the realization of God. Whenever he thought of his father and mother he felt great anguish of heart. Many a time he said to his friends, with tears in his eyes: "I am at a loss as to my duty. Alas, I could not serve my parents; I could not be of any use to them. What great hope they placed in me! On account of our poverty my mother did not have any jewelry. I cherished the desire to buy some for her. But now all my hopes are frustrated; it is impossible for me to return home. My Master asked me to renounce 'woman and gold'. I simply cannot return home."

After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away Śaśi's father had hoped that his son would come back to his family. The boy had spent a few days at home, but immediately after the establishment of the new monastery he had begun to frequent it and, after a few days, had decided to remain there as one of the members. Every now and then his father came to the monastery to persuade him to come home; but he had not succeeded.

This day, on learning that his father had come, Śaśi fled the monastery by another door. He did not want to meet him.

Śaśi's father knew M. They paced the upper verandah together and talked.

ŚAŚI'S FATHER: "Who is in charge of this place? Narendra alone is the cause of all the mischief. For a while all these young men returned home and devoted themselves to their studies."

M: "There is no master here. They are all equals. What can Narendra do? Can a man renounce home against his own will? Have we householders, for instance, been able to give up our homes altogether?"

ŚAŚI'S FATHER: "You are doing the right thing. You are serving both the world and God. Can't one practise religion after your method? That is exactly what we want Śaśi to do. Let him live at home and come here too. You have no idea how much his mother weeps for him."

M. became sad and said nothing.

ŚAŚI'S FATHER: "And if you speak of searching for holy men, I know where to find a good one. Let Śaśi go to him."

Rākhāl's yearning for God

Rākhāl and M. were walking on the verandah to the east of Kāli Tapasvi's room.

RĀKHĀL (earnestly): "M., let us practise *sādhanā*! We have renounced home for good. When someone says, 'You have not realized God by renouncing home; then why all this fuss?', Narendra gives a good retort. He says, 'Because we could not attain Ram, must we live with Shyam and beget children?' Ah! Every now and then Narendra says nice things. You had better ask him."

M: "What you say is right. I see that you too have become restless for God."

RĀKHĀL: "M., how can I describe the state of my mind? Today at noontime I felt great yearning for the Narmada. M., please practise *sādhanā*; otherwise you will not succeed. Even Sukadeva was afraid of this world. That is why immediately after his birth he fled the world. His father asked him to wait, but he ran straight away."

M: "Yes, the Yogopanishad describes how Sukadeva fled this world of māyā. It also describes Vyāsa's conversation with Suka. Vyāsa asked his son to practise religion in the world. But Suka said that the one essential thing is the Lotus Feet of God. He also expressed his disgust with worldly men for getting married and living with women."

RĀKHĀ : "Many people think that it is enough not to look at the face of a woman. But what will you gain merely by turning your eyes to the ground at the sight of a woman? Narendra put it very well last night, when he said: 'Woman exists for a man as long as he has lust. Free from lust, one sees no difference between man and woman.' "

M: "How true it is! Children do not see the difference between man and woman."

RĀKHĀL: "Therefore I say that we must practise spiritual discipline. How can one attain Knowledge without going beyond māyā?

"Let's go to the big hall. Some gentlemen have come from Baranagore. Narendra is talking with them. Let's go and listen to him."

M. did not enter the room. As he was pacing outside he overheard some of the conversation.

NARENDRA: "There is no fixed time or place for the *Sandhya* and other devotions."

GENTLEMAN: "Sir, can one realize God through spiritual practice alone?"

NARENDRA: "Realization depends on God's grace. Sri Krishna says in the Gitā: The Lord, O Arjuna, dwells in the hearts of all beings, causing them, by His māyā, to revolve as if mounted on a machine. Take refuge in Him with all thy heart, O Bharata. By His grace wilt thou attain Supreme Peace and the Eternal Abode.

"Without the grace of God mere worship and prayer do not help at all. Therefore one should take refuge in Him."

GENTLEMAN: "May we come now and then and disturb you?"

NARENDRA: "Please come whenever you like. We take our baths in the Ganges at your ghat."

GENTLEMAN: "I don't mind that. But please see that others don't use it."

NARENDRA: "We shall not use your ghat, if that is what you mean"

GENTLEMAN: "No, I don't mean exactly that. But if you see other people using it, then you had better not go."

It was dusk. The evening worship was over. The devotees, as usual, sang in chorus, "Jaya Śiva Omkara". Afterwards they assembled in the room of the "Dānās". M., too, was seated there. Prasanna was reading from the Guru Gitā.

Narendra sang:

I salute the Eternal Teacher, who is the Embodiment of the Bliss of Brahman,
The Essence of knowledge and liberation, the Giver of Supreme Joy;
Who is all-pervading, like the Ākāśa, and is the goal of the Vedānta's teachings;
Who is One, eternal, stainless, pure, and is the constant Witness of all things;
Who dwells beyond all moods, transcending the three Gunās.

Narendra sang again:

There is none, higher than the Guru, none better than the Guru;
This is what Śiva has declared.
I shall sing of the blessed Guru, the Supreme Brahman;
I shall worship the blessed Guru, the Supreme Brahman;
I shall meditate on the blessed Guru, the Supreme Brahman;
I shall bow down to the blessed Guru, the Supreme Brahman.

As Narendra sang these verses from the Guru Gitā in his melodious voice, the minds of the devotees became steady, like a candle-flame in a windless place.

Rākhāl was seated in Kāli Tapasvi's room. Prasanna sat near him. M., too, was there.

Rākhāl had renounced the world, leaving behind his wife and child. A fire of intense renunciation burnt day and night in his heart. He was thinking seriously of going away, by himself, to the bank of the Narmada or some other holy place. Still, he was trying to persuade Prasanna not to run away from the monastery.

RĀKHĀL (to Prasanna): "Where do you want to go, running away from here? Here you are in the company of holy men. Wouldn't it be foolish to run away from this? Where will you find another like Narendra?"

PRASANNA: "My parents live in Calcutta. I am afraid of being drawn by their love: That is why I want to flee to a distant place."

RĀKHĀL: "Can our parents love us as intensely as Gurumaharaj [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] did? What have we done for him, to deserve all this love? Why was he so eager for our welfare in body, mind, and soul? What have we done for him, to deserve all this?"

M. (to himself): "Ah! Rākhāl is right. Therefore a person like Sri Ramakrishna is described as the 'Ocean of Mercy without any reason'."

PRASANNA (to Rākhāl): "Don't you yourself feel like running away from here?"

RĀKHĀL: "Yes, now and then I have a fancy to spend a few days on the bank of the Narmada. I say to myself, 'Let me go to a place like that and practise *sādhanā* in a garden.' Again, I feel a strong desire to practise the *Panchatapa* for three days. But I hesitate to live in a garden that belongs to worldly people."

Tārak and Prasanna

Tārak and Prasanna were talking in the room of the "Dānās". Tārak had lost his mother. His father, like Rākhāl 's father, had married a second time. Tārak himself had married but had lost his wife. Now the monastery was his home. He too was trying to persuade Prasanna to live there.

PRASANNA: "I have neither jnāna nor prema. What have I in the world for a support?"

TĀRAK: "It is no doubt difficult to attain jnāna; but how can you say you have no prema?"

PRASANNA: "I have not yet wept for God. How can I say I have prema? What have I realized in all these days?"

TĀRAK: "But you have seen the Master. And why do you say that you have no jnāna?"

PRASANNA: "What sort of jnāna are you talking about? Jnāna means Knowledge. Knowledge of what? Certainly of God. But I am not even sure of the existence of God."

TĀRAK: "Yes, that's true. According to the Jnāni, there is no God."

M. (to himself): "Ah! The Master used to say that those who seek God pass through the state that Prasanna is now experiencing. In that state sometimes one doubts the very existence of God. I understand that Tārak is now reading Buddhistic philosophy. That is why he says that according to the Jnāni God does not exist. But Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the Jnāni and the bhakta will ultimately arrive at the same destination."

Narendra asks Prasanna to practise self-surrender

Narendra and Prasanna were talking in the meditation room. Rākhāl , Harish, and the younger Gopal were seated in another part of the room. After a while the elder Gopal came in. Narendra was reading from the Gitā and explaining the verses to Prasanna:

The Lord, O Arjuna, dwells in the hearts of all beings, causing them, by His māyā, to revolve as if mounted on a machine. Take refuge in Him with all thy heart, O Bharata. By His grace wilt thou attain Supreme Peace and the Eternal Abode. Relinquishing all dharmas, take refuge in Me alone. I shall liberate thee from all sins. Grieve not.

NARENDRA: "Did you notice what Krishna said? *'Mounted on a machine.'* The Lord, by His māyā, causes all beings to revolve as if mounted on a machine. To seek to know God? You are but a worm among worms-and you to know God? Just reflect a moment: what is a man? It is said that each one of the myriads of stars that shine overhead represents a solar system. This earth of ours is a part of only one solar system, and even that is too big for us. Like an insect man walks about on this earth, which, compared to the sun, is only a tiny ball."

Narendra sang:

We are born, O Lord, in the dust of earth,
And our eyes are blinded by the dust;
With dust we toy like children at play:
O give us assurance, Thou Help of the weak!
Wilt Thou cast us out of Thy lap, O Lord,
For a single mistake? Wilt Thou turn away
And abandon us to our helplessness?
Oh, then we shall never be able to rise,
But shall lie for ever dazed and undone.
Mere babes are we, Father, with baby minds;
At every step we stumble and fall.
Why, then, must Thou show us Thy terrible face?
Why, Lord, must we ever behold Thy frown?
Small are we-oh, do not be angry with us,
But tenderly speak to us when we do wrong;
For though Thou dost raise us a hundred times,

A hundred times we shall fall again!
What else can one do with a helpless mind?

Then he said to Prasanna: "Surrender yourself at His feet. Resign your self completely to His will."

Narendra sang again in an ecstatic mood:

O Lord, I am Thy servant, I am Thy servant! Thy servant am I!
O Lord, Thou art my Master, Thou art my Master! My Master art Thou!
From Thee I have received two pieces of bread and a kaupin;
When I sing Thy name, devotion wells up in my heart and shields me from harm.
Thou art the Master, the All-compassionate; this I repeat, O Lord!
Thy servant Kabir has taken refuge at Thy feet.

Narendra said to Prasanna: "Don't you remember Sri Ramakrishna's words? God is the hill of sugar and you are but an ant. One grain is enough to fill your stomach, and you think of bringing home the entire hill! Don't you remember what the Master said about Sukadeva? Even Sukadeva was a big ant at the most. That is why I scolded Kāli, saying: 'You fool! Do you want to measure God with your tape and foot-rule?'

"God is the Ocean of Mercy. Be His slave and take refuge in Him. He will show compassion. Pray to Him: 'Protect me always with Thy compassionate face. Lead me from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality. Reveal Thyself to me and protect me always with Thy compassionate face.' "

PRASANNA: "What kind of spiritual discipline should one practise?"

NARENDRA: "Repeat His name. That's enough. Don't you remember Sri Ramakrishna's song?"

Narendra sang:

O Syama, my only hope is in Thy hallowed name!
What need have I of kosha and kushi? What need of smiles and conventions?
Thy name dissolves death's bonds, as Śiva has proclaimed,
And I myself am Śiva's servant; whom else should I obey?
O Mother come what may, I shall repeat Thy name;

Why should I fret myself to death? To Śiva's words I cling.

He sang again:

Mere babes are we, Father, with baby minds;
At every step we stumble and fall.
Why, then, must Thou show us Thy terrible face?
Why, Lord, must we ever behold Thy frown?

PRASANNA: "Now you are saying that there is a God. Again, it is you who say that according to Chārvāka and many other thinkers the world was self-created."

NARENDRA: "Haven't you studied chemistry? Who combines the different elements? It is a human hand that combines hydrogen, oxygen, and electricity to prepare water. Everybody admits the existence of an Intelligent Force-a Force that is the essence of Knowledge and that guides all these phenomena."

PRASANNA: "How are we to know that God is kind?"

NARENDRA: "The Vedas say, 'That which is Thy compassionate face.' John Stuart Mill said the same thing. He said, 'How much kindness must He have, who has implanted kindness in the hearts of men.' The Master used to say: 'Faith is the one essential thing. God exists. He is very near us. Through faith alone one sees Him.' "

Narendra sang:

Where are you seeking Me, My servant? I am very close to you.
Far away you still are seeking, though I am so very near.
I am not in skin or hair, I am not in bones or flesh,
Not in mosque and not in temple, not in Kasi or Kailas.
Never will you come on Me in Ayodhya or Dwaraka;
But you will be sure to find Me if you search where faith abides.
Not in pleasant tasks or yoga, not in vairāgya or sannyās,
Yet I come without delaying if you only search for Me.

PRASANNA: "Sometimes you say that God does not exist, and now you are saying all these things! You are not consistent. You keep changing your opinions."

All laughed.

NARENDRA: "All right! I shall never change what I have just said. As long as one has desires and cravings, so long one doubts the existence of God. A man cherishes some

desire or other. Perhaps he has the desire to study or pass the university examination or become a scholar, and so forth and so on."

Narendra sang again, in a voice choked with emotion:

Hail to Thee, our God and Lord! Hail, Giver of every blessing!
Hail, Thou Giver of good!
O Redeemer from fear, from danger and suffering!
Upholder of the worlds!
Hail, Lord! Victory to Thee!
Unfathomable and infinite, immeasurable, beyond compare,
O God, none equals Thee!
Lord of the Universe! O All-pervading Truth!
Thou the Ātman Supreme!
Hail, Lord! Victory to Thee!
O Thou, the All-compassionate One, adored by the whole universe,
I bow before Thy feet!
Thou art the only Refuge in life and death, O Lord;
Before Thy feet I bow!
Hail, Lord! Victory to Thee!
This is our only prayer, O Lord! What other boon can we implore?
Thus do we pray to Thee:
Grant us true wisdom here, and in the life hereafter
Reveal Thyself to us.
Hail, Lord! Victory to Thee!

Again Narendra sang, describing how very near God is to us-as near as the musk to the deer-and exhorting his brother disciples to drink deep from the cup of Divine Bliss:

Drinking the Bliss of Hari from the cup of prema,
Sādhu, be intoxicated!
Childhood you spent in crying, and youth in women's control;
Now, in your old age, full of phlegm and wind,
You wait for the funeral couch to bear you to the cremation ground.
Within the musk-deer's navel the fragrant musk is found;
But how can you make it understand?
Without the proper teacher to guide him on his way,
Man, too, is blindly roaming through the world,

Deluded as the foolish deer that wanders round and round the woods.

M. heard all this from the verandah.

Narendra got up. As he left the room he remarked, "My brain is heated by talking to these youngsters."

He met M. on the verandah and said, "Please, let us have a drink of water."

One of the members of the Math said to Narendra, "Why, then, do you say that God does not exist?"

Narendra laughed.

Monday, May 9, 1887

The next morning M. was sitting alone under a tree in the garden. He said to himself: "Sri Ramakrishna has made the brothers of the monastery renounce 'woman and gold'. Ah, how eager they are to realize God! This place has become a veritable Vaikuntha, and the brothers living here are embodiments of Narayana. It is not many days since the Master passed away; that is why all the ideas and ideals he stood for are there, almost intact. 'The same Ayodhya-only Rāma is not there.' The Master has made these brothers renounce their homes. Why has he kept a few in the world? Is there no way of liberation for them?"

Narendra's longing for God-vision

From a room upstairs Narendra saw M. sitting alone under the tree. He came down and said with a smile, "Hello, M.! What are you doing?"

After a little conversation M. said to him: "Ah, you have such a sweet voice. Please sing a hymn."

Narendra sang the following hymn to Śiva, in which the devotee prays for forgiveness for his sins:

Even before I saw the light of this world, my sins from previous births,
Through which I passed because of desire for the fruit of my deeds,
Punished me as I lay in my mother's womb.
There I was boiled in the midst of filthy things:
Who can describe the pain that afflicts the child in its mother's womb?
Therefore, O Śiva! O Mahadeva! O Sambhu! forgive me, I pray, for my transgressions.

In childhood my suffering never came to an end;
My body was covered with filth and I craved for my mother's breasts.
Over my body and limbs I had no control;

I was pursued by troublesome flies and mosquitoes;
Day and night I cried with the pain of many an ailment, forgetting Thee, O Sankara!
Therefore, O Śiva! O Mahadeva! O Sambhu! forgive me, I pray, for my transgressions.

In youth the venomous snakes of sound, sight, taste, touch, and smell,
Bit into my vitals and slew my discrimination;
I was engrossed in the pleasures of wealth, sons, and a youthful wife.
Alas! my heart, bereft of the thought of Śiva,
Was filled with arrogance and pride.
Therefore, O Śiva! O Mahadeva! O Sambhu! forgive me, I pray, for my transgressions.

Now in old age my senses have lost the power of proper judging and acting;
My body, though still not wholly bereft of life,
Is weak and senile from many afflictions, from sins and illnesses and bereavements;
But even now my mind, instead of meditating on Śiva,
Runs after vain desires and hollow delusions.
Therefore, O Śiva! O Mahadeva! O Sambhu! forgive me, I pray, for my transgressions.

The duties laid down in the smriti-perilous and abstruse-are now beyond me;
How can I speak of the Vedic injunctions for brahmins, as means for attaining Brahman?
Never yet have I rightly grasped, through discrimination,
The meaning of hearing the scriptures from the guru and reasoning on his instruction;
How then can I speak of reflecting on Truth without interruption?
Therefore, O Śiva! O Mahadeva! O Sambhu! forgive me, I pray, for my transgressions.

Not even once have I finished my bath before sunrise and brought from the Ganges
Water to bathe Thy holy image;
Never, from the deep woods, have I brought the sacred vilwa leaves for Thy worship;
Nor have I gathered full-blown lotuses from the lakes,
Nor ever arranged the lights and the incense for worshipping Thee.
Therefore, O Śiva! O Mahadeva! O Sambhu! forgive me, I pray, for my transgressions.

I have not bathed Thine image with milk and honey, with butter and other oblations;

I have not decked it with fragrant sandal-paste;
I have not worshipped Thee with golden flowers, with incense, with camphor-flame and savoury offerings.
Therefore, O Śiva! O Mahadeva! O Sambhu! forgive me, I pray, for my transgressions.

I have not made rich gifts to the brahmins, cherishing in my heart,
O Mahadeva, Thy sacred form;
I have not made in the sacred fire the million oblations of butter,
Repeating the holy mantra given to me by my guru;
Never have I done penance along the Ganges with japa and study of the Vedas.
Therefore, O Śiva! O Mahadeva! O Sambhu! forgive me, I pray, for my transgressions.

I have not sat in the lotus posture, nor have I ever controlled
The Prāna along the Sushumna, repeating the syllable Om;
Never have I suppressed the turbulent waves of my mind, nor merged the self-effulgent Om
In the ever shining Witness-Consciousness, whose nature is that of the highest Brahman;
Nor have I, in samādhi, meditated on Sankara, who dwells in every form as the Inner Guide.
Therefore, O Śiva! O Mahadeva! O Sambhu! forgive me, I pray, for my transgressions.

Never, O Śiva! have I seen Thee, the Pure, the Unattached, the Naked One,
Beyond the three Gunās, free from delusion and darkness, absorbed in meditation,
And ever aware of the true nature of the world;
Nor, with a longing heart, have I meditated on Thine auspicious and sin-destroying form.
Therefore, O Śiva! O Mahadeva! O Sambhu! forgive me, I pray, for my transgressions.

O mind, to gain liberation, concentrate wholly on Śiva,
The sole Reality underlying the worlds, the Giver of good;
Whose head is illumined by the crescent moon and in whose hair the Ganges is hidden;
Whose fire-darting eyes consumed the god of earthly love; whose throat and ears are decked with snakes;
Whose upper garment is a comely elephant-skin.
Of what avail are all the other rituals?

O mind, of what avail are wealth or horses, elephants or a kingdom?
Of what avail the body or a house?

Know all these to be but momentary and quickly shun them;
Worship Śiva, as your guru instructs you, for the attaining of Self Knowledge.

Day by day does man come nearer to death;
His youth wears away; the day that is gone never returns.
Almighty Time devours everything;
Fickle as lightning is the goddess of fortune.
O Śiva! O Giver of shelter to those that come to Thee for refuge!
Protect me, who have taken refuge at Thy feet.

I salute the ever auspicious Śiva, the Home of Peace,
Who sits in the lotus posture; who has five mouths and three eyes;
Who holds in both His hands weapons and gong and drum;
Who is bedecked with many an ornament;
Whose skin is clear as crystal; who is Parvati's Lord.

I salute the self-effulgent Guru of the gods, the Lord of Uma;
I salute the Cause of the Universe;
I salute the Lord of beasts, adorned with snakes;
I salute Śiva, whose three eyes shine like the sun, the moon, and fire;
I salute the Beloved of Krishna; I salute Sankara, who bestows boons on His devotees and gives them shelter;
I salute the auspicious Śiva.

O Śiva! White is Thy body, covered with ashes; white shine Thy teeth when Thou smilest!
White is the skull Thou holdest in Thy hand; white is Thy club, which threatens the wicked!
White is the bull on which Thou ridest; white are the rings that hang from Thine ears!
White appear Thy matted locks, covered with the form of the Ganges;
White shines the moon on Thy forehead!
May He who is all white, all pure, bestow on me the treasure of forgiveness for my transgressions!

O Śiva, forgive all the sins that I have committed
With hands or feet, with words or body, with ears or eyes, with mind or heart;
Forgive my sins, those past and those that are yet to come! Victory unto Śiva, the Ocean of Compassion, the Great God, the Abode of Blessedness!

After the hymn Narendra and M. talked again.

NARENDRA: "You may speak of leading a detached life in the world, and all that, but you will not attain anything unless you renounce 'woman and gold'. Don't you feel disgusted with your wife's body?

Fools enjoy the contact of the body, filled with filth, peopled with worms, foul of smell by nature, made of flesh, blood, bone, and marrow; but the wise shun it.

"Vain is the life of a person who does not take delight in the teachings of Vedānta and drink the Nectar of Divine Bliss. Listen to a song."

Narendra sang:

O man, abandon your delusion! Cast aside your wicked counsels!
Know the Lord and free yourself from earthly suffering!
For a few days' pleasure only, you have quite forgotten Him
Who is the Comrade of your soul. Alas, what mockery!

"No liberation is possible for a man unless he puts on the loin-cloth of a sannyāsi. The world must be renounced."

Narendra sang from the Five Stanzas on the glory of the monk's loin cloth:

Roaming ever in the grove of Vedānta,
Ever pleased with his beggar's morsel
Ever walking with heart free from sorrow,
Blest indeed is the wearer of the loin-cloth. . . .

Continuing, Narendra said: "Why should a man be entangled in worldliness? Why should he be ensnared by māyā? What is man's real nature? He is the blessed Śiva, the Embodiment of Bliss and Spirit."

He sang Sankaracharya's Six Stanzas on Nirvāna:

Om. I am neither mind, intelligence, ego, nor chitta,
Neither ears nor tongue nor the senses of smell and sight;
Nor am I ether, earth, fire, water, or air:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva! . .

Narendra recited another hymn, the Eight Stanzas on the glory of Krishna:

I am consumed with false desires and wrapped in the sleep of lust: Save me, O Madhusudana!
Thou art my only Refuge, Lord! I have no other salvation.
I am entrapped in the mire of sin:
O Madhusudana, redeem me!

I am ensnared in the net of love for children, wife, and home:
Save me, O Madhusudana!
I am without devotion, helpless, smitten by wrong desire,
Afflicted with grief and misery:
O Madhusudana, redeem me!
Lord, I have neither master nor place of shelter to call my own: Save me, O Madhusudana!
Utterly wearied out am I by all this going and coming
Along the endless road of life:
O Madhusudana, redeem me!
From this hard and unavailing journey through life and death,
Save me, O Madhusudana!

Many the births that I have seen in many a bodily form,
And painful it is in the mother's womb:
O Madhusudana, redeem me!
To Thee I come for salvation out of the cycle of existence:
Save me, O Madhusudana!
For I am terrified alike of old age and of death:
I come to Thee for shelter, Lord!
O Madhusudana, redeem me!
Never a good deed have I done, but many have been my sins:
Save me, O Madhusudana!
Headlong have I fallen into the mire of worldliness;
Countless the births I have endured:
O Madhusudana, redeem me!
I have lorded it over men but happiness is not there:
Save me, O Madhusudana!
What my words have promised, my deeds have never carried out;
Lord, I am full of wretchedness:
O Madhusudana, redeem me!
If as a man or a woman I must be born again and again-
Save me, O Madhusudana!-
May my devotion be unswerving to Thy feet, O Lord!
From the delusion of this world,
O Madhusudana, redeem me!

M. remained spellbound as he listened to these hymns sung by Narendra. He said to himself: "How intense Narendra's dispassion is! This is how he has infused the spirit of

dispassion into the hearts of the other brothers of the monastery. The very contact with them awakens in the hearts of the Master's householder devotees the desire for renunciation of 'woman and gold'. Ah, how blessed are these all-renouncing brothers! Why has the Master kept us few in the world? Will he show us a way? Will he give us the spirit of renunciation, or will he delude us with worldliness?"

After the meal all were resting. The elder Gopal was copying some songs. Niranjan was on a visit to his mother. Sarat, Baburam, and Kāli were in Puri.

Narendra, with one or two brothers, left for Calcutta. He had to see to his lawsuit. He was going to return in the evening; the brothers could not bear his absence.

About Rabindra

In the afternoon Rabindra arrived, looking like a mad person. He was barefoot and had only half of his black-bordered cloth round his waist. His eyeballs were rolling like a madman's. All asked him anxiously what the matter was.

"Let me recover my breath!" he said. "I shall tell you everything presently. I am certainly not going back home; I shall stay at this very place with you all. She is certainly a traitor! Let me tell you something, friends. For her sake I gave up my habit of drinking, which I had indulged for five years. I have not taken a drop for the last eight months. And she is a traitor!" The brothers of the Math said: "Be calm, please! How did you come?"

RABINDRA: "I have come barefoot all the way from Calcutta."

The brothers asked him where he had lost the other half of his cloth.

RABINDRA: "When I was leaving her place she began to pull at my cloth. That is how half of it was torn off."

The brothers told him to bathe in the Ganges and cool off; then they would hear his story.

Rabindra belonged to a respectable kayastha family of Calcutta. He was twenty or twenty-two years old. He had first met Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar temple and had received his special blessing. On one occasion he had spent three nights with the Master. His disposition was very sweet and tender, and the Master had loved him dearly. Once he had said to Rabindra: "You will have to wait some time; you have to go through a few more experiences. Nothing can be done now. You see, the police can't do much just when the robbers attack a house. When the plundering is almost over, the police make their arrests."

Rabindra had many virtues. He was devoted to God and to service of the poor. He had many spiritual qualities. But he had walked into the snare of a prostitute. Now, suddenly, he had discovered that the woman was being unfaithful to him. Therefore he had come to the Math in this dishevelled state, resolved not to go back to the world.

A devotee accompanied Rabindra to the Ganges. It was his inmost desire that Rabindra's spiritual consciousness should be awakened in the company of these holy men. When Rabindra finished his bath, the devotee took him to the adjacent cremation ground, showed him the corpses lying about, and said: "The brothers of the Math come here every now and then to meditate on God. It is a good place for meditation. Here one sees clearly that the world is impermanent."

Rabindra sat down in the cremation ground to meditate. But he could not meditate long; his mind was restless.

Rabindra and the devotee returned to the Math. They went to the worship room to salute the Deity. The devotee said to him, "The brothers of the Math meditate in this room." Rabindra sat there to meditate, but could not meditate long there either.

DEVOTEE: "How do you feel? Is your mind very restless? Is that why you have got up from your seat? Perhaps you could not concentrate well."

RABINDRA: "I am sure I shall not go back to the world. But the mind is restless."

M. and Rabindra were talking. No one else was present. M. was telling him stories from the life of Buddha. At that time, the members of the Math regularly read the lives of Buddha and Chaitanya. M. said to Rabindra that Buddha's spiritual consciousness was first awakened by hearing a song of some heavenly maidens.

M. sang the song:

We moan for rest, alas! but rest can never find;
We know not whence we come, nor where we float away.
Time and again we tread this round of smiles and tears;
In vain we pine to know whither our pathway leads,
And why we play this empty play. . . .

That night Narendra, Tārak, and Harish returned from Calcutta. They said, "Oh, what a big meal we had!" They had been entertained by a devotee in Calcutta.

The members of the monastery assembled in the room of the "Dānās". Narendra heard Rabindra's story. He sang by way of giving instruction to him:

O man, abandon your delusion! Cast aside your wicked counsels!
Know the Lord and free yourself from earthly suffering!
For a few days' pleasure only, you have quite forgotten Him
Who is the Comrade of your soul. Alas, what mockery!

Narendra sang again:

Drinking the Bliss of Hari from the cup of prema,
Sādhu, be intoxicated! . . .

A few minutes later the brothers went to Kāli Tapasvi's room. Girish Ghosh had just sent two of his new books to the monastery: the Life of Buddha and the Life of Chaitanya.
Since the founding of the new Math Śaśi had devoted himself heart and soul to the worship and service of the Master. All were amazed at his devotion. Just as he had tended Sri Ramakrishna's physical body during his illness, so now, with the same unswerving zeal, he worshipped the Master in the shrine room.

A member of the monastery was reading aloud from the lives of Buddha and Chaitanya. He was a little sarcastic while reading Chaitanya's life. Narendra snatched the book from his hand and said, "That is how you spoil a good thing!"

Narendra read the chapter describing how Chaitanya gave his love to all, from the brahmin to the pariah.

A BROTHER: "I say that one person cannot give love to another person."

NARENDRA: "But the Master gave it to me."

BROTHER: "Well, are you sure you have it?"

NARENDRA: "What can you understand about love? You belong to the servant class. All of you must serve me and massage my feet. Don't flatter yourselves by thinking you have understood everything. Now go and prepare a smoke for me."

All laughed.

THE BROTHER: "I surely will not."

M. (to himself): "Sri Ramakrishna has transmitted mettle to all the brothers of the Math. It is no monopoly of Narendra's. Is it possible to renounce 'woman and gold' without this inner fire?"

May 10, 1887
It was Tuesday, a very auspicious day for the worship of the Divine the Mother. Arrangements were being made for Her special worship at the monastery.

M. was going to the Ganges to take his bath. Rabindra was walking alone on the roof. He heard Narendra singing the Six Stanzas on Nirvāna:

Death or fear I have none, nor any distinction of caste;
Neither father nor mother nor even a birth have I;
Neither friend nor comrade, neither disciple nor guru:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!
I have no form or fancy; the All-pervading am I;

Everywhere I exist, yet I am beyond the senses;
Neither salvation am I, nor anything that may be known:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss: I am Śiva! I am Śiva!

Rabindra went to the Ganges to take his bath. Presently he returned to the monastery clad in his wet cloth.

Narendra said to M. in a whisper: "He has bathed in the Ganges. It would be good to initiate him now into sannyās."

Both Narendra and M. smiled.

Prasanna asked Rabindra to change his wet cloth and gave him a dry *Gerruā* cloth. Narendra said to M., "Now he is going to put on the cloth of renunciation."

M. (with a smile): "What kind of renunciation?"

NARENDRA: "Why, the renunciation of 'woman and gold'."

Rabindra put on the ochre cloth and entered Kāli Tapasvi's room to meditate.

Appendix A

KESHAB AT DAKSHINESWAR

Saturday, January 1, 1881

KESHAB CHANDRA SEN, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj, was expected to visit Sri Ramakrishna at the temple garden at Dakshineswar. With the Master were many Brahmo celebrities-Pratap, Trailokya, Jaygopal, and others. It was only a few days before the annual festival of the Brahmo Samaj, and the Brahmos were eagerly awaiting the arrival of their leader, who was to come by steamer. They were restless and talking rather noisily. Ram, Manomohan, and several other devotees of .the Master were also there.

Keshab's reverence for the Master

At last Keshab entered the Master's room with two fruits and a bouquet of flowers in his hands. Touching the Master's feet, he laid the offering at his side. Then he saluted Sri Ramakrishna with great reverence, bowing very low before him. Sri Ramakrishna returned in like manner his distinguished visitor's salutation. Then he laughingly began the conversation.

MASTER: "You, Keshab, want me; but your disciples don't. I was saying to them: 'Let us be restless. Then Govinda will come.' (To Keshab's disciples) See, here is your Govinda!

"We have been showing signs of restlessness all this while to set the stage for your arrival. It isn't easy to have the vision of Govinda. You must have noticed in the Krishnayatra that Narada enters Vrindavan and prays with great yearning: 'O Govinda! O my soul! O Life of my life!', and then Krishna comes on the stage with the cowherd boys, followed by the gopis. No one can see God without that yearning.

"Well, Keshab, say something! They are eager to hear your words."

KESHAB (humbly, with a smile): "To open my lips here would be like trying to 'sell needles to a blacksmith'."

MASTER (smiling): "But don't you know that the nature of devotees is like that of hemp-smokers? One hemp-smoker says to another, 'Please take a puff for yourself and give me one.'" (All laugh.)

Tasting divine bliss in different ways

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. They heard the music from the nahabat in the temple garden.

MASTER (to Keshab and the others): "Do you hear how melodious that music is? One player is producing only a monotone on his flute, while another is creating waves of melodies in different ragas and raginis. That is my attitude. Why should I produce only a mortotone when I have an instrument with seven holes? Why should I say nothing but, 'I am He, I am He'? I want to play various melodies on my instrument with seven holes.

Why should I say only, 'Brahma! Brahma!'? I want to call on God through all the moods-through santa, dasya, sakhya, vatsalya, and madhur. I want to make merry with God. I want to sport with God."

Keshab listened to these words with wonder in his eyes and said to the Brahmo devotees, "I have never before heard such a wonderful and beautiful interpretation of jnana and bhakti."

KESHAB (to the Master): "How long will you hide yourself in this way? I dare say people will be thronging here by and by in great crowds."

Master's abhorrence of public preaching

MASTER: "What are you talking of? I only eat and drink and sing God's name. I know nothing about gathering crowds. Hanuman once declared: 'I know nothing about the day of the week or the position of the moon and stars in the sky. I simply meditate on Rama.'"

KESHAB: "All right, sir, I shall gather the crowd. But they all must come to your place."

Master instructs about humility

MASTER: "I am the dust of the dust of everybody's feet. If anyone is gracious enough to come here, he is welcome."

KESHAB: "Whatever you may say, sir, your advent cannot be in vain."

In the mean time the devotees had arranged a kirtan. Many of them had joined it. The party started at the Panchavati and moved toward the Master's room. Hriday blew the horn, Gopidas played the drum, and two devotees played the cymbals.

Sri Ramakrishna sang:

O man, if you would live in bliss, repeat Lord Hari's name;
Then you will lead a life of joy and go to paradise,
And feed upon the fruit of moksha evermore:
Such is the glory of His name!
I give you the name of Hari, which Siva, God of Gods,
Repeats aloud with His five mouths.

The Master danced with the strength of a lion and went into samadhi. Regaining consciousness of the outer world, he sat down in his room and began to talk with Keshab and the other devotees.

MASTER: "God can be realized through all paths. It is like your coming to Dakshineswar by carriage, by boat, by steamer, or on foot. You have chosen the way according to your convenience and taste; but the destination is the same. Some of you have arrived earlier than others; but all have arrived.

Renunciation of "woman and gold"

"The more you rid yourself of upadhis, the nearer you will feel the presence of God. Rain-water never collects on a high mound; it collects only in low land. Similarly, the water of God's grace cannot remain on the high mound of egotism. Before God one should feel lowly and poor.

"One should be extremely watchful. Even clothes create vanity. I notice that even a man suffering from an enlarged spleen sings Nidhu Babu's light songs when he is dressed up in a black-bordered cloth. There are men who spout English whenever they put on high boots. And when an unfit person puts on an ochre cloth he becomes vain; the slightest sign of indifference to him arouses his anger and pique.

Yearning for God

"God cannot be seen without yearning of heart, and this yearning is impossible unless one has finished with the experiences of life. Those who live surrounded by 'woman and gold', and have not yet come to the end of their experiences, do not yearn for God.

"When I lived at Kamarpukur, Hriday's son, a child four or five years old, used to spend the whole day with me. He played with his toys and almost forgot everything else. But no sooner did evening come than he would say, 'I want to go to my mother.' I would try to cajole him in various ways and would say, 'Here, I'll give you a pigeon.' But he wouldn't be consoled with such things; he would weep and cry, 'I want to go to my mother.' He didn't enjoy playing any more. I myself wept to see his state.

"One should cry for God that way, like a child. That is what it means to be restless for God. One doesn't enjoy play or food any longer. After one's experiences of the world are over, one feels this restlessness and weeps for God."

The devotees sat in silence, listening to the Master's words. When evening came, a lamp was lighted in the room. Preparations were being made for feeding Keshab and the devotees.

KESHAB (with a smile): "What? Puffed rice again today?"

MASTER (smiling): "Hriday knows."

The devotees were served first with puffed rice, and then with luchi and curries on leaf-plates. All enjoyed the meal very much. It was about ten o'clock when supper was over.

The Master went to the Panchavati with Keshab and the devotees.

Master(to Keshab and the others):"One can very well live in the world after realizing God. Why don't you first touch the 'granny' and then play hide-and-seek?

"After attaining God, a devotee becomes unattached to the world. He lives like a mudfish. The mudfish keeps its body unstained though it lives in mud."

About eleven o'clock the Brahmos became eager to go home. Pratap said, "It would be nice if we could spend the night here."

MASTER (to Keshab): "Why not stay here tonight?"

KESHAB (smiling): "No, I have business to attend to. I must go."

Story of the fishwife and her basket

MASTER: "Why must you, my dear sir? Can't you sleep without your fish-basket? Once a fishwife was a guest in a gardener's house. She was asked to sleep in a room full of flowers. But she couldn't get any sleep there. (All laugh.) She was restless and began to fidget about. The gardener called to her: 'Hello there! Why aren't you asleep?' 'Oh, I don't know', said the fishwife. 'There are flowers here. The smell keeps me awake. Can't you bring me my fish-basket?' She sprinkled a little water in the basket, and when she smelled the fish she fell fast asleep." (All laugh heartily.)

Keshab took a few of the flowers that he had offered at Sri Ramakrishna's feet on his arrival. He and his Brahmo devotees cried out as the Master, "Hail, Navavidhan!" Thus they bade him adieu.

One day during the rainy season of 1881 Sri Ramakrishna and a number of devotees visited Surendra's house. It was about dusk.

The Master entered the drawing-room on the second floor, where several of Surendra's neighbours had already gathered. Kashab had also been invited but could not come. Trailokya and a few Brahmo devotees were present. A mat covered with a white sheet was spread on the floor, and on it had been placed a beautiful carpet with a cushion. Surendra requested the Master to sit on the carpet; but Sri Ramakrishna would not listen to him and sat on the mat next to Mahendra Goswami, one of Surendra's neighbours.

MAHENDRA (to the devotees): "For several months I spent most of my time with him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna]. I have never before seen such a great man. His spiritual moods are not of the ordinary kind."

MASTER (to Mahendra): "How dare you say that? I am the most insignificant of the insignificant, the lowliest of the lowly. I am the servant of the servants of God. Krishna alone is great.

Personal God and Impersonal Reality

"Krishna is none other than Satchidananda, the Indivisible Brahman. The water of the ocean looks blue from a distance. Go near it and you will find it colourless. He who is endowed with attributes is also without attributes. The Absolute and the Relative belong to the same Reality.

"Why is Krishna tribhanga, bent in three places? Because of His love for Radha.

"That which is Brahman is also Kali, the Adyasakti, who creates, preserves, and destroys the universe. He who is Krishna is the same as Kali. The root is one-all these are His sport and play.

The pure mind sees God

"God can be seen. He can be seen through the pure mind and the pure intelligence. Through attachment to 'woman and gold' the mind becomes impure.

"The mind is everything. It is like a white cloth just returned from the laundry. It will take any colour you dye it with. Knowledge is of the mind, and ignorance is also of the mind. When you say that a certain person has become impure, you mean that impurity has coloured his mind."

Surendra's vanity curbed

Surendra approached the Master with a garland and wanted to put it around his neck. But the Master took it in his hand and threw it aside. Surendra's pride was wounded and his eyes filled with tears. He went to the west porch and sat with Ram, Manomohan, and the others. In a voice choked with sadness he said: "I am really angry. How can a poor brahmin know the value of a thing like that? I spent a lot of money for that garland, and he refused to accept it. I was unable to control my anger and said that the other garlands were to be given away to the devotees. Now I realize it was all my fault. God cannot be bought with money; He cannot be possessed by a vain person. I have really been vain. Why should he accept my worship? I don't feel like living any more," Tears streamed down his cheeks and over his chest.

In the mean time Trailokya was singing inside the room. The Master began to dance in an ecstasy of joy. He put around his neck the garland that he had thrown aside; holding it with one hand, he swung it with the other as he danced and sang. Now Surendra's joy was unbounded. The Master had accepted his offering. Surendra said to himself, "God crushes one's pride, no doubt, but He is also the cherished treasure of the humble and lowly."

The Master now sang:

Behold, the two brothers have come, who weep while chanting Hari's name,
The brothers who, in return for blows, offer to sinners Hari's love!
Behold them, drunk with Hari's love, who make the world drunk as well,
Embracing everyone as brother, even the outcaste shunned by men.
Behold, the two brothers have come, who once were Kanai and Balai of Braja.. . .

Many of the devotees danced while Sri Ramakrishna sang this song.

When the kirtan was over, everyone sat around the Master and became engaged in pleasant conversation. Sri Ramakrishna said to Surendra, "Won't you give me something to eat?" Then he went into the inner apartments, where the ladies saluted him. After the meal Sri Ramakrishna left for Dakshineswar.

Saturday, December 3, 1881

In the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna paid a visit to his householder disciple Manomohan, at 23 Simla Street, Calcutta. It was a small two-storey house with a courtyard. The Master was seated in the drawing-room on the first floor. Ishan of Bhawanipur asked him: "Sir, why have you renounced the world? The scriptures extol the householder's life as the best."

MASTER: "I don't know much about what is good and what is bad. I do what God makes me do and speak what He makes me speak."

ISHAN: "If everybody renounced the world, they would be acting against God's will"

MASTER: "Why should everybody renounce? On the other hand, can it be the will of God that all should revel in 'woman and gold' like dogs and jackals? Has He no other wish? Do you know what accords with His will and what is against it?

"You say that God wants everybody to lead a worldly life. But why don't you see it as God's will when your wife and children die? Why don't you see His will in poverty, when you haven't a morsel to eat?

Maya obstructs vision of God

"Maya won't allow us to know the will of God. On account of God's maya the unreal appears as real, and the real as unreal. The world is unreal. This moment it exists and the next it disappears. But on account of His maya it seems to be real. It is only through His maya that the ego seems to be the doer. Furthermore, on account of this maya a man regards his wife and children, his brother and sister, his father and mother, his house and property, as his very own.

"There are two aspects of maya: vidya and avidya. Avidya deludes one with worldliness, and vidya-wisdom, devotion, and the company of holy men-leads one to God.

"He who has gone beyond maya, through the grace of God, views alike both *Vidyā* and *Avidyā*. Worldly life is a life of enjoyment. After all, what is there to enjoy in 'woman and gold'? As soon as a sweetmeat has gone down the throat, one doesn't remember whether it tasted sweet or sour.

"But why should everybody renounce?

Renunciation, true and false

Is renunciation possible except in the fullness of time? The time for renunciation comes when one reaches the limit of enjoyment. Can anybody force himself into renunciation? There is a kind of renunciation known as 'monkey renunciation'. Only small-minded

people cultivate it. Take the case of a fatherless boy. His poor widowed mother earns her livelihood by spinning. The boy loses his insignificant job and suddenly is seized with a fit of renunciation. He puts on the ochre cloth of a monk and goes to Benares. A few days later he writes home, 'I have secured a job for ten rupees a month.' In the mean time he tries to buy a gold ring and beautiful clothes. How can he stifle his desire for enjoyment?"

Keshab arrived with some Brahmo devotees and respectfully saluted the Master. He took a seat on Sri Ramakrishna's left, Ram on his right. For some time a reader recited from the Bhagavata and explained the text.

God and worldly duties

MASTER (to the devotees): "It is very difficult to do one's duty in the world. If you whirl round too fast you feel giddy and faint; but there is no such fear if you hold on to a post. Do your duty, but do not forget God.

"You may ask, 'If worldly life is so difficult, then what is the way?' The way is constant practice. At Kamarpukur I have seen the women of the carpenter families flattening rice with a husking-machine. They are always fearful of the pestle's smashing their fingers; and at the same time they go on nursing their children and bargaining with customers. They say to the customers, 'Pay us what you owe before you leave.'

"An immoral woman goes on performing her household duties, but all the time her mind dwells on her sweetheart.

"But one needs spiritual discipline to acquire such a state of mind; one should pray to God in solitude every now and then. It is possible to perform worldly duties after obtaining love for God. If you try to break a jackfruit, your hands will be smeared with its sticky juice. But that won't happen if, beforehand, you rub them with oil."

The kirtan began. Trailokya was singing. The Master danced, Keshab and the other devotees dancing with him. Though it was winter, the Master became hot and perspired. After the music he wanted something to eat. A plate of sweetmeats was sent from the inner apartments. Keshab held the plate before Sri Ramakrishna and the Master ate. When he had finished, Keshab poured water on his hands and then dried the Master's hands and face with a towel. Afterwards he began to fan the Master.

MASTER (to Keshab and the other devotees): "They are heroes indeed who can pray to God in the midst of their worldly activities. They are like men who strive for God-realization while carrying heavy loads on their heads. Such men are real heroes. You may say that this is extremely difficult. But is there anything, however hard, that cannot be achieved through God's grace? His grace makes even the impossible possible. If a lamp is brought into a room that has been dark a thousand years, does it illumine the room little by little? The room is lighted all at once."

These reassuring words gladdened the hearts of Keshab and the other householder devotees.

KESHAB (to Rajendra Mitra, the uncle of Ram and Manomohan): "Wouldn't it be nice if you could arrange a festival like this at your house one day?"

RAJENDRA: "Very good, I will. Well, Ram, you'll have to take charge of everything."

Sri Ramakrishna was asked to go to the inner apartments, where Manomohan's mother had prepared his meal. A glass of ice-water, of which the Master was very fond, was placed near his plate.

Keshab and the other devotees sat in the courtyard and were treated to a sumptuous feast. The Master joined them and watched them eat. He danced and sang to entertain the guests.

When it was time for Sri Ramakrishna to leave for Dakshineswar, Keshab and the other devotees took the dust of his feet and saw him off in a hired carriage.

Saturday, December 10, 1881

At Keshab's request Rajendra Mitra arranged a religious festival at his home in Calcutta and invited Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees, including the members of the Brahmo Samaj.

Two days before, Aghorenath, a prominent member of the Brahmo Samaj, had suddenly passed away in Lucknow. Keshab and the other Brahmo devotees were in mourning, and Rajendra thought they could not possibly join in the festival at his house. This worried him. But Ram, the Master's devotee, said to him: "Why are you so sad? If Keshab can't come, let him stay away. Our Master will be here. He is always in communion with God. He enables one to see God. And his presence will make the festival a success."

Rajendra, accompanied by Ram and a few others, paid Keshab a visit to express their condolence for the death of Aghorenath. Keshab said to Rajendra: "Why, I haven't said I shall not join in the festival at your house. Sri Ramakrishna will be there; so how can I stay away? I am in mourning, it is true, but I shall come."

On the wall in Keshab's room hung a picture of Sri Ramakrishna absorbed in samiidhi.

RAJENDRA (to Keshab): "Many people say that he (pointing to the picture) is an incarnation of Chaitanya."

KESHAB (looking at the picture): "One doesn't see such samadhi. Only men like Christ, Mohammed, and Chaitanya experienced it."

About three o'clock in the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna arrived at Manomohan's house. He rested there awhile and had some refreshments. Surendra took the Master in a carriage to the studio of the Bengal Photographer. The art of photography was explained to him,

and he was shown how glass covered with silver nitrate takes the image. As the Master was being photographed he went into samadhi.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna arrived at Rajendra Mitra's house. Keshab had not yet come, and Mahendra Goswami was reading from the Bhagavata. The Master conversed with the devotees.

MASTER: "Why shouldn't one be able to lead a spiritual life in the world? But it is extremely difficult. While coming here I passed over the bridge at Baghbazar. How many chains it is tied with! Nothing will happen if one chain is broken, for there are so many others to keep it in place. Just so, there are many ties on a worldly man. There is no way for him to get rid of them except through the grace of God.

"One need not be afraid of the world after one has had the vision of God. Both vidya and avidya exist in His maya; but one becomes indifferent to them after realizing God. One understands it rightly after attaining the state of a paramahamsa. Only a swan can discard the water and drink the milk from a mixture of milk and water. A robin cannot do so."

Faith in the guru

A DEVOTEE: "Then what is the way for a householder?"

MASTER: "Faith in the guru's words. You should depend on his instruction. Do your duties in the world, holding fast to his words, like a person whirling round and holding fast to a pillar.

"One must not look on one's guru as a mere human being: it is Satchidananda Himself who appears as the guru. When the disciple has the vision of the Ishta, through the guru's grace, he finds the guru merging in Him.

"What can one not achieve through simple faith! Once there was an annaprasana ceremony in a guru's house. His disciples volunteered, according to their powers, to supply the different articles of food. He had one disciple, a very poor widow, who owned a cow. She milked it and brought the guru a jar of milk. He had thought she would take charge of all the milk and curd for the festival. Angry at her poor offering, he threw the milk away and said to her, 'Go and drown yourself.' The widow accepted this as his command and went to the river to drown herself. But God was pleased with her guileless faith and, appearing before her, said: 'Take this pot of curd. You will never be able to empty it. The more curd you pour out, the more will come from the pot. This will satisfy your teacher.' The guru was speechless with amazement when the pot was given to him. After hearing from the widow the story of the pot, he went to the river, saying to her, 'I shall drown myself if you cannot show God to me.' God appeared then and there, but the guru could not see Him. Addressing God, the widow said, 'If my teacher gives up his body because Thou dost not reveal Thyself to him, then I too shall die.' So God appeared to the guru-but only once.

"Now you see, because of faith in her guru the disciple herself had the vision of God and also showed Him to her teacher. Therefore I say, 'Even though my guru frequents a grog-shop, still to me he is the embodiment of Eternal Bliss.'

"All want to be the guru, but very few indeed want to be the disciple. But you know that rain-water doesn't collect on a high mound; it collects in low land, in a hollow.

Parable of pearl oyster

"One should have faith in the holy name given by the guru and with it practise spiritual discipline. It is said that the pearl oyster makes itself ready for the rain that falls when the star Svati is in the ascendant. Taking a drop of that rain, it dives into the fathomless depths of the ocean and remains there until the pearl is formed."

At the sight of the many Brahmo devotees assembled there, the Master said: "Is the meeting of the Brahmos a real devotional gathering or a mere show? It is very good that the Brahmo Samaj holds regular devotions. But one must dive deep; mere ceremonial worship or lectures are of no avail. One should pray to God that one's attachment to worldly enjoyment may disappear; that one may have pure love for His Lotus Feet.

"The elephant has outer tusks and inner grinders as well. The tusks are mere ornaments; but the elephant chews its food with the grinders. The inner enjoyment of 'woman and gold' injures the growth of one's devotion.

"What will you achieve through mere public lectures? The vulture undoubtedly soars high, but its eyes are fixed on the charnel-pit. The rocket undoubtedly shoots up into the sky, but the next moment it falls to the ground.

"He who has renounced his attachment to worldly enjoyments will remember nothing but God in the hour of death. Otherwise he will think only of worldly things: wife, children, house, wealth, name and fame. Through practice a bird can be trained to repeat 'Radha-Krishna'; but when a cat catches it, it only squawks.

"Therefore one should constantly practise the singing of God's name and glories, and meditation and contemplation as well. And further, one should always pray that one's attachment to the world may disappear and one's love for God's Lotus Feet may grow.

"Householders devoted to God live in the world like a maidservant, who performs her duties for her master but always keeps her mind fixed on her own native village; that is to say, they do their duties in the world keeping their minds on God. Anyone leading a worldly life is sure to come in contact with its dirt; but a householder who is a true devotee of God lives like the mudfish, which, though remaining in the mud, is not stained by it.

"Brahman and Sakti are identical. One acquires love and devotion quickly by calling on God as Mother."

Saying this, the Master sang:

High in the heaven of the Mother's feet, my mind was soaring like a kite,
When came a blast of sin's rough wind that drove it swiftly toward the earth.
Maya disturbed its even flight by bearing down upon one side,
And I could make it rise no more.
Entangled in the twisting string of love for children and for wife,
Alas! my kite was rent in twain.
It lost its crest of wisdom soon and downward plunged as I let it go;
How could it hope to fly again, when all its top was torn away?
Though fastened with devotion's cord, it came to grief in playing here;
Its six opponents worsted it.
Now Nareschandra rues this game of smiles and tears, and thinks it better
Never to have played at all.

He sang again:

O Mother, for Yasoda Thou wouldst dance, when she called Thee her precious "Blue Jewel":
Where hast Thou hidden that lovely form, O terrible Syama?
Dance that way once for me, O Mother! Throw down Thy sword and take the flute;
Cast off Thy garland of heads, and wear Thy wild-flower garland……

As Sri Ramakrishna sang, he left his seat and began to dance. The devotees, too, stood up. Every now and then the Master went into samadhi and the devotees gazed at him intently. Dr. Dukari touched the Master's eyeballs with his finger to test the genuineness of his samadhi. This disgusted the devotees.

When the music and dancing were over, the devotees took their seats. Just then Keshab arrived with some of his Brahmo disciples. Rajendra told him about their great joy in the Master's kirtan and requested Trailokya to sing again. Keshab replied, "Since Sri Ramakrishna has taken his seat, the kirtan will sound flat."

Trailokya and the Brahmo devotees sang:

Chant, O mind, the name of Hari,
Sing aloud the name of Hari,
Praise Lord Hari's name!
And praising Hari's name, O mind,
Cross the ocean of this world.
Hari dwells in earth, in water,
Hari dwells in fire and air;

In sun and moon He dwells.
Hari's ever living presence
Fills the boundless universe.

While preparations were being made to give the guests something to eat, Sri Ramakrishna talked with Keshab.

MASTER (with a smile): "Today I enjoyed very much the machine by which a man's picture is taken. One thing I noticed was that the impression doesn't stay on a bare piece of glass, but it remains when the glass is stained with a black solution. In the same way, mere hearing of spiritual talk doesn't leave any impression. People forget it soon afterwards. But they can retain spiritual instruction if they are stained inside with earnestness and devotion."

The Master was conducted to the second floor of the house and was asked to sit on a beautiful carpet. The ladies waited .on him while he ate his meal. Keshab and the other devotees were also sumptuously fed.

Sunday, January 1, 1882

Sri Ramakrishna arrived with his devotees at the house of Jnan Choudhury, in Calcutta, to join the annual festival of the Simla Brahmo Samaj. Keshab, Ram, Manomohan, Balaram, Kedar, Narendra, Rakhal, and other devotees were present. Narendra had met the Master only a few days before at the temple garden at Dakshineswar. He used to participate now and then in the worship of the Simla Brahrno Samaj and sing for the congregation.

The worship was arranged according to the usual custom of the Samaj. First the scripture was read; then Narendra sang. It was dusk. The devotees made merry.

Company of holy men extolled

The Master looked at the householder devotees seated around him and said with a smile: "Why shouldn't it be possible for a householder to give his mind to God? But the truth is that he no longer has his mind with him. If he had it, then he could certainly offer it to God. But, alas, the mind has been mortgaged-mortgaged to 'woman and gold'. So it is necessary for him constantly to live in the company of holy men. When, he gets back his own mind, then he can devote it to spiritual practice; but first it is necessary to live constantly with the guru, wait on him, and enjoy the company of spiritual people. Either he should think of God in solitude day and night, or he should live with holy men. The mind left to itself gradually dries up. Take a jar of water, for instance. If the jar is set aside, the water dries up little by little. But that will not happen if the jar is kept immersed in the Ganges.

Concerning the ego

"The iron becomes red in the furnace of a smithy. Take it out and it becomes black as before. Therefore the iron must be heated in the furnace every now and then.

"Do you know what ignorance means? It is the feeling: 'This is my house; these are my relatives; I am the doer; and the household affairs go on smoothly because I manage them.' But to feel, 'I am the servant of God, His devotee, His son'-that is a good attitude.

"The 'I' cannot be effaced altogether. You may explain it away through reasoning, but the next moment it reappears, nobody knows from where. It is like a goat that still bleats faintly and jerks its legs even after its head has been cut off.

"But the 'I' that God retains in His devotee after he has seen Him is called the 'ripe I'. It is like a sword turned into gold by touching the philosopher's stone; you cannot hurt anybody with it."

Thus the Master talked, seated in the worship hall, and Keshab and the other devotees listened with rapt attention. It was about eight o'clock in the evening. The bell rang three times for the worship. .

MASTER (to Keshab and the others): "What's this? I see you haven't yet begun your regular worship."

KESHAB: "What further worship do we need? We are having all this."

MASTER: "Oh no, my dear sir! Let the worship be performed according to your custom."

KESHAB: "Why? We are getting on very well"

At the Master's repeated request Keshab began the worship. In the midst of it Sri Ramakrishna suddenly stood up and went into samadhi. The Brahmo devotees sang:

Chant, O mind, the name of Hari,
Sing aloud the name of Hari,
Praise Lord Hari's name!
And praising Hari's name, O mind,
Cross the ocean of this world. . . .

The Master still stood there absorbed in ecstasy. Keshab led him down very carefully from the temple to the courtyard. The music went on. The Master danced to the music, the devotees dancing around him.

After the refreshments Sri Ramakrishna again talked with Keshab. Soon he began to sing. Keshab sang with the Master:

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight
To the blue lotus flower of Mother Syama's feet,
The blue flower of the feet of Kali, Siva's Consort;
Tasteless, to the bee, are the blossoms of desire.
My Mother's feet are black, and black, too, is the bee;

Black is made one with black! This much of the mystery
My mortal eyes behold, then hastily retreat.
But Kamalakanta's hopes are answered in the end;
He swims in the Sea of Bliss, unmoved by joy or pain.

Again they sang:

High in the heaven of the Mother's feet, my mind was soaring like a kite,
When came a blast of sin's rough wind that drove it swiftly to ward the earth. . . .

Both Keshab and the Master were in a state of divine fervour. The other devotees joined them and sang and danced till midnight.

The Master rested a few minutes and then said to Keshab: "Why did you send me presents when your son was married? What shall I do with them? Take them back."

Keshab smiled a little, and the Master continued: "Why do you write about me in your paper? You cannot make a man great by writing about him in books and magazines. If God makes a man great, then everybody knows about him even though he lives in a forest. When flowers bloom in the deep woods, the bees find them, but the flies do not. What can man do? Don't look up to him. Man is but a worm. The tongue that praises you today will abuse you tomorrow. I don't want name and fame. May I always remain the humblest of the humble and the lowliest of the lowly!"

Appendix B

A LETTER

(Written to M. from by Ashwini Kumar Dutta)

My beloved brother M.,

Three days ago I received the fourth part of the *Sri Sri Râmakrishna Kathāmrita* sent by you, and today I have finished reading it. You are blessed indeed. What heavenly nectar you have sprinkled all over the country! A long time ago you wanted me to set down my conversations with the Master. Now I shall try to write them for you. But I was not born under the lucky star of an M., that I might jot down the days, the dates, and the hours of my visits with the Master and note down correctly all the words uttered by his holy lips. In this letter I am giving you as many of my experiences as I remember. Very likely I shall confuse the events of one day with another-and I have forgotten many things.

It was probably during the autumn holidays of 1881 that I met Sri Ramakrishna the first time. I arrived at Dakshineswar in a country boat and, going up the steps of the landing-*ghāt,* asked someone where the Paramahamsa was.

"There is the Paramahamsa", was the reply. A man was pointed out on the north verandah, which faces the garden. He was sitting reclining against a bolster. He wore a black-bordered cloth. At the sight of the bolster and the black-bordered cloth I said to myself, "What kind of paramahamsa is this?"

Going nearer, I found him half leaning against the bolster with his hands clasped around his drawn-up knees. Then I thought: "Evidently he is not used to pillows as gentlemen are. So perhaps he is the Paramahamsa." At his right, very near the pillow sat a gentleman whose name, I came to know, was Rajendra Lal Mitra, later an Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal. A little farther off sat some others.

After a few moments the Master said to Rajendra Bābu, "See whether Keshab is coming." Evidently Keshab Sen was expected that day.

Someone walked away a few steps and, coming back, said, "No, he isn't."

After a brief interval, hearing a sound outside, he said, "Please look once more." Again someone went out and came back with the same reply.

Then Sri Ramakrishna laughed and said, quoting a popular saying, "The leaves rustle outside, and Radha say's, 'Oh, here comes my Sweetheart!'"

Continuing, he said: "You see, Keshab always tantalizes me like this. It is his way."

At dusk Keshab came with his party. Keshab bowed low before the Master, touching the ground with his forehead. The Master returned his salutation in the same manner.

Shortly afterwards Sri Ramakrishna said, in a state of partial consciousness: "Look! He has brought the whole Calcutta crowd. I am supposed to deliver a lecture. I won't do anything of the sort. Do it yourself if you like. Lecturing is none of my business."

Still in the ecstatic mood, he said with a divine smile: "I shall eat, drink, and be merry. I shall play and sleep. But I can't give lectures."

As Keshab Babu watched him, he became overpowered with divine emotion. Every now and then he said, "Ah me! Ah me!"

I too watched the Master and said to myself, "Can this be pretence?" I had never seen anything like it before, and you know how deep my faith is.

Coming back from samadhi, the Master said to Keshab: "Keshab, once I went to your temple. In the course of your preaching I heard you say, 'We shall dive into the river of devotion and go straight to the Ocean of Satchidananda.' At once I looked up [at the gallery where Keshab's wife and the other ladies were sitting] and thought, 'Then what will become of these ladies?' You see, Keshab, you are householders. How can you reach the Ocean of Satchidananda all at once? You are like a mongoose with a brick tied to its tail. When something frightens it, it runs up the wall and sits in a niche. But how can it stay there any length of time? The brick pulls it down and it falls to the floor with a thud. You may practise a little meditation, but the weight of wife and children will pull you down. You may dive into the river of devotion, but you must come up again. You will alternately dive and come up. How can you dive and disappear once for all?"

Keshab Babu said: "Can't a householder ever succeed? What about Maharshi Devendranath Tagore?"

Twice or thrice the Master repeated softly, "Devendranath Tagore - Devendra-Devendra" and bowed to him several times.

Then he said: "Let me tell you a story. A man used to celebrate the Durga Puja at his house with great pomp. Goats were sacrificed from sunrise to sunset. But after a few years the sacrifice was not so imposing. Then someone said to him, 'How is it; sir, that the sacrifice at your place has become such a tame affair?' 'Don't you see?' he said. 'My teeth are gone now. Devendra is now devoted to meditation and contemplation. It is only natural that he should be, at his advanced age. But no doubt he is a great man.

"You see, as long as a man is under māyā's spell, he is like a green coconut. When you scoop out the soft kernel from a green coconut, you cannot help scraping a little of the shell at the same time. But in the case of a ripe and dry coconut, the shell and kernel are separated from each other. When you shake the fruit you can feel the kernel rattling inside. The man who is freed from maya is like a ripe and dry coconut. He feels the soul to be separated from the body. They are no longer connected with each other.

"It is the 'I' that creates all the trouble. Won't this wretched ego ever leave a person? You see a peepal-tree growing from the rubbish of a tumble down house. You cut it down

today, but tomorrow you find a new sprout shooting up. It is the same with the ego. You may wash seven times a cup that onions have been kept in, but the wretched smell never leaves it."

In the course of the conversation he said to Keshab: "Well, Keshab, I understand that your Calcutta babus say that God does not exist. Is that true? A Calcutta babu wants to climb the stairs. He takes one step, but before taking the next he cries out: 'Oh, my side! My side!' and drops down unconscious. His relatives raise a hue and cry and send for a doctor; but before the doctor arrives the man is very likely dead. And people of such stamina say, 'There is no God'!"

After an hour or so the kirtan began. What I saw then I shall never forget either in this life or in the lives to come. Everybody danced, Keshab included. The Master was in the centre. All danced around. him in a circle. During the dancing Sri Ramakrishna suddenly stood motionless, transfixed in samadhi. A long time passed this way. After hearing his words and seeing all this, I said to myself, "Yes, a paramahamsa indeed!"

Another day, probably in 1883, I visited the Master with a few young men from Srirampore. Looking at them, he asked, "Why have they come here?"

MYSELF: "To see you."

MASTER: "What's there to see in me? Why don't they look at the buildings and temples?"

MYSELF: "Sir, they haven't come to see those things. They have come to see you."

MASTER: "Ah! Then they must be flints. There is fire in them. You may keep a flint under water a thousand years, but the moment you strike it, sparks come out. They must be of that type. But it will be useless to try to strike fire out of me!"

At this last remark we all laughed. I do not recall now what other things he said to us that day. But it seems to me he told us about the renunciation of "woman and gold" and the impossibility of getting rid of the ego.

I visited him another day. When I bowed down to him and took a seat, he said, "Can you bring me some of that stuff-a little sour, a little sweet-that begins to fizz when you push down the cork?"

MYSELF: "Lemonade?"

MASTER: "Why don't you bring a bottle for me?"

I think I brought him a bottle. So far as I remember, I was alone with him that day. I asked him a few questions.

MYSELF: "Do you observe caste?"

MASTER: "How can I say yes? I ate curry at Keshab Sen's house. Let me tell you what once happened to me. A man with a long beard brought some ice here, but I didn't feel like eating it. A little later someone brought me a piece of ice from the same man, and I ate it with great relish. You see, caste restrictions fall away of themselves. As coconut and palm trees grow up, the branches drop off of themselves. Caste conventions drop off like that. But don't tear them off as those fools do [meaning the Brahmos]."

MYSELF: "What do you think of Keshab Babu?"

MASTER: "Oh, he is a saintly man."

MYSELF: "And Trailokya Babu?"

MASTER: "A fine man. He sings very well."

MYSELF: "Shivanath Babu?"

MASTER: " . . . A very good man. But he argues."

MYSELF: "What is the difference between a Hindu and a Brahmo?"

MASTER: "There is not much difference. In the serenade we have here, one flutist plays a single note right along, while another plays various melodies. The Brahmos play one note, as it were; they hold to the formless aspect of God. But the Hindus bring out different melodies; that is to say they enjoy God in His various aspects.

"The formless Deity and God with form may be likened to water and ice. The water freezes into ice. The ice melts into water through the heat of jnana. Water takes the form of ice through the cooling influence of bhakti.

"The Reality is one. People give It various names. Take the case of a lake with four landing-ghats on its four banks. People who draw water at one ghat call it 'jal', and those who draw it at the second ghat call it 'pani'. At the third ghat they call it 'water', and at the fourth, 'aqua'. But it is one and the same thing water."

I told the Master that I had met Achalananda Tirthavadhuta of Barisal.

MASTER: "Isn't that Ramkumar of Kotrang?"

MYSELF': "Yes, sir."

MASTER: "How did you like him?"

MYSELF: "Very much."

MASTER: "Well, whom do you like better-him or me?"

MYSELF: "Oh, can there be any comparison between you two? He is a scholar, an erudite person; but are you one?"

Sri Ramakrishna was a little puzzled at my reply and became silent. A moment later I said: "He may be a scholar, but you are full of fun! There is great fun in your company."

At this the Master laughed and said: "Well said! Well said! Right you are!"

He asked me, "Have you seen my Panchavati?"

MYSELF: "Yes sir."

He told me a little of what he had practised there-his various religious austerities. He also told me about Nangta.

Then I asked him, "How can I realize God?"

MASTER: "You see, He is constantly attracting us, as a magnet attracts iron. But the iron cannot come to the magnet if it is covered with dirt. When the dirt is washed away, the iron is instantly drawn to the magnet. Weep for God and the tears will wash away the dirt from your mind."

As I was writing down his words, he remarked: "Look here. Only repeating the word 'siddhi' will not produce intoxication. You must actually get some hemp, rub it in water, and then drink the solution. . . ."

Later he said: "Since you are going to lead a householder's life, create a roseate intoxication in your mind with the thought of God. You will be doing your duties, but let that pleasant intoxication remain with you. You cannot, of course, like Sukadeva, be so inebriated with the thought of God that you will lie naked and unconscious. As long as you have to live in the world, give God the power of attorney. Make over all your responsibilities to Him; let Him do as He likes. Live in the world like a maidservant in a rich man's house. She bathes her master's children, washes them, feeds them, and takes affectionate care of them in many ways, as if they were her own children; but in her heart she knows very well that they do not belong to her. No sooner is she dismissed than all is over; she has no more relationship with the children.

"Before breaking open the jack-fruit you should rub your hands with oil in order to protect them from the sticky juice. Likewise, protect yourself with the oil of devotion; then the world will not cling to you and you will not be affected by it."

All this time Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the floor. Now he got up and stretched himself on his cot.

He said to me, "Fan me a little."

I began to fan him and he was silent.

After a while he said: "Oh, it's so hot! Why don't you dip the fan in water?"

"Ah!" I said. "You have your fancies, too!"

The Master smiled and drawled out, "And-why-not?"

"Very well!" I said. "Have your full measure of them."

I cannot express in words how immensely I enjoyed his company that day.

The last time I visited him-you have mentioned it in the third part of your book- I had with me the headmaster of our school, who had just then graduated. You met him the other day. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw him, he asked me: "Where did you pick him up? He's a fine fellow!"

Then he continued: "You are a lawyer. You are very clever. Can you give me a little of your cleverness? The other day your father came here and stayed three days."

MYSELF: "How did you find him?"

MASTER: "A nice man. But now and then he talks nonsense."

MYSELF: "Please help him get over it when you see him next."

At this Sri Ramakrishna smiled a little.

MYSELF: "Please give us a few instructions."

MASTER:, "Do you know Hriday?"

MYSELF: "Your nephew? I know him only by name."

MASTER: "Hriday used to say to me: 'Uncle, please don't give out your stock of instructions all at once. Why should you repeat the same things over and over again?' I would reply: 'You fool, what's that to you? These are my words and if I like I shall repeat them a hundred thousand times. You keep quiet!'"

MYSELF (smiling): "Exactly so!"

A little later he sat up on the bed. He repeated "Om" several times and began to sing a song whose first line is:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God's Beauty.

Hardly had he sung one or two lines when he himself dived deep and was lost in samadhi.
When the samadhi was over, he began to pace the room and with both hands pulled up

the cloth he was wearing, till it reached his waist. One end of it was trailing on the floor and the other was hanging loose.

Nudging my companion, I whispered, "See how nicely he wears his cloth!"

A moment later he threw away the cloth, with the words: "Ugh! What a nuisance! Off with it!"

He began to pace up and down the room naked. From the northern end of the room he brought an umbrella and a stick, and asked us, "Are these yours?"

Scarcely had I replied no when he said: "I knew it. I can judge a man by his stick and umbrella. They must belong to that man who was here some time ago and swallowed a lot of my words without understanding them."

A few minutes later he sat down, still naked, on the northern end of his cot, facing the west, and asked me, "Well, do you consider me ungentlemanly?"

MYSELF: "Of course not. You are a perfect gentleman. But why do you ask me that?"

MASTER: "You see, Shivanath and others don't think I am a gentleman. When they come I have to wrap a cloth or something around me. Do you know Girish Ghosh?"

MYSELF: "Which Girish Ghosh? The one who is in the theatre?"

MASTER: "Yes."

MYSELF: "I have never seen him. But I know him by reputation."

MASTER: "A good man."

MYSELF: "They say he drinks."

MASTER: "Let him! Let him! How long will he continue that? Do you know Narendra?"

MYSELF: "No, sir."

MASTER: "I wish very much that you could meet him. He has passed the B. A. examination and is unmarried."

MYSELF: "Very well, sir. I shall meet him."

MASTER: "Today there will be a kirtan at Ram Dutta's house. You may meet him there. Please go there this evening."

MYSELF: "All right."

MASTER: "Yes, do. Don't forget."

MYSELF: "It is your command. Shall I not obey it? Surely I will go."

He showed us the pictures in his room and asked me whether a picture of Buddha could be had.

MYSELF: "Very likely."

MASTER : "Please get one for me."

MYSELF: "Very well. I'll bring one when I come again."

But alas, I never returned to Dakshineswar.

That evening I went to Ram Babu's house and met Narendra. In one of the rooms the Master sat reclining against a pillow. Narendra sat at his right, and I in front.

He asked Narendra to talk with me. But Narendra said: "I have a bad headache today. I don't feel like talking."

I replied, "Then let us put it off till another day."

And that came to pass in May or June of 1897, at Almora. The will of the Master had to be fulfilled, and it was fulfilled after twelve years. Ah, how happily I spent those few days with Swami Vivekananda at Almora! Sometimes at his house, sometimes at mine, and one day on the top of a hill with nobody accompanying us. I never met him after that. It was as if to fulfil the Master's wish that we saw each other at Almora.

I saw the Master not more than four or five times; but in that short time we became so intimate that I felt as if we had been class-mates. How much liberty I took while speaking with him! But no sooner had I left his presence than it flashed on me: "Goodness gracious! Think where I have been!" What I saw and received in those few days has sweetened my whole life. That Elysian smile of his, laden with nectar, I have locked up in the secret closet of my memory. That is the unending treasure of a hapless person like myself. A thrill of joy passes through my heart when I think how a grain of the bliss shed from that laughter has been sweetening the lives of millions, even in distant America. If that be my case, you may very well understand how lucky you are.

A CHRONOLOGY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S LIFE

Year	Event(s)
1775	Birth of Khudirām.
1791	Birth of Chandrā Devi.
1805	Birth of Rāmkumār.
1814	Khudirām settles at Kāmārpukur.
1826	Birth of Rāmeswar.
1835	Khudirām's pilgrimage to Gayā.
1836	Birth of Sri Rāmakrishna, February 18, about 5:15 a.m.
1843	Death of Khudirām.
1845	Sri Rāmakrishna's *Sacred Thread Ceremony.*
1850	Rāmkumar opens his school in Calcutta.
1852	Sri Rāmakrishna comes to Calcutta.
1853	Birth of Holy Mother, Sri Sāradā Devi, December 22.
1855	Dakhineśwar Kāli Temple founded. Hriday at Dakshineśwar. Sri Ramakrishna appointed Priest of the Vishnu Temple and then, of the Kāli Temple.
1856	Death of Rāmkumār. Realization of God and first God-intoxicated state of Sri Rāmakrishna.
1857	Sri Rāmakrishna's treatment under Gangā Prasād.
1858	Haladhāri as Priest at Dakshineswar. Sri Rāmakrishna goes to Kāmārpukur.
1859	Sri Rāmakrishna's marriage.
1860	Return to Dakshineśwar. Mathur's vision.
1861	Death of Rāni Rāsmani. Meeting with the Brāhmani. *Tantra* practice under the Brāhmani. Second divine madness.
1863	Completion of *Tantra* practice. Meeting with Pundit Padmalochan. Chandrā Devi comes to live at Dakshineśwar.
1864	Sri Rāmakrishna's practice of the *Vātsalya Bhāva* under Jatādhāri. Practice of the *Madhur Bhāva.* Initiation into *Sannyās* by Totāpuri.
1865	Akshay replaces Haladhāri. Totāpuri leaves Dakshineśwar.
1866	Sri Rāmakrishna in the *Advaita* plane for six months. Illness. Practise of *Mohammadanism.*
1867	Sri Rāmakrishna at Kāmārpukur. Brāhmani takes leave.
1868	Pilgrimage. Meeting with Ganga Mā.
1870	Tour with Mathur. Sri Rāmakrishna at the Colootola Harisabha. Visit to Kālna and Navadvip.
1871	Death of Mathur.
1872	The Holy Mother's first visit to Dakshineśwar. The *Shodashi Puja.*

1873	Death of Rāmeswar.
1874	The Holy Mother again at Dakshineśwar.
1875	Sri Rāmakrishna's first visit to Keshab Chandra Sen
1876	Death of Chandrā Devi.
1878	Intimacy with Keshab. The Holy Mother's third visit to Dakshineśwar.
1879	Coming of disciples begins.
1880	Last visit to Kāmārpukur.
1881	Dismissal of Hriday. Meeting with Rākhāl and Narendranāth.
1882	Visit to Pundit Vidyāsāgar. The Holy Mother again at Dakshineswar.
1884	Death of Keshab. Meeting with Pundit Shashadhar, Gopal Mā. Holy Mother comes to live at Dakshineśwar for the last time.
1885	Last visit to Panihati. Illness and shifted to Śyāmpukur. Association with Dr. Sarkār. Shifted to Cossipore.
1886	Treatment at Cossipore. Organization of disciples. *Mahā-samādhi,* August 16, at two minutes past 1 a.m.

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INTRODUCTION

I

THE sayings and parables of Sri Ramakrishna included in this volume speak for themselves as far as their spiritual value and philosophic depth are concerned. The stamp of genius they bear cannot escape the notice of even a casual reader. But wise maxims and admirable reflections on life have been given also by great intellectuals and first-rate literary men. The sayings embodied in this volume should, however, be distinguished from the productions of such men. For with all their artistic beauty and sublimity of thought, the writings of one, who is merely an academic philosopher or a man of letters, lack authority in matters relating to God and spiritual life, since their author is only groping in the dark, just like any plain man, as far as these subjects of transcendental significance are concerned. The sayings of Sri Ramakrishna stand on quite a different footing in this respect, because Sri Ramakrishna possessed not only a great intellect and an artistic mind, but had the additional qualification that he had 'seen God face to face', 'talked with Him' and shared the Divine life. Hence his words on these transcendental themes come with a weight of authority derived from the Supreme Being Himself. Our excuse for writing the following brief life-sketch of his as an Introduction to this edition of his

sayings, is that there may be, among its readers, persons who have had no occasion to study any detailed biography of his and to be acquainted with this unique aspect of his life and teachings.

II

Sri Ramakrishna was born in a poor Brahmin family of the village called Kamarpukur in Bengal, on the 17th February, 1836. His father Khudiram Chatterjee was a man of great piety and uprightness of character. His adherence to truth was so great that he would not break this cherished principle of his life even when he found that its observance meant utter ruin to himself and his family. Once when bidden by the landlord of the village to bear false witness in his favour, Khudiram refused to do so, and in his wrath at the defiance of this virtuous Brahmin, the big man of the village despoiled him of all his earthly possessions. His mother Chandramani Devi too was a paragon of womanly virtues. And tradition has it that this pious couple had many Divine visions and experiences before the birth of Sri Ramakrishna, indicative of the divinity of their Gadadhar, as they called their son in his early days.

From his infancy Sri Ramakrishna showed signs of the great power of personality that became a distinguishing feature of his in later life. As a boy he could easily fascinate people, and become the darling of his elders and the beloved leader of his own playmates. He had the soul of an artist that revelled in Nature's beauties, and caught the subtle shades of difference in sounds and

images as well as in the formation of the faces and muscles of men. The favourite pastimes of his boyhood therefore consisted in mimicry, portraiture, clay-modelling, dramatic performances, devotional music and contemplation of epic heroes and heroines. And it was perhaps the artist in him that led him to revolt against the dull routine of the school and its curriculum of stereotyped studies, and show special dislike for exact sciences like mathematics. But his keen intellectual powers and prodigious memory more than compensated for this dislike of academic study. He educated himself in a higher sense by mastering the Hindu epics embodying the great spiritual ideals of India through listening to their recital and exposition by scholars, and above all by going direct to Nature to study men and things through observation.

Among the boys of his age he was noted for his courage and stubborn spirit of independence. Even from infancy he knew no shyness or timidity. Full of health and vigour, he would never allow himself to be bullied or put down by elders when he considered himself in the right. In the face of some of the influential elders of the village he defied the rules of Purdah (the system of secluding women) which he considered in themselves to be of no use in educating women in high ideals of character. He must have been considered a revolutionary by many in that conservative village when, on the occasion of his Upanayana ceremony (investiture with sacred thread), he insisted, in the face of much opposition, on receiving his first Bhiksha or alms from a blacksmith woman, according to the promise he had made to her previously.

But the young rebel was not without the quality of reverence. For love of God was ingrained in him from childhood, and both in the worship of the Deity in his own house as well as in the religious activities of the village in general, he took a leading part. From early life he had a fancy for wandering ascetics, and he mixed and conversed with them freely whenever he got an opportunity. With the advance of years his devotional inclinations took a more definite form. Enwrapped in Divine contemplation, he was often seen to pass into high spiritual moods that culminated in ecstasy. The most noteworthy occasions of such occurrences in his early days were mainly three—once while observing a flight of snow-white cranes against a dark sky overcast with sombre thunderclouds, next in the course of enacting the part of Siva in a village drama, and again while singing songs in praise of the Deity during a pilgrimage. And it was this devotional strain that ultimately dominated over the leader, the artist and the rebel in him, and organised the diverse qualities of his personality in the service of the supreme spiritual ideal, the achievement of which made him one of the noted figures in modern times.

III

The proper environment for the full development of Sri Ramakrishna's personality was provided by the Kali temple of Dakshineswar in Calcutta, founded by the Rani Rasmani in 1855. The daily round of pious duties as the chief priest in the Divine Mother's temple fanned the fire of devotion in him. He was observed to spend hours in deep meditation and in singing

devotional songs. It was also found that he was spending a large part of his nights in contemplation in the jungly regions of the garden, quite bereft of all clothing and even the sacred thread. In his method of worship the rigid observance of rituals was noticed to give place gradually to an informality of procedure born of a sense of intimacy with the object of worship.

All this was only the sign of the storm that was raging in his soul—the passionate longing to know whether the Mother whom he worshipped was real or not. As days passed, this longing became so great that one day he was about to put an end to his own life in despair. Suddenly the screens that hid the Truth from his soul's eyes disappeared, and passing into a state of ecstasy, he had a vision of the Divinity as 'a boundless, effulgent Ocean of Intelligence'. The solace and the sense of Divine presence accompanying this experience did not, however, last for many days. He found that it gave him only a glimpse of the higher life, but did not enrich his consciousness with a perpetual experience of the Divinity. Hence this first flight of the soul only went to whet his appetite for the Divine, and in the period of dryness that soon followed, he was filled with a longing, even more powerful than the previous, to feel the presence of God everywhere and at all times. The intensity of the urge was so great that he practically lost all sense of reality for the external world. Without any thought of even food or sleep, he began to spend his whole time in praying to the Divine Mother in the agony of his soul. It became impossible for him to perform the daily worship of the Deity in the temple any

longer. Therefore Mathuranath, the manager of the temple and son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, who had by this time contracted great affection and respect for Sri Ramakrishna, relieved him of his duties in the temple, and gave him every facility to pursue his spiritual inclinations. And Sri Ramakrishna utilised this opportunity to plunge himself into prayer, meditation and ascetic practices with an intensity of spiritual aspiration that has seldom been witnessed in the world. Often, seized with a desperate longing, he was seen to rub his face on the ground until it bled.

Describing this insatiable longing of his soul for God, he said to his disciples in later days that it was something like the organic craving that a man kept under water felt for a breath of air. Again he used to say that one could have a hazy idea of that craving for God if one could imagine a concentration of these three types of attachments —a miser's fondness for his hoarded wealth, a noble lady's love of her husband, and a parent's affection for an only child.

About this time he went on a visit to his village at Kamarpukar. His mother thought that if he married, his madness for God and supreme unconcern for the world would be checked, and that he would naturally come back to normal ways of living in course of time. Accordingly in 1859 he was wedded to Saradamani Devi, a little girl of five, daughter of Ramachandra Mukhopadhyaya of a neighbouring village. Though this marriage was destined to have important consequences in his later days, it did not have the intended effect of abating his zeal for God. For immediately after his return to Dakshineswar in 1860, his

soul was again caught in the same cyclonic passion of God-love.

Till now his spiritual strivings may be described as a solitary and unaided quest. From this time onwards many great spiritual teachers went to him, as if sent by Divine Providence, to help him in his search after God, and with their guidance he began to practise various spiritual disciplines as enjoined in the scriptures.

There are two outstanding features that distinguish Sri Ramakrishna from other spiritual aspirants in this aspect of his life. One is the rapidity with which he attained success in each Sadhana (spiritual practice), which may be explained as due to the intensity of his quest. The other is the variety of Sadhanas he underwent, which is unprecedented in the spiritual history of mankind.

The first of his teachers to arrive was Bhairavi, the Brahmani, who met Sri Ramakrishna in 1861. She was a middle-aged Brahmin woman of great learning and high spiritual attainments; and under her guidance he successfully underwent all the principal spiritual practices mentioned in the sixty-four Tantras of the Sakta cult. All these practices relate to the worship of the Deity as the Divine Mother of the universe, and several of them are so difficult to follow that none but those who are perfect masters of the senses, and are capable of seeing the Divinity in everything, can practise them with advantage or safety. His successful pursuit of them gives one a fair idea of the great purity of his mind and his innate spiritual genius. Besides bestowing on him the realisation of the Divine Mother in Her diverse aspects, this discipline of Mother-worship

established him in the conviction that every woman is a manifestation and a symbol of the Divine Mother in a special sense.

The Vaishnava form of Sadhana was another type of spiritual discipline that Sri Ramakrishna practised. The Vaishnavas worship the Deity by cultivating various forms of personal relationship with Him, known as Bhavas or attitudes, as those of the servant towards the Master (Dasya), of the friend towards a friend (Sakhya), of the parent towards the child (Vatsalya), and of the beloved towards her sweet-heart (Madhura). Sri Ramakrishna adopted all these attitudes one after another, and while doing so, he used to identify himself with the classical personalities with whom a particular attitude has been traditionally associated—with Mahavir for Dasyabhava, with Radha for Madhura-bhava, and so on. During such periods of identification, he used to live like those very personalities and express in himself their consciousness and behaviour. Thus for many months he lived like a woman, in the company of women, while practising the Sakhya and Madhura forms of Sadhana; and neither he nor the ladies in whose company he lived felt any sense of strangeness or artificiality in this. So radical was the transformation he could effect at will on his consciousness and even on his physical life.

Next in 1864 he came into contact with a great Vedantin of the non-dualistic school, an itinerant monk named Totapuri. Sri Ramakrishna was initiated by him into the life of Sannyasa. Till now he was worshipping the Deity as the Divine Personality endowed with attributes.

From Totapuri he learnt the method of contemplating on Him in His attributeless and impersonal aspect. So ripe was his mind for this highest form of spiritual discipline that within a period of three days after his initiation, he attained the Nirvikalpa-samadhi or the state of unconditioned consciousness, which the Advaita scriptures speak of as the goal of all the spiritual endeavours of man. And after Totapuri had left Dakshineswar at the close of nearly an year's stay in the temple, Sri Ramakrishna remained in the non-dual state of Nirvikalpa-samadhi continuously for six months.

In 1866 he received initiation in Islamic spiritual practices from a Sufi ascetic named Govinda, and discovered that that path also ultimately led to the same spiritual realisation which the Hindu systems of spiritual discipline had given him. Some time later he meditated on Christ and his ideals, and found the goal of that path also to be identical with that of the other religions.

The long period of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices came to a close in 1872 with the inspiring rite known as the Shodasi Pooja when he worshipped his own wedded wife as the symbol of the Deity. His girl wife, Saradamani Devi, had by this time grown up into a young woman. During these years she had seen her husband only on two or three occasions. In 1872 she went to Dakshineswar, anxious as she was to serve her husband whom the village gossip described as mad. Quite unlike an ordinary ascetic, Sri Ramakrishna received her kindly, and did everything to educate her in secular and spiritual matters. Her presence at Dakshineswar also helped him to test his own realisation

and sense-control, but in every form of crucial test, he found that he was above all bodily cravings, and that he could view every woman, including his own wife, as a manifestation of the Divine Mother. In token of this attainment, he placed his own wife before him as the Deity, offered her worship with all the proper rituals, surrendered all the fruits of his spiritual practices at the feet of the Deity manifest as the pure virgin, and at the close of the worship entered into deep Samadhi.

IV

The Shodasi Pooja is supposed to mark the close of Sri Ramakrishna's life as an aspirant (Sadhakabhava), and herald the period of his spiritual ministration as the world-teacher (Gurubhava). After this time his insatiable craving for practising spiritual disciplines abated. In place of it he felt the unshakable conviction of truth within himself. What was more, he began to have a vivid consciousness of the mighty spiritual power and wisdom that the Divine Mother was manifesting through his body and mind, and he felt an intense longing to minister unto the spiritual needs of men.

Indeed, a detailed study of his life-incidents would show that from his boyhood onwards there was present in him the inborn quality of a teacher, and that gleams of spiritual wisdom emanating from him used to enlighten the hearts of men every now and then. This became more and more prominent in the course of his spiritual practices. His attitude towards Rani Rasmani and Mathuranath, the

proprietors of Dakshineswar temple, was not that of an employee, but that of an intimate friend at ordinary times, and that of their lord and saviour in his exalted spiritual moods. Persons who came to teach him often learned from him more than what they taught him. By his contact Bhairavi, the Brahmani, had the defects of her character rectified and came to be endowed with supreme renunciation. From him, Totapuri, his spiritual preceptor in the path of Advaita, learned the secret of the love of the Personal God, to which he was a stranger before. Besides, when he went on pilgrimage with Mathuranath in 1870, many an aspirant in the holy places he visited drew inspiration from his company. And what was more, from time to time innumerable ascetics of various orders were flocking to Dakshineswar, and most of the sincere aspirants among them received spiritual help from him. Among these aspirants were also some of the scholarly Pandits of those days like Vaishnavacharan, Padmalochan, Gauri and Narayan Sastri, who were so filled with inspiration in his company that they looked upon him as an Incarnation of Godhead.

Thus from his early days the mood of the teacher was present in him. But it was, however, occasional, the dominant attitude of his till now being that of a Sadhaka or spiritual aspirant. But after the Shodasi Pooja the ardour of the spiritual aspirant got transformed into the intensity of the redeeming love of the world-teacher.

Sri Ramakrishna was now a Divya, a divine man. His awareness of God had become perpetual, and did not depend on any particular state of mind like ecstasy,

although the phenomenon of ecstasy continued to be a frequent occurrence with him till the last. The state of mind that he had gained may be described in terms of Christian mysticism as theopathetic, or in his own words as Bhava-mukha—a state in which the mind could ever dwell in the Divine both in His absolute and relative aspects, and yet, without the least distraction to this union, apply itself actively to everyday concerns of life. That his experience of God was not an imaginary state or a degenerate sub-normal condition, we know from its effect on his character, which, in its power and purity, stands in striking contrast with that of the so-called great and mighty men of the world. Unlike even the best and greatest of them, he was established in a state of peace, poise and radiant joy, which could not in the least be affected by any change of worldly fortune., He was absolutely free from carnality, and in all women, whether noble or fallen, he saw the expression of the Divine Mother. Nor had he any selfish attachment to possessions, —a trait of character which he expressed by developing in himself a spontaneous inability to possess anything or even to touch any metal. For in the period of Sadhana he used to take mud and precious metal in hand and throw them both into the Ganges, discriminating within himself that, though their value differed in point of purchasing worldly goods, they were both alike, and to an equal degree worthless, in gaining for oneself the realisation of God. This idea went so deep into him that in course of time he began to feel even physical pain at the touch of any metal, and a violent shock in body and mind when anybody

offered him money or property. He was also devoid of all worldly snobbery and discrimination against men placed in low positions of life, and this he symbolised by cleaning the dirty places in the huts of scavengers with his own long matted hair. His adherence to truth was something phenomenal. Not only did his habit of truthfulness extend to the major issues of life, but even to petty matters like an agreement to visit a place on a particular day, or to take a medicine from a particular person and not another. Even if his conscious mind happened to forget a promise or an agreement, his body reminded him of it by refusing to act in any way that would be contrary to his words. Indeed, he said that when he surrendered everything to the Divine Mother, he could not surrender the virtue of truthfulness: for, if that was done, the very truth of his self-surrender would be falsified. And withal, he possessed such wonderful powers of personality, of which we shall say more in the succeeding sections.

V

Although this phase of his life as the world-teacher might be said to have begun from 1872, his spiritual ministry reached its climax only after 1875 when he got acquainted with great Brahmo leader Keshub Chandra Sen. Keshub's public utterances and writings about him attracted the notice of the educated men of Calcutta to him, and a constant stream of them, both young and old, began to visit him, attracted by the power of his love and holiness. Among those who met him and held him in great respect may be

mentioned the names of many of India's best thinkers, writers and leaders of those days, like Keshub Chandra Sen, Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, Sivanath Sastri, Vijay Krishna Goswami, Devendra Nath Tagore, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Aswini Kumar Dutt and Girish Chandra Ghosh.

From among the many earnest souls who went to him, a good many became very intimate with him, and formed into the group of his devotees through whom his message was destined to be transmitted to the world at large in later days. This group was formed of two sets of people —one, of elderly, married gentlemen settled down in life, and the other, of young school and college boys who had not yet taken upon themselves the responsibilities of life. It was this second group that took to the life of Sannyasa afterwards, and formed into the Ramakrishna Order of monks under the leadership of Swami Vivekananda, then known as Narendranath Datta. The Swami was the special object of Sri Ramakrishna's love and grace, and in later life spread his Master's message far and wide, and made a lasting impression on the consciousness of his countrymen as the great patriot-saint of modern India.

The rest of Sri Ramakrishna's life was spent in teaching these devotees and in moulding their lives in the light of the highest spiritual ideal. The manner and method of his teaching, as well as his relationship with his disciples, were in many respects unique. He never undertook the work of teaching in an egoistic sense. He was the humblest of men, without any sense of ego in him, and he attributed all

that he achieved to the Divine Mother of the universe. And it was because of this very fact of his having surrendered his ego completely to the Divine that the Guru Sakti (the redeeming power of the Lord) manifested itself through his body and mind in so remarkable a degree, sanctifying and enlightening all that came within their influence.

Before he accepted people as disciples, he subjected them to very minute tests and got a thorough understanding of their character. He would study their nature by observing their physical features—an art in which he was a past master. He would watch carefully the little actions of their daily life at unguarded moments, and besides gauge their worth by putting them questions and observing their reactions towards his teachings and ideals. In addition to these methods he would also sometimes use his Yogic powers to see into the hearts of men, or to put them into a sort of trance in which they revealed the innermost contents of their minds.

As for those whom he accepted as disciples, he made them his own by the power of his love, the like of which they never received even from their parents. He spared no pains in instructing them, and in seeing that they carried out his instructions into practice. Often by a touch or an act of will, he would obliterate any undesirable tendency he found in them, and bestow on them the highest experiences of spiritual life. The very contact with his dynamic personality, radiant with the flame of holiness and Divine love, imparted strength and steadiness to their aspiration for the Divine life. He never entered into arguments with people or delivered academic discourses to them, but

just stated his settled convictions on spiritual matters in all humility, and left each person to understand and accept according to his capacity. He never forced his views on any one. Those of his disciples who were critically minded were free to criticise his teachings, and also to test him just as he himself tested them. Such conduct on their part only brought his praise, never his displeasure.

He had the strange capacity to make himself interesting and intelligible to people of diverse temperaments and stages of intellectual development. He could astound learned Pandits like Sasadhar and Iswar Candra Vidyasagar by the profundity of his wisdom, and he could also bring himself to the intellectual level of the ignorant village woman who went to him to get the wounds of her heart healed, or to have her simple doubts cleared. Himself an orthodox Hindu in his life and thought, and quite innocent of modern scientific and social ideas, he could yet have appreciation and sympathy for the ideals and aspirations of champions of reform and rationalism. In his room could therefore meet on friendly terms a Viswanath Upadhyaya and a Keshub Chandra, a Narendranath and a Nag Mahashay, a Dr Mahendra Lal Sircar and a Girish Chandra Ghosh. As in the practice of diverse religions with mutually conflicting traditions, here too the unparalleled catholicity of his mind and heart could alone account for this wide range of his sympathy and his appeal as a teacher to men of diverse temperaments and outlooks. Truly he was the most universal yet most individual of men.

There was with him none of the formal features usually characteristic of the relationship between Guru and disciple,

nor did he demand any cringing reverence or any attitude of awful expectancy from those whom he taught. His disciples were more intimate with him than the members of a loving family, and he was to them dearer than their earthly parents. He preached no particular dogma, creed or philosophy. What he did was to convey to people a spirit that transformed their outlook on life and gave them an insight into the ultimate nature of the world and of human personality. In doing this, he relied not on formal sermons and discourses, but on loving contacts, illustrations drawn from Nature, a life of purity and self-control, and above all the practice of silent Japa and meditation. He never failed to impress on his disciples that the scrupulous observance of truth and absolute continence was the unavoidable condition for the realisation of spiritual ideals.

Another remarkable feature of his method was its unconventionality, and its intermingling of the serious and the funny, the sublime and the ridiculous. Almost every day, centering round him, were enacted in his room scenes that by turn inspired, entertained, instructed and consoled those who were present. He would sing devotional songs with an ecstatic abandon, and dance with the joy of the Mother's name. This might be followed by simple and luminous exposition of abstruse metaphysical and ethical problems like the relation between the Impersonal and the Personal God, or the compatibility of God's goodness with the existence of evil in the world. From these thoughts on transcendental wisdom, he could, with the utmost ease, come to sound practical instruction on conduct in the world. He taught the simple-minded Yogen about the ways of

bargaining in the market; checked the impetuous Niranjan in his rash actions; taught Hari, the disciple who hated women, to be considerate towards the fair sex; consoled old Mani Mallick in the bereavement of his only son; and reprimanded the brother of S. for neglecting his duty towards wife and children. His instructions, whether on philosophy, devotion or conduct, would take the form of witty sayings, striking analogies and illuminating parables couched in his rustic conversational Bengali of a highly expressive type, and delivered in his sonorous voice with a 'slight though delightful stammer' in it. Often these talks were punctuated with humorous remarks that created side-splitting laughter among his hearers and with masterly caricatures of men and things—of the Kirtani (professional singer of religious songs) receiving rich visitors, of the idle talks of pilgrims going for bath in the Ganges, of hypocritical devotees bargaining with fish-mongers, of domineering widows asserting authority in their brothers' houses, of hen-pecked husbands submissive only to their wives, and of several other features of daily life which revealed great powers of observation and of healthy criticism. In the midst of all this fun and frolic, a slight suggestion would set his mind to a high spiritual pitch, and he would lose himself in devotional fervour, or in deep Samadhi, radiating the influence of his powerful thought on all who were around.

But with all his ecstasy and Divine intoxication, few men could excel him in attention to the minute details of life. He was very particular about personal cleanliness and about the orderliness of the things kept in his room. He disliked to see people going about with torn clothes

and shoes, or keeping their houses insufficiently lighted. Whenever he went anywhere on a visit, he always carried the few things required for his personal use, and he advised his disciples never to go to a place at a time or in a manner calculated to cause inconvenience to their host. It is also remarkable that never in his life he came away from a place leaving behind any of his things in forgetfulness, be it shoe, umbrella or cloth. And in spite of all his Samadhi and self-forgetfulness in the thought of God, the powers of his senses were so very keen that when he entered a room, his eagle eyes would at a glance observe all objects present there, and he could, even long after, give exact descriptions of the shape and position of even such of those things as were hardly noticed by others accompanying him.

Thus this great teacher of men spent his life, holding forth before the world the ideal of a perfect man, and actively ministering to the spiritual needs of those who flocked to him, until his delicate frame broke down under the strain of constant teaching. In 1885 he had an attack of cancer of the throat. About a few months later, his devotees took him to Calcutta and put him under the treatment of the famous doctor Mahendra Lal Sircar. With the passing of days, the disease got only aggravated in spite of the best medical aid. But even the prolonged tortures of this excruciating disease could not in the least affect the joy and serenity of his mind, or disturb his perpetual consciousness of the Divine Presence everywhere.

Moreover, this period of physical suffering formed also the most active part of his ministry. For the Divine Power that was working through his body and mind found

Its fullest expression during this period. By 1884 his name had already become widely known in Calcutta, and therefore his presence in the city for treatment attracted large crowds to him. Though he was prohibited by doctors from speaking, his great love of men made him go against medical restrictions and give himself up entirely to the service of his visitors, quite regardless of its fatal effect on his own health.

The period of his illness was also the occasion for the spiritual advancement of his intimate devotees, and for the formation of a spirit of brotherhood among them, which later on fructified into the Ramakrishna order of monks. For while the expenses of his stay and treatment were defrayed by the householder devotees, his young disciples under the leadership of Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda) undertook to stay with him and nurse him in his illness. Thus at the bed-side of their sick Master the disciples formed themselves into a community, unified by their common devotion to him and their earnestness to realise the spiritual ideal.

In spite of his physical illness, Sri Ramakrishna was like a living spiritual dynamo during this period. He blessed many of his devotees with higher experiences. Especially on the 1st of January, 1886, he was in a highly exalted mood, and by an act of will he roused the latent spiritual powers of all the devotees who went to him for blessings. A few days after, he imparted the experience of Nirvikalpa Samadhi to Swami Vivekananda.

After a period of nearly one year's illness, he gave up the body in the early hours of Monday, the 16th of August,

1886, leaving behind him a new spirit to be broadcast in this world by his disciples, especially by the young men who took to the life of renunciation, following in his footsteps.

VI

What did Sri Ramakrishna teach? Evidently he taught more by his life than by words. He never wrote or lectured, but imparted all his teachings in the shape of informal conversations, some of which have been faithfully recorded by his disciples. By their very nature, even these original sources of information cannot claim to exhaust his teachings. Whatever he taught by words, and whatever of it has been recorded by his direct disciples —of that the present book is a faithful and fairly comprehensive summary, consisting as it does of all the precious instructions lying scattered in a voluminous literature. Being a collection of extracts from various contexts, the subject-matter of the present book is bound to appear fragmentary in spite of all attempts to give it a logical sequence by devices of arrangement. While no effort has been spared to arrange the sayings logically, we trust the general reader would find it easier to follow their trend of thought if we give below a summary of the fundamental principles embodied in them. The following brief summary should not, however, be taken as the statement of a creed—for the Master taught no special creed or dogma—or as an exhaustive exposition of his teachings, but only as a guide to their detailed study.

Reality is in essence a principle of Intelligence. It is this one Intelligent Principle that is variously known as God, Allah, Buddha, Siva, Vishnu, Brahman, etc., in the different religions of the world. It is both personal and impersonal, with attributes and without attributes. Impersonal does not mean less than personal, but without the limitations of personality.

While Reality transcends every form of relation in its absolute nature, it is, in its cosmic aspect, intimately related to the world of living and non-living beings as their cause, support and substratum. In this aspect the Intelligent Principle is spoken of as He or She, as Father or Mother of the universe. Both the Jivas (living beings) and the Jagat (non-living beings) are the manifestations of this Father-Mother Divinity. He is the source alike of what is pleasing and terrific in Nature.

For the devotee, however, He is the God of Love, the pains and terrors of life being only the devices He employs to draw His careless and forgetful children to His feet. He is present in every being, but is very near to a devoted heart in a special sense. He hears the sincere prayers that well up from the heart of man, and responds to them in His infinite mercy.

As the Impersonal, He can be approached through Knowledge, and as the Personal, through Love. But the path of Love and self-surrender is easier and more natural, and on one who treads this path He confers also the fruit of Knowledge—the sense of identity with the Absolute. In the path of Love He may be looked upon as Father, Mother, Friend, Child, Lover or in any other

intimate form of human relationship. According to the devotee's attitude He manifests Himself in various forms of beauty and holiness to his purified vision.

A special form of Divine mercy is the Incarnation. From time to time He embodies Himself as a human being of great holiness and spiritual power in order to show mankind the way of holy and righteous living. The founders of all the great religions, who have opened new paths of spiritual life to men of different ages and climes, are either such special Divine manifestations, or are souls specially commissioned by Him. To worship them and to meditate on their life and doings form one of the most effective forms of spiritual upliftment.

The human personality is intimately related to the Cosmic Intelligence; for it is a manifestation of that Intelligence through the limitations of matter. Every soul is therefore potentially Divine, and the goal of life is to manifest this indwelling Divinity by controlling Nature within and without. All forms of righteous activity in life can aid this process, provided the proper attitude of mind is brought to bear on it. Religion embodies the methods evolved by mankind for the attainment of life's goal, and does not consist in mere intellectual assent to dogmas or creeds, or performance of rituals. Religion, in a vital sense, means the realisation or the actualisation of the great spiritual truths in our consciousness and daily activities. We shall have to do this through work, worship, psychic control, or philosophy—through one or all of these.

Strength is one of the most essential requirements of spiritual life. For strength is virtue and weakness is sin.

Faith is the source of all strength—faith in God and faith in oneself. Self-depreciation, or morbidly dwelling upon one's essential sinfulness, is no part of true religion, and should, by all means, be avoided; for sin is not overcome by dwelling on thoughts of sin but by contemplating the inherent Divinity of the soul. Man is no sinner but a child of God. An abiding consciousness of this is the true faith, the source of all strength and therefore of all virtue.

Spiritual life is impossible without a sound moral basis. The underlying principle of all morality is unselfishness. A man cannot be unselfish unless he is imbued with the spirit of renunciation. Renunciation means the giving up of Kama and Kanchana, i.e., lust and greed. The spirit of renunciation manifests in life as purity of character, as devoted service to fellow-beings, and as a strong and steady aspiration for the Divine. The vision of God dawns in a heart in which the spirit of renunciation and the intensity of aspiration have reached their maturity. If a man does not reach this goal, or at least make some progress towards its realisation, his life on earth, as a man, has surely been in vain.

BOOK I

MAN AND THE WORLD

An eternal portion of Myself, having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to itself the mind and the five senses that rest in Nature.

Three are the gates of this hell leading to the ruin of the soul—lust, wrath and greed. Therefore let man renounce these three.

The man who has escaped these three gates of darkness, O Arjuna, works out his own good and reaches the highest state.

—Bhagavadgita

CHAPTER I

MAN

[*The destiny of man—Real nature of man—Man in bondage—Death and reincarnation*]

THE DESTINY OF MAN

1. You see many stars in the sky at night, but not when the sun rises. Can you therefore say that there are no stars in the heavens during the day? O man, because you cannot find God in the days of your ignorance, say not that there is no God.

2. He is born in vain, who, having attained the human birth, so difficult to get, does not attempt to realise God in this very life.

3. A man is rewarded according to his thoughts and motives. The Lord is like Kalpataru. the wish-yielding tree of heaven. Everyone gets from Him whatever he seeks. A poor man's son, having received education and become a judge of the High Court by hard work, is apt to think, "Now I am happy. I have reached the highest rung of the ladder. It is all right now." To him the Lord says, "Do thou remain so." But when the judge of the High Court retires on pension and reviews his past, he understands that he wasted his life, and exclaims, "Alas!

What real work have I done in this life!" To him the Lord also says, "Alas! What hast thou done!"

4. Man is born in this world with two tendencies—Vidya, the tendency to pursue the path of liberation, and Avidya, the leaning towards worldliness and bondage. At his birth, both these tendencies are, as it were, in equilibrium like the two scales of a balance. The world soon places its enjoyments and pleasures in one scale, and the Spirit, its attractions in the other. If the mind chooses the world, the scale of Avidya becomes heavy, and man gravitates towards the earth; but if it chooses the Spirit, the scale of Vidya becomes heavier and pulls him towards God.

5. Know the One, and you will know the all. Ciphers placed after the figure one gets the value of hundreds and of thousands, but they become valueless if you wipe out that figure. The many have value only because of the One. First the One and then the many. First God, and then the Jivas and the Jagat (creatures and the world).

6. First gain God, and then gain wealth; but do not try to do the contrary. If, after acquiring spirituality, you lead a worldly life, you will never lose your peace of mind.

7.* Do you talk of social reform? Well, you may do so after realising God. Remember, the Rishis of old gave up the world in order to attain God. This is the one thing needful. All other things shall be added to you, if indeed you care to have them. First see God, and then talk of lectures and social reforms.

8. A new-comer to a city should first secure a comfortable room for his rest at night, and after keeping his luggage there, he may freely go about the city for sight-seeing. Otherwise he may have to suffer much in the darkness of night to get a place for rest. Similarly, after securing his eternal resting place in God, a new-comer to this world can fearlessly move about doing his daily work. Otherwise, when the dark and dreadful night of death comes over him, he will have to encounter great difficulties and sufferings.

9. At the doors of large granaries are placed traps containing fried rice (Moori) to catch mice. The mice, attracted by the flavour of the fried rice, forget the more solid pleasure of tasting the rice inside the granary, and fall into the trap. They are caught therein and killed. Just so is the case with the soul. It stands on the threshold of Divine bliss, which is like millions of the highest worldly pleasures solidified into one; but instead of striving for that bliss, it allows itself to be enticed by the petty pleasures of the world and falls into the trap of Maya, the great illusion, and dies therein.

10. A Pandit: The Theosophists say that there are 'Mahatmas'. They also say that there are different planes and spheres like astral plane, Devchanic plane, solar sphere, lunar sphere, etc., and that man's subtle body can go to all these places. They say many other such things. Well, Sir, what is your opinion on Theosophy?

The Master: Bhakti alone is supreme—Bhakti or devotion to God. Do they care for Bhakti? If they do, that is well. It is well if they have God-realisation for

their aim and goal. But remember, to be engrossed in such trivial things as solar sphere, lunar sphere, astral sphere, etc., is not genuine search after God. One has to do Sadhanas (spiritual practices) in order to get devotion to His lotus feet; one has to weep for Him with the intense longing of the heart. The mind should be gathered up from the different objects and concentrated exclusively on Him. He is not in the Vedas or Vedanta or in any scripture. Nothing will be achieved unless one's heart yearns for Him. One has to pray to Him with intense devotion, and practice Sadhanas. God cannot be realised so easily. Sadhanas are necessary.

11. Will all men see God? No man will have to fast for the whole day; some get their food at 9 a.m., some at noon, others at 2 p.m., and others again in the evening or at sunset. Similarly, one time or other, in this very life or after many more lives, all will, and must, see God.

12. Little children play with dolls in the outer room just as they like, without any care or fear or restraint; but as soon as their mother comes in, they throw aside their dolls and run to her crying, "Mamma mamma". You too, O man, are now playing in this material world, infatuated with the dolls of wealth, honour, fame, etc., and do not feel any fear or anxiety. If, however, you once see your Divine Mother, you will not afterwards find pleasure in all these. Throwing them all aside, you will run to Her.

13. There are pearls in the deep sea, but you must hazard all perils to get them. If you fail to get at them by a single dive, do not conclude that the sea is without them. Dive again and again, and you are sure to be

rewarded in the end. So also in the quest for the Lord, if your first attempt to see Him proves fruitless, do not lose heart. Persevere in the attempt, and you are sure to realise Him at last.

14. Meditate upon the Knowledge and the Bliss Eternal, and you will have bliss. The Bliss is indeed eternal, only it is covered and obscured by ignorance. The less your attachment to the sense-objects, the more will be your love for God.

15.* Mere possession of wealth does not make a man rich. The sign of a rich man's house is that a light burns in each room. The poor cannot afford the oil; therefore they do not arrange for many lights.

This temple of the body should not be kept in darkness; the lamp of Knowledge must be lighted in it. "Light the lamp of Knowledge in your room, and look at the face of the Mother Divine." Everyone can attain Knowledge. There is the individualised self and there is the higher Self. Every individual is connected with the higher Self. There is a gas connection in every house, and gas can be had from the Gas Company. Only apply to the proper authorities, and the supply will be arranged. Then you will have gas-light in your room.

REAL NATURE OF MAN

16. The digit one may be raised to a figure of any value by adding zeroes after it; but if that one is omitted, zeroes by themselves have no value. Similarly so long as the Jiva (individual soul) does not cling to God, Who is the One, he has no value, for all things here get their value

from their connection with God. So long as the Jiva clings to God, Who is the value-giving figure behind the world, and does all his work for Him, he gains more and more thereby: on the contrary, if he overlooks God and adds to his work many grand achievements, all done for his own glorification, he will gain nothing therefrom.

17. As a lamp does not burn without oil, so a man cannot live without God.

18. God is to man what a magnet is to iron. Why does He not then attract man? As iron thickly imbedded in mud is not moved by the attraction of the magnet, so the soul thickly imbedded in Maya does not feel the attraction of the Lord. But when the mud is washed away with water, the iron is free to move. Even so, when, by the constant tears of prayer and repentance, the soul washes away the mud of Maya that compels it to stick to the earth, it is soon attracted by the Lord to Himself.

19. The union of the Jivatman with the Paramatman is like the union of the hour and the minute hands of a watch once in every hour. They are inter-related and interdependent, and though usually separate, they may become united as often as favourable opportunities occur.

20. The soul enchained is man, but when free from the chain (Maya), it is the Lord.

21. What is the relation between the Jivatman and the Paramatman? As a current of water seems to be divided into two when a plank of wood is placed against it edgewise, so the Indivisible appears divided into two, the Jivatman and the Paramatman, due to the limitation of Maya.

22. Water and a bubble on it are one and the same. The bubble has its birth in the water, floats on it, and is ultimately resolved into it. So also the Jivatman and the Paramatman are one and the same, the difference between them being only one of degree. For one is finite and limited while the other is infinite; one is dependent while the other is independent.

23*. The idea of an individual ego is just like enclosing a portion of the water of the Ganges and calling the enclosed portion one's own Ganges.

24. As a piece of lead thrown into a basin of mercury soon becomes an amalgam with it, so an individual soul loses its limited existence when it falls into the ocean of Brahman.

25. God is the infinite Being, while Jiva is only a finite being. How then can the finite grasp the Infinite? It is like a doll made of salt trying to fathom the depth of the ocean. In doing so the salt doll is dissolved into the sea and lost. Similarly the Jiva, in trying to measure God and know Him, loses its separateness and becomes one with Him.

26. The Lord Himself is playing in the form of man. He is the great juggler and this phantasmagoria of Jiva and Jagat is His great jugglery. The Juggler alone is true, the jugglery is false.

27. The human body is like a pot, and the mind, the intellect and the senses are like water, rice and potato. When you place a pot containing water, rice and potato on fire, they get heated, and if any one touches them, his finger is burnt, even though the heat does not really

belong to the pot, or the water, or the potato, or the rice. Similarly it is the power of Brahman in man that causes the mind and the intellect and the senses to perform their functions; and when that power ceases to act, these also stop work.

MAN IN BONDAGE

28. The true nature of the Jiva is eternal Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. It is due to egotism that he is limited by so many Upadhis (limiting adjuncts), and has forgotten his real nature.

29. The nature of the Jiva changes with the addition of each Upadhi. When a man dresses like a fop, wearing the fine black-bordered muslin, the love songs of Nidhu Babu spring to his lips. A pair of English boots inflates even a languid man with the delight of vanity; he begins to whistle immediately, and if he has to ascend a flight of stairs, he leaps up from one step to another like a Saheb. If a man holds a pen in his hand, he will go on scratching carelessly on any paper he happens to get.

30. As the snake is separate from its slough, even so is the Spirit separate from the body.

31. The Self is not attached to anything. Pleasure, pain, sinfulness, righteousness, etc., can never affect the Self in any way; but they can affect those who identify themselves with the body, as smoke can blacken only the wall but not the space enclosed within it.

32. The Vedantins say that the Atman is completely unattached. Sin or virtue, pain or pleasure, cannot affect it; but they can inflict sufferings on those who have

attachment to the body. The smoke can soil the walls, but can do nothing to the sky.

33. Men are of different natures according to the preponderance of Sattva, Rajas, or Tamas in them.

34. Though all souls are one and the same in their ultimate nature, they are of four classes according to their respective conditions. They are Baddha or bound, Mumukshu or struggling for liberation, Mukta or emancipated, and Nityamukta or ever-free.

35. A fisherman cast his net into the river and had a large haul. Some fish lay in the net calm and motionless, not exerting in the least to go out of it. Others struggled and jumped but could not extricate themselves, while a third class of fish somehow managed to force their way out of the net. In the world men too are thus of three kinds—those who are bound and never strive to be free, those who are bound but struggle for freedom, and those who have already attained freedom.

36. There are three dolls—the first made of salt, the second made of cloth, and the third of stone. If these dolls are immersed in water, the first will become dissolved and lose its form, the second will absorb a large quantity of water but retain its form, and the third will remain impervious to water. The first doll represents the man who merges his self in the universal and all-pervading Self and becomes one with It; he is the liberated man. The second represents the Bhakta or the true lover of God, who is full of Divine bliss and knowledge. And the third represents the worldly man who will not admit even a particle of true knowledge into his heart.

37. Men are like pillow-cases. The colour of one may be red, that of another blue, and that of a third black; but all contain the same cotton within. So it is with man; one is beautiful, another is black, a third holy, and a fourth wicked; but the Divine Being dwells in them all.

38. The outer layers of cakes are made of rice flour, but inside they are stuffed with different ingredients. The cake is good or bad according to the quality of its stuffing. So all human bodies are made of one and the same material, yet men are different in quality according to the purity of their hearts.

39. A Brahmin's son is no doubt a Brahmin by birth; but some of these born Brahmins grow up into great scholars, some become priests, others turn out cooks, and still others roll themselves in the dust before courtesans' doors.

40. It is true that God is even in the tiger; but we must not therefore go and face that animal. It is true that God dwells even in the most wicked beings, but it is not proper that we should associate with them.

41. The Deity Narayana (God) broods over the water, but every kind of water is not fit for drinking. Similarly, though it is true that God dwells in every place, yet every place is not fit to be visited by man. One kind of water may be used for washing our feet, another for purposes of ablution, and a third for drinking, while there are still others which are unfit even to be touched. Similarly there are different places, of which some may be approached and others visited, while there are still others which should only be saluted from a distance and bidden good-bye.

42. Beware of the following: the garrulous man; the man who is not open-hearted; the man who makes a parade of his devotion by sticking sacred Tulsi leaves on his ears; the woman who wears a long veil; and the cold water of the stagnant pool overgrown with rank vegetation, which is very injurious to health.

DEATH AND REINCARNATION

43. Even at the time of death the 'bound souls' speak of worldly matters only. There is no use in visiting places of pilgrimage, or bathing in the holy Ganges, or counting beads; if there are worldly attachments in the heart, they are sure to manifest themselves at the dying moment. Hence 'bound souls' indulge in random talks even at that time. A parrot may ordinarily sing the holy name of Radha-Krishna, but, when it is attacked by a cat, it cries out 'Kang', 'Kang'—its natural cry.

44. Man suffers so much simply for want of devotion to God. One should therefore adopt such means as would help the thought of God to arise in the mind at the last moment of one's life. The means is practice of devotion to God. If this is done during one's life-time, the thought of God is sure to occur to one's mind even at the last hour.

45. A man's rebirth is determined by what he has been thinking about just before death. Devotional practices are therefore very necessary. If, by constant practice, one's mind is freed from all worldly ideas, then the thought of God, which fills the mind in their place, will not leave it even at the time of death.

46. When an unbaked pot is broken, the potter can use the mud to make a new one; but when a baked one is broken, he cannot do the same any longer. So when a person dies in a state of ignorance, he is born again; but when he becomes well-baked in the fire of true knowledge and dies a perfect man, he is not born again.

47. A grain of boiled paddy does not sprout again when sown. Only unboiled paddy sends forth the shoot. Similarly when one dies after becoming a Siddha, a perfect man, he has not to be born again, but an Asiddha, an imperfect man, has to be born again and again until he becomes a Siddha.

CHAPTER II

MAYA

[*Maya as the Cosmic Power of the Lord—Maya as the deluding power (Avidya)—Maya as the liberating power (Vidya)*]

MAYA AS THE COSMIC POWER OF THE LORD

48. Maya is to Brahman what the snake in motion is to the snake at rest. Force in action is Maya, force in potency is Brahman.

49. As the water of the ocean is now calm and next agitated into waves, so are Brahman and Maya. The ocean in the tranquil state is Brahman, and in the turbulent state, Maya.

50. The relation of Brahman to Sakti is that of fire to its burning property.

51. Siva and Sakti (Intelligence and Energy) are both necessary for creation. With dry clay no potter can make a pot; water also is necessary. So Siva alone cannot create without the help of Sakti.

52. Desirous of seeing Maya I had one day a vision: A small drop slowly expanded and formed itself into a girl;

the girl became a woman and gave birth to a child; and as soon as the child was born, she took it up and swallowed it. In this way, many children were born to her and were devoured by her. Then I knew that she was Maya.

53. The snake itself is not affected by the poison in its fangs; but when it bites, the poison kills the creature bitten. Likewise Maya is in the Lord but does not affect Him, while the same Maya deludes the whole world.

MAYA AS THE DELUDING POWER (AVIDYA)

54. A certain Sadhu lived for sometime in a room in the temple of Dakshineswar. He did not speak to anybody and spent his whole time in meditation on God. One day, all of a sudden, a cloud darkened the sky, and shortly afterwards, a light wind blew away the cloud. The holy man now came out of his room and began to laugh and dance. Upon this the Master asked him, "How is it that you, who spend your days so quietly in your room, are dancing in joy and feeling so jolly today?" The holy man replied, "Such is Maya that envelops this life! No trace of it was there before; but suddenly it appears in the serene sky of Brahman, creating the whole universe, and is dispersed by the breath of Brahman."

55. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana went to the forest as exiles. Rama walked in front, Sita in the middle, Lakshmana behind her. Lakshmana was very anxious to have always a full view of Rama; but as Sita was in the middle, he could not have it. Then he prayed to Sita to move aside a little; and as soon as she did so, Lakshmana's wish

was fulfilled, and he saw Rama. Such is the arrangement of Brahman, Maya and Jiva in this world. So long as the illusion of Maya does not move aside, the creature cannot see the Creator—man cannot see God.

56. A holy man used to look and smile at the chandelier prism day and night. The reason for his doing so was that he saw various colours through the prism—red, yellow, blue, etc. Knowing these colours to be false, he realised with a smile that the world also was equally false.

57. Hari, wearing the mask of a lion's head, looks indeed very terrible. He goes where his little sister is playing, and yells hideously. She is shocked and terrified, and shrieks out in pain to escape from the frightful creature. But when Hari puts off the mask, the frightened girl at once recognises her loving brother and runs up to him, exclaiming, "Oh, it is my dear brother after all!" Such is the case with all men. They are deluded and frightened and made to do all sorts of things by the inscrutable power of Maya or nescience, behind which Brahman hides Himself. But when the veil of Maya is removed from the face of Brahman, one does not see in Him a terrible and uncompromising Master, but one's own most beloved inner Self.

58. If God is ommipresent, why do we not see Him? Observing from the bank of a pool thickly covered with scum and weeds, you will not see the water in it. If you desire to see the water, remove the scum from the surface of the pond. With eyes covered with the film of Maya, you complain that you cannot see God. If you wish to see Him, remove the film of Maya from your eyes.

59. As the cloud covers the sun, so Maya hides the Deity. When the cloud moves away, the sun is seen again; when Maya is removed, God becomes manifest.

60. The mythical swan can separate milk from the water with which it is diluted, and drink only the milk, leaving the the water behind. Other birds cannot do this. God is intimately mixed up with Maya. Ordinary men cannot see Him apart from Maya. Only the Paramahamsa can reject Maya, and reach God in His purity.

61. If you can find out the nature of Maya, the universal illusion, it will leave you just as a thief runs away when detected.

MAYA AS THE LIBERATING POWER (VIDYA)

62. In God there are both Vidya Maya and Avidya Maya. The Vidya Maya takes man towards God, whereas the Avidya Maya leads him astray. Knowledge, devotion, dispassion, compassion—all these are expressions of Vidya Maya; only with their help can one reach God.

63. It is Maya which reveals Brahman. Without Maya, who could have known Brahman? Without knowing Sakti, the manifested power of God, there is no means of knowing Him.

64. It is only due to Maya that the attainment of supreme knowledge and final beatitude becomes possible for us. Otherwise who could even dream of all this? From Maya alone spring duality, and relativity; beyond Maya there is neither the enjoyer nor the object of enjoyment.

65. The cat catches her kitten with her teeth and they are not hurt; but when a mouse is so caught, it dies. Thus Maya never kills the devotee, though it destroys others.

CHAPTER III

MAYA AS 'WOMAN AND GOLD'[1]

[The bondage of sex—Sex and spiritual progress—How to conquer sex?—Riches and the spiritual aspirant]

THE BONDAGE OF SEX

66. What is Maya? It is lust which forms an obstacle to spiritual progress.

67. Is it Maya or Meye (woman, sex) which has devoured everything?

68. Souls enmeshed in worldliness cannot resist the temptation of 'woman and gold' and direct their minds to God, even though these things bring upon them a thousand humiliations.

69. Be careful, O householders! Put not too much confidence in women; they establish their mastery over you very insidiously!

70. You cannot live in a sooty room, and at the same time escape being somewhat blackened in spite of all your caution. So also, if a man lives in the company of women, some carnality, however little, is bound to arise in him,

[1] In reading the sayings contained in this chapter and others, where reference is made to Kamini-Kanchana, 'woman and gold', one must specially bear in mind that the Master is propounding no cult of woman-hatred. The study of his sayings in their entirety, as well as perusal of the Introduction to

even though he may be very circumspect and has his senses under control.

71. If pitchers of ice-cold water and bottles of savoury sauces are placed near a man who is suffering from very high fever and is semi-delirious, do you think that it is possible for him, thirsty and restless that he is, to resist the temptation of drinking the water or tasting the sauces? Similarly the worldly man who suffers from the high fever of lust, and is thirsty for sensual pleasures, cannot resist temptations when he is placed between the charms of beauty on one side, and those of wealth on the other. He is sure to deviate from the path of devotion.

72. Once a Marwari gentleman approached Sri Ramakrishna and said, "How is it, Sir, that I do not see God although I have renounced everything?"

The Master: Well, haven't you seen leather jars for keeping oil?. If one of them is emptied of its contents, still it retains something of the oil as well as its smell.

this Volume, will show that his attitude towards womankind was one of profound respect bordering on worship. For he saw in them a symbol of the Divine Mother of the universe in a special sense. It was in this light that he himself viewed all women, and he wanted his devotees also to cultivate the same attitude. But at the same time he impressed on his disciples that when viewed with a sensual eye, 'woman' was the greatest danger to the spiritual aspirant. Of course, by 'woman' he meant 'sex' or 'carnality'; but the great teacher that he was, with deep insight into the workings of the human mind, he preferred to use the concrete for the abstract, and always spoke of the bondage of 'woman' and not of 'sex'. His motive must have been purely psychological; for speaking on the same subject to his women devotees, he used to warn them against the dangers from 'man'. Since his teachings were all recorded by men devotees, we naturally get warnings against dangers from 'woman' only and not from 'man'. Just as 'woman' stands for sex, 'gold' stands for the acquisitive instinct, and is a concrete representation of all the material things that men value and like to possess. The correct English expression for it is 'wealth' or 'riches'.

In the same way there is still some worldliness left in you, and its odour persists.

73. 'Woman and gold', remember, keep men immersed in worldliness and away from God. It is strange that no one has anything but praise for his own wife, be she good, bad or indifferent.

74. As the monkey sacrifices his life at the feet of the hunter, so does a man at the feet of a beautiful woman.

SEX AND SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

75. Those who wish to attain God or make progress in their devotional practices should particularly guard themselves against the snares of lust and wealth. Otherwise they will never attain perfection.

76. Nityananda asked Sri Chaitanya, "Why is it that all my teaching of Divine love produces no tangible result on the minds of men?" Sri Chaitanya replied, "Because, due to their association with women, they cannot retain the higher teachings. Listen, Brother Nityananda, there is no salvation for the worldly-minded."

77. When does the indicator of a balance move away from the pointed needle attached to the top? When one of the scales becomes heavier than the other. Similarly the mind runs away from God and gets unbalanced when the pressure of woman and wealth is placed upon it.

78. If there is a small hole at the bottom of a jar of water, the whole water will leak out. Similarly, if there is the smallest tinge of worldliness in the aspirant, all his exertions will come to naught.

79. Try to gain absolute mastery over the sexual instinct. If one succeeds in doing this, a physiological change is produced in the body by the development of a hitherto rudimentary nerve known as Medha (the function of which is to transmute the lower energies into the higher). The knowledge of the higher Self is gained after the development of this Medha nerve.

80. The mind steeped in affection for 'woman and gold' is like the green betel-nut. So long as the betel-nut is green, its kernel remains adhering to its shell, but when it dries up shell and nut are separated, and the nut moves within, if shaken. So when the affection for 'woman and gold' dries up, the soul is perceived as quite different from the body.

81. When the mind is free from attachment to sense-objects, it turns to God and is fixed on Him. The bound soul becomes free in this way. That soul is bound which takes the path leading away from God.

82. When attachment for wealth and sex is wiped out from the mind, what else is left in the soul? Only the bliss of Brahman.

HOW TO CONQUER SEX?

83. As persons living in a house infested with venomous snakes are always alert, so should men living in the world be always vigilant against the allurement of lust and greed.

84. On coming across a snake usually we say, "Mother Manasa, please move away showing your tail and hiding your head." So also it is wise to hold aloof from such

influences as have a tendency to excite sensuality. It is far better not to come in contact with them than to gain experience by a fall.

85. A disciple once asked Sri Ramakrishna how he was to conquer lust; for, 'though he was passing his days in religious contemplation, evil thoughts were arising in his mind from time to time. To him the Master said: "There was a man who had a pet dog. He used to caress it, carry it inabout his arms, play with it and kiss it. A wise man, seeing this foolish behaviour of his, warned him not to lavish such affection on a dog. For it was, after all, an irrational brute, and might bite him one day. The owner took the warning to heart and putting away the dog from his arms, resolved never again to fondle or caress it. But the animal could not at first understand the change in his master, and would run to him frequently to be taken up and caressed. Beaten several times, the dog at last ceased to trouble his master any more. Such indeed is your condition. The dog that you have been cherishing so long in your bosom will not easily leave you, though you may wish to be rid of it. However, there is no harm in it. Do not caress the dog any more, but give it a good beating whenever it approaches you to be fondled, and in course of time you will be altogether free from its importunities."

86. 'Woman and gold' have drowned the whole world in sin. 'Woman is disarmed when you view her as the manifestation of the Divine Mother. God cannot be seen so long as one's passion for 'woman and gold' is not extinguished.

87. Once a man attains God through intense Vairagya (freedom from worldly passions), temptations of sex disappear, and he finds himself in no danger even from his own wife. If there are two unequal magnets at an equal distance from a piece of iron, which of them will draw it with greater force? Certainly the larger one. Verily, God is the larger magnet. What can the smaller magnet, woman, do against it?

88. Snakes are venomous reptiles. If you try to catch them, you are sure to be bitten. But to the man who has learnt the art of snake-charming by the use of magnetised dust, it is not a very difficult affair to catch them. He can play even with seven of them twisted together and coiled round his neck. (Similarly a man of realisation is immune from the dangers of worldly life.)

89. One day a Marwari gentleman went to Sri Ramakrishna and asked him for permission to present him with some thousands of rupees. But the Master had nothing but a stern refusal for this well-meant offer. He said, "I shall have nothing to do with your money; for if I accept it, my mind would always be dwelling on it." The gentleman then proposed to invest the amount in the name of one of Sri Ramakrishna's relatives to be used by him for the Master's service. To this the Master replied, "No, it would be double-dealing. Moreover, it would always be in my mind that I am keeping my money with so-and-so."

But the Marwari still persisted in his proposal, quoting one of Sri Ramakrishna's own sayings, "If the mind is like oil, it will float even upon an ocean of 'woman and gold'."

At this the Master retorted: "That is true indeed; but if the oil floats on water for a considerable length of time, it becomes putrefied. In the same way, even if the mind were only to float over the ocean of 'woman and gold,' the continuous contact of the latter for a long period would surely tend to vitiate the mind and make it give out an evil odour."

RICHES AND THE SPIRITUAL ASPIRANT

90. Referring to the fact that the pursuit of wealth diverts an aspirant from the path of God, the Master once said to a young disciple: "Like a man of the world you have accepted a paid appointment. But you are working for your mother. Otherwise I should have said, 'For shame! For shame!'" He repeated this several times and then said, "Serve the Lord alone."

91. Referring to the degradation that service undertaken for the sake of money brings about, the Master said to a young disciple: "A change for the worse has come over his face. A dark shadowy film seems to have spread over it. All this is due to office work. There are the accounts and a hundred other matters to attend to."

92. Money is an Upadhi (a deceptive influence) of a very strong nature. As soon as a man becomes rich, he is thoroughly changed. A Brahmin who was very meek and humble used to come here (Dakshineswar) every now and then. After some time he stopped his visits, and we knew nothing of what happened to him. One day we went to Konnagore in a boat. As we were getting

down from the boat, we saw him sitting on the bank of the Ganges, where, in the fashion of big folk, he was enjoying the pure breeze of the river. On seeing me, he accosted me in a patronising tone with the words, "Hallo, Thakkur! How do you do now?" At once I noticed the change in his tone and said to Hriday who was with me, "I tell you, Hriday, this man must have come by some riches. See what a great change has come over him!" And Hriday burst into laughter.

93. Money can fetch you bread alone. Do not consider it as your sole end and aim.

94. There are some who boast of their wealth and power, of their name and fame and high status in society; but all these are for a few days only. None of these will follow them after death.

95. On two occasions the Lord smiles: First when the doctor comes to the bed-side of a patient who is seriously taken ill and is about to die, and says to his mother, "Why, madam, there is no cause for anxiety at all. I take upon myself the responsibility of saving your son's life." Next He smiles when two brothers, who are busy partitioning their land, take a measuring tape, put it across the land and say, "This side is mine, that side is yours."

96. There is nothing to be proud of in money. If you say you are rich, there are richer and richer men than you, in comparison with whom you are a mere beggar. After dusk when the glow-worms make their appearance, they think, "We are giving light to the world." But when the stars begin to twinkle, the pride of the glow-worms is

humbled. Now the stars begin to think, "We are illuminating the universe." But after a while the moon ascends the sky, and her silvery light humiliates the stars and they pale away in sadness. Again, the moon grows proud and thinks that by her light the world is lighted and bathed in beauty. But presently the dawn proclaims the ascent of the sun on the eastern horizon. And where is the moon now!

If they who think themselves rich ponder over these facts of Nature, they would never, never boast of their riches and power.

97. Water always flows out under a bridge but never stagnates; so money passes through the hands of the free, and is never hoarded by them.

98. He is truly a man to whom money is only a servant; but, on the other hand, those who do not know how to make proper use of it, hardly deserve to be called men.

CHAPTER IV

MAYA AS AHAMKARA OR EGOTISM[1]

[*Evils of egotism—The difficulty of conquering egotism—'Ripe' ego and 'unripe' ego—How to conquer the ego—Ego in the man of realisation*]

EVILS OF EGOTISM

99. The sun can give heat and light to the whole world, but he cannot do so when the clouds shut out his rays. Similarly as long as egotism veils the heart, God cannot shine upon it.

100. Egotism is like a cloud which keeps God hidden from our sight. If it vanishes by the mercy of the Guru, God is perceived in all His glory. For instance, you see in the picture that Sri Ramachandra, Who is God, is only two or three steps ahead of Lakshmana (the Jiva), but Sita (Maya), coming in between the two, prevents Lakshmana from having a view of Rama.

[1] *Ahamkara and Aham*—These two words have been variously translated here, accordingly to context, as egotism, the sense of 'I', the 'I', the ego, the 'I-ness' and so on. None of these is perhaps an exact equivalent. Indian philosophy and system of spiritual discipline understand by it the basic principle of individuation giving rise to the sense of 'I', the concomitant feeling of separation from God and other individuals, and all other psychical and physical develcpments following from it. The aim of spiritual life is to root out this prime source of all worldliness, and realise the unity of all existence.

101. *Q.* Sir, why are we in bondage like this? Why do we not see God?

A. Man's ego itself is Maya. It is the veil that shuts out the Light. Verily, with the death of the 'I' all troubles cease. If by the grace of the Lord a man once gains the knowledge that he is not the doer, then he assuredly becomes a Jivanmukta, one freed in this very life, and transcends all fear.

102. If I hold this cloth before me, you cannot see me any more, though I am still as near you as ever. So also though God is nearer to you than anything else, because of the screen of egotism you cannot see Him.

103. As long as there is egotism, neither Self-knowledge (Jnana) nor liberation (Mukti) is possible; and there is no cessation of birth and death.

104. Rice, pulse, potatoes and other things put in cold water in an earthen vessel can be touched with hand until they are heated on a fire. The same statement applies to the Jiva. This body is the earthen vessel; wealth and learning, caste and lineage, power and position are like rice, pulse and potatoes. Egotism is the heat. The Jiva is made hot (haughty) by egotism.

105. Rain-water never stands on high ground, but runs down to the lowest level. So also the mercy of God remains in the hearts of the lowly, but drains off from those of the vain and the proud.

106. Egotism is so injurious to man that as long as it is not eradicated there is no salvation for him. Look at the young calf and the troubles that come upon it through egotism. As soon as it is born, it cries,

'Ham hai'—'I am', 'I am'. The result of its egotism is that, when it grows up, if it is an ox, it is yoked to the plough, to drag carts full of heavy load; if a cow, it is kept tied to its post and is sometimes even killed and eaten. But still, in spite of all this punishment, the animal does not lose its egotism; for drums that are made of its hide produce the same sound of 'Ham', I. The creature does not learn humility until the cotton-carder makes bow-strings out of its entrails; for it is then that the animal's intestines sing out 'Tu hai'—'Thou art'. The 'I' must go and give place to the 'Thou'; and this is not achieved until man becomes spiritually awakened.

107. Freedom will come when your 'I-hood' (egotism) vanishes and you yourself are merged in the Divinity.

108. When does a man attain salvation? Only when his egotism dies.

109. *Q.* 'When shall I be free?

A. When that 'I' vanishes from you. 'I' and 'mine'—this is ignorance; 'Thou' and 'Thine'—that is true knowledge. The true devotee always says, "O Lord, Thou art the doer (Karta). Thou doest everything. I am a mere instrument in Thy hands. I do whatever Thou makest me do. All this is Thy glory. This home and this family are Thine, not mine; I have only the right to serve as Thou ordainest."

THE DIFFICULTY OF CONQUERING EGOTISM

110. The vanities of all others may gradually die out, but the vanity of a saint regarding his sainthood is hard indeed to wear away.

111. The cup in which garlic juice is kept retains the odour, though washed several times. Egotism is such an obstinate aspect of ignorance that it never disappears completely, however hard you may try to get rid of it.

112. The dyspeptic knows only too well that sour things are injurious to him, but such is the force of association that the sight of them is enough to make his mouth water. So, even if one tries hard to suppress the idea of 'I-ness' and 'mine-ness', yet when one begins to act, the 'unripe' ego asserts itself.

113. There are few who can attain Samadhi and get rid of the Aham—the feeling of 'I' within. Generally it does not go. You may reason and discriminate without end, yet this 'I' comes back again and again. Today you may cut down the Pepul tree, but tomorrow you will see it sprouting again.

114. Those who seek name and fame are under a delusion. They forget that everything is ordained by the Great Dispenser of all things and that all is due to the Lord and the Lord alone. The wise man says always, "It is Thou, O Lord, It is Thou"; but the ignorant and the deluded say, "It is I, it is I."

'RIPE' EGO AND 'UNRIPE' EGO

115. There are two types of egoes, one 'ripe' and the other 'unripe'. "Nothing is mine, whatever I see, or feel, or hear, nay, even this body itself, is not mine; I am always eternal, free and all-knowing,"—such ideas arise from the 'ripe' ego. "This is my house, this is my child, this is my

wife, this is my body,"—thoughts of this kind are the manifestation of the 'unripe' ego.

116. The ego that asserts "I am the servant of God" is characteristic of the true devotee. It is the ego of Vidya (Knowledge), and is called the 'ripe' ego.

117. What is the 'mischievous I'? The 'I' which says, "What! Don't they know me? I have so much money! Who is so wealthy as myself? Who dares to surpass me?"

118. The 'I' which makes a man worldly and attached to lust and wealth is mischievous. The individual soul and the Universal Being are separated because this 'I' comes in between them. If a stick is placed on the surface of water, the water will appear to be divided into two sections. The stick is the Aham—the 'I'. Take that away, and the water becomes again undivided.

HOW TO CONQUER THE EGO

119. If one ponders over this word 'I', trying to track it down, one sees that it is only a word which denotes egotism. But it is extremely difficult to shake it off. So one must say, "You wicked 'I', if you will not go by any means, remain as the servant of God." The ego that feels itself to be the servant of God is called the 'ripe I'.

120. Sankaracharya had a disciple who had been serving him for a long time but was not still given any instruction by him. Once, while seated alone, Sankara heard the footsteps of someone coming behind. So, he called out, "Who is there?" The disciple answered, "It is I." The

Acharya thereupon said, "If this 'I' is so dear to you, then either expand it to infinity (*i.e.*, know the universe as yourself), or renounce it altogether."

121. If you find that you cannot drive off this feeling of 'I', then let it remain as the 'servant I'. There is not much to fear from the ego which is centered in the thought, "I am the servant of God; I am His devotee." Sweets cause dyspepsia, but not sugar candy which is an exception. The 'servant I', the 'I' of a devotee, the 'I' of a child—each of these is like a line drawn with a stick on the surface of water. 'I' does not last long.

122. Just as sugar candy has no unwholesome effect like other sweets, so also the 'ripe' ego which considers itself to be the servant or worshipper of God causes none of those evil consequences characteristic of the 'unripe' ego. On the other hand it leads to God, and signifies that one has progressed in Bhakti Yoga or the path of devotion.

123. What is the nature of the feelings and impulses of one who has the attitude of the 'servant I'? If his conviction is true and sincere, then there remains only the forms, the appearance, of his former feelings and impulses. Even if the 'ego of the servant' or the 'ego of the devotee' remains, one who has realised God can hurt none. The whole sting of individuality vanishes from him. The sword becomes gold by a touch of the philosopher's stone. It retains its former shape, but can no longer hurt any one.

124. If you feel proud, let it be in the thought that you are the servant of God, the son of God. Great men have the nature of children. They are always children before Him; so they are free from pride. All their strength

is of God, and not their own. It belongs to Him and comes from Him.

125. A person who is convinced that everything is done by the will of God, feels himself to be a mere tool in His hands. He is then free from all bondage even in this very life. "Thou doest Thy work, Lord; but man says, 'I do it'!"

126. As long as one says, "I know" or "I do not know", one looks upon oneself as a person. My Divine Mother says: "It is only when I have effaced the whole of this Aham (I-ness) in you, that the Undifferentiated Absolute (My impersonal aspect) can be realised in Samadhi." Till then there is the 'I' in me and before me.

127. After a process of severe struggle with one's lower nature and the assiduous practice of spiritual discipline leading to Self-knowledge, one attains the state of Samadhi. Then the ego with all its train vanishes. But it is very difficult to attain Samadhi; the ego is very persistent. That is why we are born again and again in this world.

128. So long as one is not blessed with the vision Divine, so long as the touch of the philosopher's stone has not transmuted the base metal in one into gold, there will be the illusive feeling: 'I am the doer'. And until this illusion ceases, there will persist the idea that gives the sense of distinction between 'I have done this good work', and 'I have done that bad work'. Maya means this sense of distinction, and it is because of it that the world continues. One reaches Him if one takes refuge in Vidya Maya —that aspect of Divine Power having the preponderance

of Sattva—which leads one by the right path. He alone crosses the ocean of Maya, who comes face to face with God—realises Him. A man is truly free, even here in this embodied state, if he knows that God is the true agent and he by himself is powerless to do anything.

THE EGO OF THE MAN OF REALISATION

129. Will the sense of 'I' never die away completely? The petals of the lily drop off in time, but they leave their mark behind. So the ego of man entirely disappears (when he realises God), but traces of its former existence remain; this, however, does not produce any evil effect.

130. The truly wise man is he who has seen the Lord. He becomes like a child. The child, no doubt, seems to have an individuality, a separateness, of its own. But that individuality is a mere appearance, not a reality. The self of the child is nothing like the self of the grown-up man.

131. Some great souls who have reached the seventh or the highest plane of Samadhi, and have thus become merged in God-consciousness, are pleased to come down from that spiritual height for the good of mankind. They keep the ego of Knowledge (the Aham of Vidya), which is the same as the higher Self. But this ego is a mere appearance. It is like a line drawn across water.

132. As a piece of rope, when burnt, retains its form, but cannot serve to bind, so is the ego which is burnt by the fire of supreme Knowledge.

133. A man dreams that someone is coming to cut him to pieces. Frightened, he awakens with a groan and sees

that the door of his room is closed from within and that no one is inside it. Even then, his heart continues to beat fast for some minutes. So does our Abhimana, or sense of 'I', leave behind it some momentum even when it has departed.

134. After the attainment of Samadhi some still retain the ego—the 'I' of the servant or worshipper of God. Sankaracharya kept the ego of Vidya (knowledge) for the teaching of others.

135. Hanuman was blessed with the vision of God both with form and without it (Sakara and Nirakara). But he retained the ego of a servant of God. Such was also the case with Narada, Sanaka, Sananda and Sanatkumara.

A devotee. Were Narada and others only Bhaktas, or were they Jnanis also?

The Master: Narada and others had attained the highest Knowledge (Brahmajnana). But still they went on like the murmuring water of the rivulet, talking and singing the praise of God. This shows that they too kept this ego of Knowledge, a slight trace of individuality, to mark their separate existence from the Deity, for the purpose of teaching others the saving truths of religion.

136. Once the Master asked a disciple of his in a playful mood, "Well, do you notice in me any Abhimana (pride arising from the sense of 'I')? Have I any Abhimana?

The Disciple: Yes, Sir, a little; but that little has been kept for the following purposes: firstly for the preservation of the body; secondly, for the practice of devotion to God,

thirdly, for mixing with the company of devotees; and fourthly, for giving instruction to others. At the same time, it must be said that you have retained it only after a good deal of prayer. I mean, the natural state of your soul is capable of being described only by the word Samadhi. Hence I say that the Abhimana or egoism which you possess is the result of your prayer.

The Master: Yes, but it has been retained not by me but by my Divine Mother. It lies with my Divine Mother to grant the prayer.

CHAPTER V

BONDAGE OF BOOK-LEARNING

[*Barrenness of mere book-learning—Vanity of disputation—The true end of learning*]

BARRENNESS OF MERE BOOK-LEARNING

137. One day the late Keshab Chandra Sen came to Sri Ramakrishna in the temple of Dakshineswar and asked him, "How is it that even learned people remain so profoundly ignorant of things that truly matter in spiritual life, although they have read a whole library of religious books?" The Master replied, "The kite and the vulture soar high up in the air, but all the time their eyes remain fixed on charnel-houses in search of putrid carcasses; similarly the minds of the so-called learned men are attached to the things of the world, to lust and wealth, in spite of their erudition in sacred lore, and hence they cannot attain true Knowledge."

138. That knowledge which purifies the mind and heart alone is true Knowledge, all else is only a negation of Knowledge.

139. What is the use of mere book-learning? The Pandits may be familiar with plenty of sacred texts and couplets. But what is the good of repeating them? One must realise in one's life the truths embodied in the

scriptures. Mere reading will not bring Knowledge or salvation as long as one is attached to the world, as long as one is fond of 'woman and gold'.

140. Our so-called Pandits will talk big. They will talk of Brahman, of God, of the Absolute, of Jnana Yoga, of philosophy, of ontology, and the rest. But there are very few who have realised what they talk about. They are dry and hard, and good for nothing.

141. It is easy to utter 'do, re, mi, la, si, do' with the mouth, but it is difficult to play them on an instrument. So it is easy to talk on religion, but difficult to practise it.

142. A parrot repeats by rote the holy name of Radha-Krishna, but as soon as it is caught by a cat it screams 'kang, kang', betraying its natural cry. Worldly-wise men sometimes repeat the name of Hari (God) and perform various pious and charitable deeds with the hope of worldly gains, but when misfortune, sorrow, poverty and death overtake them, they forget Him and all such deeds.

143. Can love of God be acquired by reading holy books? In the Hindu almanac it is mentioned that on a particular day there will be twenty Adas (a unit of measure) of rain-water. But you will not be able to squeeze out of the almanac a single drop! So also many good sayings are to be found in holy books, but merely reading them will not make one religious. One must practise the virtues taught in such books in order to acquire love of God.

144.* In the kingdom of God reason, intellect and learning are of no avail. There the dumb speak, the blind see, and the deaf hear.

145. To explain God after merely reading the scriptures is like explaining to a person the city of Benares after seeing it only in a map.

146. The intoxication of hemp is not to be had by repeating the word 'hemp' even a thousand times. Get some hemp, pound it with water into a solution and drink it; you will then really get intoxicated. What is the use of crying aloud, "O God, O God!" Regularly practise devotion, and you will see God.

147. This knowledge of God comes not to the person who is proud of his learning or wealth. You may say to such a person, "There is a holy man in a certain place. Do you like to see him?" He is however, sure to put forward excuses and say that he cannot go. He thinks he is too big a man to pay a visit to such a person. Such pride is born of ignorance.

148. Those who have read a little become puffed up with pride. I had a conversation with a certain person on God. He said, "Oh, I know all this." I said to him, "Does one who had been to Delhi go about boasting of it? Does a gentleman ever tell us that he is a gentleman?"

149. Grantha does not always mean a holy scripture, but often it comes to mean a 'Granthi' or a knot. If a man does not read it with an intense desire to know the Truth, and renouncing all vanity, the mere reading of books only gives rise to pedantry, presumption, egotism, etc., which will be an encumbrance on his mind like so many knots.

150. Water is dried up at once if poured on a heap of ashes. Vanity is like this heap of ashes. Prayer and

contemplation produce no effect upon the heart puffed up with vanity.

VANITY OF DISPUTATION

151. Water poured into an empty vessel makes a bubbling noise, but when the vessel is full, no sound is heard. Similarly, the man who has not found God is full of vain disputation about His existence and nature. But he who has seen Him, silently enjoys the bliss Divine.

152. Common men talk 'bagfuls' of religion but do not act even a 'grain' of it. The wise man speaks little, even though his whole life is religion expressed in action.

153. When a large number of guests are invited to a feast, you first hear a tremendous noise produced by them; but it continues only till they commence eating. When the dishes are served and the guests fall to, threefourths of the noise subside. Then comes the course of sweetmeats. The more they are served, the more does the noise subside; and finally, when the turn comes for curds (the last course), only one sound is heard *viz.*, 'soop-soop'. The feast over, the next thing for the guests to do is to go to sleep!

The nearer you come to God, the less you are disposed to questioning and reasoning. When you actually attain Him, when you behold Him as the reality,—then all noise, all disputations, come to an end. Then is the time for sleep, *i.e.*, for enjoyment which comes in Samadhi, the state of communion with the Divine.

154. So long as the bee is outside the petals of the flower and has not tasted the sweetness of the nectar within, it hovers round humming; but when it gets into the flower, it drinks it noiselessly. So long as a man disputes about doctrines and dogmas, he has not tasted the nectar of true faith. Once he tastes that, he becomes silent.

155. One who has just taken to the study of a foreign language, while talking, constantly resorts to words belonging to that language in order to make a show of his attainments; but he who knows the language well seldom uses it when speaking in his own mother tongue. Such indeed is the case with those who are well advanced in religion.

156. At a distance from the market, we hear only a loud buzzing noise; but entering the market, we hear it no longer, and perceive the bargains that are being carried on. Similarly, so long as a person is far away from God, he cannot but be in the midst of the confusion of sophistry, vain argument and discussion; but once he approaches God, all arguments and discussions cease, and he gains a clear and vivid perception of the mysteries of God.

157. Throw an unbaked cake of flour into hot ghee, and it will make a sort of noise. But the more it is fried, the less is the noise; and when it is fully fried, the bubbling ceases altogether. So long as a man has a little knowledge, he goes about talking and preaching; but when the perfection resulting from true Knowledge is gained, he no more makes vain display.

158*. When the grace of the Almighty descends on any one he immediately understands his mistakes; knowing this, you should not dispute.

THE TRUE END OF THE LEARNING

159. Sacred books only point out the way to God. Once you have known the way, what is the use of books? Then comes the time for the culture of the soul in solitary communion with God. A person received a letter from his village-home, asking him to send certain things to his kinsmen. When he was going to order for them, he wanted to ascertain from the letter the articles requisitioned. So he searched for the letter, which was then missing. At last, to his great delight, it was found out after a long search. He took it up eagerly, and went through the contents, which ran as follows: "Please send five Seers of sweetmeats, a hundred oranges and eight pieces of cloth." Knowing the contents, he threw the letter aside and set about procuring the articles.

How long then does one care for such a letter? So long as one does not know the contents. The contents being known once, the next step is to put forth the necessary effort to get the things desired. Similarly the sacred books tell us only the way to God, *i.e.*, of the means for the realisation of God. That being once known, the next step is to work one's way to the goal. Realisation is the goal.

160. Para-vidya, *i.e.*, higher knowledge, is that by which we know God. All else, mere scriptures, philosophy, logic, or grammar, as such, only burden and puzzle the mind. The Granthas (books) are sometimes Granthis (knots). They are good only when they lead to the higher knowledge.

161. Many think that knowledge of God cannot be attained except through the study of books. But higher

than reading is hearing, and even higher than hearing is seeing or realising. The hearing of the truth from the lips of the preceptor makes a greater impression on the mind than the mere reading of books; but seeing makes the greatest impression. Better than reading about Benares is hearing about the place from the lips of one who has actually visited it; but the best is to see Benares with one's own eyes.

162*. Only two kinds of people can attain to self-knowledge: those who are not encumbered at all with learning, that is to say, whose minds are not over-crowded with thoughts borrowed from others; and those who, after studying all the scriptures and sciences, have come to realise that they know nothing.

163. People talk of errors and superstitions, and feel proud of their book-learning; but the sincere devotee finds the loving Lord ever ready to lend him a helping hand. It matters not if he had been walking along a wrong path for a time. The Lord knows what he wants and in the end fulfils his heart's desires.

164. Two friends went into an orchard. One of them possessing much worldly wisdom, immediately began to count the mango trees there and the number of mangoes each tree bore, and to estimate what might be the approximate value of the whole orchard. His companion went to the owner, made friendship with him, and then, quietly going to a tree, began, at his host's desire, to pluck the fruits and eat them. Whom do you consider to be the wiser of the two? Eat mangoes! It will satisfy your hunger. What is the good of counting the trees and leaves

and making calculations? The vain man of intellect busies himself uselessly with finding out the 'why' and 'wherefore' of creation, while the humble man of wisdom makes friends with the Creator and enjoys His gift of supreme bliss.

165. One ray of light from my Divine Mother, Who is verily the Goddess of Wisdom, has power to cow down even the most learned of Pandits and make him appear like an insignificant worm crawling upon the earth.

166. Utter the word Gita, in quick succession, a number of times—Gi-ta-gi-ta-gi-tagi. It is then virtually pronounced as 'Tagi', 'Tagi', which means one who has renounced the world for the sake of God. Thus, in one word, the Gita teaches, "Renounce, ye world-bound men! Renounce everything, and fix the mind on the Lord."

167. In the course of his pilgrimage through the southern parts of India, Chaitanya Deva came across a certain devotee who was in tears all the while a Pandit was reading from the Gita. Now this devotee knew not even the alphabet. He could not follow a single text of the Gita. On being asked why he shed tears, he replied, "It is indeed true that I do not know a word of the Gita. But all the while it was being read, I could not help seeing with my inner eye the beautiful form of my Lord Sri Krishna seated before Arjuna in a chariot in the field of Kurukshetra, and giving out all those sublime thoughts embodied in the Gita. This it was that filled my eyes with tears of joy and love."

This man, who knew not letters, had the highest Knowledge, for he had pure love for God and could realise Him.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGIOUS TEACHERS—FALSE AND TRUE

[*Pitfalls of teachership—True teachers*]

PITFALLS OF TEACHERSHIP

168. Do you, O preacher, carry the badge of authority? The humblest servant of the king, authorised by him, is heard with awe and respect, and can quell a riot by showing his badge; so must you, O preacher, first, obtain your commission and inspiration from God Himself. So long as you do not have this badge of Divine inspiration, you may preach all your life, but it will be mere waste of breath.

169. None has patience or desire to dive deep into Divine love. None cares for discrimination and dispassion for worldly things (Viveka and Vairagya), or for devotional practices (Sadhana). On the other hand, all will rush to lecture and to teach with only a bit of book-learning. Strange indeed! To teach others is the most difficult of tasks. He alone can teach, who gets commission from God after having realised Him.

170. What do you think of the man who is a good orator and preacher, but whose spiritual powers are undeveloped? He is like the person who squanders another's property entrusted to him. He can easily advise others, for it costs him nothing since the ideas he expresses are not his own but borrowed.

171. A well-known speaker was lecturing once in a Harisabha (religious association). In the course of his speech he said, "The Lord is totally devoid of Rasa (sweetness); we must make Him sweet by lending to Him the sweetness of our own nature." By Rasa he meant love and other divine attributes. When I heard this, I was reminded of the boy who said that his mother's brother had many horses, and sought to convince his hearers by explaining that they occupied a whole cowshed. Of course, the intelligent could at once see that cowsheds are not meant for horses, that the youngster was telling a lie, and that he had no experience or knowledge of horses.

To say that God is devoid of Rasa was an absurdity, which proved that the speaker was totally ignorant of what he was saying. He had never realised the Supreme Being, Who is the very fountain of eternal love, wisdom and joy.

172. What is your opinion about the method employed by present-day religious preachers? It is like inviting a hundred persons to a dinner with food enough only for one. It is only pretending to be a great religious teacher with a small stock of spiritual experience.

173. First install God in the temple of your heart; first realise Him. Speeches, lectures and the rest may be taken up after you have seen God, not before. People

talk glibly of God and Brahman, while they are attached to the things of the world. What does all this amount to? Mere blowing of the conch (Sankha) for Divine Service without God to worship within the temple.

174. One day as I was going through Panchavati, I heard the frightful croaking of a frog. I guessed it must have been caught by a snake. When after a long time I was returning that way, I again heard the same noise. Peeping through the bushes, I saw a water snake with a frog in its mouth. It could neither swallow it, nor let it go, and there was no end to the agony of the frog. Then I thought, "Well, had it been the victim of a cobra, it would have been silenced for ever after three croaks at the most (and then there would have been no more suffering either for the frog or the snake). But here the snake's suffering is almost equal to the frog's." So if an unenlightened man takes upon himself in his foolhardiness the responsibility of saving another, there is no end to the misery of both. Neither does the ego of the disciple vanish, nor are his worldly ties cut asunder. If the disciple comes under the influence of an unworthy teacher, he never gets liberation. But under a competent teacher the egotism of the Jiva perishes with three croaks."

175. There was a professional preacher who could rouse strong devotional feelings in the hearts of his hearers whenever he delivered religious discourses; but personally he was not a man of character. Pained at the kind of life he led, I asked him one day how it was that he moved so many hearts to devotion, while he himself lived such an unworthy life. The man bowed and said, "Yes, Sir, the

broom though a contemptible thing, removes the dust and dirt on the floor and the street!" Of course I could not answer him.[1]

WHO IS A TRUE TEACHER?

176. He alone is the true teacher who is illumined by the light of true Knowledge.

177. As many people have merely heard of snow but not seen it, so many religious preachers have only read in books about the attributes of God, but not realised them for themselves. And as many others have seen snow but not tasted it, so many religious teachers have obtained only a glimpse of Divine glory but have not understood its real essence. Only he who has tasted the snow can say what it is like. Similarly, he alone can describe the attributes of God, who has associated with Him in His different aspects in the relationship of a servant, a friend and a lover, and has realised his oneness with Him in complete absorption in Him.

178. If one has the idea that one is a leader and has formed a sect, one's ego is 'unripe'. But if one gets commission from God after realising Him, and preaches for the good of others, there is no harm. Sukadeva had such a commission to reveal the Bhagavata to Parikshit.

179. When the jar is full, it does not make noise any more. So the man of realisation too does not talk

[1] This need not be taken as a contradiction of the main theme of this chapter. For the effect which preaching of this type produces is temporary and is unlike the permanent change which the words of men of true spiritual realisation produce in their disciples.

much. But what then about Narada and others? Yes; Narada, Sukadeva and a few others like them came down several steps after the attainment of Samadhi, and out of mercy and love they taught mankind.

180. There are two classes of perfect men in the world —those who, on attaining Truth, become silent and enjoy it all by themselves without any thought of others; and those who attain Truth, but finding no pleasure in keeping it to themselves, cry out in a trumpet voice to all—"Come ye, and enjoy the Truth with us."

181. Bees come of themselves to the full-blown flower when the breeze wafts its fragrance all around. Ants come of themselves to the spot where sweets are placed. No one need invite the bee or the ant. So when a man becomes pure and perfect, the sweet influence of his character spreads everywhere, and all who seek the Truth are naturally drawn towards him. He need not go in search of an audience to listen to him.

182. Ants gather of themselves where the sweetmeats have fallen. Try to become sugar candy, *i.e.*, have within yourselves the sweetness of an enlightened spiritual consciousness, and the ants (devotees) will come to you of themselves. If you preach without commission from God, your preaching will be powerless, and none will listen to it. One must attain God by devotion or by any other means, and then, if one receives His word, one may teach and preach anywhere and everywhere. For only thus can one get power and strength from Him; and only then can one rightly discharge the responsible duties of a preacher.

183. When fire burns, the moths come, one knows not whence, and fall into it. The fire never goes about inviting the moth. Such is the preaching of the perfect. They do not go about inviting others, but hundreds and thousands, of their own accord, go to them—one knows not whence—seeking instruction from them.

184. What is true preaching like? Instead of preaching to others, if one worships God all the time, that is preaching enough. He who exerts himself to attain emancipation from birth and death is the real preacher. To him who is free hundreds of people come from all sides anxious to be taught. When a rose blossoms, bees come from all sides uninvited.

185. When corn is measured out to a purchaser from the granary of a big merchant, the man engaged in measuring out goes on unceasingly with his work, having a constant supply of grain. A petty dealer's store, on the other hand, is soon exhausted. Similarly, it is God Himself Who unfailingly inspires thoughts and sentiments in His devotees, and that is why they are never lacking in what is new and wise. But the book-learned, like petty grocers, soon find themselves short of thoughts and ideas.

186. Gas-light illumines different parts of the city in varying degrees. But the life of the light, namely, the gas, comes from one common source. So the true religious teachers of all climes and ages are like lamps through which is revealed the life of the Spirit flowing constantly from the one source, the Almighty Lord.

187. Rain-water falling upon the roof of a house flows down to the ground through spouts shaped grotesquely like

a tiger's head. One gets the impression that the water comes from the tiger's mouth, but in reality it descends from the sky. In the same way the holy teachings that come from the mouths of godly men seem to be uttered by those men themselves, while in reality they proceed from God.

CHAPTER VII

THE WORLDLY-MINDED AND THEIR WAYS

[*Characteristics of the worldly-minded—Fickle devotion of the worldly-minded—The worldly-minded and spiritual practices*]

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORLDLY-MINDED

188. Men are of two classes—men in name only (Manush) and the awakened men (Man-hush). 'Those who thirst after God alone belong to the latter class; those who are mad after 'woman and gold' are all ordinary men—men in name only.

189. As one mask may be worn by various persons, so also various kinds of creatures have donned the garb of humanity. Some are tearing wolves, others are ferocious bears, and some again are cunning foxes or venomous snakes, though they all look like men.

190. Just as it is the nature of the sieve to reject the fine grains and to keep the coarse ones, so it is the nature of evil souls to reject the good and retain the evil. Just the opposite is the nature of the winnowing basket and of good souls.

191. There are people who are so situated in life that naturally they have nothing in the world to attract them, but would yet create for themselves some attachment and get themselves bound by it. They neither want nor like to be free. A man who has no family to care for, nor relatives to look after, generally takes a cat or a monkey or a dog or a bird for a pet and fondles it, and thus 'slakes his thirst for milk with mere whey'. Such is the snare that Maya's charm has set for humanity.

192. The new-born calf looks very lively and gay. It runs and frisks about all day long, only stopping now and then to suck the sweet milk from its dam. But no sooner is the rope tied round its neck than it begins to pine away gradually, and, far from being merry, wears a dejected and sorrowful look, and gets emaciated. In the same way, so long as a boy has no concern with the affairs of the world, he is quite merry and gay. But when he once gets himself locked in the world, as it were, with the strong bar of wedlock, and is harnessed with the responsibilities of family life, all his joy vanishes. He wears a look of dejection, care and anxiety; no more is there the glow of health on his cheeks, and deep wrinkles gradually furrow his forehead. Blessed is he that remains a boy throughout his life, free as the morning air, fresh as a newly opened flower, and pure as a dew-drop.

193. As a little boy or girl can have no idea of conjugal pleasure, even so a worldly man cannot at all comprehend the ecstasy of Divine communion.

194. The worldly man cannot easily resist the lure of 'woman and gold', and turn his mind to God, although he

may be relentlessly buffeted by the miseries and sufferings of life.

195. A worldly man is best known by his antipathy to whatever savours of religion. Not only does he himself dislike to hear any hymn or sacred music or the chanting of the holy 'name' of God, but he dissuades others from listening to them. He who scoffs at prayers, religious societies and pious men, is indeed a true worldling.

196. Sometimes I see worldly-minded men coming to me with pious devotees. These worldly men have no liking for religious conversations. So they become very impatient and restless while the others are having long talks about God and spirituality. They find it very difficult even to sit still, and hence whisper in their friends' ears, "When are you going? How long will you stay?" Occasionally their friends would say, "Wait a little. We are coming presently." Disgusted with their words, these worldly men would reply, "Then you had better continue your talk. We shall go now and wait for you in the boat" (which was to take them back to Calcutta).

197. While talking with a worldly man, one can see clearly how his heart is stuffed with all kinds of worldly thoughts and desires, just as the crop of the pigeon is filled with grain.

198. The heart of a sinful man is like curly hair. You will never succeed in straightening it, howsoever you may try. So also the heart of the wicked cannot be easily made upright and pure.

199. The mendicant's calabash jug (Kamandalu) may have been to the four Dhamas (the four chief places of

pilgrimage which a Sadhu is expected to visit), yet it remains as bitter as ever. Such is the nature of worldly-minded men.

200. The potter shapes various forms with unburnt clay, but he cannot work the clay that has once been burnt. In the same way the heart that has been burnt in the fire of worldly desires cannot be acted upon by any higher sentiment, and is incapable of being moulded into any lovely form.

201. As water can never soak a piece of stone, so religious teachings can produce no impression on a soul in bondage (Baddha-jiva).

302. As a nail cannot be driven into a stone but enters easily into the earth, so the advice of the pious does not affect the soul of a worldly man while it goes deep into the heart of a believer.

203. As soft clay easily takes an impression, but not hard stone, so also Divine wisdom impresses itself on the heart of a devotee, but not on a bound soul.

204. As the water under a bridge enters from one side and passes out at the other, so religious advice given to the worldlings enters the mind through one ear and goes out by the other, without leaving any impression.

205. What is the characteristic of the worldly-minded man? He is like the mongoose in the tamer's pot. The mongoose-tamer fixes a pot high up in a wall to serve as a nest for the animal. He ties one end of a rope round the neck of the mongoose while the other end is fastened to a weight. Coming out of the pot, the mongoose goes down the wall and wanders about here and there, but when

frightened, runs back into the pot to hide itself there. Unfortunately it cannot stay there long, as the weight at the other end of the rope drags it down from its comfortable home. Similarly, the worldly man is often forced by the chastening influence of the sufferings and miseries of life to soar high above the world and take refuge in God, but the dead weight of the world with all its attraction soon pulls him down.

206. Seeing the gleaming water pass through the valve of the bamboo trap placed in rice fields, small fish enter the trap with great glee. But having once entered, they cannot come out. Similarly, foolish men enter the meshes of the world, lured by its false glitter; but it is much easier to enter than to escape; and they are caught like little fish and imprisoned for good.

207. The fettered ones—the worldlings—are never awakened. How sorrows assail them, how frauds deceive them, and how dangers threaten them! Yet they do not 'wake up', even as the camel, so fond of the prickly bush and the nettle, does not cease browsing on them though they make its mouth bleed. The man of the world suffers so much, yet in a few days he forgets everything. Perhaps his wife has died or proved faithless; and lo! he marries again. Or perhaps his child has died, and he weeps; but in a short while everything has slipped out of his memory. And the mother of the child, who has been so overwhelmed with grief, is again looking to her toilet, and wearing ornaments and jewels. Parents are impoverished by their daughter's marriage, and yet annually children are born to them. And these men, though ruined by

law-suits, will yet go for litigation. They have not the wherewithal to provide well for their children, yet they will beget more children every year!

The worldling is sometimes like a snake that has caught hold of a mole which it can neither swallow nor throw out. Possibly he has come to see that there is nothing substantial in the world, that it is all skin and stone like sour-sop (Amrah fruit), yet he cannot forget the world and set his heart on God. If you remove him from worldly environment and place him in holy surroundings, he will lose heart and pine away, even as a worm which lives and thrives on filth will die if kept in a pot of rice.

208. None would keep milk in an earthen pot which has once been used for preparing curd lest the milk should get curdled. Nor can it be safely used for cooking, because it may crack upon the fire. It is therefore almost useless. So also a good and experienced Guru does not entrust valuable and exalted precepts to a worldly man, for he is sure to misinterpret and misuse them for his own mean ends. Nor will he ask him to do any useful work which may cost a little labour lest he should think that the preceptor is taking undue advantage of him.

209. Man cannot renounce the world even if he wishes, because he is thwarted by the Karmas that are bearing fruit in the present birth and by the impressions of previous actions left on the mind (Prarabdha and Samskara). Once a Yogi asked a king to sit down near him and meditate upon God. To him the king replied, "No, Sir, that cannot be. I can remain near you, but, still the thirst for worldly enjoyment will be with me. If I remain in

this forest, perhaps there will arise a kingdom within it, as I am still destined to enjoy."

FICKLE DEVOTION OF THE WORLDLY-MINDED

210. Worldly persons may perform many pious and charitable acts in the hope of earthly rewards, but at the approach of misfortune, sorrow and poverty, their piety and charity forsake them. They are like the parrot that repeats, 'Radha-Krishna, Radha-Krishna' the livelong day, but cries, 'Kang, Kang' when caught by a cat, forgetting the Divine name.

Therefore, I say unto you, preaching religion to such men will prove useless. In spite of all your sermons they are sure to remain as worldly as ever.

211. A spring cushion is pressed down when one sits upon it but soon resumes its shape when the pressure is removed. So it is with worldly men. They are full of religious sentiment as long as they hear religious talk; but as soon as they enter upon the routine of their daily life they forget all those high and noble thoughts, and become as impure as before.

212. Iron appears red-hot in the furnace, but becomes black soon after it is taken out. In the same way worldly men are full of religious emotion as long as they are in a temple or in the society of the pious; but no sooner do they leave these associations, than the flood of devotion in them subsides.

213. As the fly now sits on an unclean sore and next on offerings to God, so the mind of the worldly man is at

one time engaged in religious topics and at the next loses itself in the pleasures of wealth and lust.

214. The heart of the worldly man is like the worm in a dung-hill. The worm always lives in the dung and loves to live therein. If by chance someone takes it out of that filthy habitation and put it on a lotus-flower, it will soon die of the fragrance of the flower. So the worldly man cannot live even for a moment outside the dirty atmosphere of worldly thoughts and desires.

215. Do you know what worldly people's idea of God is like? It is like the children's prattle while they play among themselves. Sometimes they swear, saying, "By God, I say!" They learn this from their elders when they hear them taking an oath. Or, at best, it is like the utterance of the dandy who with all his foppish airs goes to a garden in one of his idle promenades, whistling and twirling his stick about, and picks up a flower and exclaims, "O what a beautiful flower God has made!" It is only a momentary mood like the sprinkling of a drop of water on a bar of redhot iron. So, I say, you must thirst for Him. You will have to take a deep plunge into the ocean.

THE WORLDLY-MINDED AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

216. A husbandman was watering a sugar-cane field throughout the day. After finishing his task he saw that not a drop of water had entered the field; all the water had run underground through several big rat-holes. Such is the state of the devotee who worships God, secretly cherishing ambitions and worldly desires in his heart.

Though he may be praying daily, he makes no progress, because his entire devotion runs to waste through the rat-holes of these desires, and at the end of his lifelong devotion, he remains the same as before.

217. Why does the mind become unsteady when engaged in contemplation? The fly sits at times on the sweetmeats kept exposed for sale in the shop of the confectioner; but when a scavenger passes by with a basketful of filth, the fly leaves the sweets and at once settles on the filth. On the other hand, the bee in search of honey sits only on flowers and never on filthy objects. Worldly men, like flies, get occasionally a momentary taste of the sweetness of Divine love, but their natural hankering after filth soon brings them back to the dung-hill of worldliness. The great Paramahamsas are, however, always absorbed in the contemplation and enjoyment of Divine love.

218. An evil spirit is exorcised by throwing charmed mustard seeds on the possessed; but if the evil spirit has possessed the mustard seeds themselves, how can they be of any use in exorcising it? If the mind with which you contemplate the Deity is tainted with the vicious thoughts of the world, how can you expect to do your religious devotions successfully with such a corrupt instrument?

219. A wet match does not ignite, however hard you may strike it; it only smokes. But a dry match lights at once, even with the slightest rubbing. The heart of the true devotee is like the dry match; the slightest mention of the name of the Lord kindles the fire of love in his heart, while the mind of the worldly man, soaked in lust and attachment for wealth, resists all warmth like the

moistened match. Though God may be preached to him several times, the fire of Divine love can never be kindled in him.

220. A worldly man may be endowed with as much intelligence and knowledge as a Jnani, may take as much pains and trouble as a Yogi, and may make as great sacrifices as an ascetic; but all his exertions are in vain since his energies are misdirected, and since he does all these for the sake of worldly honour and wealth, and not for the sake of the Lord.

221. The soiled mirror never reflects the rays of the sun; similarly those who are impure and unclean at heart and are deluded by Maya never perceive the glory of the Lord. But the pure in heart see the Lord as the clear mirror reflects the sun. Therefore be pure.

222. When a certain quantity of pure milk is mixed with double the quantity of water, it requires a good deal of time and labour to condense it into Kshira (condensed milk). The mind of a worldly man is largely diluted with the filthy water of evil and impure thoughts, and he has to work long and hard to purify it and give it the proper strength and consistency characteristic of a truly pious heart.

223.* Q. Why is it that worldly men do not give up everything to find God?

A. Can an actor coming on the stage throw off his mask at once? Let worldly men play out their part, and in time they will throw off their false appearance.

224. The soul that is wholly world-bound is like the worm that lives for ever in filth, and dies there and has no idea of anything better. The soul whose worldliness is

of lesser intensity is, however, like the fly that sits now on filth and now on sugar. The free soul alone is like the bee that always drinks honey and tastes nothing else.

225.* The worldly man is like the alligator. As the body of the alligator is not pervious to the strokes of any weapon, and as it cannot be put to death except by striking at the belly, so no matter how much good advice you give to the worldly man, and no matter how much self-disgust you arouse in him, he will never realise his situation fully unless you wean him from the objects of his attachment.

226. Worldly men will not act up to your advice if you ask them to renounce everything and devote themselves to the lotus-like feet of the Lord. Hence, after much deliberation as to how to attract such souls, Gour and Nitai[1] hit upon a plan of alluring them, and said, "Come, take the name of Hari, and you will have a nice soup of Magur fish and the caress of a young damsel." These two items tempted many to join them and take the name of the Lord. When by and by they came to have a little taste of the nectar of the holy name, they understood the hidden meaning of Nitai's teaching. The soup of the Magur fish is nothing but the streams of tears they shed in love of God. The earth is 'the young damsel', and to be caressed by her, means to roll on earth in the rapture of Divine love.

[1] Lord Chaitanya and his companion Nityananda.

BOOK II

THE ASCENT OF MAN

He who has not given up sinful ways, whose senses have not been restrained, who is unmeditative, and whose mind is devoid of peace, cannot attain Him even by a highly cultivated intelligence.

O good-looking youth, taking hold of that bow, the mighty weapon of scriptural wisdom (embodied in Om, the sound symbol of the Most High) and fixing the arrow (of the self) rendered sharp by devoted worship, draw it with the mind absorbed in His thought, and hit the mark—even that Imperishable Being.

He in whom are woven the heaven, the earth, the sky, and the mind together with the vital energies, know Him, that Atman alone, and give up all other vain talk. This is the path to Immortality.

The Upanishads

CHAPTER VIII

VARIETIES OF ASPIRANTS AND THEIR IDEALS

[*Some types of aspirants—Characteristics of true aspirants—Kinship of the spiritually-inclined—Ideals of the aspirant entangled in the world—Ideals of the Sannyasin*]

SOME TYPES OF ASPIRANTS

227. Out of the myriads of paper kites that are seen flying in the air, only one or two gets free by the snapping of the string. So out of hundreds of aspirants practising spiritual disciplines only one or two gets free from worldly bondage.

228. There is a fabled species of birds called 'Homa'. They live so high up in the heavens and love those high regions so dearly that they never come down to the earth. And it is said that they even lay their eggs in the sky, and that their young ones are hatched in mid-air as the eggs fall, pulled down by gravity. No sooner do these fledglings find out that they are falling downwards, than they immediately change their course and instinctively fly up towards their

home. Men like Sukadeva, Narada, Jesus and Sankaracharya are like these birds. Even in their boyhood they become free from all attachment to the things of the world and betake themselves to the highest regions of true Knowledge and Divine light.

229.* There are two classes of Yogis, hidden and open. The former go through religious practices in secret and keep themselves hidden from public gaze. The latter carry about them the external symbols of the Yogi, such as a staff, and converse freely on spiritual subjects.

230.* Though it is the general rule that flowers appear first and then fruits, there are some plants and creepers which bear fruits first and then flowers. Similarly, ordinary persons have to go through Sadhanas before they realise God but there is a class of aspirants who realise God first, and then perform the Sadhanas.

231. Of the grains of paddy fried in a frying pan, the few that leap out of the pan and burst outside are the best fried, for they are without any mark of charring. On the other hand, every one of the properly fried grains in the pan is sure to have some charred mark on it, however small. So of all good devotees, those few who give up the world altogether and go out of it are perfect without any spot, while even the best of those who are in the world must have at least some small spot of imperfection in their character.

232. Butter churned early in the morning is the best; that churned after sunrise is not so good. Addressing his young disciples who became Sannyasins later on, the Master used to say, "You are like butter churned early in

the morning while my householder disciples are like butter churned late in the day."

233. The young bamboo can be easily bent, but the full grown bamboo breaks when it is bent with force. It is easy to bend the young heart towards God, but the untrained heart of the old escapes the hold whenever it is so drawn.

234. The parrot cannot be taught to sing when the the vibrating membrane in its throat has hardened too much due to age. It must be taught to sing while young, before the collar line appears on its neck. So in old age it is difficult to learn how to fix the mind on God, but it can be easily learnt in youth.

235. A ripe mango may be offered to God, or used for some other purpose; but if it is pecked by a crow even once, it is unfit for any use. It can neither be offered to the Deity, nor presented to a Brahmin, nor may it be eaten by the pure. So boys and girls should be dedicated to the service of God before the impurities of worldly desires taint their hearts. Once worldly desires enter their minds, or the demon of sensual pleasures casts his baneful shadow over them, it is very difficult indeed to make them tread the path of virtue.

236. The love in the heart of a boy is whole and undivided. When he gets married in time, half of his heart, if not more, is given away to his wife, and when children are born to him, he loses another quarter thereof, while the remaining quarter is divided among father, mother, honour, fame, pride, dress, and the rest; therefore he has no love left to offer to God. Hence if the undivided

mind of a boy is directed early enough to God, he may gain His love, and realise Him easily. But it is not quite so easy for grown-up people to do so.

237. If you ask whether there is any difference between the Jnanis who live in the world and those who renounce it, I would say that the two are the same. Both of them have the same Jnana in common. But if the Jnani is in the world, he has cause to fear; for life in the midst of sensual attractions is attended with the fear of fall, slight as it is. If you live in a sooty room, you are sure to get a little tainted by the soot, however careful you may be.

238. To some one the Master said: "Well, you have now come to seek God when you have spent the best part of your life in the world. Had you entered the world after realising God, what peace and joy you would have found!"

239. *Q.* What is the difference between the Sattvic, the Rajasic and the Tamasic ways of worship?

A. The man who worships from the very depth of his heart without the least ostentation or vanity is a Sattvic worshipper. The man who gives much attention to decorating his house, makes much fuss about music and dancing, and makes all costly and elaborate arrangements for a rich feast when celebrating the worship of the Deity, is a Rajasic worshipper. The man who immolates hundreds of innocent goats and sheep on the altar, has dishes of meat and wine for offerings, and is absorbed only in dancing and singing while conducting worship, is a Tamasic worshipper.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE ASPIRANTS

240. The flint may remain for myriads of years under water and still not lose its inner fire. Strike it with steel whenever you like, and out flashes the glowing spark. So is the true devotee firm in his faith. Though he may remain surrounded by all the impurities of the world, he never loses his faith in, and love of, God. He warms up with devout enthusiasm as soon as he hears the 'name' of the Lord.

241. Just as gold and brass are tested by a touchstone, so are the sincere and the hypocritical Sadhus distinguished by persecution and calumny.

242. The railway engine easily drags with it a train of heavily loaded carriages. So the loving children of God, firm in their faith and devotion, feel no trouble in passing through life in spite of all troubles and anxieties, and at the same time they lead many to God along with them.

243. When does the attraction of the pleasures of the sense die away? When one realises the consummation of all happiness and of all pleasures in God—the indivisible, eternal ocean of bliss. Those who enjoy Him can find no attraction in the cheap, worthless pleasures of the world.

244. He who has once tasted the refined crystal of sugar candy finds no pleasure in tasting the dirty treacle. He who has slept in a palace will not find pleasure in lying down in a dirty hovel. The soul that has tasted the sweetness of Divine bliss finds no happiness in the vulgar pleasures of the world.

245. The lady who has a king for her lover will not accept the addresses of a street beggar. The soul that has found favour in the eyes of the Lord does not fall in love with the paltry things of the world.

246. It is the nature of the winnowing basket to reject whatever is light and useless, and retain whatever is weighty and good. Such is the nature of all pious souls.

247. Sugar and sand may be mixed together, but the ant rejects the sand and carries away the grains of sugar. So the holy Paramahamsas and pious men successfully sift the good from the bad.

248. The water of a rapid stream moves round and round in eddies and whirlpools in some places; but passing these it resumes again a straight and swift course. So the heart of the devotee is caught every now and then in the whirlpool of despondency, grief and unbelief; but this is only a momentary aberration and does not last long.

249. Wherein is the strength of a devotee? He is a child of God, and his devotional tears are his mightiest weapon.

250. The more you scratch the part affected by ringworm, the greater grows the itching, and the more the pleasure you derive from scratching. So the worshippers of God never get tired of singing His praise.

251. That man whose hair stands on end at the mere mention of the 'name' of God, and from whose eyes flow tears of love—he has indeed reached his last birth.

252. What happens when an impure woman tempts a pious man and tries to cast her evil influence upon him? Just as the skin of a ripe mango, when pressed hard, is left

in the hand, the stone and the kernel having slipped out of it, so does the mind of the pious man glide away to God, leaving behind its earthly tabernacle to be acted on by the woman.

253. The truly religious man is he who does not commit any sin even when he is alone, and when no man observes him, because he feels that God sees him even then. He who can resist the temptations of a young and seductive woman in a lonely forest, where he is unobserved by human eye, through the fear that God sees him and who, through such fear, will not even cast an immoral glance at her,—he is truly a religious man. He who finds a bag full of gold in a lonely and uninhabited house, and resists the temptation of appropriating it, he is a truly religious man. But he who practises religion for the sake of show, through fear of public opinion, cannot be called truly religious. The religion of silence and secrecy is the true religion, but it is all sham and mockery when attended with vaunting and vanity.

KINSHIP OF THE SPIRITUALLY-INCLINED

254. The spiritually-minded belong to a caste of their own, beyond all social conventions.

255. A woman naturally feels shy to relate to all the conversation she daily holds with her husband. She neither communicates it to anyone nor feels inclined to do so; and if it gets divulged in any way, she feels annoyed. But she would herself relate it to her intimate companion without reserve; nay, she would even be impatient to tell it to

her and would find pleasure in doing so. Similarly, a devotee of God does not like to relate to any one but a true Bhakta the ecstatic joy that he experiences in Divine communion; nay, sometimes he is impatient to relate his experiences to such a person and feels happy to do so.

256. If a strange animal were to approach a herd of cows, it would soon be driven off by the combined attack of the whole herd. But let a cow come, and all the cows would make friends with her, with much mutual licking of bodies. Thus, when one devotee meets another devotee, both experience much delight and are loth to part from each other. But when a scoffer enters their circle, they sedulously avoid him.

257. Why is it that one who loves the Lord does not like to live in solitude? The hemp-smoker finds no pleasure in smoking without company. The pious man, like the hemp-smoker, finds no pleasure in chanting the sacred 'name' of God away from the company of other devotees.

IDEALS OF THE ASPIRANT ENTANGLED IN THE WORLD

258. It is said that, when a Tantrika tries to invoke the Deity through the medium of the spirit of the dead, he sits on a fresh human corpse and keeps near him food and wine. In the course of the invocation, if at any time the corpse is, as they say, vivified temporarily and opens its mouth, the intrepid invoker must pour the wine and thrust the food into its gaping mouth to appease the elemental that has, for the time being, taken possession of it. If he does not do so, the invocation is interrupted by the elemental, and the higher spirit does not appear.

So, remaining on the carcass of the world, if you desire to attain beatitude, first provide yourself with all the things necessary to pacify the clamour of worldly demands on you; otherwise your devotions will be broken and interrupted by the cares and anxieties of life.

259. There is necessity of money, no doubt, in worldly life; but do not ponder much over it and other material gains. Contentment with what comes of its own accord is the best attitude. Do not be anxious to hoard. Those who dedicate their very life and soul to Him, those who are His devotees and have taken refuge in Him, can never think of such worldly matters. With them, expenditure is commensurate with income. As money comes into their hands in one way, it is spent in another.

260.* A householder disciple: Sir, may I try to earn a larger income?

The Master: Yes, if you mean to devote it to the life in the family based on discrimination. But take care that you earn money by honest means. For it is not earning money but the service of the Lord that is your aim; and wealth devoted to God is beyond cavil.

Disciple: How long, Sir, have I obligations to the family?

The Master; So long as the family is not provided with enough to maintain itself. But if your children can support themselves, you have no more duty to them.

261.* To some householder devotees the Master said: "You will look upon money only as a means of getting food, clothes and shelter, of worshipping the Deity and

serving Sadhus and devotees. But it is wrong to hoard it. Bees labour hard to build their hives, but man comes and robs them. You need not renounce 'woman' completely. But after a few children are born, you and your wife should live like brother and sister."

262. *Q.* How can I go through my devotional practices when I have always to think of my daily bread?

A. He for whom you work will supply you with your necessaries. God made provisions for your support before He sent you into this world.

263.* We possess home, family and children for a short time, but these are all ephemeral. The palm tree itself is real, but when one or two of its fruits fall to the ground, why should we regret it?

264.* Renunciation of 'woman and gold' has been laid down only for those that lead a monastic life. Monks must not even look at the pictures of women. Even the thought of spiced pickles causes the mouth to water—not to speak of the sight or the touch of those dainties. But this hard rule is not meant for men of the world, like you (addressing the householder devotees present); it is intended purely for monks. As for you, you may go amongst women with a mind unattached and fixed upon God. That your mind may be thus unattached and fixed upon God, it is good that you should often retire into solitude—a place away from either men or women; a place where you may be left absolutely to yourself, praying to the Lord with a yearning heart for true knowledge; a place where you may stay at least for three days, if not more, or for at least one day, if not three.

Your path, again, as married men, is to live with your wife just as brother and sister, after one or two children are born to you, and to pray to the Lord constantly that both of you may have strength to live a perfect life of spirituality and self-control.

265. Live in the world, but be not worldly. As the saying goes, make the frog dance before the snake, but let not the snake swallow the frog.

266. A boat may stay in water, but water should not stay in the boat. An aspirant may live in the world, but the world should not live within him.

267. It matters not if you live the life of a house-holder, only you must fix your mind on God. Do your work with one hand, and hold the feet of the Lord with the other. When you have no work in the world to do, hold His feet fast to your heart with both your hands.

268. What is the state of a man who is in the world but is free from its attachments? He is like a lotus-leaf in water, or like a mud-fish in the marsh. Neither of these is polluted by the element in which it lives. The water wets not the leaf, nor does the mud stain the glossy coat of the fish.

269.* It does not matter much whether you are a family man or not. Always perform your duties unattached, with your mind fixed on God. As for instance, the man who has got a carbuncle on his back talks with his friends and others, and even carries out undertakings, but his mind is all the while on his pain.

270.* Living in the world one is safe, if one has Viveka (discrimination of the Real from the unreal), and

Vairagya (dispassion for worldly things), and along with these intense devotion to God.

271.* What are you to do when you are placed in this world? Give up everything to Him, resign yourself to Him, and there will be no more trouble for you. Then you will come to know that everything is done by His will.

272. It may be given even to the householder to see God. It was the case with Raja Janaka, the great royal sage. But one cannot rise to the height of Raja Janaka all of a sudden. Janaka spent many long years in solitude, away from the din and bustle of the world, practising devotional exercises. Thus it would do infinite good to men of the world, if they would retire now and then into solitude, even for three days at a time, so that God might be realised.

273. Some Brahmo boys once told me that they followed Janaka's example—they lived in the world but quite unattached to it. I said to them that it was easy to say one was Janaka but quite a different matter to be actually one. It is so hard to move among worldly objects without being contaminated. What terrible austerities did not Janaka practise at the outset! But I do not advise you to go through similar hardships. What I want you to do is to practice devotion, and to live alone for some time in some quiet place. Enter the world after gaining Jnana and Bhakti. The best curd is formed when the milk is left quite still; shaking, or even changing the pot, spoils it. Janaka was unattached; hence one of the epithets applied to him is Videha—literally 'bodiless'. He led the life of a Jivanmukta. The annihilation of the idea of the body

is exceedingly difficult to accomplish. Truly Janaka was a great hero. He handled with ease the two swords —one of Knowledge (Jnana) and the other of work (Karma).

274. Men always quote the example of king Janaka as a man who lived in the world and yet attained spiritual illumination. But throughout the whole history of mankind he is the solitary example of this type. He was not the rule but the exception. The general rule is that no one can attain spiritual perfection without renouncing 'woman and gold'. Do not think yourself to be a Janaka. Many centuries have rolled away, and the world has not yet produced a second Janaka.

275. If you desire to live in the world unattached, you should first practise devotion in solitude for some time —a year, six months, a month, or at least twelve days. During this period of retirement, you should constantly meditate upon God and pray to Him for Divine love. You should think that there is nothing in the world which you may call your own, that those whom you consider as your own are sure to pass away some day or other. God alone is really your own. He is your all-in-all. How to obtain Him?—this should be your only concern.

276. When you are engaged in devotional practices, keep aloof from those who scoff at them, and also from those who ridicule piety and the pious.

277. If you first smear your palms with oil and then cut open the jack, the milky exudation of the fruit will not stick to your hands and inconvenience you. If you first fortify yourself with the true knowledge of the

Universal Self, and then live in the midst of wealth and worldliness, surely they will in no way affect you.

278. The magnetic needle always points to the North, and hence it is that the sailing vessel does not lose her direction. So long as the heart of man is directed towards God, he cannot be lost in the ocean of worldliness.

279. In the game of hide-and-seek, if the player succeeds in touching the 'Grand-dame' (Boori), he is no longer liable to be made a 'thief' by the seeker. Similarly by once seeing God, we are no longer bound by the fetters of the world. Just as the person touching the Boori is free to go about wherever he chooses, without being pursued and made a 'thief', so also in the world's play-ground there is no fear for him who has once touched the feet of God. He attains freedom from all worldly cares and anxieties, and nothing can ever bind him again.

280. Alligators love to float on water, but as soon as one rises up, it is made a mark by the hunters. Necessarily it is obliged to remain under water and cannot rise to the surface. Yet, whenever it finds a safe opportunity, it rises up with a deep whizzing noise, and swims happily on the expanse of water. O man, entangled in the meshes of the world, you too are anxious to swim on the surface of the ocean of bliss, but are prevented by the importunate demands of your family. Yet be of good cheer. Whenever you find leisure, call upon God eagerly, pray to Him earnestly and tell Him all your sorrows. In due time, He will surely emancipate you and enable you to swim merrily on the ocean of bliss.

281. When you are forced by circumstances to go to a place of temptations, always remember the Divine Mother. She will protect you from the many evils that may be lurking even in your heart. The presence of the Mother will shame you away from evil deeds and evil thoughts.

282. The world and God—how is it possible to harmonise these two? Look at the carpenter's wife, how diversely busy she is! With one hand she stirs the flattened rice in the mortar of a Dhenki, with the other hand she is nursing her child, and at the very same time she bargains with a customer about the flattened rice. Thus, though her occupations are many, her mind is fixed on the one idea that the pestle of the Dhenki does not fall on her hand and bruise it. So be in the world, but always remember Him, and never go astray from His path.

283. As a boy holding to a post or pillar whirls about it with headlong speed without any fear of falling, so perform your worldly duties, fixing your hold firmly upon God, and you will be free from danger.

284. As the village maidens in India carry four or five pots of water placed one over the other upon their heads, talking all the way with one another about their joys and sorrows, and yet do not allow a single drop of water to spill, so must the traveller in the path of virtue walk along his route. In whatever circumstances he may be placed, let him always take heed that his heart does not swerve from the true path.

285. As an unchaste woman, busily engaged in household affairs, will all the while be thinking of her secret lover

so do you, O man of the world, perform your round of worldly duties, but let your heart be fixed always on God.

286. As a wet-nurse in a wealthy family brings up her master's child, loving it as if it were her own, yet knowing well that she has no claim upon it, so you also think that you are but trustees and guardians of your children whose real father is the Lord Himself.

287. As the street minstrel plays the guitar with one hand and with the other strikes a drum, while at the same time he sings a song, so do you, O man of the world, perform all your worldly duties with your hands, never forgetting to repeat and glorify the 'name' of the Lord with all your heart.

288. The maidservant says with reference to her master's house, "This is our house." All the while she knows that the house is not her own, and that her own house is far away in a distant village of Burdwan or Naddia. Her thoughts are all really directed to her village home. Again, referring to her master's child in her arms, she says, "My Hari has grown very naughty," or, "My Hari likes to eat this or that," and so on. But all the while she knows for certain that Hari is not her own. I tell those who come to me, to lead a life unattached like the maid-servant. I tell them to live unattached to this world—to be in the world, but not of the world—and at the same time to have their mind directed to God, the heavenly home whence all come. I tell them to pray for Bhakti, and base their lives on it.

289. Always consider that your family concerns are not yours; they are God's and you are His servant come

here to obey His commands. When this idea becomes firm, there remains nothing indeed that a man may call his own.

290.* He is a true hero who performs all the duties of the world with his mind fixed on God. None but a strong man can, while carrying a load of two maunds (more than a hundredweight) on his head, stop to admire a bridal procession passing his way.

291. Those who live in the world and still try to gain salvation are like the soldiers that fight from behind the ramparts of a fort, while the ascetics who renounce the world in search of God are like the soldiers fighting in the open field. To fight the enemy from within the fort is more convenient and far safer than to fight in the open field.

292. Before soldiers go out to meet the enemy, they learn the art of fighting in their barracks, where they do not have to put up with the hardships incidental to action in the open field. So avail yourselves of the conveniences of your home-life to raise your spiritual condition before you take to the austerities of an ascetic life.

293. He indeed is blessed, in whom all the qualities of head and heart are fully developed and evenly balanced. He acquits himself admirably well in whatever position he may be placed. He is full of guileless faith and love for God, and yet his dealings with others leave nothing to be desired. When he is engaged in worldly affairs, he is a thorough man of business. In the assembly of the learned he establishes his claims as a man of superior learning, and in debates he shows wonderful powers of reasoning. To

his parents he is obedient and affectionate; to his relations and friends he is loving and sweet; to his neighbours he is kind and sympathetic and always ready to do good; to his wife he is the god of love. Such a man is indeed perfect.

IDEALS OF THE SANNYASIN

294. The first birth of a man is from his father; Upanayana marks his second birth, and Sannyasa the third.

295. The mind is much wasted while one is engaged in worldly pursuits. And that loss can be made good, only if one takes to the life of renunciation (Sannyasa).

296. Who is a fit candidate for the holy order of Sannyasins? He who gives up the world altogether without having any thought of the morrow, as to how he will eat or how he will be clothed, is fit to be a true Sannyasin. His mentality must be like that of a man who can, if need be, let himself fall fearlessly from the top of a tall tree, without any thought of saving his own life or limbs.

297. Yogins and Sannyasins are like snakes. The snake does not dig out a hole for itself, but lives in the hole made by the mouse. When one hole becomes uninhabitable, it enters into another hole. Just so Yogins and Sannyasins make no house for themselves. They pass their days in other men's houses—today in one house, tomorrow in another.

298.* Sadhus never settle down in a place where there are 'no jungles' near by and where 'food and drink' is hard to get. 'Jungles' means solitary spots for answering the calls of nature; and 'food and drink' means alms. As

Sadhus live on alms, they select only those places for their temporary residence where alms can be easily procured. When they get tired in the course of their journey they may halt at a place for a day or two, in spite of the difficulty of procuring alms. But they never stay anywhere if there is scarcity of water and of solitary spots for answering the calls of nature. Good Sadhus never attend to these matters of physical cleanliness in places where they may be observed by others. They finish these things in solitude, far away from the haunts of men.

299. If a white cloth is stained even with a small spot, the stain appears very ugly indeed. So the smallest fault of a holy man becomes painfully prominent.

300.* A Sannyasin may himself be perfectly unattached and may have full control over his senses. Yet to set an example to mankind he must make a rigorous renunciation of 'woman and gold'. For only when they notice the thoroughness of the Sannyasin's renunciation, will men take courage; only then will they make efforts to renounce sex and riches. And who indeed will impart this lesson on renunciation, if not the Sannyasin?

301.* What is the sign of a genuine Sannyasin and a Tyagi? Both must be entirely unconnected with lust and gold. Should they feel an attachment for gold, or be troubled by pollution even in a dream, all their spiritual exercises would come to naught.

302. When one has taken up the garb of a Sannyasin, one has to conduct oneself precisely like a true Sadhu. Don't you see in the drama how the person playing the

part of a king always acts like a king and how he who is in the roll of the minister always plays the minister? Once a village clown put on the garb of a Sannyasin and appeared before the Zamindar of the place. The Zamindar wanted to present him with a purse, but he refused to accept it and went away. After a while he came back, having washed himself and changed his dress, and asked for the money that the Zamindar wanted to give. When he dressed like a Sadhu, he could not even touch the money, but now he was ready to feel gratified even with a four-anna bit.

303. A person went to a holy man to get some medicine for his sick child, carrying the little patient in his arms. The holy man asked him to come next day. Next day, when the man went, the Sadhu said, "Give no sweets to the child, and the child will soon be cured." The man replied, "Sir, you could have told me this yesterday itself." The Sadhu said, "Yes, I could have, but yesterday I had a quantity of sugar lying before me, and seeing that, your child would have thought that the Sadhu who advised others not to take sugar but ate it himself was a hypocrite."

304. The man who becomes an ascetic owing to some misunderstanding with his father, or mother, or wife may be called an 'ascetic-by-disgust'. His asceticism is momentary; he gives up the ascetic way of life as soon as he gets a good lucrative job in a wealthy family.

305. A disciple: How can we recognise a truly pious man (Sadhu)?

The Master: He is truly pious whose heart and soul are wholly dedicated to God. Truly pious is he who

has renounced 'woman and gold'. The truly pious man never views women in the ordinary worldly light. He always remains at a distance from them, and if they happen to come near, he looks on them as his mother and shows respect to them. He thinks constantly of God, and serves all creatures, knowing that He resides in all. These are the general traits of the truly pious.

306.* Trust not a Sannyasin, who practises medicine, uses spells and incantations, receives money, and displays his piety with the sign-boards of elaborate external marks.

307. Forgiveness is the true nature of the ascetic.

CHAPTER IX

SOME AIDS TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

[*Caste and external observances—Worship of images—Value of pilgrimages—Pious company—Repetition of Divine 'names'*]

CASTE AND EXTERNAL OBSERVANCES

308. Honour both spirit and form, the sentiment within as well as the symbol without.

309. In a grain of paddy the germ is commonly considered to be the only thing necessary for germination and growth, while the husk is regarded as of no importance; but if the husked grain is sown, it will not sprout and grow up into a plant and yield rice. To get a crop one must needs sow the grain with its husk intact. If, however, one wants to get the pure grain itself for eating purposes, one must remove the husk from the seed. So rites and ceremonies are necessary for the growth and perpetuation of a religion. They are the receptacles that contain the germinating seeds of truth; and consequently every man must perform them till he reaches the central truth therein.

310. The oyster that contains the precious pearl is in itself of very little value, but it is essential for the growth

of the pearl. The shell itself may prove to be of no use to the man who has secured the pearl. So ceremonies and rites may not be necessary for him who has attained the highest truth, namely, God.

311.* Rituals are to be observed. But when one advances in spirituality, it is not necessary to observe them for long. Then the mind gets concentrated on God, resulting in communion with Him.

312. When a wound is perfectly healed, the scab falls off of itself; but if the scab be taken off earlier, it bleeds. In the same way, with the advent of Divine illumination all distinctions of caste vanish; but it is wrong for the ignorant to override such distinctions, lest they should lead to undesirable consequences.

313. A fruit that has ripened on the tree and fallen down of itself, tastes very sweet, but the one that has been picked and ripened artificially is not so sweet, and soon shrivels up. In like manner, the rules of caste fall away of themselves from him who has attained perfection and has realised the unity of all things; but those who have had no such exalted experience cannot escape the consciousness of superiority and inferiority in others, and have to observe caste distinctions. If in this state of ignorance a man feigns perfection by overriding all caste distinctions and by living a free life, he is surely like the green fruit artificially ripened.

314. Is it proper for one who has attained Divine wisdom to keep the Brahminical thread? When the knowledge of the Self is gained, all fetters drop off of themselves. Then there is no distinction between Brahmin and

Sudra, between high caste and low caste. Thus the sacred thread, a sign of caste, falls off of itself. But so long as a man is conscious of any distinction and difference, he should not forcibly throw it away.

315. While a storm is blowing, we cannot distinguish between an Asvattha (fig tree) and a Vata (banyan tree). So when the storm of supreme Knowledge blows, there can be no distinction of caste.

316. A true devotee who has drunk deep of Divine love is like a veritable drunkard, and as such cannot always observe the rules of propriety.

317. Once Krishna Kishore asked me, "Why have you cast off the sacred thread?" When this change came over me,[1] everything was blown away, as if by the great cyclone of Ashvin.[2] The old landmarks were swept away. There was no outward consciousness itself. What to speak, then, of taking care of either the holy thread or even of the piece of cloth I used to wear? Lost in intense God-consciousness, I could not even know that I was nude for the greater part of the day. Therefore when Krishna Kishore took me to task for having parted with the sacred thread, I only observed, "You will see it all clearly if you are once seized with madness for the Lord."

318. Those who utter the 'name' of God are holy. Krishna Kishore was a holy man of Ariadaha. Once he had been to Brindavan on a pilgrimage. There, one day, in the course of his walk he felt thirsty, and seeing a person standing near a well, he asked him to draw a little water

[1] Through God-vision and spiritual realisation.

[2] The great cyclone of 1864 in Bengal.

for him. The man said that he was of a very low caste and so was not fit to draw water for a Brahmin. Krishna Kishore said, "Will you pronounce the name of God and thus make yourself pure?" The man did so and fetched some water for him; and he, an orthodox Brahmin, drank the water! How great was the power of his faith!

319. As a drunkard sometimes puts his coat on his head and at other times uses it as breeches, so the God-intoxicated man behaves as if he is not conscious of the external world.

320. People of this age care for the essence of everything. They will accept the essentials of religion and not its non-essentials (that is, the rituals, ceremonials, dogmas and creeds).

321. Those who take fish do not want the useless head and tail of the fish, but only the soft middle portion of it; so the ancient rules and commandments of our scriptures must be pruned of all their accretions to make them suit modern times.

WORSHIP OF IMAGES

322. While raising a building, the scaffolding is indispensable; but when the work is completed, no one feels the necessity of it. So also image-worship is necessary in the beginning, but not afterwards.

323. As a man begins to learn writing by drawing big scrawls before he tries to write a smaller hand, so a person must acquire the power of concentrating his thoughts by fixing the mind first upon forms, and then, after succeeding therein, by fixing it upon the formless.

324. A marksman learns to shoot by first having big objects to shoot at; and as he acquires more and more facility in shooting, he aims more and more easily at the smaller marks on the target. So when the mind has been trained to focus on images having form, it is easy for it to do so on things having no form.

325. As a toy fruit or a toy elephant reminds one of the real fruit and the living animal, so do the images that are worshipped remind one of God Who is formless and eternal.

326. The Master once said to a disciple of his: "You were talking of images made of clay. There arises a necessity for them too. These various forms used for worship have been provided to suit the needs of different men at different stages of spiritual evolution."

327. The mother so arranges food for her children that each one gets what agrees with him. If she has five children and she gets a big fish to cook, she makes different dishes out of it, and gives each one what suits him exactly. One is given rich Polao with fish; another, of weak digestion, only a little soup; and so on, according to the digestive power of each. (The same in the case with the various symbols and disciplines prescribed for spiritual aspirants.)

328. A disciple: One may believe that God is 'with form'. But surely He is not the earthen image that is worshipped.

The Master: Why call it an earthen image? The Divine image is made of the Spirit.

329. The Master once said to Keshab Chandra Sen, who was a great iconoclast in his days: "Why

do these images rouse the idea of mud and clay, stone and straw, in your mind? Why can you not realise the presence of the eternal, blissful, all-conscious Mother, even in these forms?"

330. If a worshipper is convinced that the images of the Deity in the shape of various Gods and Goddesses are verily divine, he reaches God by their worship. But if he holds them to be nothing better than mud and straw and clay, to him the worship of snch images does no good.

331. If there is anything wrong in image-worship, does He not know that all worship is meant for Him? He will surely be pleased to accept the worship, knowing that it is meant for Him alone. Love God; that is the duty nearest to you.

332. When one sees God, one realises that everything, images and all, is a manifestation of the Spirit. To him the image is not made of clay but of Spirit.

VALUE OF PILGRIMAGES

333. The Milk of the cow in reality pervades the whole body of the animal through its blood, but you cannot milk it by squeezing the ears or the horns; you can get the milk only from the teats. Similarly, God pervades the universe everywhere, but you cannot see Him everywhere. He manifests Himself more readily in sacred temples which are full of the spirit of devotion diffused by the life and spiritual practices of the devotees of former times.

334. Know that there must be manifestation of God in places where countless people have for long practised

austerity, Japa, meditation, prayer and worship with a view to realise Him. Through their devotion, spiritual ideas are present in these places in a solidified form, as it were. Hence there man easily feels the awakening of spirituality and realises Him. From time immemorial, numberless Sadhus, devotees and men of realisation have come to these holy places to have a vision of God, and have prayed to Him with an outpouring of their hearts, setting aside all worldly desires. Therefore, though equally present everywhere, God manifests Himself specially in these places. Water can be had anywhere by digging into the earth. When, however, there is a well or a tank or a lake, one has not to dig for water, but can get it whenever one likes.

335. As cows, after eating their fill, lie down quietly at a place and chew the cud, so after visiting a sacred spot or a place of pilgrimage, you must take hold of the holy thoughts that rose in the mind while there, sit down in a solitary corner and think of them till you are immersed in them. You must not devote yourself to the pursuit of the senses and drive away such higher ideas from your mind immediately after you leave those places.

336. Travel in all the four quarters of the earth, you will find nothing (no true religion) anywhere. Whatever there is, is only here (*i.e.* in one's own heart).

337.* When the Master was alive, many of his disciples used to express to him their desire to visit holy places, and to them he used to reply: "Well, he who has got it (spirituality) here (*i.e.* in the company of the Master or within himself) has got it there (i.e. in holy

places) also. Whereas he who has not got it here, has not got it there either", or, "He who has got the spirit of devotion already within his heart, will find it more intensified in holy places. But of what profit will it be to him who has no devotion at all? We often hear that the son of so-and-so has run away from home and has gone to Benares or some such place. But later on we hear again that with great effort he has managed to secure a job there, and has sent money and news about himself to his family. People go to live in some sacred place, but many there are who open shops there and take to business. Going to the western provinces in the company of Mathuranath, I found the environment there just the same as here. The mango trees, the tamarind trees or the bamboo groves—they were exactly similar to those of these parts. Hence I told Hriday, 'Well what have we come to see here? Things are just the same here as well as there, with this one point of difference, that the inhabitants of these places seem to have better digestion.'"

BENEFITS OF PIOUS COMPANY

338.* Milk and water, when brought into contact, are sure to get mixed, and the milk can never be separated again.. Similarly if the aspirant thirsting after self-improvement mixes indiscriminately with all sorts of worldly people, not only does he lose his ideal, but also his former faith, love and zeal; they die away imperceptibly.

339. The companionship of the holy and the wise is one of the main elements of spiritual progress.

340. Many warm themselves in the fire kindled by someone else who has taken the trouble of collecting the firewood and other necessary things; similarly, many fix their mind on the Lord by associating with, and following the instruction of, holy men who have come to know the Lord after a good deal of hard penance.

341. If a man sees a pleader, he naturally thinks of lawsuits and courts. Similarly, on seeing a pious devotee, one is reminded of God and of the life hereafter.

342. How should one pass one's life? As the fire in the hearth is stirred from time to time with a poker to make it burn brightly and prevent it from going out, so the mind should be occasionally invigorated by the society of the pious.

343. As the blacksmith keeps alive the fire of his furnace by blowing the bellows, so the mind should be kept clean and glowing with the help of pious company.

344. The society of pious men is like the water in which rice is washed. This rice-water has the potency of dissipating alcoholic intoxication. So does the society of the pious relieve worldly men, drunk with the wine of vain desires, from their intoxication.

345. The agent of a rich Zemindar, when he goes into rural localities away from the seat of his master, tyrannises over the tenants in various ways. But when he comes back to the headquarters, and is under the eyes of his master, he changes his ways, becomes very pious, treats the tenants kindly, investigates into all their grievances fully, and tries to mete out justice impartially to all. The tyrannical agent becomes good through the fear of the master and also by

reason of his society. Similarly does the society of the pious make even the wicked righteous, awakening awe and reverence in them.

346. Even moist wood placed upon a fire soon becomes dry and finally begins to burn. Similarly, the Society of the pious drives away the moisture of greed and lust from the hearts of worldly persons, and then the fire of Viveka (discrimination) burns steadily in them.

347. In the Puranas, we are told that when Uma, the Mother of the universe, incarnated Herself as the daughter of the Himalayas, She blessed Her father with the vision of the various manifestations of the omnipotent Mother. But when, Giriraj (the king of mountains) asked Her to show him the Brahman of the Vedas, Uma said, "O father, if you wish to realise Brahman, you must live in the company of holy men—men who have entirely given up the world!"

348. If you wash an elephant well and leave it at large, it is sure to make itself dirty in no time; but if, after the wash, you tie it down in its stable, it will remain clean. So, if by the good influences of holy men you once become pure in spirit, and then allow yourself to mix freely with worldly men, you are sure to lose that purity soon; but if you keep your mind fixed on God, you will never more get soiled in spirit.

REPETITION OF DIVINE NAMES

349.* "The best thing for people whose minds are attracted by sense-objects is to cultivate the dualistic attitude and chant loudly the 'name' of the Lord as mentioned in Narada-Pancharatra (a work on devotion).

350.* The Master said to a devotee: "Through the path of devotion the subtle senses come readily and naturally under control. Carnal pleasures become more and more insipid as Divine love grows in your heart. Can the pleasures of the body attract a husband and wife on the day their child has died?"

Devotee: But I have not learnt to love Him.

The Master: Take His 'name' constantly. This will cleanse all sin, lust, anger and all desire for the pleasures of the body will vanish.

Devotee: But I do not find delight in His 'name'.

The Master: Then pray with a yearning heart that He may teach you to relish His 'name'. Undoubtedly He will grant your prayer . . . "I find no delight in Thy 'name'!"—If a delirious patient loses all taste for food, despair of his life. But if he relishes food even slightly, you may hope for his recovery. So I say, "Find joy in his 'name'." Durga, Krishna, Siva—any name will do. And if you daily feel a greater attraction for taking His 'name' and a greater joy in it, you need fear no more. The delirium must get cured, and His grace will surely descend on you.

351.* Why, is the 'name' insignficant? He and His 'name' are not different. Satyabhama failed to balance the Lord with gold and jewels. But Rukmini succeeded when she placed a Tulsi leaf and the 'name' of Krishna in the other pan of the balance.

352. If you wish to see God, have firm faith in the efficacy of repeating the 'name' of Hari and try to discriminate the real from the unreal.

353.* Sri Chaitanya has said: "Very powerful indeed is the Lord's 'name'. It may not bring about immediate result, but it must one day bear fruit, just as we find that a seed left long ago on the cornice of a building at last reaches the ground, germinates, grows into a tree, and bears fruit, perhaps when the building cracks and is demolished."

354. Knowingly or unknowingly, consciously or unconsciously, in whatever state of mind a man utters God's 'name', he acquires the merit of such utterance. A man who voluntarily goes to a river and bathes therein gets the benefit of the bath; so does he also who has been pushed into the water by another, or who, when sleeping soundly, has water thrown upon him.

355. In whatever way one falls, whether consciously or unconsciously, into the lake of immortality, one becomes immortal by the mere immersion. Whoever utters the 'name' of God, howsoever pronounced, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, finds immortality in the end.

356.* To a religious teacher who said that His 'name' alone is sufficient for Divine realisation, the Master said: "Yes, no doubt the holy 'name' is very effective; but is it sufficient without Love? The soul must hunger for God. What will it avail if I repeat His 'name' while I allow my mind to be attached to 'woman and gold'? Mere muttering of magic incantations will not heal up a scorpion-sting. You must also apply the smoke of burning cow-dung.[1] No doubt, man is purged of his sins by once

[1] The reference is to a simple recipe of the village housewife for scorpion-sting.

uttering His 'name'. But the next moment he takes to various sinful ways of living. He has no strength of mind to take a vow that he will no more commit any sin. Ablutions in the Ganges take away all sins, but little do they avail. The story goes that the sins lie in ambush on the trees on the banks, and when the man returns after his bath, those old sins jump down on his shoulders. So, you see, before he has proceeded a few steps, they are on him again, they have possessed him once more. Therefore take the 'name' of the Lord always, but pray to him at the same time that you may gain love for Him, and that your attachment to money, fame and physical comforts—all transient things—may grow less and less.

357. Sing with Bhakti the hallowed 'name' of the Lord, and the mountain of your sins will vanish, just as a mountain of cotton will burn to ashes and disappear if but a spark of fire falls on it.

358. The devotional practices of the worldly-minded are only for the time being. They leave no lasting impression behind. But those who are solely devoted to God chant His 'name' with every breath. Some chant 'Om Ram Om' constantly within themselves. The votaries of the path of Knowledge chant 'Soham'. Of some, again, the tongue moves constantly (*i.e.*, utters prayers or some Mantra).

359. Japa means repeating the 'name' of the Lord silently, sitting in a quiet place. If one continues the repetition with concentration and devotion, one is sure to be blessed with Divine visions ultimately—one is sure to have God-realisation. Suppose a big log of

wood is immersed in the Ganges with one end attached to a chain, which is fixed on the bank. Following the chain, link by link, you can gradually dive into the water and trace your way to it. In the same manner, if you become absorbed in the repetition of His holy name, you will eventually realise Him.

360. The Master would often say: "Chant the 'name' of Hari (God) morning and evening, clapping your hands all the while; all your sins and afflictions will then leave you. If you clap your hands standing under a tree, the birds perching on it will fly away. So if you chant the 'name' of Hari clapping your hands at the same time, the birds of evil thoughts will fly away from the tree of your body."

CHAPTER X

WAYS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

[*Some obstacles to spiritual life—Influence of past impressions—Pitfalls of occult powers—Alms and charity —Dress and food—Attitude towards the body—Attitude towards sufferings—Forbearance—Reticence—Humility and self-respect—Simplicity—Conquest of desires—Attitude towards women—Devotee and his family—Prayer and devotion*]

SOME OBSTACLES TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

361. God comes 'not where reign timidity,' hatred and fear.

362.* The heavier scale of a balance goes down while the lighter rises up. Similarly, he who is weighed down by the many cares and anxieties of the world sinks down into it, while he who has fewer rises up towards the feet of the Lord.

363. One who spends his time in discussing the good and bad qualities of others simply wastes his own time. For it is time spent neither in thinking about one's own self nor about the Supreme Self, but in fruitless thinking of others' selves.

364. In what condition of mind is the vision of God obtained? When the mind is perfectly tranquil.

When the sea of one's mind is agitated by the wind of desires, it cannot reflect God, and then God-vision is impossible.

365. Though a person's stomach may be full and he is suffering from dyspepsia in addition, his tongue will water naturally at the sight of sweet delicacies and savoury sauces. Similarly a man may not have the slightest covetousness in him; yet the sight of wealth and other objects of temptation will unsettle his mind, howsoever holy he may be.

366.* Be not like the frog in the well. The frog in the well knows nothing bigger and grander than its well. So are all bigots. They do not see anything better than their own creed.

367. The great Sankaracharya had a foolish disciple who used to imitate his Master in all matters. Sankara uttered 'Sivoham' (I am Siva); the disciple also repeated 'Sivoham'. To correct his disciple's folly, Sankara one day, while passing by a smithy, took a potful of molten iron and swallowed it; and then he asked that disciple also to do the same. Of course, the disciple could not imitate this act of his Master, and thenceforward he left off saying 'Sivoham'. Base imitation is always bad, but an attempt to correct one's own self by the noble examples of the great ones is always good.

INFLUENCE OF PAST IMPRESSIONS

368. How strong is the influence of Samskaras (impressions of the past)? In a certain place there were seated some Sannyasins, when a young woman chanced to pass by. All continued as before to meditate upon God, except one

person, who stole a glance at her. This man who was attracted by her beauty had been a householder formerly, and was the father of three children when he became a Sannyasin.

369. Once I saw two castrated bulls at a certain place. just then a cow passed that way, and I noticed that at the sight of it one of the bullocks got excited with passion while the other remained quiet. Seeing the strange behaviour of this bullock, I made enquiries into its past history, and came to know that it was castrated after it had grown up and had mated with cows, while the other was castrated quite young. Such is the effect of the impressions of past habits on the mind. The Sadhus who renounce the world without enjoying sexual pleasures never get excited at the sight of women, but those who assume the yellow garb in their advanced age, after having tasted the pleasures of family life, are liable to have the impressions of their past revived, even after years of self-control.

370. When the mind dwells in the midst of evil propensities, it is like a high-caste Brahmin living in the quarters of the outcastes , or like a gentleman dwelling in the slums of a big town.

371. A person once said, "After my boy Harish has grown up, I shall get him married, and then leaving the family in his charge, I shall renounce the world and take to the practice of Yoga." At this, the Master remarked, "You will never find any opportunity to cultivate devotion to God. You will hereafter say, 'Harish and Girish are very much attached to me. Oh! they will miss my company if I retire from the

world. Let Harish have a son first, and let me see his son also married.' Thus there will be no end to your desires."

PITFALL OF OCCULT POWERS

372. Visit not miracle-mongers and those who exhibit occult powers. These men are stragglers from the path of Truth. Their minds have become entangled in psychic powers, which are like veritable meshes in the way of the pilgrim to Brahman. Beware of these powers, and desire them not.

373. Those that are of low tendencies seek for occult powers which help in healing diseases, winning lawsuits, walking on the surface of water and such other matters. True devotees seek nothing but the lotus-feet of the Lord.

374. Krishna once said to Arjuna, "If you desire to attain Me, know that it would never be possible so long as you possess even a single one of the eight psychic powers (Ashta Siddhis)." For occult powers increase man's egotism and thus make him forgetful of God.

375. A man, after fourteen years of hard penance in a solitary forest, obtained at last the power of walking on water. Overjoyed at this acquisition, he went to his Guru and said, "Master, I have acquired the power of walking on water." The Guru rebuked him, saying: "Fie upon you. Is this the result of your fourteen years' labour? What you have attained is only worth a pice. What you could accomplish only after fourteen years' labour ordinary men can do by paying a pice to the boatman."

376. Siddhis or psychic powers are to be avoided like filth. These come of themselves by virtue of Sadhanas or religious practices, and Samyama or control of the senses. But he who sets his mind on Siddhis remains stuck thereto, and he cannot rise higher.

377. There was a man named Chandra[1] who acquired the power called Gutika-siddhi. Keeping an amulet (Gutika) with him, he could roam anywhere at will or penetrate into any place without being seen by any person. The man was at first devoted to God and was austere in his spiritual disciplines. Later on, however, when he came to possess that power, he began to use it for satisfying the demands of his lower nature. I warned him against doing so, but he paid no heed. He used to frequent unseen a gentleman's house and had illicit amour with a young lady of the family. He lost all his power thereby, and became a fallen soul.

378. Sometimes it is very dangerous to have occult powers. Tota Puri told me that once a great Siddha (a spiritual man possessing psychic powers) was sitting on the sea-shore when there came a great storm. The Siddha, being greatly distressed by it, exclaimed, "Let the storm cease!" and his words were fulfilled. Just then a ship was going at a distance with all sails set, and as the wind suddenly died away, it capsized, drowning all who were on board the ship. Now the sin of causing the death of so many persons accrued to the Siddha, and for that reason he lost all his occult powers and had to suffer in purgatory.

[1] This Chandra also was a disciple of the Master's Guru, Bhairavi, the Brahmin woman, of whom we have made mention in the Introduction. Thus the Master had occasion to be acquainted with him.

379. At the time of my practising austere Sadhanas under the Panchavati, a man named Girija came there. He was a great Yogi. Once when I wanted to come to my room in the dark night, he raised his arm and a strong light emanated from his arm-pit and lighted the whole path. On my advice he gave up using that power and turned his mind to the realisation of the highest Reality. He lost that power subsequently, no doubt, but gained in true spirituality.

380.* A beggar would be acting very foolishly were he to go to the king's palace and beg for such insignificant things as a gourd or pumpkin. Similarly, a devotee would be acting foolishly were he to appear at the threshold of the King of kings and beg for psychic powers, neglecting the priceless gifts of true Knowledge and love of God.

381. A youthful disciple of the Master once acquired facility in thought-reading. Overjoyed at this he spoke to the Master about his attainment. The Master thereupon rebuked him, saying, "Shame on you, child; do not waste your energies on these petty things."

382. A disciple once told Sri Ramakrishna that in the course of his meditation he could see things as they actually happened at a distance and also what some people were doing at the time, and that on subsequent enquiry the visions proved to be true. The Master said to him, "My boy, for some days don't meditate. These powers are obstacles to the realisation of God."

ALMS AND CHARITY

383. Why is it that people are fed at a religious feast? Do you not think that it is the same as offering a sacrifice

to God, who is the Fire of Life in all creatures? But bad men, not God-fearing, guilty of adultery and so forth, should on no account be entertained at such feasts. Their sins are so great that even several cubits of earth under where they sit become polluted.

384. Once a butcher was taking a cow to a distant slaughter-house. Being ill-treated by the butcher, the cow got unruly on the way, and the man found it very difficult to drive her. After several hours, he reached a village at noon, and being thoroughly exhausted, he went to an alms-house near by and partook of the food freely distributed there. Feeling himself quite refreshed after a full meal, the butcher was able to lead the cow easily to the destination. Now, a part of the sin of killing that cow fell to the donor of the food distributed at the alms-house. So even in giving food and alms in charity, one should discriminate and see that the recipient is not a vicious and sinning person likely to use the gift for evil purposes.

385.* Thus goes the law: Those who made large charities in former life are born rich in this. But then this world is His Maya, and the process of Maya is beset with many irregularities—none can comprehend it.

DRESS AND FOOD

386. What is the good of wearing the orange coloured dress of an ascetic? What is there in the dress? The orange dress brings with it pure associations. The wearing of worn out shoes and torn clothes brings thoughts of one's low state into the mind; dressing smartly

in trousers and coats, with patent leather shoes on, makes one naturally feel rather elated with pride and vanity; by wearing the black-bordered Dhoti of fine muslin, one feels impelled to be lively and to sing love songs perhaps. The wearing of the orange garb of the Sannyasin causes sacred thoughts naturally to rise in the mind. Every kind of dress has its own associations, although dress in itself has no special significance.

387. A young plant should always be protected against goats and cows and the mischief of little urchins by a fence. But when it becomes a big tree, a flock of goats or a herd of cows can freely find shelter under its spreading boughs and fill their stomachs with its leaves. So when your faith is yet in its infancy, you should protect it from the evil influences of bad company and worldliness. But when you grow strong in faith, no worldliness or evil inclination will dare approach your holy presence; and many who are wicked will become godly through your holy contact.

388. Once a student questioned Sri Ramakrishna; "Sir, as the same God dwells in every being, what harm is there in accepting food from any and every man's hands? In reply the Master asked him whether he was a Brahmin. When the student said "Yes", the Master remarked, "That is why you put me the question. Suppose you light a match and heap over it a lot of dry wood. What would become of the fire?" The student replied, "The fire will get extinguished, being choked by the pile." Again the Master said, "Suppose a wild fire is blazing and you throw into it a lot of green banana trees. What would become of these trees?" The student replied,

"Surely they will be reduced to ashes in a moment." "Similarly," said the Master, "if the spirituality in you is very weak, there is every danger of its being smothered by eating indiscriminately from all hands. But if it is strong, no food will affect you."

389. Once I was initiated by a Mohammedan teacher and was given the 'name' of Allah to repeat. I repeated the 'name' for several days, strictly observing their ways and eating their food. During that period, I could not go to the temple of Mother Kali, or take the names of Hindu gods and goddesses.

390. Eat not in the feast given at a funeral ceremony; for such food destroys all devotion and Love. Also do not take food in the house of a priest who lives by conducting sacrificial rites for others.

391. *Q.* As regards eating, should not one eat what one gets?

A. That depends upon the spiritual state. In the path of Jnana it produces no harm. When a Jnani eats, he offers the food as an oblation in the fire of Kundalini. But for a Bhakta, it is different. A Bhakta should eat only pure food, such food as he can freely offer to his beloved Lord. Animal food is not for a Bhakta. At the same time I must say that if a man loves God, even while living upon pork, he is blessed; and wretched is he who lives on milk and rice or on Havishyanna (unspiced food) but whose mind is absorbed in 'woman and gold'.

392. He who eats simple non-stimulating vegetable food, but does not desire to attain God,—for him that simple food is as bad as beef. But he who eats beef and

desires to attain God,—for him beef is as good as the food of the gods.

393. Eat to your satisfaction in the day, but let your meal at night be light and small in quantity.

394. That food alone should be taken by the devotee which does not heat the system or unsettle the mind.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE BODY

395.* *Q.* How is one to conquer the love of the body?

A. The human frame is made up of decaying matter. It is a collection of flesh, bone, marrow, blood and other unclean substances subject to putrefaction. By such constant analysis of the body one's love of it vanishes.

396. One does not care for the cage when the bird has flown away from it. And when the bird of life flies away, no one cares for the body left behind.

397. If this body is worthless and transitory, why do pious and devout men take care of it? No one takes care of an empty box, but all protect with care a chest full of precious jewels, gold and costly articles. The pious soul cannot help taking care of the body because God dwells in it. All our bodies form the treasure-house of the Deity.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS SUFFERING

398. Disease is the tax which the soul pays for the use of the body, as the tenant pays house-rent for the use of the house.

399. Iron must be heated again and again and hammered a hundred times before it becomes good steel.

Then only it becomes fit to be made into a sharp sword, and can be bent in any way you like. So man must be heated several times in the furnace of tribulations and hammered with the persecutions of the world before he becomes pure and humble, and fit to enter the presence of God.

400. The Master once said to Keshab Chandra Sen while the latter was ill: "You are suffering; but your illness has a deep meaning. In this body you have gone through various stages of spiritual development; the body is now suffering from the reaction. When the spiritual waves arise, the consciousness of the body vanishes, but it tells upon the body in the end. When a big steamer plies on the Ganges, the waves dash against the shore for sometime after the steamer has passed. The larger the boat, the bigger the waves; and sometimes they even break down the banks. If an elephant enters a small hut, the hut shakes and falls down. So also the experience of spiritual ecstasy shakes and sometimes shatters the body of the devotee. Do you know the consequence of this? If a house catches fire, many things are burnt. Similarly, the fire of Divine wisdom burns all passions, anger and other evils, and in the end destroys the consciousness of 'I, me and mine'. The body suffers then a severe shock and is shattered. You may think that everything is finished, but as long as there is the least vestige of the ego, He will not make you free. If you are admitted as a patient in a hospital, you will not be discharged unless you are perfectly cured."

401. The Master said to Keshab while the latter was ill: "The gardener sometimes exposes the roots of rose

bushes, so that the dew may fall upon them. Sometimes he trims off some of the roots, so that the flowers may become larger. Perhaps the Lord is preparing you to do greater works."

402. Expressing his own attitude towards illness, the Master said: "Let the disease run its course and let the body suffer, but, O mind, be thou ever in bliss."

403. The power and glory of Knowledge and faith never fail a true devotee, whatever be the joy and suffering his body undergoes. His Knowledge and faith never get dim. See how severe were the tribulations that visited the Pāndavas, yet not for a moment did the light of Knowledge desert them.

FORBEARANCE

404. In the Bengali alphabet no three letters are alike in sound except the three sibilants (Sa, Sha, and Sa); and they all mean for us, 'forbear', 'forbear', 'forbear'. (In Bengali Sa means forbear. It is derived from the Sanskrit root Sah.) This shows that even from our childhood we are made to learn forbearance through our very alphabet. The quality of forbearance is of the highest importance to every man.

405. Look at the anvil of a blacksmith—how it is hammered and beaten; yet it moves not from its place. Let men learn patience and endurance from it.

RETICENCE

406. Keep your own sentiments and faith to yourself. Do not talk about them abroad. Otherwise you will be a great loser.

407. The more a person conceals his devotional practices from others, the better for him.

HUMILITY AND SELF-RESPECT

408. It is a great degradation to be conceited. Look at the crow—how wise it thinks itself to be! It never falls into a snare. It flies off at the slightest approach of danger, and steals food with the greatest dexterity. But the poor creature cannot help eating filth. This is the result of being over-wise or having the wisdom of a pettifogger.

409.* To become great one must be humble. The nest of the sky-lark is on the earth below, but it soars high into the sky. High ground is not fit for cultivation; low ground is necessary, so that water may stand on it.

410. The tree laden with fruits always bends low. If you wish to be great, be lowly and meek.

411.* Our duty is to fall down and adore where others only bow.

412.* One should not entertain egotistical feeling, such as the conceit of the preacher, "I am lecturing, hear me, all of you!" Egotism exists in ignorance, not in Knowledge. He attains the Truth who is devoid of conceit. The rain water stands in low places, but runs off from high places.

413. In a balance, the scale that is heavy bends down, but the lighter one rises up. So the man of merit and ability is always humble and meek, while the fool is puffed up with vain conceit.

414. Be as devoid of vanity as the cast-away leaf carried by the high wind.

415. If you wish to thread a needle, make the thread pointed and remove all protruding fibres. Then it will easily pass through the eye of the needle. So, if thou wish to concentrate your heart and soul on God, be meek, humble and poor in spirit and remove all the spreading filaments of desire.

416. Many a man with a show of humility says, "I am like an earth-worm grovelling in the dust." In this way, thinking themselves always to be worms, in time they become weak in spirit like worms. Let not despondency ever enter into your heart. Despair is the greatest enemy in the path of progress. As a man thinks, so he becomes."

417. A true man (Manush) is only he who is a Manhus—one endowed with a sense of self-respect. Others are men only in name.

418. No pride is pride that expresses the glory of the soul. No humility is humility that humiliates the self.

SIMPLICITY

419. Till one becomes simple like a child, one cannot get divine illumination. Forget all the worldly knowledge that you have acquired and become as ignorant of it as a child; then you will get the knowledge of the Truth.

420. Simple-mindednes takes one easily to God. If a person is simple, spiritual instructions easily fructify in him, as seeds germinate easily and grow to bear fruit soon when sown in tilled soil free from stones.

421*. The Master used to say: "People become generous and simple-minded only in consequence of much

penance. 'God can never be attained except with a simple mind.' It is to the simple-minded that He reveals His own nature." But to safeguard people from developing into simpletons in the name of simplicity and truthfulness, the Master would also sound a note of warning; "You are to be a devotee but not a simpleton on that account," or again, "Always you must discriminate in your mind between the true and the false, the eternal and the transient; and then leaving aside all that is transient, you should fix your mind upon that alone which is eternal."

CONQUEST OF DESIRES

422. He is a true man who is dead even in this life —that is, whose passions and propensities have been curbed to extinction as in a dead body.

423. So long as the heavenly expanse of the heart is troubled and disturbed by the gusts of desire, there is little chance of our beholding therein the brightness of God. The beatific vision dawns only in the heart that is calm and rapt in Divine communion.

424. God cannot be seen so long as there is the slightest taint of desire. Therefore have your minor desires satisfied, and renounce the major ones by right reasoning and discrimination.

425. As one who is standing by the brink of a deep well is always careful lest he should fall into it, even so should one living in the world be always on his guard against its temptations. He who has once fallen into the well of the world, so full of temptations, can hardly come out of it uninjured and stainless.

426. On being asked when the enemies of man, such as lust, anger, etc., will be vanquished, the Master replied: "So long as these passions are directed towards the world and its objects, they behave like enemies. But when they are directed towards God, they become the best friends of man, for then they lead him unto God. The lust for the things of the world must be changed into the hankering for God, the anger that man feels in relation to his fellow man should be turned towards God for not revealing Himself to him. One should deal with all the passions in the same manner. These passions cannot be eradicated but can be educated."

427. Mandodari told her royal husband Ravana, "If you are so intent upon having Sita as your queen, why don't you impose on her by assuming the form of her husband Rama with the help of your magical powers?" "Fie on you!" explained Ravana, "Can I stoop to the pleasures of the senses while I am in the holy form of Rama—a form the very thought of which fills my heart with such unspeakable joy and blessedness that even the highest heaven appears to me worthless?"

428. When an elephant is let loose, it goes about uprooting trees and shrubs; but as soon as the driver applies the hook on its head it becomes quiet. So the mind, when unrestrained, wantons in the luxuriance of idle thoughts, but becomes at once calm when pulled up with the goad of discrimination.

429.* The more a man's attachment to the world, the less he is likely to attain Knowledge. The less his attachment to the world, the more is the probability of his gaining Knowledge.

430. When butter is produced by churning curds, it should not be kept in the same vessel with the buttermilk, for then it will lose something of its sweetness and hardness. It should be kept in pure water and in a different vessel. Similarly after attaining partial perfection in the world, if one still continues to mix with the worldly and remains in the midst of the temptations of the world, one is likely to become tainted, but can remain pure by living out of it.

431. *Q.* How may we conquer the old Adam that is in us?

A. When the flower develops into fruit, the petals drop off of themselves. So, when the divinity in you increases, the weakness of human nature in you will vanish of its own accord.

432.* If once through intense Vairagya (dispassion) one attains God, then the inordinate temptations of lust fall off, and a man finds himself in no danger from his own wife. If there are two magnets at an equal distance from a piece of iron, which of them will draw it with a stronger force? Certainly the larger. Verily God is the larger magnet; what can the smaller magnet ('woman') do against it?

433.* *Q.* How does the attraction of sensual pleasures die away?

A. In God, who is at once the embodiment of all happiness and pleasures. They who realise Him can find no attraction in the mean and worthless pleasures of the world.

434. Taking Helancha (a medicinal herb) is not the same as taking a pot-herb, and taking a piece of sugar

candy is not the same as taking common sweets: for Helancha and sugar candy are not injurious to health and even a sick man may use them. The mystic Pranava, too, is no mere word but a phonetic symbol of the Divinity. In the same way the desire for holiness and devotion cannot be deemed to be equal to the common polluting desires of the world.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN

435. All women are parts of the Divine Mother, and therefore they should be looked upon as mothers by all.

436. Women, whether naturally good or not, whether chaste or unchaste, should always be looked upon as images of the blissful Divine Mother.

437.* *Q.* How should we look upon the fair sex?

A. He who has known the Real, who is blessed with the vision of God, does not regard them with any fear. He sees them as they really are—parts of the Divine Mother of the universe. So he not only pays all honour and respect to women, but actually worships them as a son does his mother.

438.* *Q.* How can we conquer lust?

A. Look upon all women as your own mother. Never look a woman in the face, but always look at her feet. All evil thoughts will then fly away.

439. The woman who observes continence even while living with her husband, is veritably the Divine Mother Herself.*

440. *Q.* Sir, what do you think of the mode of devotional practices in the company of women, as enjoined by the Tantras?

A. Those are not safe 'paths'; they are very difficult, and are often attended with slips. There are three ways of practising devotion (according to the Tantras) —one may cultivate the attitude of the 'hero', or the 'hand-maid', or the 'son' towards the Divine Mother. Mine is the attitude of the 'son'. To think of oneself as the hand-maid of the Divine Mother is also good. But the path of the 'hero'[1] is fraught with danger. Very pure is the path of 'sonship' (*i.e.* thinking of oneself as the son of the Divine Mother).

441.* Do you aspire after Divine grace? Then propitiate the Mother, the Primal Divine Energy (Sakti). Yes, She is Mahamaya Herself. She it is Who has deluded the whole world, and is conjuring up the triple device of creation, maintenance and dissolution. She has spread a veil of ignorance over all, and unless She unbars the gate, none can enter the 'Inner Court'. Left outside, we see only the external things, but the Eternal One, Sachchidananda, remains ever beyond our ken.

The Divine Sakti has two aspects—Vidya and Avidya. Avidya deludes and is the mother of Kamini-Kanchana, 'woman and gold'; and it binds. But Vidya is the source of devotion, kindness, knowledge and love, and it takes us towards God.

[1] It is called Virachara in the Tantras. In this path the devotee has to worship the Goddess as his Divine Consort, taking a woman as the *vice deus*.

This Avidya has to be propitiated, and hence the institution of Sakti worship. Various are the ways of worship for gratifying Her—as Her 'handmaid', or 'hero', or 'child'. Sakti-sadhana is no joke. There are very strenuous and dangerous practices in it. I passed two years as Mother's 'hand-maid' and 'friend'. Mine, however, is the mood of the 'child', and to me the breasts of any women are like unto my mother's.

Women are so many images of Sakti. In the western parts of this country the bridegroom holds a knife in his hand during marriage, and in Bengal, a nut-cracker. The idea is that he will cut the bonds of Maya with the help of the bride who is Sakti Herself. This is Virabhava, 'the way of the hero'. But I never practised it. Mine is the attitude of the 'child'.

DEVOTEE AND HIS FAMILY

442. *Q.* Suppose a wife tells her husband who is given to religious practices, 'If you do not look after me properly, I will commit suicide.' What should one do in that case?

A. One should give up such a wife—the wife that stands in the way to God-realisation. Let her commit suicide or let her not! The wife who thus puts obstacles in one's path to God is an embodiment of Avidya (nescience). But then all become amenable to one who has a sincere devotion to God—even the king, wicked persons and the wife. If one has true devotion, then one's wife also gradually turns Godward. If one is good-natured, it

is quite possible that she too becomes good through the grace of God.

443. Father and mother are of prime importance to man. Unless they are pleased, no devotional practice will be of any avail. Look at Sri Chaitanya. Though mad with love of God, he took much pains to console his mother before he took Sannyasa. He told her, "Mother, do not be sorry. I will come now and then to see you." There are so many debts that one has to repay—the debt to the gods, the debt to the Rishis, and also the debt to the parents and the wife. No pious work can succeed unless the debt to the parents is paid off. There is a debt even to the wife. Harish is staying here, having renounced his wife. If his wife had not been provided for, I would have called him a wicked fellow. Ramaprasanna is always wandering about for milk and opium for the Hatha Yogi. He says that Manu has enjoined service to Sadhus. Meanwhile, his old mother is starving and has to do her own shopping. I feel so angry at this.

444.* But there is one consideration. If a man becomes mad with love of God, then who is father, who is mother and who is wife? He loves God so deeply that he becomes mad. He has no duty, he is absolved from all debts. When a man reaches that state, he forgets the whole world; he becomes unconscious of even the body which is so dear to everyone.

445.* The parents deserve the highest respect in this world. As long as they live, they should be served to the best of one's capacity, and after their death, their post-funeral rites ought to be performed according to one's

means. Even if the son be the poorest of the poor, and has no means to perform the post-funeral rites of his parents, he should resort to the forest and shed tears there, remembering his inability. Only then can he free himself from his obligation to them. For the sake of God alone, one may disobey one's parents without incurring sin. As for instance, Prahlada did not refrain from taking the name of Lord Krishna, although prohibited by his father to do so. And Dhruva went to the forest in order to practise austerities, even though forbidden by his mother. They had not done any wrong in this.

PRAYER AND DEVOTION

446. *Q.* Should we pray aloud to God?

A. Pray to Him in any way you like. He is always sure to hear you. He can hear even the footfall of an ant.

447. *Q.* Is there really any efficacy in prayers?

A. Yes. When mind and speech unite in earnestly asking for a thing, that prayer is answered. Of no avail are the prayers of that man who says with his mouth, "These are all Thine, O Lord!" and at the same time thinks in his heart that all of them are his.

448. Be not a traitor to your thoughts. Be sincere; act according to your thoughts; and you shall surely succeed. Pray with a sincere and simple heart, and your prayers will be heard.

449. What you think, that you should speak. Let there be harmony between your thoughts and words. Otherwise, if you merely say that God is your all in all,

while in your mind you have made the world your all in all, you cannot derive any benefit thereby.

450. To approach a mighty monarch a man must ingratiate himself with the officials who keep the gate and guard the throne. So, to reach the Almighty Lord and obtain His grace, one must practise much devotion, serve many devotees, and keep for long the company of the wise.

451. Do not let worldly thoughts and anxieties disturb your mind. Do everything that is necessary in the proper time, and let your mind be always fixed on God.

452. There is little fear that a ship will drift or run into danger as long as its compass points due North. So the ship of life steers clear of every danger, if the mind, its compass needle, is always turned towards God without oscillation.

453.* How to pray is the next question. Let us not pray for things of the world, but pray like Saint Narada. Narada said to Ramachandra, "O Rama, grant that I may be favoured with Bhakti (love, devotion and self-surrender) for Thy lotus-feet." "Be it so, Narada," said Rama, "But will you not ask for anything else?" Narada replied, "Lord, may it please Thee to grant that I may not be attracted by Thy Maya, which fascinates the universe." Ramachandra said once more, "Be it so, Narada, But will you not ask for anything else?" Narada replied, "No, Lord, that is all I pray for."

454.* If you cannot settle whether God has form or not, then pray in this way: "O Lord, I cannot understand whether Thou art with form or without it. Whatever mayst Thou be, have mercy on me. Do reveal Thyself unto me."

455.* One may attribute the various forms and aspects of God that are current in society to imagination, and may have no faith in them. Yet God will shower His grace on a person if he believes in a Divine Power that creates and directs the world, and prays with a distressed heart, "O God, I do not know Thy real nature. Deign to reveal Thyself to me as Thou really art."

456.* God is extremely attentive, my boys. He has heard every time you have prayed to Him. He will surely reveal Himself to you some day or other, at least at the time of death.

CHAPTER XI

SPIRITUAL ASPIRANTS AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

[*God of all religions the same—Different religions as paths to God—Cause and cure of fanaticism—Right attitude towards religious differences—Attitude towards secret cults*]

GOD OF ALL RELIGIONS THE SAME

457. As one and the same water is called by different names by different peoples, some calling it 'water', some 'Vari', some 'Aqua' and some 'Pani', so the one Sachchidananda—Existence-Intelligence-Bliss Absolute—is invoked by some as God, by some as Allah, by some as Hari and by others as Brahman.

458. In a potter's shop there are vessels of different shapes and forms—pots, jars, dishes, plates, etc.—but all made of the same clay. So God is one, but He is worshipped in different ages and climes under different names and aspects.

459. As the same sugar is made into various figures of birds and beasts, so the one sweet Divine Mother is worshipped in various climes and ages under various names and forms.

460. Various ornaments are made of gold. Although the substance is the same, they are called variously and appear different in form. So one and the same God is worshipped in different countries and ages under different names and forms. He may be worshipped in various ways according to different conceptions—some loving to call Him as father and others as mother, some as friend and others as beloved, some again as the innermost treasure of their heart and others as their sweet little child—but it is always one and the same God that is worshipped in all these diverse relations.

461. Once a dispute arose among the learned men at the court of the Maharajah of Burdwan as to who was the greater of the two Deities, Siva and Vishnu. Some of the courtiers said that Siva was greater, while the others gave preference to Vishnu. When the dispute grew hot, a wise Pandit remarked, "Sir, I have seen neither Siva nor Vishnu. How can I say who is the greater of the two?" Similarly, do not try to compare one Deity with another. When you will see one of them, you will come to know that they are all the manifestations of the same Brahman.

DIFFERENT RELIGIONS AS PATHS TO GOD

462. There are several bathing ghats in a large tank. Whoever goes choosing whichever ghat he pleases to take a bath or to fill his vessel reaches the water, and it is useless to quarrel with one another by calling one's ghat better than another. Similarly, there are many ghats that lead to the water of the fountain of Eternal Bliss. Every

religion of the world is one such ghat. Go direct with a sincere and earnest heart through any one of these ghats, and you shall reach the water of Eternal Bliss. But say not that your religion is better than that of another.

463. Many are the names of God and infinite the forms through which He may be approached. In whatever name and form you worship Him, through that you will realise Him.

464. Different creeds are but different paths to reach the one God. Diverse are the ways that lead to the temple of Mother Kali at Kalighat in Calcutta. Similarly various are the paths that take men to the house of the Lord. Every religion is nothing but one of these paths.

465. Some years ago when the Hindus and the Brahmos were preaching their respective religions with true earnestness and great zeal, someone asked the Master what his opinion was regarding both the parties. To this the Master said, "I see that my Divine Mother is getting Her work done through both these parties."

466. Questioned by a pious Brahmo as to what constituted the difference between Hinduism and Brahmoism, the Master said that the difference is the same as that between a single note and the whole gamut. The Brahmo religion is content with the single note of the Brahman, while the Hindu religion is made up of several notes, which together produce a sweet harmony.

467. As one can ascend to the top of a house by means of a ladder, a bamboo, a staircase or a rope, so also diverse are the ways of approaching God, and every religion in the world shows one of the ways.

468. The light of the gas-lamp illuminates various localities with varying intensity, but the sustenance of light, namely, the gas, comes from one common store. So the religious teachers of all lands and of all ages are but so many lamps through which the light of the Spirit streams constantly from the one almighty source.

469. The cries of all jackals are the same. So are the teachings of all the wise ones are the same.

THE CAUSE AND CURE OF FANATICISM

470.* Through ignorance a common man considers his own religion to be the best and makes much useless clamour; but when his mind is illumined by true Knowledge, all sectarian quarrel disappears.

471. Two persons were hotly disputing as to the colour of a chameleon. One said, "The chameleon on that palm tree is of a beautiful red colour." The other contradicted him saying, "You are mistaken, the chameleon is not red, but blue." Being unable to settle the matter by argument, both went to a man who always lived under that tree and had watched the chameleon in all its phases. One of the disputants asked, "Sir, is not the chameleon on that tree of a red colour?" The man replied, "Yes, sir." The other disputant said, "What do you say? How is that possible? Surely it is not red, but blue!" The man again humbly replied, "Yes, sir." He knew that the chameleon constantly changed its colour. So he said 'Yes' to both the conflicting views. God who is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, has likewise various forms. The devotee who has seen God only in one aspect knows that and that

aspect alone. None but he who has seen Him in manifold aspects, can say, "All these forms are of the one God, for God is multiform." He is formless and with form, and many are His forms which no one knows.

472. Dal (sedge) does not grow in large tanks with pure water. It grows only in small, stagnant and miasmatic pools. Similarly Dal (schism) does not occur in a party whose members are guided by pure, broad and unselfish motives. It appears only in the party whose members are selfish, insincere and bigoted.

473. Is it good to create sects (Dal)? (Here is a pun on the word 'dal' which means in Bengali both a 'sect' or 'party' and 'the rank growth on the surface of a stagnant pool'.) The 'dal' cannot grow in flowing water; it grows only in stagnant pools. He whose heart constantly flows towards the Lord has no time for anything else. He who seeks fame and honour forms sects.

474. Men may partition their lands by measuring rods and boundary lines, but no one can so partition the all-embracing sky overhead. The individual sky surrounds all and includes all. So the unenlightened man in his ignorance says that his religion is the only true one and that it is the best. But when his heart is illumined by the light of true Knowledge, he comes to know that above all these wars of sects and creeds is the one Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute (Akhanda Sachchidananda).

RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARDS RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

475.* Whoever performs devotional exercises, with the belief that there is but one God, is bound to attain

Him, no matter in what aspect, name or manner He is worshipped.

476.* You will advance, whatever way you meditate on Him or recite His holy names. The cake made of sugar candy will taste equally sweet, whether it is held straight or oblique when you eat it.

477. Q. If the God of every religion is the same, why is it then that God is painted differently by different religionists?

A. God is one, but His aspects are many. As the master of a house is father to one, brother to another and husband to a third, and is called by different names by different persons, so the one God is described in various ways according to the particular aspect in which He appears to His particular worshipper.

478. As a mother, in nursing her sick children, gives rice and curry to one, sago and arrowroot to another, and bread and butter to a third, so the Lord has laid out different paths for different men suitable to their natures.

479. Sankaracharya's exposition of the Vedanta is indeed true, and true also is what Ramanuja speaks of it—his Visishtadvaita philosophy.

480. Let a man be a Christian in the matter of mercy, a Moslem in the matter of strict observance of external forms, and a Hindu in the matter of universal charity towards all living creatures.

481. When you go out and mix with people, you should have love for them all; mix with them freely and become one with them. You should not shrug your shoulders and hate them, saying, "They believe in a Personal God, and not in the Impersonal;" or "They believe in the Impersonal,

and not in the Personal," or "He is a Christian, a Hindu, or a Mussalman." Man understands about Him only so much as He makes him understand.

Moreover, knowing that men are of different tendencies, you should mix with them as much as you can. And you should love all. Then returning to your own 'home' (heart) you will enjoy bliss and peace. There you will meet your own real self.

482. Every man should follow his own religion. A Christian should follow Christianity, and a Mohammedan Mohammedanism. For the Hindu the ancient path, the path of the Aryan Rishis, is the best.

483. A truly religious man should think that other religions are also so many paths leading to the Truth. We should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions.

484. Dispute not. As you rest firmly on your own faith and opinion, allow others also equal liberty to stand by their own faith and opinion. By mere disputation you will never succeed in convincing another of his error. When the grace of God descends on him, every man will understand his own mistakes.

485.* One day the Master was heard talking to the Mother of the universe, in a God-intoxicated state: "Mother, every one says, 'My watch keeps correct time.' The Christians, the Hindus, the Mohammedans, all say, 'My religion is the true religion.' But Mother, nobody's watch is exact. Who can truly know Thee? But again, if one seeks Thee with a yearning heart, one can reach Thee by Thy grace through any path, through any religion."

ATTITUDE TOWARDS SECRET CULTS

486.* Some ardent moralists among the Master's disciples often found fault with certain people of great spiritual attainments, because some of the parctices they followed, being of the secret rites of the Saktas and Vaishnavas, seemed to violate the ordinary rules of morality. To them the Master used to reply always: "They are not to be blamed for that. For they had the thorough conviction that the paths they followed in themselves led to God-realisation. Whatever is ardently believed in and adopted as a means to God-realisation should not be found fault with. No aspirant's attitude should be condemned; since any attitude, if sincerely followed, is sure to lead to God, Who is the consummation of them all. Go on calling upon Him, each in his own way, and don't find fault with another's path or take to it as your own."

487.* With a view to remove the antagonism of his disciples towards these secret cults, the Master would sometimes speak to them about his views regarding them as follows: "Well, why should you cherish hatred towards them? Know them also to be paths, though they may be dirty. There may be diverse entrances to a house—the front gate, the back-door and the door for the scavenger who comes to clean the dirty places in the house. Know these cults to be akin to this last-mentioned door. No matter by which door one enters; when once within the house, all reach the same place. Are you therefore to imitate these people or mix with them? Certainly not. But do not hate them in any way."

CHAPTER XII

ESSENTIALS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

[*Some conditions of spiritual enlightenment—Faith—Resignation to God—Necessity of Ishta or Chosen Deity—Truth—Brahmacharya or continence—Viveka or discrimination—Vairagya or aversion for worldly objects—Perseverance—Spiritual practice—Concentration and meditation*]

SOME CONDITIONS OF SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT

488. If a person possessed by an evil spirit becomes conscious that he is so possessed, the evil spirit at once leaves him. Similarly the Jiva which is possessed by the evil spirit of Maya, on realising that he is so possessed, becomes at once free from it.

489.* He alone enters the Kingdom of Heaven who is not a thief of his own thoughts. In other words, guilelessness and simple faith are the roads to that Kingdom.

490. A person once said: "The innate nature of a substance can never be changed." Another retorted, "When fire enters charcoal, it destroys its innate blackness." So when the mind is burnt by the fire of Knowledge, its innate nature too is destroyed, and it ceases to be a snare.

491. The mind is everything. If the mind loses its liberty, you lose yours. If the mind is free, you too are free. ' The mind may get dyed in any colour, like a white cloth fresh from the washing house. Study English, and you must mix English words in your talk in spite of yourself. The Pandit who studies Sanskrit must quote verses. If the mind is kept in bad company, the evil influence of it will colour one's thoughts and conversations. Placed in the midst of devotees, the mind is sure to meditate on God and God alone. It changes its nature according to the things amongst which it lives and acts.

492. The mind is everything. The attraction for the wife is of one kind, and the affection for the child is of quite a different nature. On one side is one's wife, on another side is the child ; one caresses both, but is moved by quite different impulses.

493. Bondage is of the mind; freedom too is of the mind. If you say, " I am a free soul. I am a son of God ! Who can bind me ? " free you shall be. If one is bitten by a snake and can say with all the force of will and faith, " There is no venom, there is no venom", one will surely get rid of the venom.

494. *Q.* When shall I be free ?

A. When ' I ' shall cease to be. ' I and mine ' is ignorance. ' Thou and Thine ' is Knowledge.

FAITH

495.* To a disciple who criticised some people's faith as ' blind faith ', the Master remarked: " Well, can you explain to me what you mean by ' blind faith ' ? Is not

faith wholly 'blind'? What then are its eyes? Say either 'faith' or 'knowledge'. Or else, what is this queer notion that faith in some instances is 'blind' and in others is 'with eyes'?"

496. Man suffers through lack of faith in God.

497. There are physiological signs indicating who will be endowed with faith and who not. The bony sort of fellows, the hollow-eyed, the squint-eyed—all these types cannot have faith easily.

498. To kill another, sword and shield are needed, whilst to kill oneself even a pin will do. So to teach others one must study many scriptures and sciences, while to acquire spiritual illumination for oneself, firm faith in a single motto will suffice.

499. There are various sects and creeds among the Hindus. Which of them should we adopt? Parvati once asked Mahadeva, "O Lord, what is the root of the eternal, everlasting, all-embracing Bliss?" To her Mahadeva replied, "The root is faith." So the peculiarities of creeds and sects matter little or nothing. Let every one take to devotional practices and perform the duties of his own creed with faith.

500. Knowledge relating to God keeps pace with faith. Where there is little faith, it is idle to look for much Knowledge. The cow which is over-nice in matters of eating is not liberal in its supply of milk. But the cow which welcomes all kinds of food—herbs, leaves, grass, husks, straw and the rest—and eats them up with great appetite, gives an abundant supply. Her milk comes down from the udder into the pail in torrents.

501. He who has faith has all, and he who lacks it lacks all.

502. If you are keen on realising God, repeat His 'name' with firm faith, and try to discriminate the Real from the unreal.

503. Unless one becomes childlike in faith, it is difficult to realise God. If the mother says to the child, "He is your brother," the child fully believes that the person referred to is really its brother. If the mother says, "Don't go there, there is a bogy," the child is indeed convinced that there is a bogy. God is moved to pity when He sees in a man that kind of childlike faith. None can attain God with the calculating nature of the worldly-minded.

504.* One day, Sri Krishna, while going in a chariot along with Arjuna, looked up to the sky and said, "Behold! What a nice flight of pigeons there!" Arjuna at once turned his eyes in that direction and exclaimed, "Really, friend, very beautiful pigeons indeed!" But the very next moment Sri Krishna looked again and said, "No, friend, they are not pigeons, it seems." Arjuna, too, saw again and said, "True, they are not pigeons." Now try to understand the meaning of this. A great adherent of truth that Arjuna was, he did not possibly assent to whatever Sri Krishna said, simply for flattering him. But he had such an unflinching faith in Sri Krishna that he perceived at once actually whatever Sri Krishna said.

505. Boil your sugar well over a burning fire. As long as there is dirt or impurity in it, the sweet infusion will smoke and simmer. But when all the impurity and scum

are cast out, there is neither smoke nor sound; only the delicious crystalline syrup heaves in its unmixed worth. Then whether liquid or solid, it becomes the delight of men and gods. Such is the character of the man of faith.

506. A man wanted to cross a river. A sage gave him an amulet and said, "This will carry you across." The man, taking it in his hand, began to walk over the water. Before he had gone half the way, he was seized with curiosity, and opened the amulet to see what was in it. Therein he found, written on a piece of paper, the sacred name of Rama, the Lord. At this the man said depreciatingly, "Is this the whole secret?" No sooner did this scepticism enter his mind than he sank down. It is faith in the 'name' of the Lord that works wonders; for faith is life and want of faith is death.

507. A disciple who had firm faith in the infinite power of his Guru walked over a river by simply uttering his name. Seeing this, the Guru thought, "Well, is there such a power in my mere name? Then how much great and powerful must I be!" The next day, the Guru also tried to walk over the river uttering 'I', 'I', 'I', but no sooner did he step into the water than he sank down and was soon drowned; for the poor man did not know how to swim ever. Faith can achieve miracles while vanity or egotism brings about the destruction of man.

508. Sri Ramachandra, who was God incarnate, had to bridge the ocean before he could cross over to Lanka (Ceylon). But Hanuman, his faithful monkey devotee and servant, crossed the ocean at one leap, because of his

firm faith in Rama. Here the servant achieved more than the master, simply through faith.

509. A king guilty of the heinous sin of killing a Brahmin went to the hermitage of a Rishi to learn what penance he must perform in order to be purified. The Rishi was absent, but his son was in the hermitage. Hearing the case of the king, he said, "Repeat the 'name' of God (Rama) three times, and your sin will be expiated." When the Rishi came back and heard of the penance prescribed by his son, he remarked indignantly, "Sins committed in myriads of births are purged immediately by uttering the 'name' of the Almighty but once. How weak must be your faith, O fool, since you have ordered the holy 'name' to be repeated thrice? For this weakness of your faith, you shall become an outcaste." And the son became Guhaka of the Ramayana.

510. The stone may remain in water for numberless years; yet the water will never penetrate into it. But clay is soon soaked into mud by the contact of water. So the strong heart of the faithful does not despair in the midst of trials and persecutions, but the man of weak faith is shaken even by the most trifling cause.

511.* One becomes as one thinks.' They say that by constantly thinking of a particular kind of insect (Bhramarakita), a cockroach is transformed into that insect. Similarly he who constantly thinks of the Bliss Absolute himself becomes full of bliss.

512. Why talk of sin and hell-fire all the days of your life? Chant the 'name' of God. Do say, but once, "I have, O Lord, done things that I ought not to have done,

and I have left undone things that I ought to have done. O Lord, forgive me!" Saying this, have faith in Him, and you will be purged of all sins.

513. The faith-healers of India order their patients to repeat with full conviction the words, "There is no illness at all." The patients repeat them, and this mental suggestion helps to drive off the disease. So if you think yourself to be morally weak, you will actually become so in a short time. Know and believe that you are of immense power, and then power will come to you at last.

514. He who thinks that he is a Jiva, verily remains as a Jiva; but he who considers himself to be God, verily becomes a God. As one thinks, so does one become.

RESIGNATION TO GOD

515. He who can resign himself to the will of the Almighty with simple faith and guileless love realises the Lord very quickly.

516. To live in the world or to leave it depends upon the will of God. Therefore work, leaving everything to Him. What else can you do?

517. A shallow pool of water in an open field will soon be dried up, though no one may lessen the quantity of its water by using it. So a sinful man is sometimes purified by simply resigning himself totally and absolutely to the mercy and grace of God.

518. *Q.* What are we to do when we are placed in this world?

A. Give up everything to Him, resign yourself to Him, and there will be no more trouble for you.

Then you will come to know that everything is done by His will.

519. There is no path safer and smoother than that of Ba-kalama (power of attorney).. Ba-kalama means here resigning oneself to the will of the Almighty and having no feeling that anything is one's own.

520. The young of a monkey clasps and clings to its mother tightly when she moves about. The kitten on the other hand does not do so but mews piteously, and the mother grasps it by the neck. If the young of the monkey lets go its hold of its mother, it falls down and gets hurt. This is because it relies upon its own strength. But the kitten runs no such risk, as the mother herself carries it about from place to place. Such is the difference between self-reliance and entire resignation to the will of God.

521. A father was once passing through a field with his two little sons. He was carrying one of them in his arms while the other was walking along with him holding his hand. They saw a kite flying, and the latter boy, giving up his hold on his father's hand, began to clasp with joy, crying, "Behold, papa, there is a kite!" But immediately he stumbled down and got hurt. The boy who was carried by the father also clapped his hands with joy, but did not fall, as his father was holding him. The first boy represents self-help in spiritual matters, and the second self-surrender.

522. Blessed Radha was once called to prove her chastity. She was subjected to the ordeal of fetching water in a jar with a thousand holes. She succeeded in doing so without even a drop of water leaking out, and everyone

applauded her, declaring that such a chaste woman never was and never will be. At this Radha exclaimed, "Why do you heap praise on me? Say rather, 'Glory to Krishna! Glory to Him alone!' I am only a handmaid of His."

523. What is the nature of absolute reliance on God? It is like that happy state of relaxation felt by a fatigued worker when, reclining on a pillow, he smokes at leisure after a day's hard work. It is the cessation of all anxieties and worries.

524. Live here like a leaf cast off after being used for taking food. It is at the mercy of the winds; it is blown here and there; sometimes indoors and sometimes abroad in dirty places. Well, now you are placed here; all right, remain here. And when He will take you away and put you in a better place, then, too, you should say 'Amen' and resign to His will with perfect unattachment. Let things take care of themselves.

NECESSITY OF ISHTA OR CHOSEN DEITY

525. The young wife in a family respects her father-in-law and mother-in-law, ministers to their wants, and does not despise or disobey them; but at the same time she loves her husband more than any of them. In the same way be firm in your devotion to your own Chosen Deity (Ishta), but do not despise other Deities. Honour them too; for they all represent one Authority and one Love.

526. In the play of dice called Ashta-kashta, the pieces must pass through all the squares of the chequer before they reach the central square of rest and non-return. But so long as a pawn does not reach that central square, it is

liable to return again and again to its starting point and commence its weary journey over and over again. If, however, two pawns happen to start their journey in unison and move jointly from square to square, they cannot be forced back by any winner. Similarly, those who start on their career of devotional practices, first uniting themselves with a Guru and an Ishta, have no fear of reverses and difficulties on the way. Their progress will be smooth, unimpeded and without any retrogression.

527. Many roads lead to Calcutta. Dr. Doubtful started from his home in a distant village to go to the metropolis. He asked a man on the road, "Which is the shortest route to Calcutta?" The man said, "Follow this road." Proceeding some distance, he met another man and asked him, "Is this the shortest road to Calcutta?" The man replied, "Oh no! You must retrace your steps and take the road to your left." The man did so. Going along that new road for some distance, he met a third man who pointed out another road to Calcutta. Thus Dr. Doubtful made no progress, but spent the whole day in changing roads. One who really wishes to reach Calcutta must stick to a single road pointed out by an honest man; so also those who want to reach God must follow steadily one particular guide.

528. A man began to sink a well, but having dug down to a depth of twenty cubits, he could not find any trace of water there. So he gave up that site and selected another spot for the purpose. There he dug still deeper, but even then could not find any water. So he selected yet another site and dug deeper than before, but it was also of no avail.

At last in utter disgust he gave up the task altogether. The total depth of all these three wells was only a little short of one hundred cubits. Had he the patience to devote even half of the whole of this labour to his first well, instead of changing the site again and again, he would surely have succeeded in getting water. The same is the case with men who continually change their faith. In order to succeed we have to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to one object of faith without being in the least doubtful as to its worth.

529. As a chaste woman wholly devoted to her husband is united with him for ever even after death, so the man who is solely devoted to his own Chosen Deity certainly obtains union with God.

TRUTH

530.* Have Bhakti within, and give up all cunning and deceit. Those who are engaged in business, such as work in office or trade, should also stick to truth. Truthfulness is the Tapasya (austerity) of this age of Kali.

531. Unless one always speaks the truth, one cannot find God Who is the soul of truth.

532.* One must be very particular about telling the truth. Through truth one can realise God.

533. Everything false is bad. Even false garb is bad. If your mind is not quite in accord with the garb, then terrible ruin shall visit you. In this way, one grows hypocritical, and all fear of doing wrong or uttering falsehood disappears.

534. A certain person, deeply involved in debt, feigned madness to escape the consequences of his liabilities.

Physicians failed to cure his disease; and the more medicines were administered to him the greater became his madness. At last a wise physician found out the truth, and taking the man feigning madness aside, rebuked him saying, "Sir, what are you doing? Beware that by feigning madness you do not become actually mad. Already I see some genuine signs of insanity in you." This warning roused the man from his folly and he left off feigning madness. You will actually become what you constantly pose yourself to be.

BRAHMACHARYA OR CONTINENCE

535. As one's face may be seen reflected in a sheet of glass coated with quick silver, so the glorious image of the Almighty God can be seen reflected in the heart of a person who has preserved his power and purity through perfect continence.

536. Unless one practises absolute continence, one cannot comprehend the subtle truths of spirituality.

537.* Sukadeva was an Urdhvaretas (a man of complete and unbroken continence); he had never any emission of semen. There was another class called Dhairyaretas, who had discharge of semen at one time but subsequently practised absolute continence. If a man remains a Dhairyaretas continually for twelve years, he acquires a superhuman power. A new nerve is developed in him. It is called the 'nerve of intelligence' (Medhanadi), and he can remember everything and know everything.

538.* If a man practises absolute continence for twelve years, the Medhanadi will open (*i.e.*, his powers and understanding will blossm). His understanding will become capable of penetrating and comprehending the subtlest of ideas. With such an understanding man can realise God. God can be attained only through a purified understanding of this type.

539. Waste of the vital fluid entails loss of energy. Involuntary emission, however, is not of much consequence. That is due to food. But still one (a truely spiritual man) should not know any woman carnally.

540. He who has relinquished sexual enjoyment has indeed renounced the world! God is indeed very near him!

VIVEKA OR DISCRIMINATION

541.* Practise discrimination. 'Woman' and 'gold' are both unreal; the one reality is God. Of what use is money? Why, it gives us food and clothing and a place to live in. Thus far it is useful, and no further. Surely you cannot see God with the help of money. Money is certainly not the end of life. This is the process of discrimination. What is there in money or in the beauty of women? Using your discrimination you shall find that the body of the most beautiful woman is made up only of flesh and blood, skin and bones, fat and marrow, nay, as in the case of all animals, of entrails, urine, excreta, and the rest. The wonder is that man can lose sight of God, and give his mind entirely to things of such kind!

542.* Viveka and Vairagya—Viveka means the sifting of the real from the unreal; and Vairagya, indifference to

the objects of the world. They do not come all on a sudden; they have to be practised daily. 'Woman and gold' have to be renounced, first mentally, and God willing, they should be renounced afterwards both internally and externally. It is said in the Gita that by Abhyasa Yoga (continuous practice of meditation) dislike for 'woman and gold' is engendered. Continuous practice brings to the mind extraordinary power; then nobody feels difficulty in subjugating the senses, passions and lust. It is like a tortoise that never stretches out its limbs, once it has drawn them in. Even if you cut it to pieces, it would never stretch them out.

543. *Q.* Is this world unreal?

A. It is unreal so long as you do not know God. For you do not see Him in everything, and so fasten yourself to the world with the tie of 'I and mine'. Being thus deluded by ignorance, you become attached to sense-objects and sink deeper and deeper into the abyss of Maya. Maya makes men so utterly blind that they cannot get out of its meshes even when the way lies open. You yourself know how unreal this worldly life is. Think a little of the very house that you are in. How many men were born and how many died in it! Things of the world appear before us for a moment and vanish in the next. Those whom you know to be your 'own' will cease to exist for you, the moment you close your eyes in death. How strong is the hold of attachment upon a worldly man! There is nobody in the family who requires his attention, yet for the sake of a grandson he cannot go to Benares to practise devotion. "What will become of my Hari," is

the one thought that keeps him bound to the world. In a Ghuni (a trap for catching fish) the way out is always open, yet the fish do not get out of it. The caterpillar shuts itself up in its own cocoon and perishes. Being of such a nature, is not this mundane life (Samsara) unreal and evanescent?

544. Do you know how egotism is to be destroyed? When they husk corn, they stop from time to time to examine the grain, and see if the husking is complete. When they weigh some fine things in a delicate balance, they often stop and adjust the needle to test if the point is accurate. So now and then I used to abuse myself with strong denunciations to see whether my ego still rose within me are not. At times I used to ponder thus over the nature of the body: "Look at this body. What is it but a cage of flesh and bones! It contains nothing but blood, pus and such other impure matter. It is strange that so much pride is felt with regard to this!

545.* Suppose rice is boiling in the pot. To test whether it is properly boiled, you take one grain from it and press the same between your fingers. At once you come to know whether the whole pot of rice is boiled or not. Surely you would not press each and every grain of rice? Just as you know the condition of the rice by testing only a few grains, so also you can know whether the world is real or unreal, eternal or ephemeral, existent or non-existent, by examining two or three objects in it. Man is born, lives for some days, and then dies. So too are animals and trees. Discriminating like this, you come to know that the same is the fate of all things endowed with

name and form, even of the earth, the sun and moon. Do you not thus come to understand the nature of all things in the universe? When you thus recognise the world to be unreal and ephemeral, you will no longer have any love of it. You will renounce it from the mind, and become free from all desires. When you succeed in this act of renunciation, you come to know God who is the cause of the universe. One who gains the realisation of God in this way—if he is not all-knowing, what else is he?

VAIRAGYA

546. Even when we are blinded to reality by the fulfilment of every worldly desire, there may arise in us the question, "Who am I who enjoy all this?" This may be the moment in which a revelation of the secret begins.

547. In a forest full of thorns and briars it is impossible to walk bare-footed. One can do so if the whole forest is covered with leather, or if one's own feet are protected with leather shoes. It is impossible to cover the whole forest with leather, so it is wiser to protect one's feet with shoes. Similarly, in this world man is troubled with innumerable wants and desires, and there are only two possible ways of escape from them, *viz.*, either to have all those wants satisfied, or to give up all of them. But it is impossible to satisfy all human wants; for with every attempt to satisfy them, new wants arise. So it is wiser to decrease one's wants by contentment and the knowledge of Truth.

548. It is very pleasant to scratch an itching ringworm, but the sensation one gets afterwards is very

painful and intolerable. So the pleasures of this world are very attractive in the beginning, but their consequences are terrible to endure and contemplate.

549. A kite with a fish in its beak was chased by a large number of crows and screaming kites, pecking at it and trying to snatch away the fish. In whichever direction it went the flock of kites and crows also followed it. Tired of this annoyance, the kite threw away the fish which was instantly caught by another kite. At once the flock of kites and crows turned to the new possessor of the fish. The first kite was left unmolested; it calmly perched upon the branch of a tree. Seeing it in this quiet and tranquil state, the Avadhuta saluted it and said, "You are my Guru, O kite; you have taught me that so long as man does not throw off the burden of worldly desires, he cannot escape from worldly distractions and be at peace with himself."

550. A shy horse does not move straight when its eyes are not protected by eyeflaps. Similarly, the mind of a worldly man, restrained from looking around by the eyeflaps of discrimination and aversion for worldly objects, will not stumble, or stray into evil paths.

551. When paper is wetted with oil, it cannot be written upon. So the soul stained by the oil of vice and luxury is unfit for spiritual devotion. But when the paper wetted with oil is overlaid with chalk, it may be written upon; so when such a soul is 'chalked' over with renunciation, it becomes fit again for spiritual progress.

552. There is a venomous spider whose poison no medicine can counteract till the wound is magnetised by

passes with turmeric roots held in the hand. After the wound is thus treated, other remedies are seen to produce their effect. So when the spider of lust and wealth has infected a man, he must first get thoroughly saturated with the magnetic remedy of renunciation before he can have any spiritual progress.

553.* If you put a purifying agent, say, a piece of alum, into a vessel of muddy water, the impurities settle down at the bottom and the water is made clear. Discrimination and dispassion for worldly objects are the two purifying agents. It is through these that the worldly man ceases to be worldly and becomes pure.

554. The caterpillar gets itself imprisoned in its own cocoon. So the worldly soul is caught in the meshes of its own desires. But when the caterpillar develops into a bright and beautiful butterfly, it bursts the cocoon and flies out enjoying freely light and air. So the worldly soul can fly out of the meshes of Maya with the wings of discrimination and dispassion for worldly things.

555. Reverse turns the key of the room wherein God lives. To reach Him you have to renounce the world and all.

556. It is useless to pore over the holy scriptures if one's mind is not endowed with Viveka and Vairagya. No spiritual progress can be made without these.

557. How may one attain God? One has to sacrifice body, mind and riches to find Him.

558.* What must be the condition of the mind of a bound soul before he can hope to be liberated? If by the grace of God he can acquire intense dispassion for

worldly things, then only can he be released from the attachment to 'woman and gold'. And what is this intense dispassion, this vehement desirelessness? "By and by I shall realise God"—this is the attitude of feeble Vairagya. But he whose Vairagya is acute and strong—his heart longs and pants for God, even as the mother's heart pants for her child. He never seeks anything but God, and to him the world appears as a veritable well wherein he fears he may be drowned any moment. To him his relations then seem so many venomous serpents from whom he is inclined to fly away. And such is the strength of his impulse and determination that he never thinks of settling his domestic affairs first before he would seek the Lord.

559. Why does a God-lover renounce everything for the sake of Him Whom he loves? The moth after seeing a light has no mind to return to darkness; the ant dies in the heap of sugar but does not turn back. So the God-lover gladly sacrifices his life for the attainment of Divine bliss, and cares for nothing else.

560.* One becomes a real Jnani, a true Paramahamsa, only when one has tested all possible conditions of life, from the humblest position of a scavenger to the highest role of a king, through observation, report of others and actual experience, and has become convinced thereby of the trivial nature of all worldly enjoyments.

561.* Jnana never comes without renunciation of lust and possessions. With the dawn of renunciation is destroyed all ignorance, all Avidya. Many things can be burnt by means of a lens held in such a manner that the rays

of the sun falls on it directly, but you cannot use it so in the shade of a room. Even so with the mind. You must take it out of the dark cell of this world and expose it to the full blaze of self-effulgent Divinity. Then alone true renunciation will come, and with it all ignorance will be destroyed.

562. Knowledge (Jnana) cannot be communicated all at once. Its attainment is a question of time. Suppose a fever is of a severe type, the doctor cannot give quinine in that circumstance. He knows that it will do no good. The fever must first leave the patient, which depends upon time, and then quinine or any other medicine should be administered. Analogous is the case with a man who seeks Knowledge. Religious precepts often prove useless as long as one is immersed in worldliness. Allow a man a certain time for the enjoyment of the things of the world. When his attachment to the world has somewhat lessened, then comes the time for fruitful religious instructions. Till then all such instructions will only be lost upon him.

563. In a room away from their mother, little children play with dolls just as they like; but as soon as the mother comes in, they throw aside the dolls and run to her, crying "Mamma, Mamma". You also are now playing in this world, deeply absorbed in the dolls of wealth, honour and fame, without caring for anything else. But if once you see the Divine Mother in you, you will no more find pleasure in any of these, be it wealth, honour or fame. Leaving them all away, you will run to Her.

564.* Vairagya is of many kinds. One kind of it springs from acute pain due to worldly misery. But the

better kind arises from the consciousness that all worldly blessings, though within one's reach, are transitory and are not worth enjoying. Thus, having all, he has not anything.

565. How many kinds of Vairagya are there? Generally two: the intense and the moderate. Intense Vairagya is like digging a large tank in one night until it gets filled with water then and there. Moderate Vairagya is slow in its growth and procrastinating. There is no knowing when it will become complete.

566. A person was going to a river to bathe when he heard that a certain gentleman had been preparing for some days past to renounce the world and become a sannyasin. This somehow produced a conviction in the man's mind that the Sannyasin's is the highest mode of life. He immediately determined to be a Sannyasin and without returning home went away in his half-naked condition. This illustrates intense Vairagya.

567.* Dive deep into the ocean of the Absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. Fear not those deep sea-monsters—avarice and anger. Paint yourself thickly with the turmeric of Viveka and Vairagya and these alligators will not approach you; for the scent of this turmeric is too much for them.

PERSEVERANCE

568. Do you know how peasants buy their teams? Oh, they are expert in these matters, and know very well how to distinguish the good ones from the bad. They know how to find out the mettle of an animal. They simply touch the

tail, and the effect is miraculous. Those that have no mettle in them will offer no resistance, but lie down on the ground as if they are going to sleep. But those that have mettle will jump about, as if in protest against the liberty taken with them. The peasants will choose the latter.

One must have the true mettle of a man within, if one wishes to be successful in life. But there are many who have no grit in them—who are like popped rice soaked in milk, soft and cringing! No strength within! No capacity for sustained effort! No power of will! They are failures in life.

569. The angler, anxious to hook a big fish, waits calmly for hours together, having thrown the bait and the hook into water. Similarly the devotee who patiently goes on with his devotions is sure at last to find his God.

570. The hereditary peasant does not give up tilling the soil though it may not rain for twelve years; but a merchant who has recently taken to agriculture is discouraged by one season of drought. The true believer is never discouraged even if he fails to see God in spite of lifelong devotion.

571. He who will learn to swim must attempt swimming for some days. None can venture to swim in the sea after a single day's practice. So if you want to swim in the sea of Brahman, you must make many ineffectual attempts at first before you can successfully swim therein at last.

572. The new-born calf feels unsteady and tumbles down scores of times before it learns to stand steady. So in the path of devotion slips are many and frequent until success is finally achieved.

573. Two persons, it is said, together began invoking the Goddess Kali by the terrible rite called Savasadhana.[1] One invoker was frightened to insanity by the terrible visions appearing in the earlier portion of the night, while the other was favoured with the vision of the Divine Mother at the end of the night. The latter said to the Goddess, "Mother, why did the other man become mad?" The Deity answered, "You, too, O child, did become mad many times in your previous births, and now at last you have seen Me."

574. *Q.* Peace comes to our heart but rarely, and then it does not last long. Why is it so?

A. The fire made by burning bamboo is soon extinguished unless kept alive by constant blowing. Uninterrupted devotion is necessary to keep alive the fire of spirituality.

575. If you fill an earthen vessel with water and set it apart on a shelf, all the water in it evaporates in a few days; but if you keep it immersed in water, it will remain full as long as it is there. Such is the case with your love of God. If you cultivate love of God for a time, and afterwards employ yourself in other affairs forgetting Him, then you would soon find that your heart has become empty of that precious love. But if you keep your blissful heart immersed always in holy love and faith, it is sure to remain ever full to overflowing with the divine fervour of that sacred love.

576. So long as there is fire beneath the vessel, the milk in it boils and bubbles, but remove the fire and the

[1] This Tantric rite is performed in a cremation ground in the darkness of night, the Sadhaka seating himself on a corpse.

milk stands still again. So the heart of the neophyte boils with enthusiasm only so long as he goes on with his spiritual exercises.

577. How long does godliness remain in man? Iron is red so long as it is in the fire, but it becomes black the moment it is removed from fire. So man is imbued with God so long as he is in communion with Him.

578. The mind is like the curly hair of a Negro; you may draw it straight as long as you please, but the moment you let it go it again becomes curled. As long as the mind is forcibly kept straight and steady, it works well and to advantage; but when you slacken your vigilance, it turns away from the right path.

579. Tota Puri[1] used to say, "If a brass vessel is not scoured daily, it gets dim in colour. So if a man does not meditate daily on the Deity, his heart will get impure." To him the Master once replied that a gold vessel does not require daily cleaning. The man who has reached God no more needs the help of prayers and penances.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

580. To drink pure water from a shallow pond one should gently take the water from the surface without disturbing it in the least. If it is disturbed, the sediments rise up and make the whole water muddy. If you desire to be pure, have firm faith, and slowly go on with your devotional practices, without wasting your energy in useless

[1] The itinerant monk who initiated the Master into the practice of Advaita Vedanta.

scriptural discussions and arguments. Your little brain will otherise be muddled.

581. There are many who inquire about the houses and riches of a wealthy citizen of Calcutta like Jadunath Mullick, but only a few go to see him personally and cultivate his acquaintance. Similarly, many are the men who study scriptures and talk of religion, but very few are those who wish to see God or take pains to approach Him.

582. Adopt adequate means for the end you seek to attain. You cannot get butter by crying yourself hoarse, saying, "There is butter in the milk." If you wish to get butter, turn the milk into curd and churn it well, and then you will have butter. So if you long to see God, take to spiritual practices (Sadhanas). What is the good of merely crying, "O God! O God!"

583. If a man desires to see the king in his palace, he will have to go to the palace and pass through all the gates: but, if, after entering the outermost gate only, he exclaims, "Where is the king?" he will not find him. He must go through the seven gates, and then he will see the king.

584. Effort is necessary for realisation. One day in Bhava Samadhi (spiritual absorption), I saw the Haldar-pukur[1] and found there a rustic taking water. He removed the sedges from the surface and examined it now and again, taking it up in his hand. It was shown to me, as if to signify that just as water can never be seen unless one removes the sedge, love of God and realisation of Him cannot be had if one does not work for it. Meditation,

[1] A big tank situated just in front of the ancestral house of Sri Ramakrishna in his native village Kamarpukur.

repeating the 'name' of the Lord, singing His glories, praying to Him, charity, performance of sacrifices—these are the holy works that lead to God.

585. Even Sri Krishna went through tremendous spiritual practises relating to the worship of the Radha-yantra. The Yantra is the Brahmayoni (Creative Power of Brahman), and the Sadhana consisted of its worship and meditation. From this Brahmayoni there spring myriads of worlds!

586. The course of Sadhana is of three kinds, *viz.*, (1) of the nature of birds, (2) of the nature of monkeys and (3) of the nature of ants.

(1) The bird comes and pecks at a fruit which perhaps falls down at the jerk, and the bird cannot get it for eating. So there are devotees who try to rush on with devotional practices with such violence that it often frustrates their attempts.

(2) It is the nature of the monkey to jump from branch to branch, holding a fruit in its mouth, and while jumping, the fruit often falls down from its mouth. Thus at times, distracted by the changing events of life the aspirants lose sight of the devotional path, if the grasp is not firm.

(3) The ant creeps gently and steadily towards a grain of food, and carries it back to its hole where it enjoys it comfortably. The course of Sadhana like that of the ant is considered the best—there is sureness of attaining and enjoying the fruit.

587. He who is fond of fishing, and wishes to be informed if good fish abound in a certain pond, goes to

those persons who have already fished in it, and eagerly asks them: "Is it true that there are big fish in this pond? And what is the most suitable bait to catch them?" Having gathered the necessary information from them, he resorts to the pond with his fishing rod, waits there patiently after throwing his line, and allures the fish with dexterity. At last he succeeds in hooking a large and beautiful dweller of the deep. Similarly, with implicit trust in the sayings of holy saints and sages, one must try to secure God in one's own heart with the bait of devotion, and the rod and hook of one's mind. With unceasing patience one must wait for the fullness of time. Then only can one catch the Divine fish.

588. The Master used to say: "Will you be able to obey to the fullest extent the commands that I give you? Verily, I tell you, your salvation is assured if you put into practice even one-sixteenth of what I say to you."

589.* Spiritual practices (Sadhanas) are absolutely necessary for Self-knowledge, but if there is perfect faith, then a little practice is enough.

590.* Once a person comes to believe in the power of His holy 'name' and feels inclined to repeat it constantly, neither discrimination nor devotional exercises of any sort are necessary for him. All doubts are set at rest, the mind becomes pure, and the Lord Himself is realised through the force of His holy name.

591. The Vedas and the Puranas must be read and heard, but one must act according to the precepts of the Tantras. The 'name' of Lord Hari must be uttered by the mouth and heard with the ear as well. Indeed in some

diseases it is necessary not only to apply medicine externally but also to take it internally.

592. There are two kinds of Siddhas (perfect men) —Sadhana-siddhas and Kripâ-siddhas (those who have gained perfection through religious discipline and those who have gained perfection through grace). To get a good crop, some have to irrigate their fields with great labour by cutting canals, or by drawing water. But some others are lucky enough to be saved all this trouble for getting water; for there comes the rain and floods the whole field. Almost all have to perform devotional practices assiduously in order to get freedom from the shackles of Maya. But Kripâ-siddhas are saved from all this trouble; they attain perfection through the grace of God. Their number, however, is extremely small.

CONCENTRATION AND MEDITATION

593. Meditation and contemplation should be kept up always.

594. Throwing away all work, you must meditate upon God in the evening. The thought of God naturally comes to the mind at dusk. Everything was visible a while ago, but ah! now it is all shrouded in darkness. Who has done this? Such thoughts come to the mind. Haven't you marked how the Mohammedans give up all work and sit down to pray in the evening?

595. As it is very difficult to gather the mustard seeds that escape out of a torn package and are scattered in all directions, so it is not a very easy affair to ingather and

concentrate the mind which runs after worldly things in diverse directions.

596. Meditate on God either in an obscure corner, or in the solitude of forests, or within the silent sanctuary of your own heart.

597. In the beginning a man should try to concentrate his mind always in a lonely place; otherwise many things may distract him. If we put milk and water together, they are sure to get mixed; but if the milk is changed into butter by churning, the transformed milk (*i.e.* butter), instead of mixing with water, will float upon it. So when a man has gained the power of mental concentration by constant practice, his mind will always rise above his environment and rest in God, wherever he might stay.

598.* The Master sometimes used to instruct his disciples: "Before beginning your meditation, think of this (me) for some time. Do you know why I say so? Because, on account of your faith in this (me), your thoughts, if directed towards this (me), will at once turn Godward. It is just as a herd of cows reminds one of a cowboy; or the son, of the father; or the lawyer, of the law-court. The mind that remains scattered over a thousand and one objects will be collected together when you will think of this (me); and if the mind, thus concentrated, is then directed towards God, meditation in its true sense will be possible."

599. The easiest way of concentrating the mind is to fix it on the flame of a candle. Its inmost blue portion corresponds to the causal body or the Kâranasarira. By fixing the mind on it, the power of concentration is soon obtained. The luminous portion that envelops the blue

flame represents the Sûkshmasarira or the subtle body; and outside of that there is what represents the gross body or the Sthûlasarira.

600.* Referring to the days of his Sadhana, the Master used to tell his disciples: "Well, my boys, in those days before meditating upon God I would imagine as if I was thoroughly washing the mind of all the various impurities (evil thoughts, desires, etc.) that were there, and then installing the Deity therein. Do like this."

601.* During meditation you should imagine as if you are tying your mind to the lotus feet of the Deity with a silk thread, so that it may not wander away from there. But why must the thread be silken? Since His lotus feet are too delicate, any other band will give Him pain.

602. In the course of his meditation, a beginner sometimes falls into a kind of sleep that goes by the name of Yoganidra. At that time he invariably sees some kind of Divine visions.

603. Do you know how a man of Sâttvika (pure) nature meditates? He meditates in the dead of night, upon his bed, within the mosquito-curtain, so that he may not be seen by others.

604. Be diluted in the Lord even as the crude medicine is diluted by spirit.

605. When all the clamourings of the mind are hushed, there comes the suspension of breath or the state of Kumbhaka. The Kumbhaka comes even through Bhakti Yoga; through intense love of God also the breath is suspended.

606. Deep meditation brings out the real nature of the object of meditation, and infuses it into the soul of the meditator.

607. An Avadhuta (a great Yogi) once saw a bridal procession passing along a meadow with much pomp, to the accompaniment of drums and trumpets. Hard by the way through which the procession was passing, he saw a hunter so deeply absorbed in aiming at a bird that he was perfectly inattentive to the procession and did not cast even a side glance at it. The Avadhuta, saluting the hunter, said: "Sir, you are my Guru. When I sit in meditation, let my mind be concentrated on the object of meditation as yours has been on the bird."

608. An angler was fishing in a pond. The Avadhuta, approaching him, asked, "Brother, which road leads to Benares?" The man was at that time all attention to his fishing-rod, as the float was indicating that a fish was nibbling at the bait. So he did not give any reply to the question. When the fish was caught, he turned round and said, "What was it you were saying, sir?" The Avadhuta saluted him and said, "Sir, you are my Guru. When I sit in contemplation of the Supreme Being, let me follow your example and not attend to anything else before finishing my meditation."

609. Once a heron was slowly moving towards the edge of a pond to catch a fish. Behind, there was a hunter aiming an arrow at it; but the bird was totally unmindful of this fact. The Avadhuta, saluting the heron, said, "When I sit in meditation, let me follow your example and never turn back to see who or what is behind me."

610. "To him, who is perfect in meditation, salvation is very near," is an old saying. Do you know when a man becomes perfect in meditation? When, on sitting down to meditate, he becomes immediately surrounded with divine atmosphere and his soul communes with God.

611. There comes deep concentration in meditation when nothing else can be seen or heard. Even perceptions and feelings disappear. A snake may crawl over the body, but one does not feel it. Neither the person meditating nor the snake feels it.

612. He who at the time of contemplation becomes so unconscious of everything outside that he would not know if birds were to nest in his hair—such a man has really acquired the perfection of meditative power.

613. In deep meditation all the functions of the senses are inhibited. The outward flow of the mind comes to a dead stop as if the door of the outer apartment is closed. All the five objects of the senses—light, sound, taste, touch and smell—lie outside unperceived. At first, visions of sense objects appear before the mind during meditation; but when it becomes deep, they ever rise at all—they lie outside, debarred.

614. The secret is that the union with God (Yoga) can never happen unless the mind is rendered absolutely calm, whatever be the 'path' you follow for God-realisation. The mind is always under the control of the Yogi, and not the Yogi under the control of his mind.

CHAPTER XIII

YEARNING FOR GOD

[Be mad for God—Nature of true yearning—Sole condition of God-realisation]

BE MAD FOR GOD

615.* If you must be mad, be it not for the things of the world. Be mad with the love of God.

616. Some men shed streams of tears because sons are not born to them, others eat away their hearts in sorrow because they cannot get riches. But alas! how many are there who sorrow and weep for not having seen the Lord! Very few indeed! Verily, he who seeks the Lord, who weeps for Him, attains Him.

617. He who yearns after God cannot bestow any thought on such trifles as food and drink.

618. He who feels thirsty does not discard the water of the river merely because it is muddy, nor does he begin to dig a well to find clear water. So he who feels real spiritual thirst does not discard the religion near at hand, be it Hinduism or any other, nor does he create a new

religion for himself. A really thirsty man has no time for such deliberations.

NATURE OF TRUE YEARNING

619. Let your heart pant for Him as a miser longs for gold.

620. As the drowning man pants hard for breath, so must one's heart yearn for the Lord before one can find Him.

621.* Do you know what kind of Love is required for gaining the Lord? just as a dog with a bruised head runs restlesssly, so must one become distressed for His sake.

622. O heart, call on to your almighty Mother sincerely and you will see how She quickly comes running to you. When one calls on God with heart and soul, He cannot remain unmoved.

623. Do you know how intense our love of God should be? The love that a devoted wife possesses for her beloved husband, the attachment that a miser feels for his hoarded wealth, and the clinging desire that the worldly-minded foster for the things of the world—when the intensity of your heart's longing for the Lord is equal to the sum of these three, then you will attain Him.

624. Jesus Christ was one day walking along the sea-shore when a devotee approached him and asked him, "Lord, how can one attain God?" Jesus directly walked into the sea with the enquirer and immersed him in the water. After a short time he released him, and raising him by the arm, asked him, "How did you feel?" The devotee replied, "I felt as though my last moment had

come—the condition was desperate." Upon this Jesus said, "You shall see the Father when your heart pants for Him as it has panted for a breath of air just now.[1]"

625. 'I must attain God in this very life; yea, in three days I must find Him; nay, with a single utterance of His name I will draw Him to me'—with such violent Love the devotee can attract the Lord and realise Him quickly. But devotees who are lukewarm in their Love take ages to find Him, indeed, if they find Him at all.

626.* Why this attitude of an idler, that if realisation is not possible in this birth, it will come in the next? There should not be such sluggishness in devotion. The goal can never be reached unless a man makes his mind strong, and firmly resolves that he must realise God in this very birth, nay, this very moment. In the countryside, when cultivators go to purchase bullocks, they first touch the tails of the animals. Some of the bullocks do not make any response to this. Rather, they relax all their limbs and lie down on the ground. At once the cultivators understand them to be worthless. There are some others that jump about and behave violently the moment their tails are touched; and the peasants can immediately know that they will be very useful. Their choice is then made from among this active type. Slothfulness is not at all desirable. Gather strength, firm faith, and say that you must realise God this very moment. Then only can you succeed.

[1] This story is not in the Bible and there is nothing in the Bible coming near it. It might be in an 'apocrypha', and Sri Ramakrishna might have heard it from somebody acquainted with it.

SOLE CONDITION OF GOD-REALISATION

627. What means should we adopt in order to get free from the clutches of Maya? He who yearns to be free from its clutches is shown the way by God Himself. Only ceaseless yearning is needed.

628.* A devotee asked the Master, "By what means can He be seen?" and the Master replied: "Can you weep for Him with intense longing? Men weep jugful of tears for children, wife, money, etc.; but who weeps for God? So long as a child is engrossed in play with its toys, the mother engages herself in cooking and other household works. But when the little one finds no more satisfaction in toys, throws them aside and loudly cries for its mother, she can no longer remain in the kitchen. She drops down the rice pot, perhaps, from the hearth, and runs in hot haste to the child and takes it up in arms."

629. He finds God quickest, whose concentration and yearning are strongest.

630. In this age of Kali three days' ardent yearning to see God is enough for a man to obtain Divine grace.

631.* Uncle moon is the uncle of all children. So also God is everyone's. All have got the right to call on the Lord. Whoever calls on Him becomes blessed by realising Him. If you call on Him, you too can realise Him.

632. Verily, I tell you, he who wants Him finds Him. Go and verify it in your own life. Try for three days, try with genuine zeal, and you are sure to succeed.

633. Pray to the Divine Mother, begging Her to give you unswerving Love and adamantine faith.

634. Where does the strength of an aspirant lie? He is a child of God, and tears are his greatest strength. As a mother fulfils the desires of a child who weeps and importunes her, so does the Lord grant to His weeping child whatever he is crying for.

635. A certain man once said to the Master: "I am now fifty-five years old. I have been engaged in the search for the Lord for fourteen years, have followed the advice of my teachers, had been to all the sacred places of pilgrimage, and have seen many a holy man; but I have gained nothing." Hearing this the Master replied: "I assure you, he who yearns for Him shall find Him. Look at me and take heart."

636. The child said, "Mother dear, wake me up when I shall be hungry." The mother replied, "Darling hunger itself will awaken you."

637. As a child beseeches its mother for toys and pice, weeping and teasing her, so he who weeps inwardly, intensely longing to see Him, like an innocent child, and knowing Him to be his nearest and dearest, is rewarded at last with the vision Divine. God can no longer remain hidden from such an earnest and importunate seeker.

638. In Yatras depicting the life of Krishna, the play commences with the beating of drums and the loud singing of 'O Krishna, come! Come, O dear!' But the person who plays the part of Krishna pays no heed to the noise and goes on complacently chatting and smoking in the green-room behind the stage. But as soon as the noise ceases, and the pious sage Narada, overflowing with love, enters the stage with sweet and soft music and summons

Krishna to appear, Krishna finds that he can no longer remain indifferent. Hurriedly he then enters stage. As long as the spiritual aspirant calls on the Lord with mere lip-prayers—'Come, O Lord'—the Lord will not appear. When the Lord comes, the heart of the devotee melts into divine emotion, and all loud utterances cease for ever. The Lord cannot tarry when His devotee calls on Him from the depth of his heart overflowing with profound Love.

BOOK III

MAN AND THE DIVINE

Knowing Him Who is the origin and dissolution of the universe—the source of all virtue, the destroyer of all sins, the master of all good qualities, the immortal, and the abode of the universe—as seated in one's own self, He is perceived as different from, and transcending, the tree of Samsara as well as time and form.

May we realise Him—the transcendent and adorable master of the universe—Who is the supreme Lord over all the lords, the supreme God above all the gods, and the supreme Ruler over all the rulers.

He has nothing to achieve for Himself, nor has He any organ of action. No one is seen equal or superior to Him. His great power alone is described in the Vedas to be of various kinds, and His knowledge and strength and action are described as inherent in Him.

No one in the world is His master, nor has anybody any control over Him. There is no sign by which He can be inferred. He is the cause of all, and the ruler of individual souls. He has no parent, nor is there any one who is His lord.

The Upanishads.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LORD AND HIS DEVOTEES

[*Why the Lord is not seen—The Lord and His devotees—Worldly position of devotees—How the Divine reveals Himself—The Lord cares not for wealth—Divine grace and self-effort*]

WHY THE LORD IS NOT SEEN

639. The sun is many times larger than the earth, but distance makes it appear like a small disc. So the Lord is infinitely great, but being too far away from Him, we are incapable of comprehending His real greatness.

640. Because of the reeds and scum that cover the surface of a pond, one cannot see the fishes playing in it; similarly, because of the screen of Maya that shuts off God from human view, one cannot see Him playing in one's heart.

641. Why do we not see the Divine Mother? She is like a high-born lady transacting all her business from behind the latticed screen, seeing all but seen by none. Only Her devout sons see Her, going near Her behind the screen of Maya.

642. The policeman with his lantern (bull's eye) can see every one on whom he casts light, but no one can see him so long as he does not turn the light on himself. So does God see every one; but no one can see Him until He reveals Himself to him in His mercy.

THE LORD AND HIS DEVOTEES

643. A landlord may be very rich, but when a poor tenant brings a humble present to him with a loving heart, he accepts it with the greatest pleasure. So the Almighty Lord, though so great and powerful, accepts the humble offerings of a sincere heart with the greatest pleasure and satisfaction.

644.* I am content if I have realised Him. What if I do not know Sanskrit. He bestows His mercy equally on all His children who yearn to know Him, be they learned or ignorant. Suppose a father has five chidren. Some of them can call him 'Papa'; others can perhaps say only 'Ba' or 'Pa' and cannot pronounce the whole word. But will the father love the latter less than the former? He knows that they are mere infants and cannot correctly call him father. The father indeed loves them all in an equal measure.

645. It is the nature of a child to soil itself with dirt and mud, but the mother does not allow it to remain dirty always. She washes it from time to time. Similarly it is in the nature of man to commit sin; but if man is sure to commit sin, doubly sure is that the Lord devises methods for his redemption.

646. As the same fish is dressed into soup, curry, or cutlet, and each man has his own choice dish of it, so the Lord of the universe, though one, manifests Himself differently according to the different likings of His worshippers, and each one of them has his own view of God which he values most. To some He is a kind master or loving father, a sweet smiling mother or a devoted friend, and to others a faithful husband or a dutiful and obliging son.

647. The fish may be far away, yet when a sweet, savoury and attractive bait is thrown into the water, they hastily rise to it from all quarters. Similarly the Lord approaches quickly the holy devotee whose heart is full of devotion and faith.

648. The divine sages form, as it were, the inner circle of God's nearest relatives. They are like friends, companions and kinsmen of God. All ordinary persons form the outer circle, they are merely the creatures of God.

649. Sunlight is one and the same wherever it falls; but only a bright surface like that of water, or of a mirror or of polished metals, reflects it fully. So is the light Divine. It falls equally and impartially on all hearts but the pure and pious hearts of the good and holy Sadhus alone receive and reflect that light well.

650. It is the nature of a lamp to give light. With its help some may cook their food, some may forge deeds, and some others may read the sacred scriptures. So some with the help of the Lord's 'name' try to attain salvation, while others use it for accomplishing their evil purposes. His holy 'name', however, remains untainted in its purity.

651. Bhagavan (the Lord), Bhagavata (His word or scripture) and Bhakta (devotee) are all one and the same.

652. How does a true devotee look upon God? He looks upon Him as the nearest and dearest relative, just as the shepherd women of Brindavan (Gopis) saw in Sri Krishna not Jagannatha (the Lord of the universe), but their own beloved Gopinatha (the Lord of the Gopis).

653. Why does the God-lover find such ecstatic delight in addressing the Deity as Mother? Because the child is more free with the mother than with anybody else, and consequently she is dearer to it than anybody else.

654. A patient in high fever and excessively thirsty imagines that he can drink a sea of water; but when the fever subsides and he regains his normal temperature, he can barely take a single cupful of water and his thirst is easily quenched with even a very small quantity of it. So a man, being under the feverish excitement of Maya and forgetful of his own littleness, imagines that he can receive the whole of the Infinite God within his heart, but when the illusion passes away, a single ray of Divine light becomes sufficient to flood him with the eternal bliss of God.

655. Some get tipsy with even a small peg of wine, while others require two or three bottles to make them intoxicated. But both feel equally the pleasure of intoxication. Similarly, some devotees become full of ecstasy even by a ray of Divine glory while some others get intoxicated with the Divine bliss only on coming into the direct presence of the Lord. But both are equally fortunate, since both are deluged with the bliss of God.

656. God is like a hill of sugar. A small ant fetches from it a tiny grain of sugar, and a bigger one takes from it another grain considerably larger in size. But in spite of this the hill practically remains as large as ever. So are the devotees of God. They become ecstatic even with a little of a single Divine attribute. No one can contain within him the realisation of all His glories and excellences.

657. The breeze that comes from the ocean of Brahman affects every heart on which it blows. The ancient sages Sanaka, Sanatana and others were softened by this breeze. The God-intoxicated Narada obviously got a glimpse of that Divine ocean from a distance; and so forgetting his own self, he had been wandering over the world like a mad man, always singing the praise of Lord Hari. Sukadeva, a born ascetic, only touched the water of that ocean thrice with his hand, and ever since he had been rolling about like a child through the fullness of his ecstasy. And the great teacher of the universe, Mahadeva, drank three handfuls of the water thereof, and has since been lying motionless like a corpse, intoxicated with Divine bliss. Who can fathom the depth, or measure the mysterious power, of this ocean?

658. The Master said to Keshab Chandra Sen: "Why do they, the members of the Brahmo Samaj, dwell so much upon the glories of God's works and say, 'O Lord, Thou hast made the sun, the moon and the stars?' Many are they that are charmed with the beauty of the garden, its glorious flowers and sweet odours. But few seek the Lord of the garden! 'Which is the greater of the two—the garden or its Lord? Verily the garden is unreal as long

as death stalks in our midst; but the Lord of the garden is the one reality.

"After having taken a few glasses at the bar of a tavern, who cares to inquire how many tons the liquor in the barrels there weigh? A single bottle suffices for one.

"At the sight of Narendra I get inebriated with joy. Never have I asked him, 'Who is your father?' or 'How many houses have you got as your own?'

"Men value their own possessions; they value money, houses, furniture; hence they think that the Lord will view His own works—the sun, the moon, and the stars—just in the same light! Men think He would be glad if they speak highly of His works."

659. How sweet is the simplicity of the child! He prefers a doll to all the wealth and riches of the world. So is the faithful devotee. No one else can reject all wealth and honour, and be taken up with God alone.

660. The truly pious man gives three-fourths of his mind to God; only the remaining one-fourth he gives to the world. He is more alert in matters godly, like the snake which grows furious when its tail is trampled upon, as if its feelings are more located in its tail than anywhere else.

661. Referring to the Master, a well-known Brahmo missionary once said that the Paramahamsa was a mad man, and that too much cogitation over one and the same subject had unsettled his mind, as it had happened with many European thinkers. The Master afterwards said, addressing this missionary, "You say that even in Europe learned men become mad by continuously thinking of one subject. But is the subject of their thought matter or spirit?" If it is matter, what

wonder if a man should become mad by constantly thinking of it. But how can a man lose his intelligence by thinking on that Intelligence whose light enlightens the whole universe? Is this what your scriptures teach you?"

662. Dive deep into the sea of Divine love. Fear not. It is the sea of Immortality. I once said to Narendra, "God is like a sea of sweetness. Would you not dive deep into the sea? Suppose, my boy, there is a vessel with a wide mouth containing syrup of sugar, and you are a fly anxious to drink of it. Where would you sit and drink?" Narendra replied that he would like to drink from the edge, for if he happened to fall into it, he was sure to be drowned. Thereupon I said to him, "You forget, my boy, that if you dive deep into the sea Divine, you need not fear danger or death. Remember that the sea of Sachchidananda is the sea of Immortality, having everlasting life for its waters. Be not afraid, like some foolish people, that you may 'run to excess' in your love of God."

WORLDLY POSITION OF DEVOTEES

663. Though Devaki was blessed in the prison with the sight of the Divine form of Krishna, yet that could not free her from imprisonment.

664. Once a blind man bathed in the holy waters of the Ganges and had all his sins expiated by the bath, yet his physical blindness was not removed.

665. Once a devout wood-cutter was blessed with the vision of the Divine Mother and became a recipient

of Her grace, yet his profession of a wood-cutter never ceased. The poor man had still to earn his scanty livelihood by the same hard profession of wood-cutting.

666.* As Bhishma lay dying on his bed of arrows, he was found shedding tears. Sri Krishna and the Pandavas were standing by. Arjuna exclaimed, "How strange, brother! Our grandfather Bhishma himself—so truthful and wise, the master of his self, and one amongst the eight Vasus (a class of deities)—even he is overcome by Maya in his dying hour and is shedding tears!" When this was communicated to Bhishma he replied: "O Krishna, you know full well that I am not crying for that. But when I think that even the Pandavas, whom the Lord Himself is serving as charioteer, have to pass through endless troubles and tribulations, I am overpowered with the thought that the ways of God cannot in the least be comprehended, and I cannot restrain my tears."

HOW THE DIVINE REVEALS HIMSELF

667. There is a dark room, and rays of light are coming into it from outside through a small chink. Now, the idea of light that a man inside will have, will be just commensurate to the rays of light. If there are a greater number of chinks in the doors and windows, the man within will see more of light; and if he flings open the doors and windows, he will get light still more. But then it is he who stands in the open field that receives the maximum degree of light. Just so the Lord reveals Himself to the devotees according to the varying capacity and nature of their mind.

668. The more one approaches the Universal Being, the newer and greater become the revelations of His infinite nature, and in the end he merges in Him through the consummation of Knowledge.

THE LORD CARES NOT FOR WEALTH

669. Does the Lord care for all the wealth that one may offer him? Oh, no! His grace lights on him alone who offers Him love and devotion. What He values are only love and devotion, discrimination and renunciation for His sake.

670. Sambhu Mallick once said to me, "Sir, bless me that I may die leaving all my wealth at the hallowed feet of the Divine Mother." I replied, "What do you say? It is all wealth to you, but to the Divine Mother, it is no better than the dust you trample under your feet!"

671. There was once a theft committed in Rani Rasmani's temple at Dakshineswar. The jewels with which the images in the shrine of Vishnu were adorned were stolen. Mathur (the manager of the temple and son-in-law of the Rani) and the Master went there to see what the matter was. Mathur cried out, saying, "Thou God art worthless! They took away all Thy jewels, and Thou couldst not prevent it!" Upon this, the Master retorted sharply, "How foolish it is of you to talk thus! The jewels of which you speak are as good as lump of clay to the Lord of the universe whom you worship in the image! Remember, it is from Him that the Goddess of fortune, Lakshmi, derives all Her splendour.

DIVINE GRACE AND SELF-EFFORT

672. We cannot say that God is gracious because He feeds us, for every father is bound to provide his children with food; but when He keeps us from going astray and holds us back from temptations, He is truly gracious.

673. *Q.* By what kind of work can God be attained?

A. There is no difference in work. 'Do not think that this work will lead to God and that will not.

Everything depends upon His grace. To have His grace, whatever work you perform, do it with sincerity and earnest longing for Him. Through His grace the environment will become favourable and the conditions of realisation will become perfect. If you want to renounce the world, and if your family depends upon you, perhaps your brother will assume its responsibility for you. Perhaps your wife will not hinder you in your spiritual life, but will rather help you; or perhaps you will not marry at all and be attached to the world in any way.

674. The darkness of centuries is dispersed as soon as a light is brought into a room. The accumulated sins of countless lives vanish by a single glance of God.

675. There are some fish which have many sets of bones, but others have only one set. Fish-eaters, however, remove all of them, whether many or few. In the same way some men have many sins and others have few, but the saving grace of God purifies them all alike in time.

676. When the Malaya breeze blows, all trees having stamina in them are said to be converted into sandal trees, while the papaw, the bamboo, the plantain and other trees devoid of stamina remain unchanged. So when Divine

grace descends on men, those that have germs of piety and goodness in them are made holy and are filled with Divinity, while those that are worthless and worldly are unaltered.

677. A certain pious man used to tell the beads constantly, uttering the 'name' of the Deity silently. To him the Master said, "Why do you stick to one place? Go forward." The pious man replied, "It cannot be done without His grace." The Master said, "The breeze of His grace is blowing day and night over your head. Unfurl the sails of your boat (mind), if you want to make rapid progress through the ocean of life."

678. The wind of God's grace is incessantly blowing. Lazy sailors on the sea of life do not take advantage of it. But the active and the strong always keep the sails of their minds unfurled to catch the favourable wind and thus reach their destination very soon.

679. *Q.* Does nothing take place all of a sudden?

A. As a general rule, one must go through a long preparation before one can attain perfection. Babu Dwarka Nath Mitter was not made a Judge of the High Court in one day. He had to work hard and spend years of arduous toil and study before he was raised to the Bench of the High Court. Those who are not willing to undergo the trouble and labour must be prepared to remain mere briefless pleaders. However, through the grace of God, sudden exaltation does take place now and then, as was the case with Kalidasa, who, from the state of an ignorant rustic, became at once, through the grace of Mother Saraswati, the greatest poet of India.

680. A householder devotee: Sir, we have heard that you have seen God. So please make us also see Him. How can one get intimate knowledge of the Lord?

The Master: Everything depends upon the will of the Lord. Perseverance is necessary for God-vision. If you merely sit on the shore of a lake and say, "There are fishes in this lake," will you get any fish? Go and get the things necessary for fishing; get a rod and line and bait, and throw some food into the water to entice them. Then from the deep water the fish will rise and come near when you can see and hook them. You wish me to show you God while you sit quietly by, without making the least effort! You want me to set the curd, to churn the butter and hold it to your mouth. You ask me to catch the fish and put it in your hands. How unreasonable is your demand!

681. A bird perching upon the masthead of a ship in mid ocean, gets tired of its position and flies away to discover a new place of rest; but failing to find any other place, it returns at last to the old roost, weary and exhausted. In the same manner, an ordinary aspirant is disgusted with the monotony of the task and the discipline imposed upon him by his well-wishing and thoroughly experienced Guru. He loses all his hopes as well as confidence in the Guru and so goes out into the world with the belief that he can attain God with his self-effort alone; but after much fruitless exertion he is sure to return to his old master for his blessing and grace at last.

682. So long as no breeze is blowing, we fan ourselves to alleviate heat; but when the breeze begins to blow,

giving relief to all men, rich and poor alike, we give up fanning. We should ourselves persevere to reach our final goal so long as there is no help from above; but when fortunately that help comes to one, one might stop toiling, otherwise not.

683. Fans are of no use when the wind blows. Prayers and penances may be given up when the grace of God descends.

684. "Though a soul has received the grace of God, of a Guru and of a good devotee, yet it meets with destruction through the lack of the grace of (a fourth) one." One might have been fortunate enough to receive all the first three forms of grace, yet if one's own heart shows no grace to itself, *i.e.*, if it has no yearning to save itself, they are of no avail.

685. However much you may try, without God's grace nothing can be attained; He cannot be realised without Divine grace. But Divine grace descends not so easily. You shall have to banish your ego completely from the heart. If you have the egoistic feeling "I am the doer", you can never see God. If there is somebody in the store-room, and if the owner of the house is asked to fetch a certain thing from the store, he at once says, "Well, there is someone already in the store; please ask him to get it. There is no need of my going there." God never appears in the heart of him who thinks himself to be the doer.

686. Through His grace He reveals Himself. He is the sun of Knowledge. One ray of His has brought the power of understanding in this world. On account of it

we have the power to know each other and to acquire various forms of knowledge. We can see Him only if He turns His light on his own face.

CHAPTER XV

HELPERS IN THE SPIRITUAL PATH

[I. **Guru** : *Conception of the Guru—Necessity of having a Guru—Relation between Guru and disciple—* II. **Divine Incarnation** : *What is a Divine Incarnation? —Difficulty of recognising Divine Incarnations—Incarnations as revelations of God—Difference between Incarnations and ordinary perfect men*]

I

Guru

CONCEPTION OF THE GURU

687. Who is whose Guru (spiritual guide and teacher) ? God alone is the guide and Guru of the universe.

688. He who considers his Guru to be merely human, what good can he derive from his prayers and devotions? We should not consider our Guru to be a mere man. Before the disciple sees the Deity, he sees the Guru in the first vision of Divine illumination. And it is the Guru who afterwards shows the Deity, being himself mysteriously transformed into the form of the Deity. Then the disciple

sees the Guru and the Deity as one and the some. Whatever boon the disciple asks, the deified Guru gives him all, yea, the Guru even takes him to the highest bliss of Nirvana (the state of extinction of individuality in God). Or, the man may choose to remain in a dualistic state of consciousness, maintaining the relation of the worshipper and the worshipped. Whatever he asks, his Guru vouchsafes him.

689. The human Guru whispers the sacred formula (Mantra) in the ear; the Divine Guru breathes the spirit into the soul.

690. The Guru is a mediator. He brings man and God together, even as a match-maker brings together the lover and the beloved.

691. A Guru is like the mighty Ganges. Men throw all filth and refuse into the Ganges, but the holiness of that river is not diminished thereby. So is the Guru above all petty insult and censure.

692. There are three classes of religious teachers as there are three classes of doctors. There is one class of doctors who, when they are called in, look at the patient, feel his pulse, prescribe the necessary medicines, and ask him to take them. If the patient declines to do so, they go away without troubling themselves further about the matter. This is the lowest class of doctors. In the same way, there are some religious teachers who do not care much whether the disciples attach any value to their teachings and act up to them or not. Doctors of the second type not only ask the patient to take their medicine but go further. They expostulate with him in case he shows any reluctance

to take it. In the same way, those religious teachers who leave no stone unturned to make other people walk in the ways of righteousness, devotion and truth by means of gentle persuasion, can be said to belong to the next higher class. The third and the highest kind of doctors would proceed to use force with the patient in case their expostulation failed. They would go to the length of putting their knee on the chest of the patient and forcing the medicine down his throat. Similarly, there are some religious teachers who would use force, if necessary, with their disciples with a view to make them walk in the path of the Lord. These belong to the highest class.

NECESSITY OF HAVING A GURU

693. What is the necessity of calling a particular man our Guru instead of calling everyone who teaches us something, by that designation ? When going to a strange countrry, one must abide by the directions of the guide who knows the way. Taking the advice of many would lead to utter confusion. So in trying to reach God one must implicitly follow the advice of one single Guru who knows the way to God.

694. At a game of chess the on-lookers can tell what the correct move is, better than the players themselves. Men of the world think that they are very clever, but they are attached to the things of the world—money, honours, sense-pleasures, etc. Being actually engaged in the play, it is hard for them to hit upon the right move. Holy men who have given up the world are not attached to

worldly objects. They are like the on-lookers at a game of chess. They see things in their true light and can judge better than the men of the world. Hence, in living the holy life, one must put faith only in the words of those who meditate upon God and who have realised Him. If you seek legal advice, will you not consult lawyers who are in the profession? Surely you will not take the advice of the man in the street.

695. If you are in right earnest to learn the mysteries of God, He will send you the Sadguru, the right teacher. You need not trouble yourself about finding out a Guru.

696. He who can himself approach God with sincerity, earnest prayer and deep longing, needs no Guru. But such deep yearning of the soul is very rare; hence the necessity of a Guru. The Guru is only one but Upagurus (subsidiary teachers) may be many. He is an Upaguru from whom anything whatsoever is learned. The Great Avadhuta (an ascetic of high order mentioned in the Bhagavata) had twenty-four such Upagurus.

RELATION BETWEEN GURU AND DISCIPLE

697. The fabled pearl-oyster leaves its bed at the bottom of the sea and comes up to the surface to catch rain water when the star Svati is in the ascendant. It floats about on the surface of the sea with its shell wide open until it succeeds in catching a drop of the marvellous Svati rain. Then it dives down to the sea-bed and there rests until it has succeeded in fashioning a beautiful pearl out of that raindrop. Similarly, there are some true and eager aspirants who travel from place to

place in search of the Mantra, the saving word, from a godly and perfect preceptor (Sadguru), which can open for them the gate of eternal bliss; and if in his diligent search a man is fortunate enough to meet such a Guru and get from him the much-longed-for Mantra that has the power to break all fetters, he leaves society at once and retires into the deep recess of his own heart and rests there till he has succeeded in gaining eternal peace.

698. Do not fear if such a teacher (*i.e.*, spiritually enlightened Guru) does not seem to be learned and well up in scriptures and other books. Do not fear because he is not book-learned. No, he will never be found wanting in the wisdom of life. He has a never-failing supply of Divine wisdom—of truths directly revealed and superior to all knowledge contained in books.

699. A man was disputing about the character of his Guru when the Master said, "Why are you wasting your time in this futile discussion? Take the pearl and throw away the oyster-shell. Meditate on the Mantra given to you by the Guru and leave out of consideration the human frailties of the teacher."

700. Listen not to any one censuring your Guru. He is greater than your father and mother. Would you keep quiet when your father and mother are insulted in your very presence? Fight, if necessary, and maintain the honour of your Guru.

701. The disciple should never criticise his Guru. He must implicitly obey whatever the Guru says. A certain couplet in Bengali says: "Though my Guru may visit the tavern, still my Guru is holy Rai Nityananda; and though

my Guru may visit the unholy haunts of drunkards and sinners, still to me he is my own pure and faultless Guru."

702.* When the devotion is genuine, even the most ordinary things make the devotee remember God and lose himself in Him. Have you not heard how Lord Chaitanya was merged in Samadhi at the thought, "This is the earth of which drums are made?" Once, while passing through a village, Sri Chaitanya came to know that the inhabitants of that village earned their living by making drums. At once he exclaimed, "This is the earth of which drums are made," and immediately lost all external consciousness. For he thought that out of that earth drums were made which were used in congregational music; and that the music, again, was in praise of God who is the Soul of our souls and the Beauty of beauties. In this way a train of ideas was flashed upon him, and he was at once engrossed in God. Likewise, when a man has true devotion to his Guru, he will certainly be reminded of him at the sight of his relatives. Not only that. Even if he meets people from the Guru's village his thoughts are at once directed to the Guru himself. He prostrates before them constantly, sprinkles the dust of their feet over his body, feeds them sumptuously and renders all other kinds of service to them. At this stage the disciple fails to see any defect in his Guru. Now only can he say, "Even if my Guru frequents taverns, he is the Lord, the Eternal Bliss all the same." As a human being a Guru cannot be a repository of virtues alone and free from all defects whatsoever. The disciple, on account of his devotion, no longer sees him as man but as God Himself, just as one sees everything as yellow, due to

one's jaundiced eye. His devotion then reveals to him that God alone is everything; it is He that has become the master, the father and the mother, man and beast, the animate and the inanimate.

II

Divine Incarnation

WHAT IS A DIVINE INCARNATION?

703. An Avatara (Incarnation) is a human messenger of God, He is like a viceroy of a mighty monarch. As the king sends the viceroy when there is any disturbance in some far-off province, to quell it, so whenever there is waning of religion in any part of the world, God sends there His Avatara to guard virtue and to foster its growth.

704. Think not that Rama and Sita, Krishna and Radha, are mere allegories and not historical personages, or that the scriptures are true only in their inner or esoteric meaning. Nay, they were human beings of flesh and blood just as you are; but because they were divinities, their lives can be interpreted both historically and allegorically. The Avataras are to Brahman as waves are to the ocean.

705. The Avatara is always one and the same. Having plunged into the ocean of life, the one God rises up at one point and is known as Krishna, and when after another plunge, He rises up at another point, He is known as Christ.

706. On the tree of Sachchidananda (Absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss) there hang innumerable bunches of Ramas, Krishnas, Buddhas, Christs, etc. Out of these, one or two now and then come down into this world and produce mighty changes and revolutions.

707.* The Avataras are born with Divine powers and Divine qualities. They can go into, and stay in, any state of realisation from the highest to the lowest. In a king's palace a stranger can go only to the outer quarters, but the king's own child, the prince of the house, is free to go to every corner.

708.* It is a thin ego that personages like the Incarnations possess. Through this ego God is always visible. For example, a man is standing on one side of a wall, on either side of which are boundless stretches of land. If there is an aperture in the wall, the whole of the other side is visible, and if this be big enough, one can pass through it as well. The ego of the Incarnations resembles that wall with the aperture. Even though they be on this side of the wall, they can see the boundless extent of land on the other. The meaning of this is that though they have taken up bodies, they are always in a state of Yoga, and can, if they like, enter into Samadhi on the other side of the big aperture. Again, if this be big enough, they can come and go through it; that is to say, can come down to a lower plane of consciousness even after Samadhi.

DIFFICULTY OF RECOGNISING DIVINE INCARNATIONS

709.* A Divine Incarnation is hard to comprehend. It is the play of the Infinite on the finite.

710. When Bhagavan Ramachandra came into this world, only twelve sages recognised that He was an Incarnation of God. So when God incarnates in this world, only a few recognise His divine nature.

711. What is the reason that a prophet is not honoured by his own kinsmen? The kinsmen of a juggler do not crowd round him to see his performances, while strangers stand agape, looking at his surprising tricks.

712. The seeds of the Vajrabantula plant (euphorbia) do not fall at the root of the tree. They are carried by the wind far off, and take root at distant places. So the spirit of a prophet manifests itself at a distance from his native home, and he is appreciated there.

713. There is always a shadow under the lamp, while its light illumines the surrounding objects. So men in the immediate proximity of a prophet do not understand him. Those who live far off are charmed by his spiritual glow and his extraordinary power.

714. The elephant has two sets of teeth, the tusks visible externally, and the grinders inside the mouth. Similarly God-men like Sri Krishna have an external manifestation and behave like common men in the view of all, while internally they rest in transcendental peace far beyond the pale of Karma.

INCARNATION AS A REVELATION OF GOD

715. God is indeed infinite. But He is omnipotent. He may so ordain that His divinity as love may be manifest in flesh, and be among us as God incarnate.

Love streams to us from God Incarnate. Divine Incarnation is a fact. Of course, one cannot make this perfectly clear by means of words. It is a fact to be seen and realised by spiritual eyes. One must see God to be convinced of this. By analogy we can at best faintly apprehend the matter. Suppose one touches the horn of a cow, or her feet, or the tail, or the udder. Would not this be the same as touching the cow herself? For us, human beings, the chief thing about the cow is its milk, which comes from the udder. Well, the milk of Divine love streams for us from the Incarnations of God.

716. Who can know God fully? It is not given to us, nor is it required of us, to know Him fully. It is enough if we can see Him—feel that He is the only reality. Suppose a person comes to the holy river Ganges and touches the water. He would say, "I have been blessed with the vision and touch of the holy river from Gomukhi to Gangasagar—from its source to the estuary!"

717. Do you seek God? Then seek Him in man. His divinity is manifest more in man than in any other object. Look around for a man whose heart overflows with the love of God, a man who lives, moves and has his being in God—a man intoxicated with His love. In such a man God manifests Himself.

718. He is the absolute, and again His is the Lila (relative existence conceived as a sport of the Divine). This Lila is of four kinds—Isvara Lila, Deva Lila, Jagat Lila and Nara Lila.[1] In Nara Lila His incarnation

[1] God has four distinct aspects of manifestation. One aspect of His is Isvara, the supreme Lord of the Universe; the Devas, another aspect of His,

becomes possible. Do you comprehend the nature of the Nara Lila? One may well say that it is like the gushing out of the water of a vast terrace in a big torrent through a wide channel. It is the power of that Absolute, the Sachchidananda, which flows out—becomes manifest—through a channel, as it were. All cannot truly recognise the Avâtaras. Only seven Rishis—Bharadwaja and the rest—could recognise Srî Rama as an Avatara. God incarnates in the human form to teach man true Jnana and Bhakti.

719. A Siddha (an ordinary perfect man) is like an archæologist who, by removing the superincumbent earth and dust, lays open an old well that has been covered up by disuse. The Avatara is like a great engineer who sinks a new well even in a place where there was no water before. Whereas the former can give salvation only to those men who have the waters of salvation near at hand, an Avatara saves him too whose heart is devoid of all love and is dry as a desert.

720. When the tidal wave comes, it inundates alike rivers, streams and land, and all the adjacent area presents one watery surface; but rain water merely flows away through the usual channel. When a Saviour appears, all are saved through His grace. But Siddhas can only save themselves with much pain and penance.

721. When a mighty log of wood floats down a stream, it carries on it hundreds of birds and does not sink. A reed floating down may sink with the weight of even a single

form the superhuman agencies who maintain the world-functions under the control of the Lord; the third aspect of His manifestation is the universe; and the fourth is man.

crow. So when a Saviour appears, innumerable men find salvation by taking refuge in Him. The Siddha can only save himself with much toil and trouble.

722. As a large and powerful steamer moves swiftly over the water, towing rafts and barges in its wake, so when a Saviour comes, he easily carries thousands to the haven of safety across the ocean of Maya.

723. The locomotive engine not only moves on and reaches its destination but also takes with it a long train of waggons behind. So are our Saviours. They carry multitudes of men burdened with sin, to the presence of the Almighty.

724. In ordinary seasons water from wells can be drawn from great depths and with much difficulty; but when the country is flooded with water in the rainy season, water is obtained with ease everywhere. So, ordinarily God is attained with great difficulty through prayers and penances; but when the flood of Incarnation descends on earth, God is seen everywhere.

725. There was a place enclosed by a high wall, and men outside did not know what sort of a place it was. Once four persons determined to scale the wall with the ladder, and find out what was inside. As soon as the first man ascended the top of the wall, he laughed out, "Ha ha! ha!" and jumped into the enclosure. The second person also, as soon as he ascended the wall, laughed aloud and jumped in like the first; and so did the third. When the fourth and last man got upon the wall, he found stretched before him a large and beautiful garden with pleasant groves full of delicious fruits. Though strongly tempted to

jump in and enjoy the scene, he resisted the temptation, and coming down the ladder, spoke of the glory of the garden to those outside of it. Brahman is like that walled garden. Whoever sees Him forgets his own existence and rushes headlong to Him to be absorbed in His essence. Such are the holy men and liberated saints. But the Saviours of humanity are those who see God, and being at the same time anxious to share their happiness of Divine vision with others, refuse the opportunity of passing into Nirvana (state of extinction of individuality), and willingly undergo the troubles of rebirth in the world in order to teach and lead struggling humanity to its goal.

726. In fireworks there is a type of flower-pot which sends off one kind of flower for a while, then another kind, and again still another, thus seeming to possess an infinite variety of flowers, as it were. So are the Avataras. Then there is another kind of flower-pot which, when lighted, burns a little and then goes off all at once. Similarly, ordinary Jivas, after long practice and devotional exercises, go into Samadhi and do not return.

727.* *Q.* Why should God incarnate Himself in the human form?

A. To make manifest to man the perfection of Divinity. Through these manifestations man can talk with God and see His play. In the Incarnation, God fully enjoys, as it were, His own transcendent sweetness. In the saints, God manifests Himself only in part, like the honey in a flower. You suck the flower, and get a little honey. In the Incarnations, it is all 'honey',—all sweetness and all blessedness.

728. Nothing is problematical to the Incarnation. He solves the most difficult and intricate problems of life as the simplest of things in the world, and his expositions are such as even a child can follow. He is the sun of Divine knowledge, whose light dispels the accumulated ignorance of ages.

729. Sometimes there appears that unique composite light which may be called the lunar-solar light, and to this may be compared unique Incarnations like Chaitanya Deva, who are marked alike by Bhakti (Love) and Jnana (Knowledge). It is like the sun and the moon appearing in the firmament at one and the same time. The manifestation of Jnana and Bhakti in one and the same person is as unique an occurrence as the phenomenon referred to above.

730.* The Lord takes the human body for the sake of those pure souls who love the Lord.

731. Those who come with the Avataras are either souls who are eternally free, or who are born for the last time.

CHAPTER XVI

JNANA, BHAKTI AND KARMA[1]

[I. **Path of Knowledge**: *What is Jnana Yoga?—Method of Jnana Yoga—Difficulties of Jnana Yoga—* II. **Path of Love**: *Bhakti and the conditions of its growth—Bhakti and worldly love—Effects of Bhakti—Stages and aspects of Bhakti—Prema or Parabhakti (ecstatic Love)—Love of the Gopis—Viraha and Mahabhava*—III. **Bhakti and Jnana**: *Bhakti and Jnana the same in the end—How Bhakti leads to Jnana—Difference in the temperaments of the Jnani and the Bhakta*—VI. **Path of Work**: *What is Karma Yoga?—Bhakti as a safeguard in Karma Yoga—Work as service equal to worship—Work a means and not an end—Work and worklessness.*]

I

Path of Knowledge

WHAT IS JNANA YOGA?

732. Jnana Yoga is communion with God by means of Knowledge. The Jnani's object is to realise Brahman,

[1] These Sanskrit words may roughly be translated into English as Knowledge, Love and Work and Yogas or spiritual disciplines connected with them, as the path of Knowledge, the path of Love and the path of Work.

the Absolute. He says "Not this," "Not this" and thus leaves out of account one unreal thing after another until he gets to a point where all Vichara (discrimination) between the real and the unreal ceases, and Brahman is realised in Samadhi.

733. A thief enters a dark room and feels the various articles therein. He lays his hand upon a table perhaps, and saying "Not this" passes on. Next he comes upon some other article—a chair, perhaps—and again saying "Not this" continues his search, till, leaving article after article, he finally lays his hand on the box containing the treasure. Then he exclaims, "It is here!" and there his search ends. Such, indeed, is the search for Brahman.

734. I have seen that the knowledge derived by reasoning is of quite a different kind from the knowledge derived through meditation; and quite different from this again is the Knowledge that dawns by His revelation.

735. Knowledge (Jnana) varies in degree and kind. There is first the Jnana or insight of men of the world—ordinary mortals. This knowledge is not sufficiently powerful. It may be compared to the flame of a lamp which illumines only the interior of a room. The Jnana of a Bhakta (devotee) is a stronger light. It may be compared to the light of the moon which reveals things both inside and outside a room. But the Jnana of the Avatara is

respectively. But these terms mean more than their English equivalents. Thus Knowledge is not a mere intellectual affair, but spiritual insight affecting the whole man; Love is not worldly love, but a kindred feeling in relation to God; and Work is not mere action, but spiritualised pursuit of duties and altruistic undertakings. To indicate this technical sense we have used capitals for them in this chapter and elsewhere, wherever they stand by themselves without qualifying words pointing to their special significance.

still more powerful, and may be likened to the sun. He is the sun of Divine knowledge whose light dispels the accumulated ignorance of ages.

METHOD OF JNANA YOGA

736. If a man knows his own self, he knows other beings and God. What is my ego? Is it my hand or foot, flesh or blood, muscles or tendons? Ponder deeply, and you will know that there is no such thing as 'I'. As you peel off the skin of an onion, you find it consists only of skin; you cannot find any kernel in it. So on analysing the ego, it will be found that there is no real entity that you can call 'I'. Such an analysis of the ego convinces one that the ultimate substance is God alone. When egotism drops away, Divinity manifests Itself.

737. So long as God seems to be outside and far away, there is ignorance. But when God is realised within, there is true Knowledge.

738. Pointing to the heart, the Master used to say: "He who has God here, has Him also there (pointing to the external world). He who does not find God within himself, well never find Him outside of himself. But he who sees Him in the temple of his own soul, sees Him also in the temple of the universe."

739. A man woke up at midnight and desired to smoke. Therefore he wanted some fire, for which he went to a neighbour's house and knocked at the door. Someone opened the door and asked him what he wanted. The man said: "I wish to smoke. Can you give me a little

fire?" The neighbour replied: "Bah! What is the matter with you? You have taken so much trouble to come and awaken us at this hour, while in your own hand you have a lighted lantern!" What man wants is already within him; but he still wanders here and there searching for it.

740. Reasoning is of two kinds—Anuloma and Viloma. By the Anuloma process man rises from the contemplation of the creation to the Creator, in other words, from the effect to the First Cause. Then the Viloma process of reasoning commences. Having attained God, man learns to see His manifestation in every part or act of creation. The one process is analytical and the other is synthetical. The former is like the peeling off of the successive layers of the plantain trunk till one reaches the pith within. The latter is like lying these layers one over another.

741. Knowledge leads to unity: ignorance to diversity.

742.* To a young disciple who was much pre-occupied with the study of books on Vedanta, the Master said one day; "Well, my boy, are you not nowadays deeply engaged in inquiring into the mysteries of Vedanta? Very good. Brahman is real and the world is unreal—is this not the one teaching that forms the purport of all Vedantic studies? Is it anything more than this?" The young man admitted that that was the whole. The Master's words shed for him quite a new light on the truths of Vedanta. The words filled him with wonder. He thought that in fact if one could have a firm conviction of these truths, one would understand everything of Vedanta. The Master went on with his exposition: "Hearing, inquiry and meditation. That Brahman is real and the world is unreal is

first to be heard. Then comes inquiry; for the truth of what is heard is firmly established by reasoning. The next step is meditation; that is, withdrawing the mind from the unreal world and concentrating it on Brahman, the Real. This is the order of Vedantic discipline. If, on the other hand, the Truth is heard and understood intellectually but no attempt is made to renounce the unreal, of what use is that knowledge? Such knowledge is like that of the men of the world, and does not help one to attain the Truth. Firm conviction and renunciation—these are the necessary things. With these alone can one realise the Truth. Or else a person may profess in mere words that the world is unreal and non-existent, and that Brahman alone is existent; but the moment sense-objects—colour, taste and the rest—appear before him, he takes them to be real and gets entangled just like a man who verbally asserts that there are no thorns, but bursts out screaming as soon as his hand comes in contact with a thorn and gets pricked. Once a Sadhu came to Panchavati. He used to talk much Vedanta before others. One day I heard that he had illicit connection with a woman. After a while, when I went that side, I found him sitting there, and said, 'You talk so glibly about Vedanta; but what is all this they talk about you?' 'What of that?' he replied, 'I shall show you that there is no harm in it. If the whole world is unreal at all times, how can my fall alone be real? That also is equally unreal.' I said in utter disgust, 'I spit on such knowledge of Vedanta! It is not real Knowledge but a mere sham, falsely professed by the worldly-minded, by wiseacres with gross worldly attachment.'"

DIFFICULTIES OF JNANA YOGA

743. Jnana Yoga is exceedingly difficult in this age of Kali. In the first place, our life in this age depends entirely upon food (Annagataprana). Secondly, the term of human life now is much too short for this purpose. Thirdly, it is almost impossible in this age to get rid of the illusion that the Self is one with the body (Dehatmabuddhi), which clings to us. Now the conclusion which the Jnani must come to is: "I am not the body, I am one with the Universal Soul, the Absolute and Unconditioned Being." "As I am not the body, I am not subject to the conditions of the body, such as hunger, thirst, birth, death, disease and the rest. One subject to these physical conditions and yet calling oneself a Jnani, is like a person who is suffering from intense pain caused by a thorn that has run into his hand and who nevertheless says, "Why, my hand is not at all scratched or torn. It is all right." This kind of talk will not do. First of all the 'thorn' of body-consciousness has to be burnt into ashes by the fire of Jnana.

744. Very few persons are fit for the attainment of Jnana. The Gita declares: "One among thousands desires to know Him, and even among thousands of those who are desirous to know, one perhaps can actually know Him." The less one's attachment to the world, *i.e.*, for 'woman and gold', the more will be one's Jnana (knowledge of God).

745.* The Jnana Yogi says, "I am He." But as long as one has the idea of the Self as body, this egotism is injurious. It does not help one's progress, and it brings about one's ruin. Such a person deceives himself and others.

746.* A certain Brahmachari (religious aspirant) named Ramachandra one day visited Sri Ramakrishna at the temple of Dakshineswar. The aspirant had allowed his hair to grow into long matted tresses after the way of ascetics. Having taken his seat, he began to exclaim from time to time, "Sivoham! Sivoham!" (I am the Lord Siva!), but was dumb otherwise. Sri Ramakrishna observed him silently for some time and then remarked: "What is the good of merely repeating the word 'Sivoham'? It is only when one, by perfect meditation on the Lord in the temple of one's heart, has lost all idea of self and realised the Lord Siva within, that one is entitled to utter this sacred word. What good can the mere repetition of the formula do without the realisation? So long as the stage of realisation is not reached, it is better to regard the Lord as the Master and oneself as His humble servant." The aspirant came to see his mistake, and became wiser by this advice and other similar teachings. Before he left the place, he wrote down on the wall of Sri Ramakrishna's room: "Taught by the Swami from this day forward Ramachandra Brahmachari regards the Lord as his Master and himself as His humble servant."

II

Path of Love

BHAKTI AND THE CONDITIONS OF ITS GROWTH

747. Nothing can be impressed on smooth glass, but when the surface is coated with proper chemicals, pictures

can be impressed upon it, as in photography. In the same way, on the human heart coated with the chemicals of Bhakti, the image of Divinity can be impressed.

748. It is a rare thing—this love of God. Bhakti can arise only when there is whole-hearted devotion to God such as that of a chaste wife to her husband. Pure Bhakti is very difficult to obtain. Through Bhakti the mind and soul must be absorbed in God. Then comes Bhava (the higher form of Bhakti). In Bhava a man becomes speechless, his breath is stilled and the Kumbhaka (suspension of breath in Yoga practice) sets in of itself, just as, when one shoots at an aim, one becomes speechless and the breath is stopped.

749. Devotion to God increases in the same proportion as attachment to the objects of the senses decreases.

750. Verily these customers (worldly men) seek for Kalai pulse, (worthless commodity, *i.e.*, sensuous enjoyments). It is given to pure souls alone, uncontaminated by the world, to love God and to have a single aim, namely, to have the mind fixed wholly upon the Lord.

751. Unless one screens the eyes of unbroken horses, they will not move a single step. Is it possible to realise God unless one's passions have already been controlled? In a sense not. But that is true only of Jnana Yoga, the path of Knowledge. The knowing one says, "One must first be pure if one desires to see God. One must first control one's passions. First, self-discipline, then knowledge of God." There is, however, another path leading to God—the path of devotion (Bhakti Yoga). If once man gains love of God, if once the chanting of His holy

'name' begins to thrill the devotee with joy, what effort is needed for the control of passions afterwards? The control comes of itself. Can a man suffering from intense grief be in a mood to enter into a quarrel, or to enjoy a feast, or to give his mind up to the pleasures of the senses? So one absorbed in the love of God cannot think of sense-pleasures.

752. As Srimati (Radha) was nearing Sri Krishna, she was getting more and more the fragrance of his hallowed person. The more one approaches God, the more becomes one's love of Him; the nearer the river approaches the sea, the more is it subject to ebb and flow.

753.* On one occasion the Master said to Keshab and his followers with regard to worship: "Why do you dwell upon the glory and powers of the Lord so much? Does the son, seated in front of the father, think, 'My father has so many houses, so many horses and cows, so many gardens and orchards'? Or, does he think fondly how very, very dear his father has been to him, and how much he has been loving him? Is it strange if a father feeds and clothes his children and makes their life happy? We are all the children of God, and his protecting care has ensured our safety. What is there in it to wonder at? Therefore a real devotee of the Lord, instead of indulging in such thoughts, enters into the most intimate relation with the Lord, makes Him his own, teases Him with importunities, takes pride in Him, and presses Him with the entreaties: 'You must fulfil my prayer and reveal Yourself to me.' If you reflect upon His glorious majesty so much, it won't be possible to think of Him as your own

or as one close to you; nor is it possible for you then to press and compel Him. How great He is! how far removed from us!—such thoughts will come to you. Consider Him your own as much as you can, and then you will get Him."

754.* You must make Him your own by firmly adhering to one particular attitude. Then only will He be compelled to yield to your prayers. As for example, when two persons are only superficially acquainted with each other, they observe all rules of formality in their conversation. But with the growth of intimacy all such formal terms of respect completely disappear, and they speak to each other in the most familiar language. Similarly we must have the closest relation with God. An unchaste woman in the beginning of her liaison feels extremely shy, proceeds with great apprehension and keeps her love affair a strict secret. But when her love matures, all such feelings disappear. She then boldly leaves her hearth and home, and appears in public with her lover. If afterwards the lover does not take interest in her and wants to avoid her, she holds him by the neck and asks in a peremptory tone, "I have left my roof for your sake; now let me know whether you will provide for my maintenance or not."

BHAKTI AND WORLDLY LOVE

755.* J—'s mother grew old. She thought it was high time that she should retire from the world and spend the evening of her life peacefully in Brindavan. She expressed her intention to Sri Ramakrishna. But the Master knew

her circumstances too well to endorse her proposal, and answered as follows: "You are very fond of your son's daughter. The thought of the child will force itself upon you and make you restless, wherever you go. You may live in Brindavan if you like, but your mind will always hover about your home. On the other hand, all the good of living in Brindavan will come of its own accord to you, if you cultivate the feeling of sweet affection for your granddaughter, in the thought that she is Sri Radhika herself. Fondle her just as much as you are wont; feed and dress her to your heart's content; but always think within yourself that in those acts you are offering your worship to the goddess of Brindavan."

756.*. Finding a certain devotee inordinately attached to one of his relatives and unable to steady his mind on this acccount, the Master instructed him to look upon the object of his love as an image of God, and serve him in this attitude. In the course of explaining this point, sometimes the Master would thus refer to the similar views of Vaishnavacharan: "Vaishnavacharan would hold, 'If one looks upon the beloved as the Chosen Deity, the mind easily turns Godward.'"

EFFECTS OF BHAKTI

757. A devotee: Is it necessary, Sir, that one should first get one's senses controlled by right discrimination (Vichara)?

The Master: Well, that is one path—the path of right discrimination. In the path of Bhakti, self-control comes of

itself—and it comes very easily. The more one's love of God increases, the more insipid will become the pleasures of the senses, just as parents cannot think of physical enjoyment on the day they have lost a child.

758. Devotional practices are necessary only so long as tears of ecstasy do not flow at once on hearing the 'name' of Hari. He needs no devotional practices whose heart is moved to tears at the mere mention of the 'name' of God.

759. A poet has compared devotion (to God) to a tiger. As the tiger devours animals, devotion also swallows up all the 'arch-enemies' of man, such as lust, passion and the rest. Once the devotion to God is fully awakened, all evil passions like lust and anger are completely destroyed. The Gopis of Brindavan attained that state through their strong devotion to Krishna.

760. Devotion is compared again to collyrium. Srimati (Radha) once declared, "Lo, friends, I see my Krishna everywhere!" To that the other Gopis replied, "You have applied the collyrium of Love to your eyes; hence you are seeing like that!"

761. *Q.* Why does a Bhakta forsake everything for the sake of God?

A. The insect flies from darkness as soon as it sees a light; the ant loses its life in the syrup without leaving it. So the Bhakta clings to God for ever and leaves all else.

762. The Master: Does the moth seek darkness once it has seen a light?

The doctor (smiling): Oh! it does not—it will rather rush into the flame and perish.

The Master: But that is not so with the true worshipper of God. The Divine Light to which he is drawn does not burn and cause death. It is like the lustre of a gem, shining yet soft, cool and soothing. It burns not but illumines the heart with peace and joy.

763. It may be that one does not know the right path and yet has Bhakti for God, the intense desire to know Him. Such a devotee gains Him through the sheer force of that Bhakti. There was a great devotee who started to see Jagannath, but not knowing the way to Puri (where the temple of Jagannath is situated), he went away from the city instead of going towards it. With an anxious heart he asked everybody he met on the way about the road. They all told him, "This is not the way; take that path." And the devotee reached Puri at last, and had his wish fulfilled. Thus even if one is ignorant of the path, one is sure to get somebody to direct one to it, provided one has the will. One may err at first, but in the end one is set on the right road.

764. Devotion effloresces into right discrimination, renunciation, love of all creatures, service of pious men, keeping company with the devoted, singing the praises of the Lord, truthfulness and other virtues.

765. There are signs of God-realisation. Know that there is no more delay for him to realise God, in whom you mark the efflorescence of devotion.

766. The magnetic rock under the sea attracts the ship sailing over it, draws out all its iron nails, separates plank from plank and sinks the vessel in the deep. In the same way when the human soul is attracted by the magnet that

is God, it destroys in a moment man's selfishness and sense of individuality, and plunges the soul into the ocean of God's Infinite love.

STAGES AND ASPECTS OF BHAKTI

767. Love is of three varieties: unselfish (Sámartha), mutual (Samanjasa) and ordinary or selfish (Sadharana). Unselfish love is of the highest kind. The lover here seeks only the welfare of the beloved, and does not care whether he suffers pains and hardships thereby. The second kind of love is mutual love in which the lover desires not only the happiness of his beloved, but has an eye to his own happiness also. Selfish love is the lowest. It makes a man only care for his own happiness without having any regard for the weal or woe of the beloved.

768. As there are shades of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas in worldliness, so Bhakti has its corresponding aspects. There is one type of Bhakti that partakes of the humility of Sattva, another that is characterised by the ostentation of Rajas, and a third by the brute force of Tamas.

The Sattvic devotee performs his devotions in secret. He meditates in the night in his bed inside the mosquito-curtain, and therefore rises late in the morning—a fact explained by his friends as due to want of good sleep. The care he bestows on the body ends by providing it with plain food—perhaps a little rice and vegetables. Of luxury he has none, either in food or in dress. There is no show of fittings and furniture in his house, and he never seeks to rise in the world by flattery.

The Rajasic devotee has perhaps distinctive sectarian marks on his body and beads round his neck, with perhaps a few golden ones interspersed. He is particular about outward observances such as wearing silk at the time of worship and celebrating the worship of the Deity with pomp and splendour.

The Tamasic devotee has a fiery faith. He applies force to God like a robber seizing things by force. "What!" he says, "I have uttered His 'name' and yet I am to remain sinful! I am His son! I am duly entitled to the inheritance of His wealth!" Such is his vehement ardour.

769. *Q.* What is the violent form of devotion?

A. It is becoming mad with the constant and terrific uttering of 'Jai Kali' (Glory to the Divine Mother), or dancing like a maniac with arms upraised and shouting praise of Hari (Hari-bol). In this iron age (Kali Yuga) the violent form of devotion is more suitable than other forms; it brings speedier fruition than do milder forms of contemplation. The citadel of God must be taken by storm.

770. These are the stages of Sadhana (devotional practice) for the purification of the soul:

(1) Sadhu-sanga or the company of holy men; (2) Sraddha or faith in, and devotion to things relating to the Spirit; (3) Nishtha or single-minded devotion to one's ideal; (4) Bhakti or intense love of God; (5) Bhava or the state of speechless absorption in the thought of God; and (6) Mahabhava—When Bhava is intensified, it is called Mahabhava. The devotee sometimes laughs

and sometimes weeps like a mad man. He has completely conquered the flesh and has no consciousness of his body. This stage is not generally attained by ordinary souls but by Mahapurushas or Incarnations of God only. (7) Prema or the most intense love of God. It goes hand in hand with Mahabhava. The two marks of this stage are: first, forgetfulness of the world; second, forgetfulness of self, which includes one's own body. This brings the devotee face to face with God, and he thus attains the goal of life.

771. "This much of pious duties has been enjoined by the scriptures, so I am doing it"—this sort of attitude is called Vaidhi-bhakti. There is another kind of devotion known as Raga-bhakti, which comes through extreme love of God—as was the case with Prahlada. When that Raga-bhakti appears, there remains no necessity to do the "enjoined works" (Vaidhi-karma).

772. There is the kind of Bhakti which is called Vaidhi-bhakti (devotion as enjoined by the scriptures). Repeating the 'name' of God a certain number of times, fasting on certain occasions, making pilgrimages to certain shrines, worshipping with certain articles—these and other observances constitute Vaidhi-bhakti. Practice of this for a long time leads one to the higher aspect of devotion known as Raga-bhakti. Love is the one thing needful. Worldly ideas must go away completely; the mind should be set on Him "in all its sixteen annas" (*i.e.*, wholly) and only then you can reach Him. Without Raga-bhakti one cannot attain Him.

773. Love of God is of two kinds: First, the Bhakti which is enjoined by the scriptures. We are to worship in a certain way or repeat the 'name' of the Lord so many times, and so on. All this belongs to what is known as Vaidhi-bhakti, *i.e.*, devotion according to the Law. It may lead to pure devotion and Knowledge of the Absolute in Samadhi. The self is thus merged in the Universal Soul never to come back. This is the case with ordinary devotees. But quite different is the case with Divine Incarnations and those that are the Lord's own. Their love of God is not made up of mere scriptural formulas. It springs from within. It wells up from the soul. Divine Incarnations (like Sri Chaitanya) and those that are nearest to Him, have within their reach the Knowledge of the Absolute attainable in Samadhi, and at the same time may come down from that height, retaining their self and loving the Lord as Father, Mother, and so on. Saying, 'Not this,' 'Not this,' they leave behind them the stairs one after another until they get to the roof. Reaching there, they say, 'It is this.' But soon they find out that the staircase is made up of the same materials as the roof itself—brick lime and brick-dust. So they walk up and down, sometimes resting on the roof and sometimes on the steps of the staircase.

The roof symbolises the Absolute realised in Samadhi, in which the self responding to the sense-world is blotted out. The staircase is the phenomenal world, the world of name and form. When one has attained that roof of Samadhi, one realises the world as a manifestation of the Absolute to the human senses.

PREMA OR PARA-BHAKTI (ECSTATIC LOVE)

774. Prema or ecstatic Love comes not before the realisation of God.

775. In Persian books it is written that within the flesh are the bones, within the bones is the marrow, and so on, and within them all is Prema.

776. Prema is like a string in the hands of the devotee, binding him to that Sachchidananda, *viz.*, God. The devotee holds the Lord, so to speak, under his control. God comes to him whenever he calls.

777. The stage of devotion called Bhava (speechless absorption in God) is like an unripe mango; Prema or ecstatic Love is like the ripe fruit.

778. The worship from fear of hell fire and the like is intended for the beginner. Some people look upon the sense of sin as the whole of religion. They forget that it marks only the earliest and the lowest stage of spirituality. There is yet a higher ideal, a higher stage of spirituality, *viz.*, the love of God as our own Father or Mother.

779. What is Para-bhakti or the supreme ecstatic love of God? In the stage of ecstatic Love the worshipper contemplates God as his dearest and nearest relative. It is like the love of the Gopis to Lord Krishna. They always knew Him and addressed Him as the Lord of the Gopis and not as the Lord of the universe.

780. There is such a thing as loving God without knowing why. If this comes, there is nothing more to desire. One endowed with such Bhakti says, "O Lord, I do not want riches, fame, health, happiness or anything

else. Grant that I may have pure devotion to Thy lotus feet!"

781. The two characteristics of Prema are: (1) forgetfulness of the external world; (2) forgetfulness of one's own body.

782. There are two elements in this Prema-bhakti, *viz.*, 'I-ness' and 'my-ness' (*i.e.*, 'I am the devotee and my God is wholly mine'). Yasoda used to think that except herself none else could look after her Gopala; but for her care, her Gopala would fall ill. Yasoda never liked to perceive her Krishna as the Lord of the universe. And the 'my-ness' of the devotee makes him feel, "He is mine, my own; he is my Gopala!" Uddhava said to Yasoda, "Mother, your Krishna is the Lord Himself. He is the Chintamani (the wish-yielding gem) of the whole universe. He is not an ordinary person." To that Yasoda replied, "No, no, I am not asking about your Chintamani, I am asking how my Gopala is. Not Chintamani, but my Gopala!"

783. Prema or ecstatic Love is attainable only by a few. They are men of extraordinary powers, entrusted with Divine commission. Being heirs of Divine powers and glory, they form a class of their own. To this class belong Incarnations of God like Chaitanya Deva and their devotees of the highest order who are parts of the Lord.

784. There are a few who have this ecstatic Love naturally in them, perhaps even from their boyhood. Yes, like Prahlada they weep and long for God even in their childhood. They belong to the class of Nityasiddhas or men perfect from their very birth.

LOVE OF THE GOPIS

785. It is immaterial whether one believes or not that Radha and Krishna were Incarnations of God. One may believe (like the Hindu or the Christian) in God's Incarnations. Or one may not believe (like the modern Brahmos) in His assuming form, human or otherwise. But let all have a yearning for this Anuraga or intense love for the Lord. This intense Love is the one needful thing.

786. Speaking about the Gopis' love of God, the Master said to M., one of his disciples: "How wonderful was the intensity of their Love! At the very sight of the Tamala tree, they were seized with the madness of Love (Premonmada). (For the dark colour of the Tamala tree reminded them of Sri Krishna). This was also the case with Gauranga. Looking at a forest before him, he thought it was Brindavan. Oh! If one is favoured with but a particle of this ecstatic love! What a devotion! This devotion they had not only brim-full but in overflowing superabundance.

787. The unflinching devotion (Nishtha) of the Gopis is wonderful. When the Gopis went to see Krishna in Mathura, they got admission into the audience chamber after begging the sentinel at the gate several times. But when they saw Krishna there, with a turban on, they bent their heads and began to whisper among themselves, "Who is this turbaned man? We won't talk with him lest we should be culpable of infidelity to our Krishna. Oh, where is our Lord, that supremely Beloved, who wears yellow cloth and a crest of peacock tail!" Ah! mark the single-hearted devotion of the Gopis.

788. The devotion of the Gopis is Prema-bhakti (devotion of ecstatic Love). It is also called absolutely constant devotion (Avyabhicharini-bhakti), or passionate devotion (Nishtha-bhakti). And what is inconstant devotion (Vyabhicharini-bhakti)? It is devotion blended with knowledge; for instance, the knowledge, that Krishna has become all, that He is the supreme Brahman, that He is Rama, Siva and Sakti, that He is the Divine Energy, etc. But you will not find this element of knowledge mixed up with ecstatic Love. When Hanuman went to Dvaraka, he said, that he would only see Sita and Rama. So Lord Krishna asked Rukmini, to assume the form of Sita; otherwise Hanuman would not be reconciled. When the Pandavas celebrated the great Rajasuya sacrifice, Yudhishthira was seated on the throne and all the kings prostrated before him, but Vibhishana among them said that he would not prostrate to anybody save Narayana. So the Lord Himself began to prostrate before Yudhishthira, whereupon Vibhishana, too, did obeisance to Yudhishthira falling flat and touching his crowned head on the ground.

VIRAHA AND MAHABHAVA

789. Oh! immense is the suffering that arises from Viraha or the feeling of separation from God. It is said that when Rupa and Sanatana[1] sat under a tree in that state, the very leaves of it used to get scorched! I was almost unconscious for three days while in that state!

[1] These were two of the foremost disciples of Lord Chaitanya. They built the famous shrine of Govindaji in Brindavan.

I could not move, and I lay in one spot. When I became a little conscious, Brahmani [1] would take me to bathe; but she could not touch my skin. The whole body was covered with a thick cloth, and she held me by placing her hands over the cloth. The earth with which the body was smeared got burnt! When that state came, I used to feel as if a big spear had been passed through my spine. I would cry out at times that I was dying. But it was always followed by intense beatific feeling.

790. Mahabhava is the supreme God-consciousness; it brings about a terrible commotion both in the body and the mind, as if a mighty elephant enters into a small hut and shakes it furiously, sometimes even breaking it to pieces. There is as much bliss after that state, as there is suffering before it.

III

Bhakti and Jnana

BHAKTI AND JNANA THE SAME IN THE END

791. Pure Knowledge and pure Love are both one and the same.

792. The same Being whom the Vadantins call Brahman, is called Atman by the Yogis and Bhagavan by the Bhaktas. The same Brahmin is called priest when he conducts worship, and cook when he is employed in the kitchen.

[1] The Brahmin lady who initiated Sri Ramakrishna into the Tantrik Sadhanas.

793. What is Jnana (Knowledge) in the highest sense? Says the Jnani, "O Lord, Thou alone dost act in all this universe. I am but the smallest of tools in Thy hands. Nothing is mine. Everything is Thine. Myself, my family, my riches, my virtues—all are Thine."

794. A devotee: How can one know that one has attained Jnana, even while leading a family life?

The Master: By tears and thrill of the hair at the name of Hari. When, at the very mention of the sweet 'name' of the Lord, tears trickle down from a person's eyes and his hairs stand on end, truely he has attained Jnana.

795.* Here is a Puranic story which reconciles Jnana and Bhakti. Once Ramachandra, God incarnate, said to his great devotee Hanuman, "My son, tell Me in what relation you regard Me, and how you meditate upon Me." Hanuman replied: "O Rama, at times I worship Thee as Purna, the undivided one. Then I look upon myself as an Amsa, a part, a fragment as it were, of that Divinity. At other times I meditate upon Thee, O Rama, as my Divine Master and think of myself only as Thy servant. When, however, I am blessed, O Rama, with Tattva Jnana, or true Knowledge, I see, I realise that I am Thou and Thou art I."

796. If the scum on the surface of a tank is pushed aside a little, it spreads out again covering the water; but if it is well kept away with bamboo frames, it cannot come back any more. So if Maya is forced back merely once in a way, it comes again to trouble us; but when the heart is hedged in with Bhakti and Jnana, it is permanently

kept away. Indeed, it is only thus that God becomes manifest to human vision.

HOW BHAKTI LEADS TO JNANA

797. Knowledge of Non-duality is the highest; but God should be worshipped first as a master is worshipped by his servant, as the adored by the adorer. This is the easiest path; it soon leads to the highest knowledge of unity.

798. Though the non-dualistic Knowledge is the highest, you should proceed in your devotion first with the idea of the worshipper and the worshipped (*i.e.*, with the feeling, "God is the object of worship and I am his worshipper"), then you will easily attain Knowledge.

799*. Brahman Itself sheds tears of grief, being caught in the trap of the five elements. You may close your eyes and convince yourself saying again and again, "There is no thorn, there is no thorn." But the moment you touch it, you feel the prick, and you draw your hand away in pain. Likewise, however much you may reason within yourself that you are beyond birth and death, virtue and vice, joy and sorrow, hunger and thirst—that you are the immutable Atman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute—nevertheless, the moment the body is subjected to ailments, or the mind encounters the temptations of the world and is overwhelmed by the transient pleasures of wealth and sex, and in consequence you happen to commit any sin, you become subject to delusion, pain and misery—become deprived of discrimination and good conduct, and get

overwhelmed by utter perplexity. Know therefore that none can have Self-realisation and liberation from all miseries unless God Himself shows mercy to him, and Maya unbars the door. Have you not heard it stated in the Chandi, "This same Goddess, the bestower of boons, when propitiated, removes the bondage of human beings." Nothing can be achieved unless the Divine Mother removes the obstacles from the path. The aspirant can never realise God unless Maya takes pity on him, and moves aside from his path. The moment She bestows Her mercy on the aspirant, he becomes blessed with the vision of God and escapes from all miseries. Otherwise, however much you may go on with your discrimination and other spiritual practices, they will be of little use. They say each grain of Ajowan (Ptychotis) helps one to digest a hundred grains of rice. But when the digestive organ goes out of order, even a hundred grains of Ajowan cannot make one assimilate a single grain of rice.

800.* The Jnana Yogi longs to realise Brahman—God the Impersonal, the Absolute and the Unconditioned. But, as a general rule, such a soul would do better, in this present age, to love, pray, and surrender himself entirely to God. The Lord saves His devotee and will vouchsafe to him even Brahma-jnana if the devotee hungers and thirsts after it. Thus the Jnana Yogi will attain Jnana as well as Bhakti. It will be given to him to realise Brahman. The Lord willing, he will also, realise the Personal God of the Bhakta. The Bhakta, on the other hand, will generally be content to see and realise the Personal God: the Saguna Brahman of the Upanishads. Yet the Lord makes him

heir to His infinite glory and grants him Bhakti as well as Jnana, and the realisation of God, Personal as well as Impersonal. For if one can manage to reach Calcutta, will he not succeed in finding his way to the Maidan, the Ochterlony Monument, the Museum and other objects of interest, and know which is which?

801. *Q.* Does a devotee ever attain the state of absolute union with God? If so, how?

A. It is possible for human soul to attain the condition of absolute union with God; and it is then only that one can feel and say, "He is the same as myself." An old servant of the house in course of time, may come to be counted as one of the family, and the master of the house, being extremely pleased with his work, may one day seat him in his own seat of honour, saying to all around him that from that day forward there is no difference between him and the servant. The master may say, "He and I are one; obey his commands as you do mine. Whosoever will not do so will be punished." Though the servant may hesitate through modesty to be thus honoured, the master will by force raise him to the seat of honour. Such is the condition of those souls who realise the state of oneness with God by serving Him for a long time. He graciously endows them with all His glory and attributes, and raises them to His own seat of universal sovereignty.

802.* The Bhakta, as a rule, does not long for Brahma-jnana (the realisation of the Impersonal); but remains content with realising the Divine Person alone—my Divine Mother, or any of Her infinite forms of glory, such as the Divine Incarnations like Sri Krishna and Chaitanya Deva,

the visible revelations of God. He is anxious that the whole of his ego shall not be effaced in Samadhi. He would fain have sufficient individuality left to enjoy the vision Divine as a Person. He would fain taste sugar, instead of becoming sugar!

803.* My Divine Mother (the personal phase of Brahman) has declared that She is the Brahman of the Vedanta. It is within Her power to give Brahma-jnana, which she does by causing the effacement of the lower self. Thus, in the first place, you may, my Mother willing, come to Brahman through right discrimination (Vichara). Again you may come through Bhakti. The essence of Bhakti consists in unceasing prayer for light and love and self-surrender to Her. First, come to my Divine Mother (the Personal God) through these. Take my word for it that, if your prayer is really heartfelt, my Mother will respond to it, if you will only wait. Pray to Her again if you want to realise Her Impersonal Self. Should she deign to grant your prayer—for She is omnipotent—you will be in a position to realise Her Impersonal Self in Samadhi. This is precisely the same thing as Brahma-jnana.

DIFFERENCE IN THE TEMPERAMENTS OF THE JNANI AND THE BHAKTA

804. One meets with to classes of spiritual aspirants. One of them resembles the young of a monkey and the other may be likened to a kitten. The young one of the monkey strongly clasps its mother, while the young one

of the cat cannot do so, but mews piteously, staying wherever it is placed by her. If the young monkey lets go the hold on its mother, it falls down and gets hurt. This is because it has to depend upon its own strength. But the kitten runs no such risk, for the mother herself carries it about from place to place. Similarly, the aspirant who follows the path of Knowledge or selfless work depends upon his own effort to attain salvation. On the other hand, the aspirant who follows the path of Love knows that the Lord is the disposer of everything; so with perfect confidence he resigns himself entirely to His mercy. The former is like the young of a monkey and the latter like the kitten.

805. The Jnani says, "I am He, I am that pure Atman;" but the Bhakta declares, "Ah, all these are His glory!"

806. God is attained only when man gets established in one or other of these three attitudes: (1) All this am I; (2) All this art Thou; (3) Thou art the Master and I am the servant.

807. When one is born of the spirit of Siva, he becomes a Jnani. His constant tendency is towards the consciousness that Brahman alone is true and this world is false. But when one is born of the spirit of Vishnu, in him faith and devotion never fail. Even if, for a time, these virtues shrink by the strong influx of reason or dialectic knowledge, in the fulness of time they increase copiously like the Musala (a pestle) that brought ruin to the Yadava dynasty.

808. The Ganges of Knowledge, flowing in the heart of a Jnani, runs only in one direction. To him the whole

universe is a dream. He always lives in his own Self. But the Ganges of Love in a devotee's heart does not always run in the same direction; it has its ebb and flow. The devotee laughs, weeps, dances and sings. He loves to live in and enjoy God's presence: in that ocean of bliss he loves to cast himself, sometimes swimming, sometimes sinking, and again floating, as a block of ice dances in water, tossing up and down.

809. According to the Puranas, the devotee is separate from God. Man is one entity and He is another. This body is like a vessel; the mind, the intellect and the ego are, as it were, the water in it; and Brahman is like the sun. He is being reflected in that water. So the devotees witness the various Divine manifestations. But according to the Vedanta, Brahman alone is the reality, the substance; and every thing else is Maya, unreal like dreams. There is this 'stick' of 'I' lying on the surface of the sea of Brahman. If you take away the stick, there is one undivided sheet of water; but when the stick is there, it divides the water into two parts, one on each side. One falls into Samadhi and then the knowledge of Brahman dawns. Then the ego is blotted out. According to the Vedanta the awakened state also is not real.

810. Narada and other teachers took to Bhakti for the good of the world, even after gaining Knowledge.

811. The Master: Bhakti is the moon, while Jnana is the sun. I have heard that there are oceans in the extreme north and south, and that it is so cold there that the water in them freeze in parts, forming masses of ice in which ships are caught and held fast.

A devotee: Are men likewise caught half-way in the path of Bhakti?

The Master: Yes, they are, indeed. But it matters nothing; for the ice in which one is held is the solidified water of the ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. If you reason, "Brahman alone is real, the universe is false," the ice will thaw in the sun of Jnana, and what will remain? Only the formless water of that ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss.

812. Jnana is like a man and Bhakti is like a woman. Knowledge has entry only up to the drawingroom of God, but Love can enter His inner apartments.

813. A Jnani and a Bhakta were once passing through a forest. On the way they saw a tiger. The Jnani said: "There is no reason why we should flee; the Almighty God will certainly protect us." The Bhakta said: "No, brother, no, let us run away. Why should we trouble the Lord when we can accomplish a thing by our own exertion?"

IV

Path of Work

WHAT IS KARMA YOGA?

814.* Karma Yoga is communion with God by means of Work. Ashtanga Yoga or Raja Yoga is Karma Yoga, if practised without attachment. It leads to communion through meditation and concentration. The performance of the duties of householders (*i.e.*, self-regarding or altruistic work, social and political)—doing

them without attachment, to the end that God may be glorified—is Karma Yoga. Again, worship according to the scriptures, silent repetition of the 'name' of God and other pious duties of this kind, is Karma Yoga if done without attachment, for the glorification of God. The end of Karma Yoga is the same (as of other Yogas), namely, the realisation of God, impersonal or personal or both.

815.* In the case of a person endowed with the quality of Sattva (purity of being), action naturally falls off. Even if he tries, he cannot engage himself in action. God would not allow him to act. For example, the daughter-in-law who is with child is gradually relieved of her household work, and when the child is actually born, she is given nothing to do and is left exclusively to attend to the child. Those who are not endowed with the quality of Sattva have to attend to all worldly duties. With complete dedication to the Lord, they should behave like the servants in the house of a rich man. This is what is called Karma Yoga. Its secret consists in repeating the 'name' of the Lord and meditating on Him as much as one can, and at the same time attending to one's duties in the spirit of dedication described before.

816. Whatever you offer to God would return to you a thousandfold. So at the end of all Karma (sacrifice), one has to pour a handful of water, dedicating the fruit of the Karma to Krishna.

817. When Yudhishthira was about to offer even his sins to Krishna, Bhima warned him saying, "No, no, you should not do so; whatever you would offer to Krishna will come back to you a thousandfold."

DEVOTION AS A SAFEGUARD IN THE PATH OF WORK

818.* Work without attachment, however, is exceedingly difficult, especially in this age. Hence communion by prayer, devotion and Love has been enjoined as better adapted to this age than communion by Work or Knowledge and philosophy. No one, however, can avoid work. Every mental operation is work. The consciousness, 'I feel', or 'I think', involves work. What is meant by the path of devotion in its relation to Work is that work is simplified by devotion to, or love of, God. In the first place, this love of God reduces the quantity of one's work by fixing one's mind upon one's own ideal, that is, God. Secondly it helps one to work unattached. One cannot love God and at the same time love riches, pleasure, fame, or power. He who has once tasted the drink prepared with the Ola sugar candy does not care for that made with molasses.

819.* In this age Work without devotion to God has no legs to stand upon. It is like a foundation of sand. First cultivate devotion. All the other things—schools, dispensaries, etc.—will, if you like, be added to you. First devotion, then work. Work, apart from devotion, or love of God, is helpless and cannot stand.

820. For this Kali Yuga, Naradiya-Bhakti, or communion with God by love, devotion and self-surrender as practised and preached by the Rishi Narada, is enjoined. There is hardly time for Karma Yoga, *i.e.*, for doing the various ritualistic duties laid on man by the scriptures. Don't you see that the well-known decoction of the ten medicinal roots known as Dashamulapachana,* is not the

remedy for fevers of the present day? The patient runs the risk of being carried off before the medicine has had time to take effect. 'Fever mixture' is therefore the order of the day.

821.* A disciple: The pressure of work stands in the way of giving one's mind to God, does it not?

The Master: O yes, no doubt, that is so; but a Jnani may work unattached, and then work will not harm him. If you sincerely desire, the Lord will help you, so that the bondage of work will gradually fall away.

822.* Sri Ramakrishna once said addressing Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, the great philanthropist of India: "Your nature is made of the Sattva *i.e.*, the pure element which leads to illumination or true Knowledge. Only your Sattva is in that phase which makes you active and devoted to the doing of good works. Charity, compassion, kindness towards others, etc., are good if practised without attachment. If they are so practised, and are accompanied with Bhakti (devotion to the Supreme), they will lead to God.

823.* Should you think of God only at the time of meditation and remain forgetful of Him at all other times? Have you not noticed how during Durga Puja a lamp is kept constantly burning near the image? It should never be allowed to go out. If ever it is extinguished, the householder meets with some mishap. Similarly, after installing the Deity on the lotus of your heart, you must keep the lamp of remembering Him ever burning. While engaged in the affairs of the world, you should constantly turn your gaze inwards and see whether the lamp is burning or not.

WORK AS SERVICE EQUAL TO WORSHIP

824.* Sri Ramakrishna was one day expounding the gist of Sri Gauranga's cult in the following words: "This faith insists that man should at all times try to cultivate three things—delight in the 'name' of the Lord, loving sympathy for all living beings, and service to devotees. God and His 'name' are identical. Knowing this, one should take the 'name' of the Lord with great Love and fervour. The devotees of God should be respected and adored in the conviction that there is no difference between the Lord and his worshippers, between Krishna and the Vaishnava. With the knowledge that the whole universe is the household of the Lord, one should show pity to all creatures. . ." Uttering the last words 'pity to all creatures' in a rather abrupt fashion, the Master went into Samadhi. Sometime after—returning to a semi-conscious state—the Master exclaimed, "Pity to creatures! Pity to creatures! Sirrah! you who are lower than even a worm, how dare you speak of showing pity to creatures! Who are you to show pity to them? No, no, it is not pity to creatures, but service to them in the consciousness that they are verily God Himself."

WORK, A MEANS AND NOT AN END

825.* Addressing a group of enthusiastic social reformers, the Master said: "You talk glibly of doing good to the world. The world to which you desire to do good—is it so small a thing? In the next place, pray, who are you to do good to the world? First, go through

devotional practices and see God. Then it is that inspiration and power will come to you, and you may talk of doing good. Not till then."

A devotee: Sir, do you mean to say that we are to give up all work until we have seen God?

The Master: No, my dear sir. Why should you give up all work? Meditation, chanting of hymns, repetition of His holy 'names', and other devotional exercises—these you must go through.

The devotee: I mean work connected with the world. Should we give up all worldly affairs?

The Master: You may attend to them too, just as much as you cannot do without, in order to live in this world. But you should, at the same time, pray to the Lord with tears in your eyes for His grace, and for strength to do your duties without the expectation of any reward or fear of punishment in this world or the next.

826.* You cannot get rid of work, because Nature will lead you on to it. That being so, let all work be done as it ought to be. If work is done unattached, it will lead to God. To work without any attachment is to work without the expectation of any reward or fear of any punishment in this world or the next. Work so done is a means to the end, and God is the end.

827.* Work is a means, if done unattached; but the end of life is to see God. Let me repeat that the means should not be confounded with the end—that the first stage on a road should not be taken for the goal. No, do not regard work as the be-all and the end-all, the ideal of human existence. Pray for devotion to God. Suppose

you are fortunate enough to see God. Then what would you pray for? Would you pray for dispensaries and hospitals, tanks and wells, roads and alms-houses? No, these are realities to us so long as we do not see God. But once brought face to face with the Divine vision, we see them as they are—transitory things no better than dreams. And then we would pray for more light—more knowledge in the highest sense, more Divine love—the love which lifts us up from man to God, the love which makes us realise that we are really sons of the Supreme Being of Whom all that can be said is that He exists, that He is Knowledge itself in the highest sense, and that He is the eternal fountain of love and bliss.

828.* Referring to a devotee of his, the Master once said: "Sambhu Mallick once talked of founding hospitals and dispensaries, schools and colleges—of laying roads, sinking wells and digging tanks for the good of all. I said to him: 'Yes, but you must be unattached while doing good to others, and you must be careful to take up only such works as come in your way—such works, again, as appear to be of pressing need. Do not seek them—do not seek more work than you can well manage. If you do, you will lose sight of the Lord."

WORK AND WORKLESSNESS

829. When the pure Sattva arises in a man, he only meditates on God, and does not find pleasure in any other work. Some are born with this pure Sattva on account of their past actions. But one can develop this pure quality if one continues to perform unselfish work in a

spirit of devotion and dedication to God. If there be Sattva with an admixture of Rajas, the mind slowly gets distracted in several directions and brings in its wake the egoistic feeling, "I shall do good to the world." It is highly hazardous for ordinary Jivas to attempt to do good to the world. But it is good if a man works without motive for the benefit of others; there is no danger in it. This kind of work is called Nishkama Karma. It is quite desirable to do such works. But all cannot do it! Very difficult!

830. All have to do work; only a few can renounce it. That kind of pure Sattva is found only in a very few persons. If a person continues to perform his work with devotion and non-attachment, Sattva becomes purged of its Rajas element. And by virtue of this attainment of pure Sattva, he realises God. Ordinary persons cannot understand this state of pure Sattva.

831. Renunciation of work comes of itself when intense love of God swells up in the heart. Let them work who are made to do so by God. When the time is ripe, one must renounce every thing and say, "Come, O my mind, let us watch together the Divinity installed in the heart."

832. Sandhya loses herself in Gayatri; Gayatri loses herself in Pranava; Pranava in the end loses itself in Samadhi. So every Karma (Sandhya and the like) ultimately loses itself in Samadhi.[1]

[1] The idea is this: Sandhya consists of the rituals and prayers performed by high-caste Hindus at sun-rise and sun-set. The most important part of it is the meditation on Gayatri (Rig Veda, III. 62. 10), the greatest Mantra of the Vedas. Pranava or Om, the mystic sound symbol of God, is prefixed to this magnificent Mantra. True meditation on 'Om' leads to

833.* As long as the mind is not absorbed in Sachchidananda, man has to do both—call upon the Lord and attend to work in the world. But when the mind is absorbed in Him, there is no more need of any work. For example, let us take the illustration of the Kirtan. A man sings: "Nitai amar mata hati (My Nityananda is an elephant in rut)." When this is sung first, the singer pays attention to all details—the tune, time, melody, etc. But when his mind is a little absorbed in the song, he says simply "Mata hati, mata hati." At a further stage of absorption he says only, "Hati, hati." At a still further stage, he says simply "Ha, ha," and no further.

834.* So I say, in the beginning there is much fuss of Karma. But the more you will proceed towards God, the less will it grow. Finally comes the complete renunciation of work and the attainment of Samadhi. Generally the body does not remain long after the attainment of Samadhi. But in the case of some it remains for the work of teaching the world. Sages like Narada and Divine Incarnations like Sri Chitanya are examples of this. After a well is dug some throw away all the spades and baskets, but others preserve them with the idea that they may be of some use to any of their neighbours. Such great souls are moved with pity at the sight of the sufferings of the world. They are not so selfish as to care only for the attainment of Jnana for themselves.

* Samadhi and realisation of God. Thus Karmas, for pious duties of the type of Sandhya, have their ultimate end in God-realisation.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DIVINE

[*Brahman (The Impersonal or Supra-personal Absolute)—Brahman and the reality of relative experiences—Personal Deity, known also as Isvara, Maya and Sakti—God in everything—The Divine both with and without form—Some Divine forms—Divine immanence—The Divine and man's moral responsibility*]

BRAHMAN (THE IMPERSONAL OR SUPRA-PERSONAL ABSOLUTE)

835. What is the conception of Brahman? It cannot be explained in words. If a man is called upon to give an idea of the ocean to one who has never seen it, he can only say, "It is a vast sheet of water, a big expanse of water; it is water, water all around."

836. The Vedas, the Tantras, the Puranas and all the sacred scriptures of the world have become Uchchhishta as it were (*i.e.*, defiled like the food thrown out of the mouth), because they have come out of, and have so often been repeated by, human mouths. But Brahman or the Absolute has never been so defiled, for no one has yet been able to express It by speech.

837. What is the nature of Brahman? It is without attributes, without motion, immovable, unshakable, firm as the mount Meru.

838. Brahman is unattached to good or evil. It is like the flame of a lamp. You may read the Bhagavata (a holy scripture), or forge a document—you can do both with the help of the same light. Again, Brahman is like a serpent. What does it matter if it has poison in its fangs? It is none the worse for it; the poison does not cause its death. It is poison only to other creatures whom it may happen to bite. Much in the same way, misery, sin and whatever other evil we find in this world, are just so only in relation to us. Brahman is above and beyond all these. Good and evil in creation are not so to Brahman. He is not to be judged by any human standard of good and evil.

839. Brahman is above and beyond both knowledge and ignorance, good and evil, Dharma and Adharma. It is indeed beyond all dual throngs.

840.* Brahman is beyond mind and speech, beyond concentration and meditation (Dharana and Dhyana), beyond the knower, the known and knowledge, beyond even the conception of the real and the unreal. In short, It is beyond all relativity.

841. The Absolute is like the air which carries odours, be they good or bad, but remains ever untainted by them.

842. The Absolute is beyond all attributes—beyond whatever is connected with Maya.

BRAHMAN AND THE REALITY OF RELATIVE EXPERIENCE

843. God alone is true; His manifestations as living beings and the world (Jiva and Jagat) are untrue, *i.e.*, non-eternal.

844. It is an easy thing to say that the world is an illusion, but do you know what that really means? It is like the burning of camphor, which leaves no risidue. It is not even like the burning of wood, which leaves ashes behind. Only when discrimination ends, and the highest Samadhi is attained, there is absolutely no recognition of 'I', 'thou' and the universe.

845. In the course of his instructions to his disciple, the Guru raised two fingers, by which he meant the duality of Brahman and Maya. Then, lowering one finger, he taught him that, when Maya vanishes, nothing of the universe remains. Only the Absolute Brahman is.

846. Brahman, the absolute and the unconditioned, is realised in Samadhi alone. Then it is all silence—all talk of reality and unreality, of Jiva and Jagat, of knowledge and ignorance, is hushed. There remains, then, only 'Isness' (Being), and nothing else. For verily the salt doll tells no tale when it has become one with the infinite sea. This is Brahma-jnana.

847. *Q.* How has the delusion arisen of the undifferentiated Atman having differentiated into the individual soul?

A. The dialectical Advaitin, as long as he relies on the unaided powers of his reason, answers this question by saying, "I do not know." The answer which realisation gives alone is conclusive. As long as you say, "I know" or "I do not know", you look upon yourself as a person. And as such, you must take these differentiations as facts, not as delusion. When all personality is effaced, one realises the knowledge of the Absolute in Samadhi.

Then alone are set at rest for ever all such questions of delusion and no delusion, fact and fiction.

848. As long as you are a person, your Absolute must imply a 'relative', your Nitya (the Changeless), must imply a Lila (change), your Substance must imply qualities, your Impersonal must imply a 'personal being', your One must imply 'many'.

849. As long as you are in the plane of relativity, you must admit both 'butter' and 'buttermilk',—you must admit both Personal God and the universe. To explain the analogy, the original milk is Brahman realised in Samadhi, the 'butter' the Impersonal-personal God, and the 'buttermilk' the universe made up of the twenty-four categories.

850. Let not the Advaitin say, "My position is the only correct, rational and tenable one; those that believe in a Personal God are wrong." The personal manifestations of God are by no means less real, but infinitely more so, than the body, the mind or the external world.

851. No sooner do you talk of Advaita (monism) than you postulate the Dvaita (pluralism). Talking of the the Absolute, you take for granted the 'relative'. For your absolute, until realised in Samadhi, is at best the correlative of the 'relative', if not indeed a mere empty word. You cannot possibly put It as It is; for in doing so you cannot but enamel It with a foreign element, that is, with your own personality.

852. So long as there is the 'I' in me, there is the Personal God also before me, revealing Himself through various forms of glory, and as the world and living beings.

PERSONAL DEITY KNOWN ALSO AS ISVARA, MAYA AND SAKTI

853. When the Supreme Being is thought of as actionless—neither creating, sustaining nor destroying—I call Him by the name of Brahman or Purusha. But when I think of Him as active—creating, sustaining and destroying—I call him by the name of Sakti or Maya or Prakriti.

854.* While speaking of the Sankhya theory that the world has come out of Purusha and Prakriti, the Master said one day: "The Sankhya philosophy says that the Purusha is actionless and Prakriti is doing all works. The Purusha is only a witness of all these activities. Prakriti too cannot do any work of itself without the Purusha. Have you seen how things take place in a house during a marriage? The Master of the house sits in one place, puffing away at his Hookah and giving commands. But the mistress of the house always moves about here and there in the house, dressed in a cloth marked with turmeric. She is busy supervising the arrangements and cordially receiving women and children. Now and then she goes to the master of the house, and reports about all happenings and seeks advice with the help of gestures and movement of lips. Understanding all that she wants to convey, the master only nods his head or expresses his assent. The case of Prakriti and Purusha is just like this.

855. The actionless Brahman and the active Sakti are in fact one and the same. He who is the Absolute Existence-Intelligence-Bliss, is also the All-knowing, the All-intelligent and All-blissful Mother of the universe. A

precious stone and its luminosity are one and the same, for you cannot imagine a stone without it, and *vice versa*.

856. God the absolute and God the personal are one and the same. A belief in the one implies a belief in the other. Fire cannot be thought of apart from its burning power; nor can its burning power be thought of apart from it. Again the sun's rays cannot be thought of apart from the sun, nor the sun, apart from its rays. You cannot think of the whiteness of milk, apart from milk nor milk apart from its milky whiteness. Thus God the absolute cannot be thought of apart from the idea of God with attributes, *i.e.*, Personal God, and *vice versa*.

857. The distinction between Brahman and Sakti is really a distinction without a difference. Brahman and Sakti are one (Abheda), just as fire and its burning power are one. Brahman and Sakti are one, just as milk and the whiteness of milk are one. Brahman and Sakti are one, just as a gem and its brightness are one. You cannot conceive of one without the other, or make a difference between them.

858. Wherever there is action—creation, preservation and destruction—there is Sakti. Water is water whether it is calm or disturbed. That one Absolute Existence-Intelligence-Bliss is the eternal intelligent Energy that creates, preserves and destroys the universe, just as 'Captain'[1] is the same whether he remains inactive at times or whether he engages himself at other times in performing worship or visiting the Governor-General. He

[1] Visvanath Upadhyaya, the Agent of the Nepal Government in Calcutta. Sri Ramakrishna used to call him 'Captain'

is the same 'Captain', only these are his different Upadhis or states.

859. As sometimes I am in dress and at other times naked, so Brahman is sometimes with attributes, and at other times without. The Saguna Brahman (God with attributes) is Brahman in combination with Energy (Sakti); He is then called Isvara or Personal God.

860. Be it known that my Divine Mother is both one and many, and also beyond one and many.

861. My Divine Mother is the one Being manifested as many. Of infinite power Herself, She has differentiated Herself into Jiva and Jagat (living beings and the universe) of manifold powers,—physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual. And my Divine Mother is no other than the Brahman of the Vedanta. She is the Personal aspect of the Impersonal Brahman.

GOD IN EVERYTHING

862. Right discrimination is of two kinds—analytical and synthetical. The first leads one from the phenomena to the Absolute Brahman, while by the second one knows how the Absolute Brahman appears as the universe.

863. Even those that have realise the Absolute in Samadhi come down to the lower plane of sense consciousness, and have just sufficient ego left to hold communion with the Personal God. It is very difficult to raise the voice incessantly to 'Ni' (Si), the highest note of the gamut. Hence the necessity of devotion to Personal God.

864. To him alone who comes down from Samadhi to the plane of sense-consciousness is left a thin ego like a line (Rekha)—a length without breadth—just sufficient individuality to retain only the spiritual vision (Divya-chakshus). This enables him to see Jiva and Jagat, including his own self, as the One manifesting Himself in different forms. This vision of glory comes to the Vijnani who has realised the Nirakara Nirguna Brahman (formless and attributeless Godhead) in Jada or Nirvikalpa Samadhi (ecstasy without objective content), and also the Sakara Saguna Brahman (Godhead with form and attributes) in Chetana or Savikalpa Samadhi, (ecstasy with objective content). You cannot conceive, think of, perceive, God otherwise than as a person, so long as you are a person with an ego of your own; the Unconditioned cannot but manifest Itself to you—both within and without—as a conditioned being, as Personal God. These personal manifestations of the Deity are by no means less real than the body, the mind, and the external world; rather are they infinitely more real than these.

865. It is a case of involution and evolution. You go backward to the Supreme Being and your personality becomes lost in that of His—this is Samadhi. Then, with this higher personality, you retrace your steps and come back to the point whence you started, only to see that the universe and your ego, are evolved from the same Supreme Being, and that God, man and Nature are identities, so that if you hold on to one of them you realise the others.

866. Whose is this Lila (this universe of change, the manifestations of which can be called a play of

God), His is that Nitya (the absolute state). And again, He who is in that Nitya state, His is this Lila. It is through the Lila that you must feel your way up to the Nitya. It is again from the Nitya that you must feel your way back to the Lila—now no longer unreal but the manifestation of the Nitya on the sense plane.

867. As the shell, the pith and the kernel of a fruit are all produced from one parent seed of the tree, so from the one Lord is produced the whole of creation, animate and inanimate, spiritual and material.

868. The Master used to say: "I accept everything: the superconscious state, waking state, dream, deep sleep, Brahman, Jiva, the creation—I do accept all these (different states or manifestations of the Being). Otherwise the full weight will suffer diminution; so I accept both the Absolute and the manifestation."

869.* If God alone exists, how has this world come to be, with its diversities and inequalities caused by individual egos? Referring to this mystery the Master said: "It is His play, His Lila! A king has four sons. They are all princes, but when they play, one becomes the minister, another policeman, and so on. A prince, yet playing as a policeman!"

THE DIVINE BOTH WITH AND WITHOUT FORM

870.* A certain person asked the Master: "Sir, which aspect of God is higher? That with form or without form?" The Master replied: "Formless aspect is of two kinds—mature and immature. The mature one is very

high indeed. It has to be reached through God with form. The immature one, as professed by the Brahmos, is like darkness perceived merely by closing the eyes."

871. God is formless, and God is possessed of form too. And He is also that which transcends both form and formlessness. He alone knows what all He is.

872.* Do you know what the form aspect of God is like? It is like the rising of bubbles on a sheet of water. It can be actually seen that the different forms are rising from the Chidakasa (sky of Pure Consciousness). The Divine Incarnation is one of the forms.

873. Unless one sees God one is not able to realise all this. For the sake of those that love the Lord, He manifests Himself in various ways and in various forms.

A dyer had his own way of dying clothes. He would ask the customer, "In what colour do you want your cloths to be dyed?" If he said red, the dyer dipped the cloth in his tub and brought it out saying, "Here is your cloth dyed red." Another wanted his cloth dyed yellow. The dyer dipped it in the same tub, and when he brought it up, it was dyed yellow. In the same way, when some other colour was wanted—blue or orange or violet or green—the same tub was used with the like result.

A customer who was watching all this came up to the dyer and said, "My friend, I am not fond of any one colour. I desire to consult your taste and should like to have my cloth dyed just as you please. I want the colour in which you have dyed yourself." The Lord

manifests Himself, with form or without form, just according to the need of the devotee. Manifested vision is relatively true, that is, true in relation to different men placed in different conditions and environments. The Divine Dyer alone knows in what colour He has dyed Himself. Verily He is not bound by any limitation as to the forms of manifestation, or their negation.

874. A certain monk went to the temple of Jagannath at Puri. He had doubts as to whether God is with form or without form. When he saw the holy image, he desired to examine it and settle his doubt. He passed his staff from the left to the right in order to feel if it touched the image. For a time he could not see anything or feel anything with the staff. So he decided that God was without form. When he was about to pass the staff from the right to the left, it touched the image. So the monk decided that God is both with form and without form.

875. When a bell is rung, the repeated ding-dongs may be distinguished, one from the other, as if each sound has a form; but when we stop ringing, the indistinguishable sound, which is audible for a while and gradually dies away, appears formless. Like the sounds of the bell, God is both with and without form.

876. God with form is visible. Yes, we can touch Him and talk to Him face to face as with our own dearest friend.

877. To think of Him as formless is quite right. But take care that you do not run away with the idea that that view alone is true and that all else is false. Meditating upon Him as a being with forms is equally right. But you

must hold on to your particular view until you realise God; and then everything would be clear.

878. God is the absolute and eternal Brahman as well as the Father of the universe. But the indivisible Brahman, who is pure Existence, Intelligence and Bliss, is incomprehensible like a vast shoreless ocean without bounds and limits, in which we only struggle and sink. But when we enter into the spirit of the sportive Personal God, we easily obtain peace like the sinking man on being gently carried ashore.

879. At a certain stage in the path of devotion, the devotee finds satisfaction in God with form, and at another stage, in God without it.

880. To a Bhakta the Lord manifests Himself in various forms. But to a person who reaches the height of Brahmajnana in Samadhi, He is the attributeless Brahman once more, formless and unconditioned. Herein is the reconciliation between Jnana and Bhakti.

881. As water, when congealed, becomes ice, the visible form of the Almighty is the materialised manifestation of the all-pervading formless Brahman. It may be called in fact Sachchidananda solidified. As the ice, which is part and parcel of water, remains in water and afterwards melts into it, so the Personal God, Who is part and parcel of the Impersonal, rises from the Impersonal, remains there, and ultimately merges into It and disappears.

882. Fire itself has no definite shape, but as glowing embers it assumes different forms. Thus the formless fire is seen endowed with forms. Similarly, the formless God sometimes invests Himself with definite forms.

SOME DIVINE FORMS

883. God appears in various ways—sometimes in human form, sometimes as a spiritual expression (Chinmaya-rupa). But one should have belief in Divine forms.

884.* No one can say what Sachchidananda is like. That is why He first took the form of Ardhanarisvara (half man and half woman). Do you know why He has done so? It is to show that both Prakriti and Purusha are Himself. At a step still lower, Sachchidananda became several Purushas and Prakritis.

885. Sea-water appears dark-blue from a distance, but when you take a little of it in your hand, it is all pure and limpid. So Lord Krishna appears azure from a distance, but He is not really so. He is the Absolute, taintless and colourless.

886. Sri Krishna is called Tribhanga, *i.e.*, bent in three different directions. It is only a soft thing that is capable of being twisted. So this form of Sri Krishna implies that He must have been softened in some way or other. The softening in this case is accounted for by Prema, ecstatic Love.

887. A devotee: Why is the Divine Mother called Yogamaya?

The Master: Yogamaya means the union of Purusha and Prakriti. Whatever you see is nothing but that union of the two. Haven't you seen the Siva-Kali image—Kali standing on Siva? Siva is lying prostrate like a corpse and Kali is standing with a fixed gaze upon Siva. All this means the same Purusha-Prakriti union. Purusha is inactive, hence Siva is lying down inert like a corpse. But

by virtue of the union with Him, Prakriti is doing everything—creation, preservation and destruction. The same is the significance of the coupled image of Radha and Krishna.

888.* The more you advance towards God, the more you will find his attributive grandeur falling off. The first vision an aspirant gets is of the ten-handed form (Durga) —the form of the Supreme Mistress of the universe. In that form there is a great expression of power and grandeur. Next She appears in a twohanded form; no more are there the ten arms with all their respective weapons. Next comes the vision of the Gopala form. Here there is absolutely no expression of power and grandeur—it is simply the form of a tender child. There is a vision even superior to this—the vision of the effulgent Light.

DIVINE IMMANENCE

889. God is in all men, but all men are not in God: that is why they suffer.

890. Every object is Narayana (*i.e.*, God). Man is Narayana, the animal is Narayana, the sage is Narayana, the knave also is Narayana. All that exists is Narayana. The Deity (Narayana) sports in various aspects. All things are His diverse forms and the manifestations of His glory.

891. Says God, "I am the snake that bites and the charmer that heals; I am the judge that condemns and the servant that inflicts the punishment."

892. The manifestation of Sakti (the Divine power) varies in varying centres of activity; for variety is the

law, not sameness. God is immanent in all creatures; He is even in the ant. The difference is in manifestation only.

893. Divine power is greater in those who are honoured, respected and obeyed by a large following than in those who have no such influence.

894. *Q.* How does the Lord dwell in a physical body?

A. He dwells in the body, as a piston-rod in a syringe; He is in the body, and yet apart from it.

THE DIVINE AND MAN'S MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

895. *Q.* If God has become all, is there no sin and virtue?

A. Yes, there is, and at the same time there is not. As long as He preserves the ego in us, He retains in us also the apprehension of duality, and the consciousness of sin and virtue. But at times, in some, He completely wipes away the ego; then they go beyond all good and bad. So long as one does not Realise God, the perception of duality, and the idea of good and bad, are sure to exist. You may say in words that good and bad have all become equal to you, that you do just what He makes you do. But in your heart of hearts you know that all these are mere words. The moment you do some evil actions, your conscience will begin to prick you.

896.* *Q.* If it is He who is actuating me to all actions, then I am not responsible for my sins. Am I?

A. Duryodhana also said like that. He said "O Lord, Thou abidest in my heart, and I do as Thou

makest me do." But he who really believes that God alone is the doer and that he himself is only an instrument, cannot commit any sin. A perfect dancer never takes a wrong step. Indeed, till the heart becomes pure one cannot even believe in the existence of God.

897. A devotee: Sir, I have a doubt. They say that our will is free; that is, we can do whatever we like—good, bad or otherwise. Is it true?

The Master: Everything depends upon the Lord's will! This is all His play. He is making us do various things in various ways, good and bad, great and small, weak and strong—all these are ultimately from Him. Good men, bad men—all these are His Maya, His play. For instance, all the trees of a garden are not equal in height, beauty or grandeur.

So long as one does not realise God, one thinks that his will is free. But it is He who maintains this delusion in man. Otherwise there would have been a mighty increase of sins; people would not have feared to do evil, nor would there have been any punishment for crime or sin.

But do you know the attitude of him who has realised God? He says and feels: "I am the machine, Thou art the mechanic; I am the house, Thou art the dweller; I am the chariot, Thou art the charioteer; I move as Thou makest me move; I speak what Thou makest me speak!"

898. God impels the thief to go and steal, and at the same time warns the householder against the thief. He does everything.

CHAPTER XVIII

REALISATION OF THE DIVINE

[*Psychology of man with reference to God-realisation —Kundalini and spiritual awakening—Spurious ecstasy— Perception of Divine forms and sounds—Samadhi and Brahma-jnana—The Psychology of Samadhi—Vijnana which comes after Samadhi*]

PSYCHOLOGY OF MAN WITH REFERENCE TO GOD-REALISATION

899. This body which is made of the 'five elements' is called the gross body. The subtle body consists of Manas, Buddhi, Chitta and Ahamkara. The body by which one realises the bliss of God-vision and continues to enjoy His union, is the causal body. In the Tantras it is called Bhagavati-tanu. Beyond all is the Mahakarana —the First Cause.

900. When the mind is attached to the consciousness of the external world, it sees gross objects and abides in the Annamaya-kosa, the physical sheath of the soul, which depends on food. When the mind turns itself inward, it is like shutting the door of a house and entering its inner apartments; that is to say, it goes from the gross into the subtle, thence into the causal, till it reaches the final causal state. In that state the

mind is merged in the Absolute and nothing can be said of it.

901. Lord Chaitanya used to have three sorts of 'states': (1) the conscious state in which the mind dwelt on the gross and the subtle bodies. (2) The semi-conscious state in which the mind soared to the causal body and felt the 'causal bliss' and (3) the state of in-turned consciousness (superconscious state) in which the mind used to merge completely in the Mahakarana—the great First Cause.

There is a great similarity between this and the 'five sheaths' or Kosas of the Vedanta—the Annamaya and Pranamaya Kosas (together forming the gross body), the Manomaya and Vijnanamaya Kosas (together forming the subtle body) and Anandamayakosa (forming the causal body). The First Cause is beyond all these Kosas. When the mind used to merge in this First Cause, he (Sri Chaitanya) used to fall into Samadhi; this is known as the Nirvikalpa or Jada Samadhi.

KUNDALINI AND SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

902. Unless the Kundalini is roused, spiritual awakening never takes place. The Kundalini [1] lies dormant in the

[1] Kundalini, sometimes translated as 'Serpent Power' is the dormant spiritual potentiality of man, located in the root Chakra (force-centre) known as Muladhara. This power is the Divine Sakti in man. Spiritual progress is sometimes described in terms of the rousing up of this latent energy and elevating it along the spinal channel called Sushumna, through the six centres, Svadhishthana, Manipura, Anahata, Visuddha and Ajna, until it reaches the crown centre known as Sahasrara. As the Kundalini ascends, man gains higher and higher spiritual experiences.

Muladhara. When She is roused, She enters into the Sushumna and passes through Svadhishthana, Manipura, and other centres, and finally reaches the cerebral centre, and then comes Samadhi. I actually saw all these.

903. One of the signs of God-realisation is that the Great Energy (Maha-vayu) wakes up with a sudden start and goes to the 'head'. Then one falls into Samadhi and gets God-vision.

904.* Describing his experience of the rise of Kundalini, the Master once said: "Something rises with a tingling sensation from the feet to the head. So long as it does not reach the brain, I remain conscious, but the moment it does so I am dead to the outside world. Even the functions of seeing and hearing come to a standstill, and talking then is out of the question. Who is to speak? The very distinction between 'I' and 'you' vanishes. Sometimes I think I would tell you everything about what I see and feel when that mysterious power rises up to this, or even this (pointing to the heart and the throat). At that stage it is possible to speak, which I do. But the moment it has gone above this (pointing to the throat), somebody stops my mouth, as it were, and I am off my moorings. I make up my mind to relate to you what I feel when the Kundalini goes beyond the throat, but as I think over it, up goes the mind at a bound, and there is an end of the matter!" Many a time did the Master attempt to describe this state, but every time he failed. One day he was determined to tell those present about these experiences and went on with his description of them up to the stage when the energy rises to the level of the throat. Then pointing to

the sixth centre, opposite the junction of the eyebrows, he said, "When the mind reaches this point, one catches a vision of the Paramatman and falls into Samadhi. Only a thin, transparent veil intervenes between the Jiva and the Paramatman. He then sees like this . . ." And as he attempted to explain it in detail, he fell into Samadhi! When his mind came down a little, he tried it again, and again he was immersed in Samadhi! After several fruitless attempts like this, he said with tears in his eyes, "Well, I sincerely wish to tell you everything without concealing a bit, but Mother won't let me do so on any account. She gagged me!"

905.* Again referring to the different ways in which the Kundalini rises to the brain, the Master would often say, "Well, that which rises to the brain with a tingling sensation does not always follow the same kind of movement. The scriptures speak of its having five kinds of motion. First, the ant-like motion: one feels a slow creeping sensation from the feet upwards, like a row of ants creeping on with food in their mouths. When it reaches the head, the Sadhaka (spiritual aspirant) falls into Samadhi. Second, the frog-like motion: just as frogs make two or three short jumps in quick succession and then stop for a while to proceed again, in the same way something is felt advancing from the legs to the brain. When this reaches the brain, the man gets Samadhi. Third, the serpentine motion: as snakes lie quietly, straight or coiled up, but as soon as they find a victim in front, or get frightened, they run in a zigzag course; in like manner the 'coiled up power' rushes to the head, and this produces Samadhi. Fourth, the bird-like

motion: just as birds in their flight from one place to another take to their wings and fly sometimes a little high and sometimes low without however stopping till they reach their destination, so that power progresses and reaches the brain, and Samadhi ensues. Fifth and last, the monkey-like motion: as monkeys going from one tree to another take a leap from one branch to another and thus clear the distance in two or three bounds, so the Yogi feels the Kundalini going to the brain, and Samadhi ensues."

906.* These experiences he would detail at other times from the Vedantic standpoint, as follows: "The Vedanta speaks of seven planes, in each of which the Sadhaka has a particular kind of vision. The human mind has a natural tendency to confine its activities to the three lower centres—the highest of these being opposite the navel—and therefore is content with the satisfaction of the common physical appetites, such as eating and so forth. But when it reaches the fourth centre, that is, the one opposite the heart, the man sees a divine effulgence. From this state, however, he often lapses into the three lower centres. When the mind comes to the fifth centre opposite the throat, the Sadhaka cannot talk of anything but God. While I was in this state I would feel violently struck on the head if anyboy raised worldly topics before me. I would hide myself in the seclusion of the Panchavati where I was safe from these inflictions. I would flee at the sight of worldly-minded people, and relatives appeared to me like a yawning chasm, from which there was no escape if I once fell into it. I would feel suffocated in their presence,—

almost to the point of death, and I would feel relieved only when I left the spot. Even from this position a man may slip down to the three lower centres. So he has to be on his guard. But he is above all fear when his mind reaches the sixth centre opposite the junction of the eye-brows. He gets the vision of the Paramatman and remains always in Samadhi. There is only a thin transparent veil between this place and the Sahasrara or the highest centre. He is then so near the Paramatman that he imagines he has merged in Him. But really he has not. From this state the mind can come down to the fifth, or at the most, to the fourth centre, but not below that. The ordinary Sadhakas, classed as 'Jivas' cannot come down from this state. After remaining constantly in Samadhi for twenty-one days they break that thin veil and become one with the Lord for ever. This eternal union of the Jiva and the Paramatman in the Sahasrara is known as getting into the seventh plane."

SPURIOUS ECSTASY

907.* Referring to a man who used to have a kind of emotional excitement that looked like Samadhi externally, the Master said: "In real ecstasy one dives into the deeper realms of one's being and becomes perfectly still. But what do we find here! Be quiet; compose yourself. (To the others present). Do you know the nature of this ecstasy? It is like boiling one ounce of milk in a big pan. The pan seems to be full of milk, but remove it from the stove and you would not find a single drop. Even the little quantity that was there would have all stuck to the pan."

PERCEPTION OF DIVINE FORMS AND SOUNDS

908. The realisation of God is of two kinds—one consists in the unification of the Jivatman and the Paramatman and the other in seeing Him in His personal manifestation. The former is called Jnana, and the latter Bhakti.

909.* Really God can be seen, my boys. As we are sitting and talking together, in the very same way God can be seen and conversed with. Truly and sincerely I say so.

910. The manifesfation of Personal God is often a Spiritual Form, which is seen only by a purified human soul. In other words, these forms of God are realised by the organs of spiritual vision belonging to the spiritual body (Bhagavati-tanu) which is derived from the Lord. So the perfect man alone can see these Divine Forms.

911.* On being questioned whether those who see God see Him with the ordinary fleshly eyes, the Master replied: "No, He cannot be seen with the physical eye. In the course of Sadhana a 'Love-body' is created in you, with eyes and ears of Love, and with them you see and hear Him."

912. The Anahata sound is always going on of itself. This is the sound of Pranava (Om). It comes from the Supreme Brahman and is audible to the Yogis. The ordinary worldly men cannot hear it. The Yogis can understand that the sound rises on one side, from the 'region of the navel', and on the other, from Supreme Brahman.

SAMADHI AND REALISATION OF BRAHMAN

913. What is the state of one's mind in Samadhi? It is like the state of bliss that is experienced by a live fish

which, after being kept out of water for some time, is again put into it.

914. Mysterious is that sacred state which recognises neither teacher, nor pupil. Brahma-jnana is so mysterious that when one attains it there remains no distinction between the Guru and the disciple.

915. As a lamp brought into a room that has been dark for a thousand years illumines it immediately, the light of Jnana illumines the Jiva, and dispels his age-long ignorance.

916. On being questioned as to whether he was conscious of the gross world in the state of Samadhi, the Master replied, "There are hills and mountains, dales and valleys under the sea, but they are not visible from the surface. So in the state of Samadhi one sees the broad expanse of the Sachchidananda only, and the individual consciousness lies in a latent condition."

917.* In true Jnana not the least trace of egotism is left. Without Samadhi, Jnana never comes. Jnana is like the midday sun, in which one looks around but finds no shadow of oneself. So when one attains Jnana or Samadhi, one retains no shadow of egotism. But even if there be some ego left, know for certain that it is now composed of Vidya (purely divine elements) and not of ignorance or Avidya.

918.* When the question was raised whether the Buddha was an atheist, the Master said: "He was no atheist; only he could not speak out his realisations. Do you know what 'Buddha' means?—To become one with 'Bodha', the Supreme Intelligence—through deep

meditation, to become Pure Intelligence Itself. The state of self-realisation is something between 'Asti' and 'Nasti' —'being' and 'non-being'. These 'being' and 'non-being' are modifications of Prakriti. The Reality transcends them both."

919.* Get to the other side of both knowledge and ignorance. Ignorance is the consciousness of the many, *i.e.*, the knowledge of diversity without knowing the Unity, without knowing the one God. The egotism due to erudition proceeds from ignorance. The conviction that God is in all objects—that there is unity in variety—is called knowledge of Oneness. Knowing Him intimately is realisation (Vijnana).

Suppose your foot is pricked with a thorn. Well, you want a second thorn to take it out. When the first thorn is taken out, you throw away both. So, in order to get rid of the thorn of ignorance, you bring in the thorn of knowledge. Then you throw away both ignorance and knowledge with a view to the complete realisation of the Absolute. For the Absolute is beyond knowledge as well as ignorance.

Lakshmana once said to his Divine brother Rama: "O Rama, is it not strange that a God-knowing man like Vasishtha Deva should have wept for the loss of his sons, and would not be comforted?" Thereupon Rama replied: "Brother, bear in mind that whoever possesses relative knowledge of Unity (God) must at the same time have relative ignorance also."

Such a person is not in the nature of things free from ignorance as to God, for knowledge and ignorance in

this case are as correlatives. For a knowledge of Unity in the universe presupposes a concurrent knowledge of diversity. One who feels the existence of light has also an awareness of the existence of darkness.

The Absolute is beyond knowledge and ignorance, beyond sin and virtue, good works and bad works, cleanliness and uncleanliness—as understood by the limited faculties of man.

An enquirer: Sir, may I ask what remains after you have thrown away both the thorns as you call them—knowledge and ignorance.

The Master: Well, what remains is the eternally pure and absolute Consciousness (Nitya-suddha-buddha-rupa). But how can I make it clear to you? Suppose some one asks you what is the taste of clarified butter? Is it possible to make the matter perfectly clear to him? The utmost one may say in reply to such a question is, "The taste of butter is precisely like the taste of butter." A girl who was unmarried once asked a friend, "Your husband is come. Do tell me what sort of joy you feel whenever you meet him." Thereupon the married girl said in reply, "My dear, you will know everything when you have got a husband of your own. How can I make it clear to you now?"

PSYCHOLOGY OF SAMADHI

920. When the nest of a bird is destroyed, it betakes itself to the sky. Similarly, when the consciousness of the body and the outer world is effaced from the mind, the Jivatman (individual Spirit) soars into the sky of the Paramatman (Supreme Spirit) and merges itself in Samadhi.

921. Humanity must die before divinity manifests itself. But this divinity must, in turn, die before the higher manifestation of the Blissful Mother (Brahmamayi) takes place. It is on the bosom of the dead divinity (Siva) that the Blissful Mother dances Her celestial dance.

922. When camphor is burnt, no residue is left. When discrimination ends and the highest Samadhi is attained, there is neither 'I' nor 'thou' nor the universe; for the mind and the ego are merged in the Absolute Brahman.

923. When the ego is effaced, the Jiva dies and there follows the realisation of Brahman in Samadhi. Then it is Brahman, not the Jiva, that realises Brahman.

924. When it was contended by a devotee that God is beyond the comprehension of words, thoughts and senses, and that the mind cannot reach Him, the Master remarked, "That is not quite so. It is true enough that the conditioned mind cannot realise God. But He can be realised by the pure mind (Suddha-manas), which is the same thing as the pure reason (Suddha-buddhi), which again is the same thing as the pure unconditioned Spirit. He cannot indeed be realised by the finite reason, or by the finite, relative and conditioned mind that has a sensuous nature, due to its attachment to 'woman and gold'. The mind may however be rid of its sensuous nature and may be purified by culture. When freed from all worldly tendencies, desires and attachments, it becomes one with the unconditioned Spirit. Was it not thus that the sages of old saw God? God, the unconditioned Spirit, they saw by means of the purified mind, which they found to be the same as the Atman or the unconditioned Spirit within.

925. God is beyond both mind and intellect as long as they are bound within relativity; but He manifests Himself to them when they are purified. It is lust and greed which make the mind impure. So long as Avidya (ignorance) reigns in the heart, the mind and the intellect can never be pure. Ordinarily, mind and intellect are known to be different from each other; but in their purified state they become one, and are resolved into Chaitanya (Pure Consciousness). Then God, the Chaitanya, becomes manifest to the Chaitanya.

VIJNANA WHICH COMES AFTER SAMADHI

926.* Jnana is the realisation of the Atman by the elimination of all phenomena. By eliminating the phenomena through the process of discrimination, one attains Samadhi and realises the Atman.

And Vijnana means knowing with greater fulness. Some have only heard of milk, some have but seen it, while others have tasted it. He who has only heard of it is an ignorant man. He who has seen it is the Jnani. But only he who has tasted it has attained Vijnana, that is, has known it in its entirety. To see God and have intimate relation with Him as with a near kinsman, is what is called Vijnana.

First you have to follow the process of 'Neti, Neti'—not this, not this'. He is not the five elements. He is not the senses, nor the mind, nor the intelligence, nor the ego—He is beyond all categories. To get up to the roof you have to leave below all the steps of the staircase one

by one. Of course the steps are not the roof. But when you reach the roof, you find that the roof is made of the same brick, lime, mortar and sand as the staircase. That which is the Supreme Brahman, the same has become the Jiva and Jagat—the twenty-four categories of the philosophers. That which is the Atman has become the five elements. You may ask why the earth is so hard if it has come out of the Atman. Through His will everything is possible. Are not flesh and bone made out of blood and semen. How hard becomes the foam of the ocean?

After attaining Vijnana a man can live in the world as well. For then he clearly perceives that He Himself has become the world of living and non-living substances, that He is not outside the world. When Ramachandra attained Jnana and refused to remain in the world, Dasaratha sent Vasishtha to instruct him. Vasishtha said to Ramachandra: "Rama, if the world is outside God, you may give it up." Ramachandra remained silent, for he well knew that nothing exists without God.

927.* In music the notes gradually rise from the lowest to the highest pitch and again come down in the reverse order; similarly, after experiencing non-duality in Samadhi one descends to a lower plane and lives with the ego-consciousness. After divesting the banana plant of all its sheaths one after another, one reaches its pith and takes that alone to be the essential part. But later he considers that the sheaths also are of the plant itself. Both of them are necessary to make the stem a complete whole.

928.* While examining a Bel fruit one analyses it into its constituent parts, the shell, the seed and the pulp.

Now, which of these is the Bel? First one rejects the shell as non-essential, then the seeds, and lastly takes the pulp separately and considers that alone as the real fruit. But then the after-thought comes that the same fruit which has the pulp, has the shell and the seeds as well. All these together make the whole fruit. Similarly, after having directly perceived God in His attributeless aspect, one realises that the same Deity Who is eternal by nature has assumed the form of the world in a playful mood.

929.* Once Sri Ramakrishna asked Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) what his ideal in life was. "To remain absorbed in Samadhi," replied Narendra. "Can you be so small-minded as that?" the Master said, "Go beyond Samadhi. Samadhi is a trifling thing for you!"

To another he said, "Bhava (divine ecstasy) and Bhakti—these are not final."

930. On another occasion Sri Ramakrishna asked the same question to Narendra, and received the same reply as before. To which the Master remarked: "Why! I thought you were made of better stuff. How can you be satisfied with such a one-sided ideal? My strength is all-sidedness. I would like to enjoy fish, for instance, in a variety of ways—fried and boiled, made into soup, pickled, etc. I enjoy the Lord not only in His unconditioned state of Oneness, as unqualified Brahman, in Samadhi, but also in His various blessed manifestations through sweet human relationship. So do you likewise. Be a Jnani and a Bhakta in one."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MAN OF DIVINE REALISATION

[*Varieties of perfect men—At the advent of the Divine in the heart—Some characteristics of spiritual perfection —Non-attachment of the perfect man—Perfect man transcends good and evil, but never does evil—Perfect man and work*]

VARIETIES OF PERFECT MEN

931. People do not see that science deals only with conditioned knowledge. It brings no message from the land of the Unconditioned. Such message has been brought by holy men who have seen and realised God, like the Rishis of old. It is they alone that are competent to say, "God is of this nature."

932. There are five kinds of Siddhas (perfect men) found in the world. They are: (1) The Svapna-siddhas, or those who attain perfection by means of dream-inspiration. (2) The Mantra-siddhas, or those who attain perfection by means of a Mantra or sacred 'name' of God. (3) The Hathat-siddhas, or those who attain perfection suddenly, like a poor man, who at once becomes rich by finding a hidden treasure or by marrying a rich wife. Similarly, many who are sinful somehow become pure all of a sudden and enter the Kingdom of Heaven. (4) The

Kripa-siddhas, or those who attain perfection through the grace of God. As a man in clearing a forest may discover some ancient tank or house and himself need not construct one with pain and trouble, so some fortunately become perfect with very little effort on their own part. (5) The Nitya-siddhas, or those who are ever perfect. As the vine of a gourd or pumpkin brings forth first its fruit and then its flower, so the ever perfect soul is born a Siddha, and all his seeming exertions after perfection are merely for the sake of setting an example to humanity.

933. The perfect man among the Saktas is called Kaula; among the Vedantins, Paramahamsa; among the Vaishnavas of the Baul sect, Sayin.

934. There are some who would wipe their lips clean after eating a mango lest others should know of it; but there are also those who, if they get a mango, would call others and share it with them. So there are some who, having realised the Divine bliss themselves, cannot rest without helping others also realise it.

AT THE ADVENT OF THE DIVINE IN THE HEART

935.* He who has seen the Lord is a changed being.

936.* Some are already awake. These have certain marks. They do not care to hear or speak of anything but what relates to God, just as the bird called Chataka cries only for rain-water, though there are the seven seas and the Ganges and the Yamuna and all the other rivers, full of water. Though its throat might be parched with thirst, it would drink no other water than rain-water.

937. What are the indications of God's advent into the human heart? As the glow of dawn heralds the rising sun, so unselfishness, purity and righteousness announce the advent of the Lord.

938. Before visiting a servant's house to receive his hospitality, a king will send there the necessary articles like seats, ornaments and food from his own stores so that the servant may be enabled to receive his master properly and show due honour. In the same manner the Lord sends love, reverence and faith into the yearning heart of the devotee before He makes His advent.

939. Ananda, or perfect bliss within, is one of the signs of God-vision. The waves roll on the surface of the ocean but the deep expanse of water lies unruffled beneath.

940. When Divine bliss is attained, a person becomes quite intoxicated with it; even without drinking wine, he looks like one fully drunk. When I see the feet of my Divine Mother, I feel as intoxicated as if I have drunk five bottles of wine. In this state one cannot take food indiscriminately.

941. What is the state which a Siddha (perfect man) attains? As a potato or brinjal becomes soft and pulpy when it gets Siddha,[1] so a man, when he becomes a Siddha, is seen to be all humility and tenderness.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUAL PERFECTION

942. He is truly an Atma-jnani, knower of the Self, who is dead even in this life; that is, whose passions and desires have been destroyed as in a dead body.

[1] There is a pun on the word Siddha, which means both 'a perfect man' and 'well-cooked'.

943.* Sri Ramakrishna once said to Keshab Chandra Sen: "If you advance further, and preach higher and higher things, your 'sect' will fall to pieces. In the state of Jnana, forming sects becomes meaningless—false as a dream."

944. When man attains true Jnana, he does not perceive God as a far-off being. He is no more felt thereafter as 'He', but as 'This,' 'here within'—as within one's own soul. He is within all; whoever seeks Him, meets Him there.

945. A jar kept in water is full of water inside and outside. Thus the soul immersed in God sees the all-pervading Spirit within and without.

946. After the attainment of God-realisation, one sees Him everywhere, in everything. But greater is His manifestation in man; and greatest of all, is He manifest in devotees full of Sattva-guna—in those who have not the slightest passion for 'woman and gold'.

947.* It is true, however, that when the devotee has realised God, he wishes to witness His sport (Lila). When Ramachandra entered the city of the Rakshasas (demons) after the destruction of Ravana, the old Nikasha began to run away. Lakshmana said, "How is this, Rama? This Nikasha is so aged and has suffered so much from the loss of her sons, and yet she is afraid of losing her life, and is running away!" Rama bade her have no fear, and called her near him to learn why she was flying. Nikasha replied, "O Rama, it is because I have lived so long that I could witness so much of your 'sport'. I, therefore, desire to live longer so that I shall see more of your 'sport'."

948. Can there be Maya in the emancipated soul? Ornaments cannot be made of pure gold; some alloy must be mixed with it. As long as man has a body he must have some Maya, at least to carry on the functions of the body; a man totally devoid of Maya will not survive more than twenty-one days.

949.* When the head of a goat is severed from its body, the trunk struggles for some time, still showing signs of life. Similarly, though Ahamkara (egotism) is slain in the perfect man, yet enough of its vitality is left to make him carry on the functions of physical life; but it is not sufficient to bind him again to the world.

950. The body is born, and it will have to die. But there is no death to the soul. When the betel-nut is ripe, the nut separates from the outer case, but it is very difficult to separate it while the nut is green. When God is attained, there dawns the consciousness that the soul is separate from the body.

951. When the Jews nailed Jesus to the cross, how was it that he could, in spite of so much pain and suffering, pray that they should be forgiven? When an ordinary cocoanut is pierced through the shell, the nail enters the kernel of the nut. But in the case of the dry nut the kernel becomes separate from the shell; and when the shell is pierced, the kernel is not touched. Jesus was like the dry nut; his inner soul was separate from his physical shell. Consequently the sufferings of the body did not affect him. Though the nails were driven through and through, he could pray with calm tranquillity for the good of his enemies.

NON-ATTACHMENT OF THE PERFECT MAN

952. When a leaf of the cocoanut tree drops off, it leaves a mark on the trunk. This helps us to understand that there was once a leaf there. In the same way he who has attained God keeps only the marks, the withered scars, of anger and passion. His nature is just like that of a child. Having none of the consistency of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, it is as quick to attach itself to a thing as to leave it. You can persuade a little boy to hand over to you clothing worth several rupees in exchange for a toy worth a single pie, though at first he will tell you, "No, I won't give it to you; my father bought it for me." To the child every one is equal; he has no discrimination between the high and the low, and consequently no distinction of caste. If his mother says, "So and so is your brother," he will take rice from the same plate with him even if the other is a carpenter's son (*i.e.*, of low caste). Nor has he any hatred, nor any idea of cleanliness and pollution (Suchi and Asuchi).

953.* How does the emancipated soul live in the world? He lives in the world like the diver-bird. It dives into water, but the water does not wet its plumage; the few drops of water which may possibly stick to its body are easily shaken off when it once flaps its wings.

954. The snake is very venomous; it bites when any one tries to catch it. But the person who has learnt the art of snake-charming can not only catch snakes but also carry several of them hanging about his neck and arms like so many ornaments. Similarly he who has acquired spiritual

Knowledge can never be poisoned by the venom of lust and greed.

955. When the tail of the tadpole drops off, it can live both in water and on land. When the tail of delusive ignorance drops off from man, he becomes free. He can then live both in God and in the world equally well.

956. The wind carries both the fragrance of the sandal wood and the smell of the rotten carcase equally, but it does not mix with any of these. In the same way the emancipated soul lives in the world but does not get itself mixed with it.

957. Iron, after it is converted into gold by the touch of the 'philosopher's stone', may be kept under the earth or thrown into a rubbish heap. It will always remain gold and will not return to its former condition. Similar is the state of the man whose soul has touched, even once, the feet of the Almighty Lord. Whether he dwells in the bustle of the world, or in the solitude of the forest, nothing ever contaminates him.

958. Milk poured into water mixes readily with it; when converted into butter, it no longer gets mixed with water but floats in it. So having attained to the state of God, one may live in constant contact with innumerable unregenerate souls; one will not at all be affected then by such evil association.

959. Good and evil cannot bind him who has realised the oneness of the Nature and his own self with Brahman.

PERFECT MAN TRANSCENDS GOOD AND EVIL, BUT NEVER DOES EVIL

960. When a man is on the plains, he sees the lowly grass and the mighty pine tree and says, "How big is the

tree and how small is the grass!" But when he ascends the mountain and looks down from its high peak the grass and the tree blend into one indistinguishable mass of verdure. So, in the sight of worldly men, there are differences of rank and position—one is a king and another is a cobbler; one is a father and another is a son; and so on. But when the divine vision is opened, all appear equal; and there remains no distinction of good and bad, or of high and low.

961. Once a God-intoxicated Sadhu came to Rani Rasmani's Kali temple where the Master was living. One day he did not get any food; and even though feeling hungry, he did not ask anybody for it; but seeing a dog eating the remnants of food thrown away in a corner after a feast, he went there and embracing the dog, said, "Brother, how is it that you eat alone without giving me a share?" So saying, he began to eat along with the dog. Having finished his meal in this strange company, the sage entered the temple of Mother Kali, and prayed with such earnestness of devotion as sent a thrill through the temple. When, after finishing his prayers, he was going away, the Master asked his cousin, Hriday, to follow that man, and talk with him. When Hriday followed him for some distance, the sage turned round and said, "Why do you follow me?" Hriday replied, "Sir, give me some instruction." The sage said, "When the water of this dirty ditch and the holy Ganges yonder will appear as one in your sight, and when the sound of the flageolet and the noise of the crowd will have no distinction to your ear, then you will reach the state of true Knowledge." When Hriday returned and told this to the Master, he said: "That man

has reached the true state of ecstasy and of Knowledge. A Siddha roams about in various disguises—as a child, as an unclean spirit, or even as a mad man."

962. The state of a Paramahamsa (a perfect man) is just like that of a child. Like a child of five years, he feels no difference between man and woman. Yet, to set an example to the world, he should be on his guard against the other sex.

963.* Once a Sannyasini (a nun) came to the royal court of Janaka. To her the king bowed, without looking at her face. Seeing this, the Sannyasini said: "How strange it is, O Janaka, that you have still so much fear of woman!" When one attains to full Jnana, one's nature becomes like that of a little child,—one sees no distinction between male and female.

964. But these slight spots that cling to the Jnani in this world do not matter much. The moon has spots but that never interferes with her giving light.

965. The steel sword turns into a gold one at the touch of the 'philosopher's stone'; and though it retains its former shape, it is incapable of causing injury like the steel sword. Similarly, the outward form of the man who succeeds in touching the feet of God is not changed, but he can no loger do any evil.

966. With the divine Knowledge of Advaita (non-duality) in you, do whatever you wish; for then no evil can ever come out of you.

967. Once a holy man, while passing through a crowded street, accidentally trod upon the toe of a wicked person. The latter, furious with rage, mercilessly beat the Sadhu

until he fell down unconscious. At great pains to themselves, his disciples tried various measures to revive him. When they saw that he was regaining consciousness a little, one of them asked, "Sir, do you recognise who is now serving you?" The Sadhu replied, "Assuredly he who beat me!" A true Sadhu finds no distinction between a friend and a foe.

PERFECT MAN AND WORK

968.* He who has seen God roams about, sometimes like a mad man, sometimes like an unclean spirit, feeling no distinction between cleanliness and its opposite. Sometimes he remains like an inanimate object, being struck dumb by seeing God within and without. Sometimes, like a child, he attaches his mind to nothing, and goes about with his clothes bundled in his arms. But when he works for the good of others, he is as brave as a lion.

969. After the attainment of Samadhi, all Karma drops away—Karma such as external worship, the telling of beads, and worldly activities. In the beginning there is a great fuss of work. But the more one proceeds towards God, the less becomes the bustle until even prayer and the singing of the Lord's glorious 'name' are eventually given up. (Addressing Sivanath Sastri of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj): So long as you do not come to the meeting, much talk about your name, attainments, qualities, etc., passes round; but the moment you come in, all that talk ceases. Everybody feels joy at your sight, and they simply cry out, "Here comes Sivanath Babu,"—and there ceases all further talk about you.

970. A newly married young woman remains deeply absorbed in the performance of domestic duties so long as no child is born to her. But as soon as she has a child she begins to neglect the minor details of household work, and does not find much pleasure in them. Instead, she fondles the new-born baby all the day and kisses it with intense joy. Thus a man in his state of ignorance is ever busy in the performance of all sorts of work; but as soon as he sees in his heart the presence of God, he finds no pleasure in them. On the contrary, his happiness consists now only in serving God and doing His will. He no longer finds happiness in any other occupation, and he cannot withdraw himself from the ecstasy of that holy communion.

971. When God is realised, the world never appears empty. He who has attained Him sees that the Lord Himself has become all these—the universe and its creatures. When he feeds his children, he feels as if he is feeding Gopala Himself; he looks upon his parents as God, and serves them in the same manner. If one happens to be in the world, and leads a family life after the realisation of God, it is sure that he cannot keep any physical connection with his wife. Both become devotees of God and spend their lives in prayer and devotion. They serve all creatures. As God is in all beings, they worship Him in all.

CHAPTER XX

GLIMPSES OF THE MASTER'S EXPERIENCES IN HIS OWN WORDS

[*Experiences of early days—Tantric and other Sadhanas—Experience of the Nirvikalpa state—The Master's perpetual God-consciousness—How the Master prayed—The Divine in good and evil alike—The Master on his illness—The Master a combination of humanity and Divinity.*]

EXPERIENCES OF EARLY DAYS

972.* In his younger days, when taken to task by his elder brother for neglecting his studies, the Master said in reply: "Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education? I would rather acquire that wisdom which would illumine my heart—that wisdom gaining which one felt satisfied for ever."

973.* In the early days of his spiritual life, the Master's nephew, Hriday, noticed him meditating at night in the seclusion of a jungle, quite naked, and without even the sacred thread. On being asked how nudeness was connected with meditation, the Master replied: "One should meditate free from all bondages and fetters. From his

very birth man has been fettered by the eightfold shackle of hatred, shame, family pride, social conventionalities, fear, prestige, pride of caste and egotism. Even the sacred thread is a fetter—it is a token of egotism and makes one feel that one is a Brahmin and is superior to all. So, when one meditates on the Divine Mother, one should make oneself free by throwing aside all these shackles."

974.* When the great yearning for God had developed in him, the Master found life unbearable without His vision. He was therefore about to put an end to his life, when the blessed vision dawned on him suddenly. Describing it the Master said: "The room with all its doors and windows, the temple and everything around me, vanished from sight. I felt as if nothing existed, and in their stead I perceived a boundless effulgent ocean of intelligence. Whichever side I turned my eyes, I saw from all quarters huge waves of that shining ocean rushing towards me, and in a short while, they all came, and falling upon me, engulfed me completely. Thus getting suffocated under them, I lost my ordinary consciousness and fell down." Referring to the same experience he said on another occasion: "I fell down on the floor of the room, completely lost in the ecstasy of the vision. I was perfectly unconscious as to what happenened outside, and also how that day and the next passed. The one thing which I was internally conscious of was that through my soul was rolling an ocean of ineffable joy, the like of which I had no experience before. At the same time I was also conscious, to the inner core of my being, of the hallowed presence of the Divine Mother."

975.* But this experience of God did not bring on the Master a state of perpetual God-consciousness. He had to pass through periods of dryness, and a yearning for the constant vision of the Divine therefore goaded him on to pray unceasingly to the Divine Mother with bitter tears of grief and loud cries. Describing the state of his mind in that period, the Master said: "If a concourse of people happened to gather round me (attracted by loud cries and prayers) they appeared to me like shadows or so many figures drawn in a picture—so unreal and shadowy they appeared—and therefore I never used to feel any kind of shame or shyness before them. But whenever I used to lose my external consciousness through an unbearable pang of the heart, the next moment I always used to behold the radiant spiritual form of the Mother. I used to see the form sometimes laughing, sometimes talking with me, and sometimes advising and consoling me.

976. Describing the days he passed in intense yearning for God, the Master said: "As I was perfectly unmindful of cleaning the body at that time, the hairs grew long and got matted of themselves, being smeared with dirt and dust. When I used to sit in meditation, the body used to become stiff and motionless, like a stock through intense concentration of mind, and birds, taking it to be an inert substance, came freely, perched on the head, and pecked into the matted hair in search of food. Sometimes I used to feel so intensely the pangs of separation from God, that in great bitterness I rubbed my face on earth; often it used to get lacerated and bleed. And in meditation, prayer and other devotional practices, the

day used to fly away so quickly that I was not conscious of it. At dusk, when the approach of night was announced by the ringing of bells and the blowing of conchs from the temple, I used to be reminded that the day had passed and the night had set in. With this consciousness a frenzy of despair would seize my soul, and I would throw myself on the ground and rub my face on it, crying loudly, 'Mother, a day has passed; still Thou hast not appeared before me!' A gnawing anguish used to torment my soul, and those who saw me like that, writhing in agony, thought that I was suffering from colic pain."

977.* Soon after the Master's return to Dakshineswar after his marriage, his old divine madness seized him again. About the state of his mind in those days he said: "The ordinary man would have died, if he were to experience even a fourth of the spiritual metamorphosis that my body and mind underwent. And of this body too (meaning himself) the same would have been the fate; but fortunately the major portion of my days was passed in ecstatic oblivion of the Mother's divine vision. Henceforth for six long years not a wink of sleep ever visited my eyes, and the eyelids would never close, try though I might. All sense of time vanished from me, and the body idea was totally obliterated. A terrible fear would seize me at the slightest reversion of the mind from the Mother to the body. Often the fear came whether I had really run mad. I would stand before my image in a mirror, and when on poking my eyes I would find them insensitive, I would burst into tears in terror, and pray to the Mother; 'O Mother, is it that as a result of all thy prayers and absolute

reliance on Thee, Thou hast brought on me an incurable disease?' But next, the alternating thought would come: 'O Mother, whatever fate may overtake my body, do Thou never forsake me! Vouchsafe unto me Thy vision and Thy mercy! O Mother, have I not taken complete shelter at Thy hallowed feet? Except Thee, O Mother, I have no other refuge!' And thus praying tearfully, my mind would be filled with a strange enthusiasm, creating an unbounded disgust for the body, and would lose itself in the comfort of the Mother's Divine vision and consoling words."

978.* The Master's pure mind was itself his first and most important teacher. About this the Master said: "Whenever necessity arose, a young Sannyasin from inside my body, in appearance exactly like myself, would come out and teach me everything. When he came out in this way, sometimes I would retain a little consciousness of external objects and at other times, I would lose all consciousness of the outside world except for the awareness of his presence and doings. When he re-entered the body, I would again become aware of the external world. What I had heard from him before, the same teachings I heard from Brahmani, Totapuri, and others. What I learnt from him before, the same I learnt from these teachers later."

TANTRIC AND OTHER SADHANAS

979.* Referring to his Tantrik Sadhana under the guidance of Bhairavi Brahmani the Master said: "The Brahmani would go during the day to places far away

from Dakshineswar and collect the various rare things mentioned in the Tantric scriptures as requisites of Sadhana. At nightfall she would ask me to go to one of the seats. I would go, and after performing the worship of the Mother Kali, I would begin to meditate according to her directions. I could hardly tell my beads, for as soon as I began to do so I was always overwhelmed with divine fervour and fell into deep Samadhi. I cannot now relate the varieties of wonderful visions I used to have. They followed each other in quick succession, and the effects of those practices I could feel most tangibly. The Brahmani guided me through all the exercises mentioned in the sixty-four principal Tantric works. Most of these are extremely difficult Sadhanas, which generally cause many a devotee to slip his foot and sink into moral degradation. But the infinite grace of the Mother carried me through them unscathed."

980.* Describing his experience of the awakening of Kundalini, the Master said: "When I realised this state (the state of God-consciousness), one looking exactly like me came and thoroughly shook my Ida, Pingala and Sushumna nerves. He licked the 'lotuses' of the six 'centres' with his tongue, and the drooping lotuses at once turned their faces upwards. And at last the Sahasrara 'lotus' became full-bloomed."

981.* The Master used to describe his mentality when he practised Islamic Sadhanas, as follows: "Then I used to repeat the name of Allah, wear my cloth in the fashion of the Mohammedans, and recite the Namaz regularly. All Hindu ideas being wholly banished from the mind, not only did I not salute the Hindu Gods, but I had no inclination

even for visiting them. After passing three days in that way, I realised the goal of that form of devotion."

982.* I had to practise the various religions once, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, and I have walked the paths of the different sects of Hinduism again—the Sakta, the Vaishnava, the Vedantic and others. And I have found that it is the same God towards Whom all are travelling, only they are coming through diverse ways.

983.* The Master experienced how a man died when he witnessed the death of his beloved nephew, Akshay. Describing his experience, the Master said: "Akshay died before my very eyes. But it did not affect me in the least. I stood by and watched how a man died. It was like a sword taken out from the scabbard. The sword remained as it was, only the scabbard was left behind. I enjoyed the scene, and laughed and danced and sang over it. They removed the body and cremated it. But next day as I stood there (pointing to the south-eastern verandah of his room), I felt a racking pain for the loss of Akshay, as if somebody was squeezing my heart like a wet towel. I wondered and thought that Mother was teaching me a lesson. I was not much concerned with the body even—much less with a nephew. But if such was my pain at his bereavement, how much more must be the grief of the householders at the loss of their near and dear ones."

EXPERIENCE OF NIRVIKALPA STATE

984.* Describing his experience of Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the Master said: "After the initiation, the naked

one'[1] began to teach me the various conclusions of the Advaita Vedanta and asked me to withdraw the mind completely from all objects and dive into the Atman. But in spite of all my attempts I could not cross the realm of name and form and bring my mind to the unconditioned state. I had no difficulty in withdrawing the mind from all objects except one, and this was the all-too-familiar form of the Blissful Mother—radiant and of the essence of Pure Consciousness —which appeared before me as a living reality and would not allow me to pass beyond the realm of name and form. Again and again I tried to concentrate my mind upon the Advaita teaching but every time the Mother's form stood in my way. In despair I said to 'the naked one', 'It is hopeless. I cannot raise my mind to the unconditioned state and come face to face with the Atman.' He grew excited and sharply said, 'What! You can't do it! But you have to.' He cast his eyes around for something, and finding a piece of glass, took it up, and pressing its point between my eyebrows, said, 'Concentrate your mind on this point.' Then with a stern determination I again sat to meditate, and as soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my discrimination as a sword and with it severed it into two. There remained no more obstruction to my mind, which at once soared beyond the relative plane, and I lost myself in Samadhi.'

985.* I was for six months in that state of Nirvikalpa from which ordinary mortals cannot return. For after

[1] This was the appellation which Sri Ramakrishna, out of respect, invariably used for his Guru, who, being a Naga Sannyasin, generally went about naked.

twenty-one days the body drops off like a withered leaf. Days and nights succeeded one another perfectly unnoticed. Flies would enter the mouth and nostrils just as in the case of a corpse without producing any sensation. Hairs became all matted with dust. Sometimes even Nature's calls were answered unawares. Hardly would the body have survived this state but for a Sadhu who happened to come at this time. He at once recognised my condition, and also understood that the Mother had yet to do many things through this body—that many persons would be benefited if it were preserved. So at meal time he used to fetch some food and try to bring me to external consciousness by administering a good beating to the body. As soon as traces of consciousness were perceived, he would thrust the food into the mouth. In this way a few morsels would be swallowed on some days; on other days, not even that. Full six months were thus passed. Later, after some days, stay in this state, I came to hear the Mother's command, "Remain on the threshold of relative consciousness (Bhavamukha) for the instruction of mankind." Then appeared blood dysentery. There was acute writhing pain in the intestines. Through this suffering for six months the normal body consciousness slowly reappeared. Or else, every now and then the mind would, of its own accord, soar to the Nirvikalpa state.

986.* The natural tendency of this (my) mind is upwards (towards the Nirvikalpa state). Once that state is reached, it does not like to come down. For your sake I drag it down perforce. Downward pull is not strong enough without a lower desire. So I create some trifling

desires, such as, for instance, for smoking, for drinking water, for tasting a particular dish, or for seeing a particular person, and repeatedly suggest them to my mind. Then alone the mind slowly comes down (to the body). Again, while coming down, it may run back upward. Again it has to be dragged down through such desires.

987.* The Master would go into the highest state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi by uttering the word Tat (That) only, out of the formula, Om Tat Sat. Sat (existence) might bring a remote suggestion of its opposite, 'Asat', and even the most sacred symbol 'Om' seemed to fall short of the mark. But when he uttered 'Tat' (That), all ideas of relativity would be completely effaced from his consciousness; all discrimination between existence and non-existence would cease; he would become merged in the realisation of the One that transcends all limitations.

988. *Q.* Do you have, Sir, the slightest idea of ego when you are merged in Samadhi?

A. Yes, usually a little ego remains. It is like the particle of gold leaf, which, if rubbed on a lump of gold, does not wear itself off completely. All outward consciousness disappears, but the Lord keeps a little ego to let me enjoy Him.

Sometimes, however, He drives away even that little. This is the highest Samadhi. No one can say what that state is—it is the absolute transformation of one's own self into His. The doll made of salt plunged into the ocean to measure its depth. But no sooner did it touch the water than it was dissolved. Then who could come up to give information as to how deep the ocean was!"

THE MASTER'S PERPETUAL GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS

989.* The Master was questioned: "Do you believe in God, Sir?"

"Yes," the Master replied.

"Can you prove it, Sir?"—"Yes."

"How?"—"Because I see Him just as I see you here, only very much more intensely."

990. A logician once asked the Master, "What are subject, object and knowledge?"

The Master replied, "Good man, I do not know all these niceties of scholastic learning; I know only the Self in me and my Divine Mother."

991. Hriday used to say after seeing the condition of my body: "I have never seen so much spirituality and illumination in such a frail state of body!" But although my body was weak, still I never stopped talking of God with others. At one time, I remember, I was reduced to a skeleton, yet I would hold conversations on spiritual subjects for hours, without feeling that I had a body.

HOW THE MASTER PRAYED

992.* I used to pray to the Divine Mother in this way: "O Mother, Who art the embodiment of bliss, Thou must reveal Thyself to me." And sometimes I would pray: "O Lord of the meek! O Lord of the humble! Am I outside Thy universe? I have neither knowledge, nor devotion, nor the merit of austerities. I know nothing. O Lord, in Thy infinite mercy Thou must vouchsafe Thy vision to me."

993. O Mother Divine! I want no honour from men, I want no pleasures of the flesh, only let my soul flow into Thee as the permanent confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna. Mother, I am without Bhakti, without Yoga, I am poor and friendless, and I want no one's praise; only let my mind always dwell at Thy lotus feet.

994. Mother, I am the Yantra (the instrument), Thou art the Yantri (the mover); I am the room, Thou art the tenant; I am the sheath, Thou art the sword; I am the chariot, Thou art the charioteer. I do as Thou makest me do; I speak as Thou makest me speak; I behave as Thou within me behavest; not 'I', not 'I', but 'Thou'.

995. One is sure to realise God, if only one has great devotion to truth. On the contrary, if one has no regard for truth, everything of his will be destroyed gradually. After attaining to this state (of God-realisation), I told Mother, taking flowers in my hand, "O Mother, here take back Thy[1] knowledge and Thy ignorance, Thy purity and Thy impurity, Thy good and also Thy bad, Thy virtue and Thy sin; give me only pure Bhakti, Mother." But when I said all these to Mother, I could not say, "Take back Thy truth and untruth." All I could return back to Mother, but not truth.

THE DIVINE IN GOOD AND EVIL ALIKE

996. With God-realisation all Karma drops off. It was thus that my ceremonial worship came to an end. I used to perform worship in the Kali temple. One day,

[1] Here 'Thy' means 'of Thy creation'.

it was suddenly revealed that everything was Chinmaya—Pure Spirit. The utensils of worship, altar, door-way—all was Spirit. Men, beasts, birds, everyone was Chinmaya. And like one mad, I began to rain flowers all around. Whatever I saw I worshipped.

One day, in course of Siva-worship, I was putting the Vajra on the Siva-lingam, when came the revelation that the universe itself is Siva. I did not reason it out, but it came to me in a flash. That day ended my worship of Siva in His images. I was once plucking flowers when suddenly it was revealed that each flower plant was a nosegay adorning the universal form of God. That was my last flower-gathering.

997. I had once a vision: I felt that One Substance had taken the form of the cosmos with all living creatures, which resembled a house of wax with men, animals, gardens, roads and the rest, all made of wax and nothing but wax.

998. Do you know what I see? I see Him as All! Men and other creatures appear as veritable skin-bound figures, shaking the head and moving the hands and feet, but the Lord is within.

999.* She has placed me in the state of a Bhakta—of a Vijnani. Hence it is that I can joke and make fun with Rakhal and others. Had I been in the condition of a Jnani, that would not have been possible. In this condition I see that Mother Herself has become all this. I see Her everywhere. In the Kali temple I found that Mother has become even the wicked—even the brother of the Bhagavat Pandit. Try though I might, I failed to rebuke Ramlal's mother. I found she was Mother in another

form. It is because I find the Mother in the maidens that I worship them. My wife strokes my feet, but I salute her afterwards. Because I am placed in such a condition, I have to return your salutes. You see, I cannot ignore even a wicked man. A Tulsi leaf, however dry or small, can be offered to the Deity.

1000.* Do you know how I see? Trees, plants, men, animals, grass—these and all other things I see as different coverings like pillow cases, some made of fine cotton and others of coarser stuff, some round in shape and others square. But within all these pillow cases there is one and the same substance, cotton. In the same way all the objects of the world are stuffed with the unconditioned Sachchidananda. I feel as if the Mother has wrapped Herself in different clothes, and is peeping out from them. I was once in a state in which I used to perceive this every instant. Without understanding this state of mine, people came to pacify me. The mother of Ramlal wept. Looking at her, I felt that the Mother Who is in the temple has Herself come dressed as she. I rolled with laughter and said: "How beautifully you have dressed." One day I was meditating on the Divine Mother within the Kali temple. I found it impossible to visualise Her form. Sometime after I saw Her looking up from the side of the pot used for worship. She was in appearance like a prostitute named Ramani who comes to the Ghat for her bath. I laughed in wonder and said: "Very good! You like to be Ramani to-day. Accept then to-day's worship in that form." In this way the Mother taught me, "Even the prostitute is I Myself. There is nothing except

Myself." Another day while going in a carriage through Mechua Bazaar, I saw the Mother as a woman out to tempt people, dressed fashionably, with vermilion mark on the forhead and wig on head, and smoking from a Hookah. Wondering I asked whether the Mother had chosen to take this form also, and prostrated before Her.

1001. I do see the Supreme Being as the veritable Reality with my very eyes! Why then should I reason? I do actually see that it is the Absolute Who has become all things around us; it is He who appears as the finite soul and the phenomenal world! One must have an awakening of the spirit within to see this reality. As long as one is unable to see Him as the one reality, one must reason or discriminate, saying, "Not this; Not this." Of course, it would not do for one merely to say, "I have seen beyond the possibility of a doubt that it is He Who has become all!" Mere saying is not enough. By the Lord's grace the spirit must be quickened. Spiritual awakening is followed by Samadhi. In this state one forgets that one has a body; one loses all attachment to the things of the world, *i.e.*, 'woman and gold'; one likes no other words than those relating to God; one is sorely troubled if called upon to listen to worldly matters. The spirit within being awakened, the next step is the realisation of the Universal Spirit. It is the spirit that can realise the Spirit.

1002.* Many years ago Vaishnavacharan told me that one attains perfect Knowledge only when one sees God in man. Now I see that it is He Who is moving about in different forms, now as an honest man, now

as a cheat and again as a villain. So I say, "Narayana in the form of an honest man, Narayana in the form of a swindler, Narayana in the form of a villain, Narayana in the form of a lewd person." Now the problem is how I can entertain all. I wish to feed everyone. Therefore I keep one at a time with me and entertain him.

1003. When I look on a woman of character belonging to a respectable family, I see in her the Divine Mother arrayed in the modest garb of a chaste lady; and again when I look upon the public women of the city, sitting in their open verandahs arrayed in the garb of immodesty and shamelessness, I see in them the same Divine Mother sporting in a different way.

1004. In God there are both Vidya and Avidya. The Vidya Maya takes man towards God, whereas the Avidya Maya entices him away from the path of the Lord. Knowledge, devotion, dispassion, compassion—all these are the expressions of the Vidya Maya; only with their help can one reach God.

But if you ascend one step higher, you attain Brahmajnana. In this state I feel—I actually see—that He has become all. There is nothing to reject or to accept! It becomes impossible for me to get angry with anybody.

Once while going in a carriage, I happened to see two courtesans standing on a balcony. But I actually saw in them the Divine Mother, and made salutations.

When this state (of consciousness) dawned in me, I could not worship or offer anything to the Mother Kali (at the Dakshineswar Temple). At that, the temple manager

began to abuse me. But I only laughed at his abuse without feeling offended in the least.

1005.* Describing a vision, which revealed to him, the real nature of the world, the Master said: "Do you know what I saw now? A Divine vision—the vision of the Divine Mother! She appeared with a child in the womb, which She brought forth and swallowed up the next instant. And as much of it as went into Her mouth became void! She showed me that all is Void. And She said as it were, 'Come confusion! come confusion!'"

THE MASTER ON HIS ILLNESS

1006. Pandit Sasadhar, seeing the Master ill,[1] asked him: "Why do you not concentrate your mind upon the diseased part and thus cure yourself?"

The Master: How can I fix my mind, which I have dedicated to God, upon this wretched cage of flesh and blood?

Sasadhar: Why do you not pray to the Divine Mother for the cure of your illness?

The Master: When I think of my Mother, the physical body vanishes, and I am entirely out of it. So it is impossible for me to pray for anything concerning the body.

1007. When the Master was badly ill, and could even hardly speak or swallow any food, he exclaimed: "I am now speaking and eating through so many mouths. I am the Soul of all the souls, I have infinite mouths. I am the

[1] In his last days he was suffering from the cancer of the throat.

Infinite Spirit covered by a human skin which has a wound somewhere in the throat. When the body is ill, that illness reacts upon the mind. When one is scalded by hot water one says, 'This water has injured me,' but in truth what injures is the heat, and not the water. All pain is in the body, all disease is in the body, but the Spirit is above pain and is beyond the reach of disease."

1008.* I told the Mother that on account of this (pointing to his diseased throat) I could not swallow anything, and prayed to Her that I might be enabled to eat a little food. But the Mother, pointing to you all, said, "Why? Here you are, eating with so many mouths!" I was utterly abashed and I could not speak a word more.

1009. The Mother has brought this illness on me in order to teach man how to think of the Spirit and how to live in God-consciousness, even when there is extreme pain in the body. When the body is suffering from excruciating pain and starvation, and when it is beyond all human power to give any relief, even then the Mother shows me that Spirit is the master of the body. My Divine Mother has brought this illness upon this body to convince the sceptics that the Atman is divine, that God-consciousness is true, that when one reaches perfection, freedom from all bondages is attained.

1010.* When, during his last illness, the Master was earnestly requested by his disciples to pray to the Lord to cure his illness and retain his body in the world for sometime more, at least for their sake he said: "Well, nothing comes of my speaking to the Lord about it. His will be done. I now see that my Divine Mother and I have

become one, once for all. Radha said to Krishna, 'O beloved, abide Thou within my heart, and appear not any longer in Thy human form.' But She soon yearned to see Krishna in human form. Her heart struggled and panted for the Beloved. But the Lord's will must be done, and Krishna did not appear in human form for a long time."

THE MASTER, A COMBINATION OF HUMANITY AND DIVINITY

1011.* Indeed, there are three words which prick me to the core: (1) Guru (spiritual preceptor), (2) Karta (doer of action), and (3) Baba (father). God is the only Guru. My Divine Mother is the sole doer of actions, I am only an instrument in Her hands. I feel myself always to be Her child.

1012.* About his meeting with a celebrated Pandit, the Master said: "When I heard that the Pandit was coming to see me, I got frightened. For I am not even conscious of the cloth I am wearing. I had no idea of what I should reply when he talked with me. To the Mother I said: 'Apart from Thee I do not know anything—these scriptures and other matters.' So I told the people here: 'You all sit here. I shall feel encouraged by your presence.' When the Pandit actually came, I still continued to have a little fear. I sat quiet, gazing at him and listening to him. Just then I saw the Mother revealing to me the whole of the Pandit's mind. What is the good of reading the scriptures if one has no discrimination and dispassion? There (pointing to his own body) I felt something creeping up to the head. All my fear was gone and I ceased to be conscious of

myself. I raised my face, and words began to flow from my mouth. I felt as if somebody was replenishing my thoughts as they were spoken out. At Kamarpukur when people measured grain, one person would be pushing the grain forward as another measured it. It was like that. I myself did not know what all I spoke. When I regained my external consciousness a little, I saw the Pandit weeping and his body wet with tears. I experienced such states now and then. Keshab sent me word that he would take me on a cruise along the Ganges, and that a European missionary and tourist named Mr. Cook would be accompanying us. Hearing this, I began to go to the casuarina tree again and again (*i.e*, answer the calls of Nature out of nervousness). Afterwards they came, and I got into the steamer. Soon a change came over me. What all did I say then! All these people (pointing to the devotees) said that I gave excellent instructions. But I knew nothing about that."

1013.* The one who is within me is doing all this through me. At times I used to get the mood of Godhood —I would never be pacified unless worshipped. I am the instrument and He is the wielder. I do as He makes me do, I speak as He makes me speak.

1014.* Girish Chandra Ghosh, even after having given his 'power-of-attorney'[1] to the Master, felt restless thinking over the power of the evil tendencies acquired by him in his past life. At this the Master said: "You fellow, is it a water snake that has caught you? No, it is a poisonous

[1] This is a term which the Master was wont to use to express complete self-surrender.

one. Even if you go home running, you will have to die. Don't you see that? When a water snake catches a frog, it dies only after croaking many times. Sometimes it may escape, too. But if it is a poisonous snake, the frog dies with one or two croaks. Even if it escapes, it hops a short distance and dies in its hole. The same is the case with one who has come here."

1015.* One day, while a disciple was shampooing his feet, the Master said referring to this act of service, "This has a deep significance." Then placing his hand on his own heart, he said, "If there is anything (Divine) in it, then (by this act of service) ignorance and Avidya will vanish once for all." And then he added with a serious look: "There is no outsider here. That day I had a vision. Harish was near me then. I saw Sachchidananda coming out of the sheath (*i.e.*, his body). Having come out He said: 'I incarnate in every age.' I thought I was delirious. So I kept quiet. Then I heard that He was even saying: 'Even Chaitanya worshipped Sakti.'"

1016.* During his illness the Master said to his devotees one day: "Here (*i.e.*, within himself) there are two persons. One is the Divine Mother—the other person is Her devotee. It is the latter who is now taken ill . . . The Lord comes with His disciples as a Divine Incarnation. He takes a human body. His disciples go back with Him to the Divine Mother. A band of Bauls (singing mendicants) comes into a house all on a sudden. They chant the 'name' of the Lord and dance with joy. That done, they leave the house at once. As abrupt in going as in coming! And the people know them not!"

1017. I realise that the three are of the same substance—the block for sacrifice, the victim to be sacrificed, and he who immolates the victim of the sacrifice.

1018.* In his last days, while lying seriously ill, the Master asked Narendra: "Well, what do you think is the nature of my feelings?"

Narendra: Why, Sir, you are everything! A hero who has cut his way to the Reality with the sword of discrimination and with a strength which the world cannot give! You have the feeling of a Sakhi (lady friend) too—Love unspeakable, the ecstasy of Divine love which is called up by the Divine Lover alone. You are a hero, Sakhi and everything else in your yearning for the Lord.

The Master had all his feelings stirred up. He laid his hands upon the heart and said, addressing Narendra and other disciples: "I see—I realise—that all things, every conceivable thing—comes out of this!"

1019.* A couple of days before the Master's passing away, when six months of suffering from the dreadful disease of cancer in the throat had already reduced him to a mere skeleton, Narendra, the disciple (the future Swami Vivekananda), felt a curious inclination to test the Master's oft-repeated assertion of his being an Incarnation. So he said to himself: "If in the midst of this dreadful physical pain he can declare his Godhead, then I shall believe him to be true." Strange to say, the moment this thought flashed in his mind, the Master summoned all his energy and said distinctly: "He who was Rama and Krishna is now Ramakrishna in this body—but not in your Vedantic sense."

BOOK IV

MAXIMS AND PARABLES

He Who is our protector, Who is the generator and sustainer of ourselves and of all things existing, Who knows all forms in this universe as His abode, Who created the Gods and allotted to them their respective duties—it is of Him, the One, that all other beings go about enquiring, "Who is the Supreme Lord?"

O men, you do not know Him Who has brought into existence all this. He dwells hidden within you, transcending even your sense of selfhood. Not knowing Him due to ignorance, which covers your insight like a mist, you spend your lives in false notions of your real self, pursuing physical satisfactions and performing rituals that bestow enjoyments in heavens hereafter.

Rig Veda

CHAPTER XXI

SOME MAXIMS

[*Maxims of ethical significance—Maxims of spiritual significance*]

MAXIMS OF ETHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

1020. The washerman keeps a large store of unwashed clothes in his house, but these are not his. As soon as the clothes are washed, his room becomes empty. Men having no original thoughts of their own are like the washerman. Be not a washerman in your thoughts.

1021. Do yourself what you wish others to do.

1022. Man becomes small by begging. Even the Lord Himself had to assume the form of a dwarf (Vamana) when he went to Bali for begging. By this example we learn that we demean ourselves, the moment we beg something from anybody.

1023. Men are quick to praise and quick to blame; so pay no heed to what others speak of you.

1024. In living your life of peace and virtue, be indifferent alike to the praise and censure of mankind.

1025. There are certain beings with whom one should be careful. First rich men. They have money, men and great influence. They can injure you if they like. You

will have to deal with them very carefully; perhaps you will have to nod to all that they say. Secondly, the dog. When it attacks or barks, you must stop and pacify it by whistling. Thirdly, the bull. When it attempts to gore you, it should be calmed by making some sounds. Fourthly, the drunkard. If you excite him, he will abuse you in all sorts of filthy language. But if you accost him endearingly, "Well, uncle, how are you getting on?"—he will be immensely pleased with you and he will come and smoke with you.

1026. The man who has eaten radish has eructations with the smell of radish, and he who eats cucumber emits its smell in his belching; in the same way the mouth speaks out sometimes what the heart conceives within.

1027. One develops various propensities according to the company one moves in; and again one seeks the company congenial to one's propensities.

1028. There are some who have the nature of a serpent. You never know when they will bite you. You have to struggle hard to counteract their poison. Otherwise you will be so enraged as to feel the passion of revenge (against them).

1029. Anger is a sign of Tamas. In anger man loses all discrimination. Hanuman set fire to Lanka, but he had not the sense then to apprehend that it might burn even the place where Sita was staying.

1030. "Gurus can be had by hundreds and thousands, but of Chelas (disciples) there is not one" is an ancient saying. It means that many are the persons who can give good advice, but those who follow it are few.

1031. Why do religions degenerate? Rain water is pure, but by the time it reaches earth it gets dirty owing to the medium it passes through. If the roofs and the pipes and the channels are all dirty, the water discharged through them must also be dirty. (So religion gets defiled by the medium through which it manifests.)

1032. Sin and mercury are hard to digest.

1033. When visiting a sage or going to a temple, you should never go empty-handed. You have to take some thing, however trifling, in your hand as an offering.

1034. As thieves cannot enter a house if its inmates are wide awake, so if you are always on your guard, no evil thought will enter your mind to rob it of its goodness.

1035. Maya is the attachment towards one's own relatives such as father, mother, brother, sister, wife, children and cousin. And the love that flows for all creatures equally is called Daya.

1036. As long as I live, so long do I learn.

1037. As long as you live, learn every day of the mysteries of Love and devotion. It will be always to your advantage.

1038. Bow your head where others are bowing. Veneration never goes unrewarded.

1039. Remain always strong and steadfast in your own faith, but eschew all bigotry and intolerance.

1040. Bharata, Prahlada, Sukadeva, Vibhishana, Parasurama, Bali, and the Gopis of Brindavan—these persons disobeyed their superiors for the sake of God.

1041. The best course for you is to renounce desire and to work unattached.

MAXIMS OF SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

1042. Heaven sometimes speaks through the mouths of lunatics, drunkards and children.

1043. The devil never enters the house wherein songs in praise of Hari are always sung.

1044. Hallowed are they who live on the banks of the Ganges.

1045. The Ganges-water is not to be regarded as water; nor the dust of Sri Brindavana as dust! nor the Mahaprasada of Sri Sri Jagannatha Deva as rice. These three are objective manifestations of the Supreme Being.

1046. If it pleases the Lord, He can even pass an elephant through the eye of a needle. He can do whatever He likes.

1047. His steps falter not, who has taken refuge in Him.

1048. Hari means He who steals (Harati) our hearts; and Haribal means Hari is our strength.

1049. Unless the spirit in man gets awakened, he cannot know God.

1050.* Take refuge in God and forsake shame and fear. "If I were to dance in the name of God, what would people say?"—cast off all such ideas.

1051.* To someone the Master said: "Well, you have come to seek God now, after spending the greater part of your life in the world. Had you entered the world after realising God, what peace and joy you would have found!"

1052.* If you have faith, you will attain to that for which you long.

1053. First, the realisation of God, and then His creation. Valmiki was given the Mantra 'Rama' to meditate upon, but was instructed to begin repeating it reversely 'Mara' 'Mara'—that is, Ma, or Isvara, and Ra, or Jagat,—first God and then the universe.

1054. It is absurd to speak of harm from excessive absorption in God. The rays of a diamond illumine and soothe but never burn.

1055. Try to know the Nitya through the Lila.

1056. Betake yourself to Chit (Pure Consciousness) to realise the Sat (Pure Existence).

1057. The Eternal is to be reached by means of the non-eternal, the Real through the help of the unreal, and the noumenon through the help of the phenomenon.

1058. His name is Intelligence (Chinmaya): His abode is Intelligence; and He, the Lord, is All-Intelligence.

CHAPTER XXII

PARABLES

[*The bane of worldliness—Sex and its bondage—Spiritual progress depends on mind—Dangers of misunderstood philosophy—The foolishness of fanaticism—Faith, devotion and resignation—Yoga and Vairagya—Nature of Maya—Realisation of the Divine*]

THE BANE OF WORLDLINESS

1059.* God is like the wish-yielding tree of the celestial world (Kalpataru), which gives whatever one asks of it. So one should be careful to give up all worldly desires when one's mind has been purified by religious exercises. Just hear a story. A certain traveller came to a large plain in the course of his travels. As he had been walking in the sun for many hours, he was thoroughly exhausted and heavily perspiring; so he sat down in the shade of a tree to rest a little. Presently he began to think what a comfort it would be if he could but get a soft bed there to sleep on. He was not aware that he was sitting under the celestial tree. As soon as the above thought rose in his mind, he found a nice bed by his side. He felt much astonished, but all the same stretched himself on it. Now he thought

to himself how pleasant it would be were a young damsel to come there and gently stroke his legs. No sooner did the thought arise in his mind than he found a young damsel sitting at his feet and stroking his legs. The traveller felt supremely happy. Presently he felt hungry and thought: "I have got whatever I have wished for; could I not then get some food?" Instantly he found various kinds of delicious food spread before him. He at once fell to eating, and having helped himself to his heart's content, stretched himself again on his bed. He now began to revolve in his mind the events of the day. While thus occupied, he thought, "If a tiger should attack me all of a sudden!" In an instant a large tiger jumped upon him and broke his neck and began to drink his blood. In this way the traveller lost his life. Such is the fate of men in general. If during your meditation you pray for men or money or worldly honours, your desires will no doubt be satisfied to some extent; but, mind you, there is the dread of the tiger behind the gifts you get. Those tigers—disease, bereavements, loss of honour and wealth, etc.,—are a thousand times more terrible than the live tiger.

1060. A group of fisher-women, who were on their way home from a distant market held on an afternoon, were overtaken by a heavy hail-storm at nightfall, and were compelled to take shelter in a florist's cottage near by. Their kindly host allowed them to sleep that night in a room where he had kept some baskets of sweet-smelling flowers for supplying his customers on the morrow. The atmosphere of the room, filled with the fragrance of flowers, was too good for the fisher-women, and they could not, therefore,

got even a wink of sleep. At last one of them suggested a remedy. "Let us sprinkle," she said, "a little water on our empty fish-baskets and place them close to us. That would keep this troublesome smell of flowers from spoiling our sleep." Every one gladly agreed to the proposal and did accordingly; and soon all began to snore. Such, indeed, is the power and influence of habit! The worldly soul, brought up in, and accustomed to materialistic thoughts and surroundings, cannot breathe long in an atmosphere of purity and renunciation without feeling restlessness and discomfort.

1061. Once a sage was lying by the roadside deeply immersed in Samadhi. A thief, while passing by that way, saw him and thought: "This fellow here must be a thief. He must have broken into some houses last night, and is now sleeping through exhaustion. The police will be very soon here to catch him. So let me escape in time." Thus cogitating, he ran away. Soon after a drunkard came there, and seeing the sage, said, "Halloa! you have fallen into the ditch by drinking too much. Eh! I am steadier than yourself and am not going to tumble down." Last of all there came a sage, and realising that a great saint was lying in the state of Samadhi, sat down by his side and began to press his holy feet gently. (Thus do our worldly tendencies prevent us from recognising true holiness and piety.)

1062. With regard to the priestly class, Sri Ramakrishna used to tell an incident from the life of Gauranga. When Sri Gauranga, being wholly self-absorbed in Bhava Samadhi, fell into the ocean, he was hauled up in a net by the fishermen; but as they came into contact with his sacred

person through the net, they too were thrown into a trance. Abandoning all their work, they roamed about like maniacs simply chanting the sacred name of Hari. Their relatives could not cure the malady by any means, and finding no other remedy, they came at last to Sri Gauranga and told him about their sorrow. Sri Gauranga then said to them, "Get some rice from a priest's house and put it into their mouth, and you will see them cured." They did accordingly, and the fishermen lost their blissful ecstasy. (Such is the contaminating influence of worldliness, and impurity on spiritual growth.)

1063. The steward of a certain rich man was left in charge of his master's property. When asked by someone as to whose property it was, he used to say: "Sir, this is all my property; these houses and these gardens are all mine." He would speak in this strain and go about with an air of vanity. One day he happened to catch fish in a pond of his master's garden-house in contravention of his strict prohibition. As ill-luck would have it, the master came upon the scene just then, and saw what his dishonest steward was doing. Finding out the faithlessness of his servant, the master at once drove him away from his estate, disgraced and dishonoured, and confiscated all his past earnings. The poor fellow could not take with him even his rickety box of utensils which was his sole private property. Such is the punishment that overtakes false pride.

1064. A barber, who was passing under a haunted tree, heard a voice say, "Will you accept seven jars full of gold?" The barber looked around, but could see no one.

The offer of seven jars of gold, however, roused his cupidity, and he cried aloud, "Yes, I shall accept the seven jars." At once came the reply. "Go home, I have carried the jars to your house." The barber ran home in hot haste to verify the truth of this strange announcement. And when he entered the house, he saw the jars before him. He opened them and found them all full of gold, except the last one which was only half-full. A strong desire now arose in the mind of the barber to the seventh jar also; for without it his happiness was incomplete. He therefore converted all his ornaments into gold coins and put them into the jar; but the mysterious vessel was as before, unfilled. This exasperated the barber. Starving himself and his family, he saved some amount more and tried to fill the jar; but the jar remained as before. So one day he humbly requested the king to increase his pay, as his income was not sufficient to maintain himself. Now the barber was a favourite of the king, and as soon as the request was made the king doubled his pay. All this pay he saved and put into the jar, but the greedy jar showed no signs of filling. At last he began to live by begging from door to door, and his professional income and the income from begging all went into the insatiable cavity of the mysterious jar. Months passed, and the condition of the miserable and miserly barber grew worse every day. Seeing his sad plight, the king asked him one day, "Halloa! When your pay was half of what you now get, you were happy, cheerful and contended; but with double that pay, I see you morose, care-worn and dejected. What is the matter with you? Have you got 'the seven jars'?"

The barber was taken aback by this question and replied, "Your Majesty, who has informed you of this?" The king said, "Don't you know that these are the signs of the person to whom the Yaksha consigns the seven jars. He offered me also the same jars, but I asked him whether this money might be spent or was merely to be hoarded. No sooner had I asked this question than the Yaksha ran away without any reply. Don't you know that no one can spend that money? It only brings with it the desire of hoarding. Go at once and return the money." The barber was brought to his senses by this advice, and he went to the haunted tree and said, "Take back your gold, O Yaksha." The Yaksha replied, "All right." When the barber returned home, he found that the seven jars had vanished as mysteriously as they were brought in, and with it also had vanished his life-long savings. Such is the state of some men in the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who do not understand the difference between what is real expenditure and what is real income, lose all they have.

1065. Once in the month of June a kid was playing near its mother. With a merry frisk it told her that it intended to make a good feast of Ras-flowers (a species of flowers budding abundantly during the festival of Rasa-lila in November). "Well, my darling," replied the dam, "it is not such an easy thing as you seem to think. You will have to pass through many a danger before you can hope to feast on Ras-flowers. The ensuing months of September and October are not very auspicious to you? For someone may take you to be sacrificed to the Goddess

Durga. Then there is the terrible time of Kali-puja; and if you are fortunate enough to survive that period also, there is still the Jagaddhatri-puja when almost all that remain of the male members of our species are sacrificed. If your good luck carries you safely through all these crises, then you can hope to make a feast of Ras-flowers in the beginning of November." Like the dam in the fable, we should not hastily approve of all the aspirations which our youthful fancies may entertain, considering the manifold crises which we may have to pass through in our lives.

SEX AND ITS BONDAGE

1066. A gentleman of modern education was once arguing with the master that it was possible for family men to remain uncontaminated by worldliness. To him the Master said, "Do you know of what sort is your so-called 'uncontaminated family man' of the present day? Being uncontaminated by the world, and therefore having no concern in money matters, his finances and all his household affairs are managed by his wife. So if a poor Brahmin comes to beg of this 'master of the house', he tells him, "Sir, I never touch money. Why do you waste your time in begging of me?" If the Brahmin, however, be an importunate fellow, your uncontaminated family man, being tired of his entreaties, thinks that the man must be paid something, and tells him, "Well, sir, come to-morrow. I shall see what I can do for you." Then going in, this exemplary family man tells his wife, "Look here, my dear, a poor Brahmin is in great distress. Let us give him a

rupee." Hearing the word 'rupee', the wife flares up with anger and says tauntingly, "Ah, what a generous man you are! Rupees are to you like leaves and stones to be thrown away without the least thought." "Well, my dear," replies the master of the house in an apologetic tone, "the Brahmin is very poor, and we should not give him less." "No," says the wife, "I cannot spare that much. Here is a two-anna bit; you may give him that, if you like." But as the Babu is a family man quite uncontaminated by worldliness, he takes, of course, what his wife gives him, and next day the beggar gets only the two-anna piece. So you see, your so-called uncontaminated family men are not really masters of themselves. Because they themselves do not look after the family affairs, they think that they are very good and holy men, while, as a matter of fact, they are hen-pecked husbands guided entirely by their wives, and so are but very poor specimens even of common humanity."

1067. In former days, the priests of the temple of Govindaji in Jaypur never married. Then they were supremely puissant with the strength of the Self. Once the king sent for them, but they did not go. They said, "Ask the king to come to us." But afterwards they began to marry and then there was no necessity for the king to send for them! They of their own accord would go to the king and say, "Maharaj, Maharaj, we have come to bless you. Here we have brought the offered flowers from the shrine for you. Please accept them." For they were now compelled to do so. What could the poor fellows do? One day they had to build their houses; another day they had

to perform the Annaprasana ceremony (giving the first morsel of cooked rice to a child) of their sons, still another day they had to marry their daughters, and so on. All these kept them in constant need of money!

You can see for yourself what you have become by serving under others. Those of you young men who are quite learned in English and educated after the Western model, silently put up with the kicks of their masters! Do you know what is at the back of all these humiliations and pangs of thraldom? It is 'woman'—subjection to the attractions of sex.

1068. A poor man was in great distress for want of employment. He went several times to an office and danced attendance on the Bara Babu (head-clerk or manager) of the place, but was always sent back with such evasive answers as, "Not to-day, come tomorrow," "Come and see me now and then," and so on. The poor man spent much time in this way. One day he spoke about his lot to one of his friends. The friend at once said, "How thoughtless you are! Why have you worn away the soles of your feet by going to that fellow? Go to Golap and supplicate her, and believe me, you will get an appointment to-morrow." In great surprise the poor man exclaimed, "Is it so! Just now I shall run up to her." Golap was the mistress of the manager of the office. The poor man went to her and said, "Mother, I am in great distress, and none but you can save me from it. I am a Brahmin and have no other means. I have been without any employment for a long time, and my wife and children are starving. I can get a job if you say only a word."

Then Golap said, "Yes, but on saying to whom can it be managed?" And she thought compassionately, "Ah, what a pity that the Brahmin is in such a plight!" The poor man at once said, "If you say one word to the Bara Babu on my behalf, I am sure to get a job." Then Golap promised to ask the Bara Babu that very night to give him a job, and lo! the next morning a peon came to the poor man from the Bara Babu requesting him to attend his office from that day. The Bara Babu recommended the man to the chief officer with the words, "Sir, this gentleman has very high qualifications, and thinking that it would greatly benefit our office to have his services, I have given him a place here." Such is the charm that woman weaves upon man. The whole world is mad after 'woman and gold.'

1069. A poor Brahmin had a rich cloth merchant as his disciple. The merchant was very miserly by nature. One day the Brahmin was in need of a small piece of cloth for covering his sacred book. He went to his disciple and asked for the required piece of cloth; but the merchant replied, "I am very sorry, Sir. Had you told me of this a few hours earlier, I would have given you the thing wanted. Unfortunately, now I have no small piece of cloth which will answer your purpose. However, I shall remember your requirement, but please remind me of it now and then." The Brahmin had to go away disappointed. This conversation between the Guru and his worthy disciple was overheard by the wife of the latter from behind a screen. She at once sent a man after the Brahmin, and calling him inside the house, said, "Revered Father, what is it that you

were asking from the master of the house?" The Brahmin related all that had happened. The wife said, "Please go home, Sir. You will get the cloth to-morrow morning." When the merchant returned home at night, the wife asked him, "Have you closed the shop?" The merchant said, "Yes, what is the matter?" She said, "Go at once and bring two clothes of the best quality in the shop." He said, "Why this hurry? I shall give you the very best clothes to-morrow morning." The wife, however, insisted, "No, I must have them just now, or not at all." What could the poor merchant do? The person whom he had now to deal with was not the spiritual Guru whom he could send away with vague and indefinite promises, but the 'curtain Guru' whose behests must be instantaneously obeyed, or else there would be no peace for him at home. At last the merchant, willingly enough, opened the shop, at that late hour of the night, and brought the cloths for her. Early next morning, the good lady sent the article to the Guru with the message, "If in future you want anything from us, ask me, and you will get it. (Therefore those who pray to the merciful Divine Mother and ask for Her blessings have better chances of having their prayers heard than those who worship God in the sterner paternal aspect).

1070. When asked why he did not lead the life of a householder with his wife, the Master replied: "Kartikeya (son of Siva) one day happened to scratch a cat with his nail. On going home, he saw that there was a mark of the scratch on the cheek of his divine mother, Parvati. Seeing this he asked her, 'Mother, how did you get this ugly scar on your cheek? The Mother of the universe replied, 'This

is the work of your hand; it is the scratch of your nail.' Kartikeya asked in wonder, 'How is it, Mother? I do not remember to have scratched you at any time.' The Mother replied, 'Darling, have you forgotten the fact of your having scratched a cat, this morning?' Kartikeya said, 'Yes, I did scratch a cat, but how did your cheek get the scar?' The Mother replied, 'Dear child, nothing exists in this world but myself. The whole creation is myself; whomsoever you may hurt, you only hurt me.' Kartikeya was greatly surprised to hear this; and then he determined never to marry. For whom could he marry? Every woman was mother to him. Realising thus the motherhood of woman, he gave up marriage. I am like Kartiyeka. I consider every woman as my Divine Mother."

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS DEPENDS ON MIND

1071. The spiritual gain of a person depends upon his mental condition and thought—life. It proceeds from his heart, and not from any of his external actions. Two friends, while strolling about, happened to pass by a place where the Bhagavata was being expounded. One of them said, "Well, let us go there for a while and hear the holy scripture." The other replied, "No, my dear friend, what is the use of hearing the Bhagavata? Let us spend the time in yonder brothel in amusement and pleasure." The first one did not consent to this proposal. He went to the place where the Bhagavata was being read and sat down to hear it. The other went to the brothel but did not find the pleasure which he had anticipated there. So he was

thinking within himself, "Ah me! Why have I come here? How happy must my friend be to be hearing all the while an account of the sacred deeds of Lord Hari." Thus he meditated on Hari even though he was in an unholy place. The other man also, who was hearing the exposition of the Bhagavata, did not find pleasure in it. Sitting there he began to blame himself, saying, 'Ah! What a fool I was to have not accompanied my friend to the brothel! What great pleasure he must be having at this time there!" The result was that he was merely sitting where the Bhagavata was being read, while all the time his mind was dreaming of the pleasures he might have enjoyed in the bawdy-house. Now as his mind was blackened with these thoughts, he got all the sin of visiting the brothel, although he did not go there in person. And the man who had gone to the brothel acquired all the merit of hearing the Bhagavata, because his mind was meditating on the sacred book even though he was in that bad place.

1072. A Sannyasin dwelt by the side of a temple. There was the house of a harlot in front. Seeing the constant concourse of men in the prostitute's house, the Sannyasin one day called her and censured her saying, "You are a great sinner. You sin day and night. Oh, how miserable will be your lot hereafter!" The poor prostitute became extremely sorry for her misdeeds, and with genuine inward repentance she prayed to God beseeching forgiveness. But as prostitution was her profession, she could not easily adopt any other means of gaining her livelihood. And so, whenever her flesh sinned, she always reproached herself with greater

contrition of heart and prayed to God more and more for forgiveness. The Sannyasin saw that his advice had apparently produced no effect upon her, and thought, "Let me see how many persons will visit this woman in the course of her life." And from that day forward, whenever any person entered the house of the prostitute, the Sannyasin counted him by putting a pebble for him, and so in course of time there arose a big heap of pebbles. One day the Sannyasin said to the prostitute, pointing to the heap, "Woman, don't you see this heap? Each pebble in it stands for every commission of the deadly sin you have been indulging in since I advised you last to desist from the evil course. Even now I tell you, 'Beware of your evil deeds!'" The poor wretch began to tremble at the sight of the accumulation of her sins, and she prayed to God shedding tears of utter helplessness, and inwardly repeating: "Lord, wilt Thou not free me from the miserable life that I am leading?" The prayer was heard, and on that very day the angel of death passed by her house, and she ceased to exist in this world. By the strange will of God, the Sannyasin also died on the same day. The messengers of Vishnu, came down from Heaven and carried the spirit body of the contrite prostitute to the heavenly regions, while the messengers of Yama bound the spirit of the Sannyasin and carried him down to the nether world. The Sannyasin, seeing the good luck of the prostitute, cried aloud, "Is this the subtle justice of God? I passed all my life in asceticism and poverty, and I am carried to hell, while that prostitute, whose life was a whole record of sin, is going to Heaven!" Hearing this, the messengers of

Vishnu said, "The decrees of God are always just; as you think, so you reap. You passed your life in external show and vanity, trying to get honour and fame; and God has given you this. Your heart never sincerely yearned after Him. This prostitute earnestly prayed to God day and night, though her body sinned all the while. Look at the treatment which your body and her body are receiving from those below. As you never sinned with your body, they have decorated it with flowers and garlands, and are carrying it with music in a procession to consign it to the sacred river. But this prostitute's body, which had sinned, is being torn to pieces at this moment by vultures and jackals. Nevertheless, she was pure in heart and is therefore going to the regions of the pure. Your heart was always absorbed in contemplating her sins and thus became impure. You are therefore going to the regions of the impure. You were the real prostitute, and not she."

DANGERS OF MISUNDERSTOOD PHILOSOPHY

1073. A Rajah was once taught by his Guru the sacred doctrine of Advaita, which declares that the whole universe is Brahman. The king was very much pleased with this doctrine. Going in, he said to his queen, "There is no distinction between the queen and the queen's maid-servant. So the maid-servant shall be my queen henceforth." The queen was thunderstruck at this mad proposal of her lord. She sent for the Guru and complained to him in a piteous tone, "Sir, look at the pernicious result of your teachings," and told him what had occurred. The Guru consoled the queen and said, "When you serve dinner to the king today,

have a potful of cow-dung also served along with the dish of rice." At dinner-time the Guru and the king sat down together to eat. Who could imagine the rage of the king when he saw a dish of cow-dung served for his meal! The Guru, seeing this, calmly interrogated, "Your Highness, you are well-versed in the knowledge of Advaita. Why do you then see any distinction between the dung and the rice?" The king became exasperated and exclaimed, "You who pride yourself to be such a great Advaitin, eat this dung if you can." The Guru said, "Very well," and at once changed himself into a swine and devoured the cow-dung with great gusto and afterwards again assumed his human shape. The king became so ashamed that he never made again his mad proposal to the queen.

1074. A Brahmin was laying out a garden. He looked after it day and night. One day a cow strayed into the garden, and browsed on a mango sapling of which the Brahmin used to take special care. When he saw the cow destroying his favourite plant, the Brahmin became wild with rage, and gave such a severe beating to the animal that it died of the injuries received. The news soon spread like wild-fire that the Brahmin had killed the sacred animal. When any one attributed the sin of that act to him, the Brahmin, who professed himself to be a Vedantin, denied the charge, saying, "No, I have not killed the cow; it is my hand that has done it; and as God Indra is the presiding deity of the hand, it is he who has incurred the sin of killing the cow, not I." Indra in his heaven heard of this. He assumed the shape of an old Brahmin, and coming to the owner of the garden, said, "Sir, whose Garden is this?"

Brahmin: Mine.

Indra: It is a beautiful garden. You have got a skilful gardener; for see how neatly and artistically he has planted the trees.

Brahmin: Well, sir, that is also my work. The trees were planted under my personal supervision and direction.

Indra: Very nicely done, indeed! Who has laid out this path? It is very well-planned and neatly executed.

Brahmin: All that has been done by me.

Then Indra said with folded hands, "When all these things are yours, and when you take credit for all the work done in this garden, it is not proper that poor Indra should be made responsible for killing the cow."

1075. A serpent dwelt in a certain locality. No one dared to pass by that way; for whoever did so was instantaneously bitten to death by that serpent. Once a holy man passed by. As usual the serpent pursued the sage with a view to bite him, but when it approached the holy man, it lost all its ferocity and was over-powered by his gentleness. Seeing the snake, the holy man said, "Well, friend, do you want to bite me?" The snake was abashed and made no reply. At this the sage said again, "Hearken, friend, do not injure any one in future." The snake bowed and nodded assent. After the sage had gone his own way, the snake entered its hole, and thenceforth began to live a life of innocence and purity without even wishing to harm anyone. In a few days it became a common belief in the neighbourhood that the snake had lost all its venom and was no more dangerous, and so people began to tease it. Some pelted stones at it, and others dragged

it mercilessly by the tail. Thus there was no end to its troubles. Fortunately, sometime after, the sage again passed that way, and seeing the bruised and battered condition of the poor snake, was very much moved to pity and inquired the cause of its distress. At this the snake replied, "Sir, I have been reduced to this state, because I have not been injuring anyone since I received your instruction. But alas! they are so merciless!" The sage smilingly said, "Dear friend, I simply advised you not to bite anyone, but I never asked you not to hiss and frighten others. Although you should not bite any creature, still you should keep every one at a considerable distance from you by hissing." Similarly, if you live in the world, make yourself feared and respected. Do not injure anyone, but do not at the same time let others injure you.

1076. A teacher once instructed his disciple, "Everything that exists is God." The disciple understood this instruction literally and not in its true spirit. One day, while he was passing through a street, he came across an elephant. The driver (Mahut) shouted aloud from the back of the animal "Move away, move away!" The disciple however, argued within himself, "Why should I move away? I am God and so also is the elephant. What fear has God from Himself." Reflecting thus, he did not move. So the elephant caught hold of him by his trunk and dashed him aside. He was hurt severely, and going back to his teacher, related the whole story. The teacher then said, "All right. You are God, and the elephant too is God; but God in the shape of the elephant-driver was warning you from above. Why did you not pay heed to his warning?"

THE FOOLISHNESS OF FANATICISM

1077. Be not a bigot like Ghantakarna. There was a man who worshipped Siva but hated all the other deities. One day Siva appeared to him and said, "I shall never be pleased with you so long as you hate other Gods." But the man was inexorable. After a few days Siva again appeared to him. This time He appeared as Hari-Hara—a form, of which one half was Siva and the other Vishnu. At this the man was half-pleased and half-displeased. He laid his offerings on the side representing Siva, but nothing on that representing Vishnu. When he offered the burning incense to Siva, his beloved form of the Deity, he was audacious enough to press the nostrils of Vishnu lest he should inhale the fragrance. Then Siva said, "Your bigotry is ineradicable. By assuming this dual aspect, I tried to convince you that all Gods and Goddesses are but the various aspects of the one Being. You have not taken the lesson in good part, and you will have to suffer for your bigotry. Long must you suffer for this." The man went away and retired to a village. He soon developed into a great hater of Vishnu. On coming to know this peculiarity of his, the children of the village began to tease him by uttering the name of Vishnu within his hearing. Vexed by this, the man hung two bells on his ears, and when the boys cried out, "Vishnu, Vishnu," he would ring the bells and make those names inaudible to his ears. And thus he came to be kown by the name of Ghantakarna or the Bell-eared.

1078. Four blind men went out to see an elephant. One touched the leg of the elephant and said, "The

elephant is like a pillar." The second touched the trunk and said, "The elephant is like a thick club." The third touched the belly and said, "The elephant is like a big jar." The fourth touched the ears and said, "The elephant is like a big winnowing basket." Thus they began to dispute hotly amongst themselves as to the shape of the elephant. A passer-by, seeing them thus quarrelling, said, "What is it you are disputing about?" They told him everything and asked him to arbitrate. The man said, "None of you has seen the elephant. The elephant is not like a pillar, its legs are like pillars. It is not like a winnowing basket, its ears are like winnowing baskets. It is not like a stout club, its trunk is like a club. The elephant is the combination of all these—legs, ears, belly, trunk and so on." In the same manner, those who quarrel (about the nature of God) have each seen only some one aspect of the Deity.

1079. A frog lived in a well. It had lived there for a long time. It was born and brought up there. And it was a small little frog. One day another frog that had lived in the sea came and fell into that well. The frog of the well asked the new-comer, "Whence are you?" The frog of the sea replied, "I am from the sea." The frog of the well questioned, "The sea! How big is that?" The frog of the sea said, "It is very big." The frog of the well stretched its legs and questioned, "Ah! is your sea so big?" The frog of the sea, "It is much bigger." The frog of the well then took a leap from one side of the well to other, and asked, "Is it as big as this, my friend?" "My friend," said the frog of the sea, "how can you

compare the sea with your well?" The frog of the well asserted, "No, there can never be anything bigger than my well. Indeed, nothing can be bigger than this! This fellow is a liar, he must be turned out." Such is the case with every narrow-minded man. Sitting in his own little well, he thinks that the whole world is no bigger than his well.

FAITH, DEVOTION AND RESIGNATION

1080. Once a washerman was beating a devotee, severely, and the devotee was crying, "Narayana! Narayana!" Lord Narayana was in Sri Vaikuntha, sitting near Lakshmi. As soon as He heard the cry of the devotee, He got up and proceeded to protect the man. But he returned to His seat after going only a few steps. Seeing this, Lakshmi asked the Lord why He had returned so quickly. Lord Narayana replied, "Because I found no need of my going there. That fellow too has become a Dhobi (washerman). He has begun to protect himself; he is now giving blows in return to the man who has been beating him before. So where is the necessity of my going there?" The Lord saves one, only if one surrenders oneself completely to Him.

1081. Having received no news of her Gopal (Krishna, God incarnate), Yasoda once came to Radha and asked her if she had any news from him. At that time Radha was in a deep trance, and so did not hear Yasoda. Subsequently, when her trance was over, she saw Yasoda, the queen of Nanda, sitting before her. Bowing down to her at once, Radha asked Yasoda the reason of her visit, and

when Yasoda stated the reason, she said, "Mother, shut your eyes and meditate upon the form of Gopala, and you will be able to see him." And as soon as Yasoda shut her eyes, Radha, who was herself the very essence of spiritual feelings (Bhava), overwhelmed her with her power, and in that superconscious mood, Yasoda saw her Gopala. Then Yasoda asked this boon of Radha, "Mother, grant me that I may see my beloved Gopala whenever I close my eyes."

1082. Sri Ramachandra, in the course of His travels through the forest, descended into the lake called Pampa for drinking water, leaving His bow and arrow fixed on the ground. Coming up, he found that a frog was lying covered all over with blood, having been run through by His bow. He was very sorry and said to the frog, "Why did you not make some kind of sound? Then I could have known that you were here, and you would not have come to this plight." The frog replied, "O Rama, when I fall into danger, I call on Thee, saying, 'O Rama, save me.' Now that Thou Thyself art killing me, to whom else shall I turn and pray?"

1083. Once a servant of a rich man came to his master's house, and stood in a corner with great reverence and humility. He held in his hand something covered with a cloth. The master enquired, "What is there in your hand?" The servant brought out a small custard-apple from the cloth and kept it humbly before the master, feeling that he would be much gratified if the master would take it. The master was much pleased to see the loving devotion of the servant and accepted the offering, though a trifle. With great delight he exclaimed, "Ah, what a fine fruit is this!

Where did you get it from?" In the same way God looks into the heart of the devotee. He is infinite in his grandeur, yet He is responsive to the influence of love and devotion.

1084. The Master (to Pratap Ch. Mazumdar): You are an educated and intelligent man, and you are a deep thinker too. Keshab and yourself were like the two brothers, Gour and Nitai. You have had enough of this world—enough of lectures, controversies, schisms and the rest. Do you still care for them? Now it is high time for you to collect your scattered mind and turn it towards God. Plunge into the ocean of Divinity.

Mazumdar: Yes, revered Sir, that I ought to do; there is no doubt about it. But all this I do simply to preserve Keshab's name and reputation.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): Let me tell you a story. A man built a cottage on a mountain top. It cost him hard labour and much money. After a few days there came a cyclone and the cottage began to rock to and fro. The man, being very anxious to save it, prayed to the Wind-god, saying, "Lord, I beseech Thee, do not destroy this cottage." But the Wind-god did not listen. He prayed again, but the cottage kept on rocking. Then he thought of another plan to save it. He remembered that according to mythology, Hanuman was the son of the Wind-god. So he cried out, "Lord, I beg of Thee, spare this cottage; for it belongs to Hanuman, Thy son." But the Wind-god did not listen. Then he said, "Lord, I pray Thee, spare this cottage, for it belongs to Hanuman's Lord, Rama." Still the Wind-god did not listen. Then, as the cottage began to topple over, the man ran out of it to save his life, and he

began to swear saying, "Let this miserable cottage be destroyed. What is it to me?"

You may now be anxious to preserve Keshab's name; but console yourself with the thought that it was after all owing to God's will that the religious movement connected with his name was set on foot, and that if the movement has had its day, it is also due to that same Divine will. Therefore dive deep into the sea of Immortality.

1085. A man went to a Sadhu and said with a great show of humility, "Sir, I am a very low person. Tell me O Master, how I am to be saved." The Sadhu, reading the heart of the man, told him, "Well, go and bring me that which is meaner than yourself." The man went out and looked all round but found nothing whatsoever meaner than himself. At last he saw his own excrement and said, "Well, here is something which is certainly worse than myself." He stretched forth his hand to take it up and carry it to the Sadhu when suddenly he heard a voice say from within the ordure, "Touch me not, O sinner. I was a sweet and delicious cake, fit to be offered to the Gods and in appearance so pleasing to all the spectators. But my ill-fortune brought me to you, and by your evil contact I have been reduced to such a detestable condition that men run away from me with faces turned and with handkerchiefs covering their noses. Once only did I come in contact with you and this has been my fate. What deeper degradation may I not be thrown into if you touch me again?" The man was thus taught true humility, and became the humblest of the humble. As a result he attained the highest perfection.

1086. Once upon a time conceit entered into the heart of Narada, and he thought there was no greater devotee than himself. Reading his heart, the Lord said, "Narada, go to such and such a place. A great devotee of mine is living there. Cultivate his acquaintance; for he is truly devoted to me." Narada went there and found an agriculturist who rose early in the morning, pronounced the name of Hari (God) only once, and taking his plough, went out and tilled the ground all day long. At night, he went to bed after pronouncing the name of Hari once more. Narada said to himself, "How can this rustic be a lover of God? I see him busily engaged in worldly duties, and he has no signs of a pious man about him." Then Narada went back to the Lord and spoke what he thought of his new acquaintance. Thereupon the Lord said, "Narada, take this cup of oil and go round this city and come back with it. But take care that you do not spill even a single drop of it. Narada did as he was told, and on his return the Lord asked him, "Well, Narada, how many times did you remember me in the course of your walk round the city?" "Not once, my Lord," said Narada, "and how could I, when I had to watch this cup brimming over with oil?" The Lord then said, "This one cup of oil did so divert your attention that even you did forget me altogether. But look at that rustic, who, though carrying the heavy burden of a family, still remembers me twice every day."

1087. Once there lived two Yogis who were practising austerities with a view to realise the Lord. One day Narada, the divine sage, was passing by their hermitage, when one of them asked him, "Are you coming from

Heaven?" Narada replied, "Yes, that is so." The Yogi said, "Do tell me what you saw the Lord doing in Heaven." Narada replied, "I saw the Lord playing by making camels and elephants pass through the eye of a needle." At this the Yogi observed, "There is nothing in it to marvel at. Nothing is impossible with God!" But the other man exclaimed, "O nonsense! That is impossible! It only shows that you have never been to the Lord's abode."

The first man was a Bhakta and had the faith of a child. Nothing is impossible to the Lord, nor can any one know His nature fully. Everything can be predicted of Him.

1088. Once the son of a certain man lay at the point of death, and it seemed that none could save his life. A Sadhu, however, said to the father of the dying son, "There is but one hope. If you can get in a human skull the venom of a cobra mixed with a few drops of rain-water under the constellation of the Svati star, your son's life can be saved." The father looked up the almanac and found that the constellation of the Svati would be in the ascendant on the morrow. So he prayed, saying, 'O Lord, do Thou make possible all these conditions, and spare the life of my son." With extreme earnestness and longing in his heart, he set out on the following evening and diligently searched in a deserted spot for a human skull. At last he found one under a tree, and holding it in hand, waited for the rain, praying. Suddenly a shower came, and a few drops of rain were deposited in the upturned skull. The man said to himself, "Now I have the water in the skull under the right constellation." Then he prayed earnestly: "Grant, O Lord,

that the rest may also be obtained." In a short time he discovered, not far from there, a toad, and a cobra springing to catch it. In a moment the toad jumped over the skull, followed by the cobra whose venom fell into the skull. With overwhelming gratitude the anxious father cried out, "Lord, by Thy grace even impossible things are made possible. Now I know that my son's life will be saved." Therefore I say, if you have true faith and earnest longing, you will get everything by the grace of the Lord.

1089. Spiritual practices (Sadhanas) are absolutely necessary for Self-realisation, but if there be perfect faith, then a little practice is enough. The sage Vyasa was about to cross the river Jumna. Just then the Gopis arrived at the place where the sage was. They also wanted to cross the river, but there was no ferry-boat. So they asked Vyasa, "Sir, what shall we do?" Vyasa replied, "Do not worry. I will take you across the river. But before that, can you give me something to eat? For I am very hungry. The Gopis had with them a quantity of milk, cream and fresh butter, which they offered him, and he consumed them all. The Gopis then asked, "What about crossing the river?" Vyasa stood near the bank of the water and prayed: "O Jumna, if I have not eaten anything to-day, by that virtue I ask you to part your waters, so that we may walk across your bed and reach the other side." No sooner did he utter these words than the waters parted, and the dry river-bed was laid bare. The Gopis were amazed. They thought: "How could he say, 'If I have not eaten anything to-day,' when he ate so much just now?" They did not understand that this was

the proof of Vyasa's firm faith—that he did not eat anything, but the Lord who dwelt within him was the real eater.

1090. There was a certain Brahmin priest who served in a household chapel. Once he went away leaving the charge of the service in the chapel to his little son. He asked the boy to place the daily offering of food before the Deity and see that He ate it. The boy, following the injunctions of his father, placed the offering before the image and silently waited. But the image neither spoke nor ate. The boy watched for a long time. He had the firm faith that the Deity would come down from the altar, take the seat before the offering and eat it. So he prayed, "O Lord, come and eat. It is getting very late, I cannot wait any longer." But the Lord did not speak. Then the boy began to cry saying, "Lord, my father asked me to see that you didst eat the offering. Why dost Thou not come? Thou comest to my father and eatest his offering. What have I done that Thou dost not come to me and partake of my offering?" He cried bitterly for a long time. Then, as he looked up at the seat, he saw the Deity in a human form eating the offering! When the service was ended, and the boy came out, the people in the house said to him, "If the service is over, bring out the offering." The boy replied, "Yes, but the Lord has eaten everything." In amazement they asked, "What do you say?" In absolute innocence the boy repeated, "Why, the Lord has eaten all that I offered." Then they entered the chapel and dumbfounded at the sight of the empty dishes. Such is the power of true faith and true yearning!

1091. Extreme longing is the surest way to God-vision. One should have faith like an innocent child, and a child's longing for its mother.

There was a boy named Jatila. He used to go to school alone through the woods. Often he felt lonely and afraid. He told his mother about it, and she said to him, "Why are you afraid, my child? You call aloud for Krishna when you get frightened." "Who is Krishna, mother?" the boy asked. The mother answered, "Krishna is your brother." After that, when Jatila was passing through the woods alone, and felt frightened, he called aloud, "Brother Krishna!" When no one came, he called again, "O brother Krishna, where are you? Come to me and protect me. I am frightened." Hearing the call of the child, so full of faith, Krishna could no longer remain away. He appeared in the form of a young boy and said, "Here am I, your brother! Why are you frightened? Come, I will take you to school." Then having escorted him to school, Lord Krishna said to him, "I will come to you whenever you call me. Do not be afraid." Such is the power of true faith in the Lord and of real longing for Him.

1092. A milk-maid used to supply milk to a Brāhmin priest living on the other side of a river. Owing to the irregularities of the boat service, she could not supply him milk punctually every day. Once, being rebuked for her going late, the poor woman said, "What can I do? I start early from my house, but have to wait for a long time at the river bank for the boatman and the passengers." The priest said, "Woman! they cross the ocean of life by uttering the 'name' of 'God,' and can't you cross this

little river?" The simple-hearted woman became very glad at heart on learning this easy means of crossing the river. From the next day the milk was being supplied early in the morning. One day the priest said to the woman, "How is it that you are no longer late now-a-days?" She said, "I cross the river by uttering the name of the Lord as you told me to do, and don't stand now in need of a boatman." The Priest could not believe this, and said, "Can you show me how you cross the river?" The woman took him with her and began to walk over the water. Looking behind, the woman saw the priest in a sad plight and said, "How is it, Sir, that you are uttering the name of God with your mouth, but at the same time with your hands you are trying to keep your cloth untouched by water? You do not fully rely on Him." Entire resignation and absolute faith in God are at the root of all miraculous deeds.

1093. Once, finding it difficult to reconcile the contradictory doctrines of man's free will and God's grace, two disciples of the Master went to him for a solution of the same. The Master said, "Why do you talk of free will? Everything is dependent upon the Lord's will. Our will is tied to the Lord's, like the cow to its tether. No doubt we have a certain amount of freedom even as the cow has, within a prescribed circle. So man thinks that his will is free. But know that his will is dependent on the Lord's."

Disciples: Is there then no necessity of practising penance, meditation and the rest? For one can as well sit quiet and say, "It is all God's will; whatever is done, is done at His will."

Sri Ramakrishna: Oh! to what effect, if you simply say that in so many words? Any amount of your verbal denial of thorns can never save you from their painful prick when you place your hand on them. Had it been entirely with man to do spiritual practices according to his will, everybody would have done so. But no; everyone can't do it, and why? But there is one thing. If you don't utilise properly the amount of strength He has given you, He never gives more. That is why self-exertion is necessary. And so everyone has to struggle hard even to become fit for the grace of God. By such endeavour, and through His grace, the sufferings of many lives can be worked out in one life. But some self-effort is absolutely necessary. Let me tell you a story:

Once Vishnu, the Lord of Goloka, cursed Narada, saying that he would be thrown into hell. At this Narada was greatly disturbed in mind; and he prayed to the Lord, singing songs of devotion, and begging Him to show where hell is and how one can go there. Vishnu then drew the map of the universe on the ground with a piece of chalk, representing the exact position of heaven and hell. Then Narada said, pointing to the part marked 'hell', 'Is it like this? This is hell then!" So saying he rolled himself on the spot and exclaimed he had undergone all the sufferings of hell. Vishnu smilingly asked, "How is that?" and Narada replied, "Why, Lord, are not heaven and hell Thy creation? When Thou didst draw the map of the universe Thyself and point out to me the hell in the plan, then that place became a real hell; and as I rolled myself there, my sufferings were

intense. So I do say that I have under-gone the punishments of hell." Narada said all this sincerely and so Vishnu was satisfied with the explanation.

1094. Pride once entered into the heart of Arjuna, the beloved friend of Sri Krishna. Arjuna thought that none equalled him in love and devotion to his Lord and friend. The omniscient Lord, Sri Krishna, reading the heart of His friend, took him one day for a walk. They had not proceeded far when Arjuna saw a strange Brahmin eating dry grass as food, but nevertheless had a sword dangling at his side. Arjuna at once knew him to be a holy and pious devotee of Vishnu, one whose highest religious duty was to injure no being. As even grass has life, he would not eat it green but sustained his life by eating it dry and lifeless. Yet he carried a sword. Arjuna, wondering at the incongruity, turned towards the Lord and said, "How is this? Here is a man who has renounced all ideas of injuring any living being, down to the meanest blade of grass; yet he carries with him a sword, the symbol of death and hatred!" The Lord said, "You better ask the man yourself." Arjuna then went up to the Brahmin and said, "Sir, you injure no living being, and you live upon dry grass. Why then do you carry this sharp sword?"

The Brahmin: It is to punish four persons if I chance to meet them.

Arjuna: Who are they?

The Brahmin: The first is the wretch Narada.

Arjuna: Why, what has he done?

The Brahmin: Why, look at the audacity of that fellow; he is perpetually keeping my Lord awake with his songs

and music. He has no consideration whatsoever for the comfort of the Lord. Day and night, in and out of season, he disturbs the peace of the Lord by his prayers and praises.

Arjuna: Who is the second person?

The Brahmin: The imprudent Draupadi.

Arjuna: What is her fault?

The Brahmin: Look at the inconsiderate audacity of the woman; she was so rash as to call my beloved Lord just at the moment He was going to dine. He had to give up His dinner and go to the Kamyaka Vana to save the Pandavas from the curse of Durvasas. And her presumption went so far that she even caused my beloved Lord to eat the impure remnant of her own food.

Arjuna: Who is the third?

The Brahmin: It is the heartless Prahlada. He was so cruel that he did not hesitate for a moment to ask my Lord to enter the boiling cauldron of oil, to be trodden under the heavy feet of elephants, and to break through an adamantine pillar.

Arjuna: Who is the fourth?

The Brahmin: The wretch Arjuna.

Arjuna; Why, what fault has he committed?

The Brahmin: Look at his felony. He made my beloved Lord take the mean office of a charioteer of his car in the great war of Kurukshetra.

Arjuna was amazed at the depth of the poor Brahmin's devotion and love, and from that moment his pride vanished, and he gave up thinking that he was the best devotee of the Lord.

1095. In a certain village there lived a very pious weaver. Every one loved and trusted him. The weaver used to go to the market to sell his cloths. If a customer asked the price of a piece of cloth, he would say: "By the will of Rama, the thread costs one rupee; by the will of Rama, the labour costs four annas; by the will of Rama, the profit is two annas; by the will of Rama the price of the cloth as it stands is one rupee and six annas." People used to have such confidence in him that they would immediately pay the price and take the cloth. The man was a true devotee. At night after supper he would sit for a long time and meditate on God and repeat His holy 'name'.

Once it was late in the night. The weaver had not yet gone to sleep. He was sitting alone in the courtyard near the entrance, smoking. A gang of robbers was passing that way. They wanted a porter, and seeing this man, they dragged him away with them. Then they broke into a house and stole a great many things, some of which they piled on the poor weaver's head. At this moment the watchman came. The robbers at once ran away, but the poor weaver was caught with his load. He had to spend that night in confinement. Next morning he was brought before the magistrate. The people of the village, hearing what had happened, came to see the weaver. They unanimously declared, "Your Honour, this man is incapable of stealing anything." The magistrate then asked the weaver to describe what had occurred. The weaver said: "Your Honour, by the will of Rama, I was sitting in the courtyard. By the will of Rama, it was very late in

the night. By the will of Rama, I was meditating upon God and repeating His holy 'name'. By the will of Rama, a band of robbers passed that way. By the will of Rama, they dragged me away with them. By the will of Rama, they broke into a house. By the will of Rama, they piled a load on my head. By the will of Rama, I was caught. Then by the will of Rama, I was kept in prison, and this morning I am brought before your Honour." The magistrate, seeing the innocence and spirituality of the man, ordered him to be acquitted. Coming out, the weaver said to his friends, "By the will of Rama, I have been released."

Whether you live in the world or renounce it, everything depends upon the will of Rama. Throwing your whole responsibility upon God, do your work in the world.

1096. A thief entered the palace of a king at the dead of night and overheard the king saying to the queen, "I shall give my daughter in marriage to one of those Sadhus (holy men) who are dwelling on the bank of the river." The thief thought within himself, "Well, here is good luck for me. I will go and sit among the Sadhus to-morrow in the disguise of a Sadhu, and perchance I may succeed in getting the king's daughter." The next day he did so. When the king's officers came soliciting the Sadhus to marry the king's daughter, none of them consented to it. At last they came to the thief in the guise of a Sadhu, and made the same proposal to him. The thief kept quiet. The officers went back and told the king that there was a young Sadhu who might be influenced to marry the princess, and that there was no other who would consent. The king then went to the Sadhu in person and earnestly

entreated him to honour him by accepting the hand of his daughter. But the heart of the thief was changed at the king's visit. He thought within himself, "I have only assumed the garb of a Sadhu, and behold! the king himself comes to me and is all entreaties. Who can say what better things may not be in store for me if I become a real Sadhu!" These thoughts so strongly affected him that, instead of marrying under false pretences, he began to mend his ways from that very day, and exerted himself to become a true Sadhu. He did not marry at all, and ultimately became one of the most pious ascetics of his day. The counterfeiting of a good thing sometimes leads to unexpected good results.

TYAGA AND VAIRAGYA

1097. A man who was out of employment was constantly pressed by his wife to seek some job. One day when his son was dangerously ill and the doctors pronounced the case to be hopeless, he went out in search of employment. In the meantime the son died, and a search was made for the father, but he could not be found anywhere. At last, late in the evening, he returned home and was seriously taken to task by his wife for his callousness in leaving the house at a time when his son lay dying. The husband replied with a smile, "Well, once I dreamt that I had become a king and had seven sons, with whom I passed my time happily. But when I woke up I found none of them. It was all a dream. Well, tell me for whom should I grieve—for those seven sons of mine, or for the one you

'have lost just now?" He who feels this world to be a dream does not, like ordinary men, feel the pleasure or pain springing from worldly attachments.

1098. Once a young Sannyasin went to a house to beg his meal. He had embraced the monastic life from his very boyhood and so had not much knowledge of the world. A young lady came out from the house to give him alms. Seeing her breast, the young Sannyasin questioned her if she was suffering from boils on her chest. To that her mother replied, "No, my son, she hasn't got any boil. A child will be soon born to her, and so God has provided her with two breasts to suckle the child. The child will suck milk from those breasts after it is born." No sooner did the young Sannyasin heard this than he exclaimed, "No more will I beg my meals. He who created me, will feed me too."

1099. A husband and wife renounced the world and together undertook a pilgrimage to various holy shrines. Once as they were walking along a road, the husband, being a little ahead of the wife, saw a piece of diamond on the road. Immediately he began to scratch the ground to hide the diamond in it, thinking that, if his wife saw it, perchance she might be moved to avarice, and thus lose the merit of her renunciation. While he was thus scratching the ground, the wife came up and asked him what he was doing. He gave her, in an apologetic tone, an evasive reply. She, however, finding out the diamond and reading his thoughts, remarked, "Why did you leave the world, if you still feel the distinction between diamond and dust."

1100. How does a man come to have Vairagya (dispassion)? A wife once said to her husband, "Dear, I am very anxious about my brother. For the past one week he has been thinking of becoming an ascetic, and has been busy preparing for that life. He is trying to reduce gradually all his desires and wants." The husband replied, "Dear, be not at all anxious about your brother. He will never become a Sannyasin. No one can become a Sannyasin in that way." "How does one become a Sannyasin then?" asked the wife. "Thus" exclaimed the husband, so saying, he tore his flowing dress to pieces, took a piece and tied it round his loins, and told his wife that she and all of her sex were thenceforth mothers to him. He left the house, never more to return.

1101. "I shall complete it by and by", "I am about to take it up", "I am going to begin this"—all this is indicative of a procrastinating mood, and can result only in a lukewarm spirit of Vairagya. But he in whose heart the fire of renunciation burns intensely who pants after God as a mother's heart does for her child—he wants nothing except God. To him the world appears like a well without a wall; and he is always cautious lest he should fall into it. He does not think like others, "Let me first settle my family affairs and then I shall meditate on God." He has a fiery determination within him.

Once there was a great draught in a country. and all the husbandmen were busy bringing water into their fields by digging canals. One of them was a man of great determination, and had resolved to go on digging until he could connect his canal with the river. So he went on working,

though it was getting late for his bath and meal. His wife sent him oil by their daughter, who came and said, "Papa, it is almost noon; rub this oil and have your bath." The father replied, "Wait, I have work still." It was past two o'clock, and still the peasant gave no thought to his bath or meal. At last his wife came to the field herself and said: "Why have you not taken your bath as yet? The meal has become cold and stale. You always go to extremes. Come away now at least. Do the rest of the work to-morrow, or after you have taken your food." The man at once grew furious, and chased her away with the hoe in hand, calling her names and abusing her. "Foolish and senseless woman!" he exclaimed, "don't you see the crop is drying up, and all of you will have to die of starvation? First I am determined to bring the water into the field to-day, and then shall think of other things." At this the woman went away. After herculean labour till late in the night, the man was at last able to carry out his determination. When he saw the water of the river flowing into the fields with a murmuring noise, his delight knew no bounds. Then coming home, he asked his wife to give some oil and prepare a pipe of tobacco. After his bath and meal, he slept soundly. This sort of determination is the right example of intense Vairagya.

Another peasant was also engaged in the same task. But when his wife came and asked him to come home, he followed her without any protest, laying the hoe on his shoulder and saying, "Well, as you have come, I must go." He was never able to bring the water into his field in time. This illustrates idle and procrastinating Vairagya. Without

intense determination the irrigation of the field is not practicable; so without intense longing for Him no one can attain the blessed state of God-vision.

1102. Once a fisherman stealthily entered the garden of a certain gentleman in the night, and was poaching fish in his pond. The gentleman, having come to know of this, ordered his men to surround the place, and came with torches to find out the thief. In the meantime the fisherman, finding no means of escape, sat down underneath a tree like a Sadhu, having smeared his body with some ashes. So when the people came, they found no thief anywhere but only a Sadhu besmeared with holy ashes and deeply absorbed in meditation underneath a tree. Next morning it was made known to the people of the neighbourhood that a great Sadhu had come to such-and-such a person's garden. And so hundreds of people began to pour in with various presents of fruits and sweets to pay their homage to the Sadhu. Coins of silver and gold also began to gather in heaps before him. Then the fisherman thought within himself: "How wonderful! I am not a real Sadhu, still they are showing so much reverence to me! Then assuredly, if I become a real Sadhu, I can realise God." Thus even mere pretension brought about real awakening in the mind of that fisherman.

1103. Once a Sadhu acquired great occult powers, and so became very vain. But he was, on the whole, a good man and had performed many austerities. So to correct him, the Lord appeared before him in the garb of a Sannyasin and said: "Sir, I hear that you have attained great occult powers!" The Sadhu welcomed him with great

respect, and asked him to sit down there. Just then an elephant was passing by, and seeing it, the Sannyasin said to the Sadhu, "Well, Sir, can you kill this elephant if you choose?" The Sadhu replied, "Yes, it can be done," and so saying, he took a handful of dust and threw it at the elephant, chanting certain incantations. The elephant at once fell down dead, writhing in agony. Then the Sannyasin observed, "Oh! how wonderful is your power! How easily have you killed the elephant!" The Sadhu smiled at these words of praise. The Sannyasin said again, "Well, can you bring the elephant back to life?" "Yes, that too can be done," he replied, and threw again a handful of dust at the dead elephant, whereupon the animal got up quite revived. At this the Sannyasin remarked, "Wonderful indeed is your power! But I would like to ask you one question. Just now you killed the elephant and then revived it, but what benefit did it bring to you? What improvement has it brought in you? Did it help you to attain God?" So saying, he disappeared.

'1104. A wood-cutter led a very miserable life with the slender means he could procure by daily selling the load of wood be brought from a neighbouring forest. Once a Sannyasin, who was wending his way through the forest, saw him at work, and told him that he should go further into the forest so that he would be a gainer thereby. The wood-cutter obeyed the injunction and proceeded onward until he came to a sandalwood tree. He was much pleased, and took away with him as many sandal logs as he could carry and sold them in the market at a great profit. Then he began to consider why the good

Sannyasin did not tell him anything about the sandal trees, but simply advised him to proceed into the interior of the forest. So next day he went even beyond the region of the sandal trees, till at last he came upon a copper mine. He took with him as much copper as he could carry, and by selling it in the market got much money. Next day, without stopping at the copper mine, he proceeded further still, as the Sadhu had advised him to do, and came upon a silver mine. Then he took with him as much silver as he could carry, and sold it all and got even more money. And thus daily proceeding further and further, he reached gold mines and diamond mines, and at last became exceedingly rich. Such is also the case with the man who aspires after true Knowledge. If he does not stop in his progress after attaining a little of any extra-ordinary supernatural power, he at last becomes really rich in the eternal knowledge of the supreme Truth.

1105. During the reign of Akbar there lived a Fakir (a Muslim ascetic) in a certain forest near Delhi. Many used to resort to the cottage of this holy man. But as he had nothing with which to show hospitality to these visitors, he was in need of some money for this purpose and went for help to Akbar Shah, who was well known for his kindness to holy men. Akbar Shah was then saying his prayers, and the Fakir took his seat in the prayer room. In the course of his prayers Akbar was heard to say, "O Lord, do Thou grant me more wealth, more power, more territories!" At once the Fakir rose up and was about to steal out of the room when the Emperor beckoned him to be seated again.

At the end of the prayer, Akbar asked the Fakir, "Sir, you came to see me. How is it then that you wanted to depart without saying anything to me?" The Fakir said, "The object of my visit to Your Majesty . . . well, I need not trouble you with that." When Akbar repeatedly pressed him to say what he wanted, the Fakir at last said, "Your Majesty, many people come to me to be taught, but for want of money I am unable to see to their comforts. So I thought it well to come to Your Majesty for help." Akbar then asked why he was about to go away without having told him the object of his visit. The Fakir replied, "When I saw that you were yourself a beggar, begging of the Lord for fortune and power and territory, I said to myself, 'Why should I go a-begging to a person who is himself a beggar? I had better beg of the Lord Himself, if indeed it is not possible for me to do without begging altogether'."

1106. A Brahmin met a Sannyasin, and both had a long talk on worldly and religious topics. At last the Sannyasin said to the Brahmin: "Behold, child, there is no depending upon anyone in this world. None whom you call your own is yours." The Brahmin would not believe it. How could he think that those for whom he was toiling day and night, that is, the members of his own family, were not his friends on whom he could count for help? So the Brahmin said: "Sir, when I am troubled with even a slight headache, my mother is so much concerned that she is ready to give up even her life gladly if it will only bring relief to me. That such a mother is not a friend whom I can depend upon, is something I cannot

conceive." The Sannyasin replied: "If such be the case, then of course she is a friend. But, to tell you the truth, you are greatly mistaken. Never believe for a moment that your mother, wife and son will sacrifice their lives for your sake. You can verify the truth of this if you like; go home and feign excruciating pain in your stomach and groan with it; I will come and show you some fun."

The Brahmin acted accordingly. Physicians were called in, but no one could afford any relief. The mother of the patient was sighing and sorrowing; the wife and children were crying. The Sannyasin turned up at this moment.

"The disease is of a serious nature," said the Sannyasin, "and I do not see any chance of the patient's recovery unless someone comes forward to give up his or her life for the sake of the patient." At this, all of them looked aghast. The Sannyasin, addressing the old mother of the patient, said: "To live or to die will be the same thing to you, if in your old age you lose your son who earns for himself and for you all. If you can give your life in exchange for his, I can save your son. If you, as his mother, cannot make this sacrifice for him, who else in this world will care to do it?"

The old woman blubbered forth through her tears: "Revered father, I am ready to do anything you order for the sake of my son. But the thing is, my own life. . . and what is my life in comparison to that of my son? The thought—what will become of my little ones after my death—makes me a coward. Unfortunate that I am, these little ones are in my way."

While listening to this dialogue between the Sannyasin and the mother-in-law, the wife of the patient wept bitterly and said, addressing her own parents, "For your sake, dear father and mother, I cannot make the sacrifice." The Sannyasin turned to her and asked her whether she would not sacrifice her life for the sake of her husband, now that his mother had fallen back. The wife said: "The wretch that I am! If widowhood is to be my lot, be it so. I cannot make up my mind to cause grief to my father and mother for the loss of their child." In this way every one wriggled out of the difficulty. Then the Sannyasin told the patient: "Look now, no one is ready here to sacrifice a life for you. Do you understand now what I meant by saying that there was no depending upon anybody in this world?" When the Brahmin saw all this, he abandoned his so-called home and followed the Sannyasin.

1107. A disciple said to his Guru that his wife loved him very much and so he could not renounce the world. The disciple used to practise Hathayoga. To convince him of the hollowness of his plea, the Guru taught him some secrets of this branch of Yoga. One day all on a sudden there was great consternation in the disciple's house, and wailings and sobbings were heard all around. The neighbours came running to the house and saw the Hatha Yogi disciple in a room, quite motionless, in a peculiar convoluted posture. They all thought that life was extinct in the body. The wife of the man was crying: "Alas! where have you gone, dear? Why have you forsaken us? Ah! we never knew that such a calamity would befall us!" In the meantime the relatives brought a

cot to take the corpse out for cremation. Then they found themselves face to face with a serious difficulty. As the man was in a contorted posture, his body would not come out through the door. Seeing that, one of the neighbours brought an axe and began to cut the wooden frame of the door. Till then the wife was weeping in an uncontrollable fit of sorrow; but no sooner did she hear the sound of the axe than she ran to the spot, and, though still weeping, anxiously enquired what they were about. One of the neighbours told her that they were cutting the door as her husband's body could not otherwise be taken out owing to its peculiar posture. "No, no," cried out the wife, "don't do so now. I have been widowed, and there is none to look after me. I have to bring up my fatherless children. If you now cut the door, it cannot be repaired again. Whatever was to happen has happened to my husband. You had better cut his hands and legs and take him out." Hearing this, the Hatha Yogi at once stood up, the effect of the drug having gone by this time, and bawled out, "Woman, you want to cut my hands and legs?" And so saying, he went away with his Guru renouncing hearth and home.

NATURE OF MAYA

1108. A man was going through the woods. On his way he was caught by a band of three robbers. They robbed him of everything he had. Then the first robber asked, "What is the use of letting this man alive?" And drawing his sword, he was about to kill him, when the second robber stopped him, saying, "What is the good of

killing him? Tie his hands and feet, and throw him aside." So they bound him hand and foot, and went away leaving him there. After they had gone some distance, the third robber returned and said to him, "Ah! are you hurt? Come, let me untie the cords and release you?" Then when he had removed the cords, he said, "Now come with me. I will show you the road." After walking a long distance, they found the road, and then the robber said, "Look, there is your home. Follow the road and you will soon reach it." The man thanked him and said, "Sir, you have done me a great service, I am greatly obliged to you. Will you not come with me to my house? The robber answered, "No, I cannot go there, the police will find me out."

This world is the wilderness. The three robbers are the three Gunas (constituents) of Nature—Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Jiva or the individual soul is the traveller. Self-knowledge is his treasure. Tamas binds him with the fetters of the world, but Sattva protects him from the action of Rajas and Tamas. By taking refuge in Sattva, the Jiva becomes free from lust, anger and delusion which are the effects of Tamas; thus the Sattva quality emancipates the Jiva from the bondage of the world. But the Sattva quality itself is also a robber. It leads one, however, up to the path of the Supreme Abode and then it says, "Behold, there is your home!" Then it disappears. Even the Sattva quality cannot go into the region of the Absolute.

1109. A priest was once going to the village of a disciple of his. He had no servant with him. Seeing a cobbler on the way, he addressed him, saying, "Holloa!

good man, will you accompany me as a servant? You will be fed well and taken good care of if you come with me." The cobbler replied, "Sir, I am of the lowest caste. How can I come as your servant?" The priest said, "Never mind. Do not tell anybody what you are. Do not also speak to anyone, or make anybody's acquaintance." The cobbler agreed. At twilight, while the priest was sitting at prayers in the house of his disciple, another Brahmin came and said to the priest's servant, "Go and bring my shoes from there." True to the behest of his master, he made no response. The Brahmin repeated his order a second time, but even then the servant remained silent. The Brahmin repeated it again and again, but the cobbler did not move an inch. At last, getting annoyed, the Brahmin angrily said, "Sirrah! how dare you disobey a Brahmin's command?" What is your name? Are you indeed a cobbler?" The cobbler, hearing this, began to tremble with fear, and looking piteously at the priest, said, "O venerable Sir! I am found out. I dare not stay here any longer. Let me flee." So saying, he took to his heels. Just so, as soon as Maya is recognised, she flies away.

1110. Maya is unknowable. Once Narada besought the Lord of the universe, "Lord, show me that Maya of Thine which can make the impossible possible." The Lord nodded assent. Subsequently the Lord one day set out on a travel with Narada. After going some distance, He felt very thirsty and fatigued. So He sat down and told Narada, "Narada, I feel much thirsty; please get me a little water from somewhere." Narada at once ran in search of water.

Finding no water near by, he went far from the place and saw a river at a great distance. When he approached the river, he saw a most charming young lady sitting there, and was at once captivated by her beauty. As soon as Narada went near her, she began to address him in sweet words, and ere long, both fell in love with each other. Narada then married her, and settled down as a householder. In course of time he had a number of children by her. And while he was thus living happily with his wife and children, there came a pestilence in the country. Death began to collect its toll from every place. Then Narada proposed to abandon the place and go away somewhere else. His wife acceded to it, and they both came out of their house leading their children by the hand. But no sooner did they come to the bridge to cross the river than there came a terrible flood, and in the rush of water, all their children were swept away one after another, and at last the wife too was drowned. Overwhelmed with grief at his bereavement, Narada sat down on the bank and began to weep piteously. Just then the Lord appeared before him, saying, "O Narada, where is the water? and why are you weeping?" The sight of the Lord startled the sage, and then he understood everything. He exclaimed, "Lord, my obeisance to Thee, and my obeisance also to Thy wonderful Maya!"

1111. Once a tigress attacked a flock of sheep. She was with child, and so when she jumped on the flock, she gave birth to a cub and died. But the cub survived and grew up among the flock of sheep. The sheep grazed in the field and the cub too did accordingly. They

bleated and it also tried to imitate them. In course of time it became a full-grown tiger. By chance, one day, another tiger came and attacked the flock, but he was surprised to see the sheep-tiger in the flock. Then he chased it and caught it by the neck. But it began to bleat in fear like the sheep. The old tiger, however, dragged it to a pond and showing it the reflection of both of them in the water, said, "Look, your form is similar to mine. You are also a tiger like myself. Now eat this piece of flesh." And so saying, he forced the flesh into its mouth. But at first the sheep-tiger would eat it by no means. It bleated and said that it was a sheep. But as soon as it got a little taste of blood, its dormant instinct was quickened and it began to eat the flesh. Then the old tiger said, "Now have you understood that you are the same as myself? So come along with me into the forest." In the same way if one has the grace of the Guru, there is no fear. The Guru will open your eyes and tell you who you are and what your real self is.

1112. In the course of self-analysis, when the mind reaches the state of perfect peace, there comes the revelation of Supreme Brahman.

Once a man wanted to see the king. The king lived in the inner apartment of the palace beyond seven gates. The man came to the palace and saw at the first gate a person sitting in a great pomp surrounded by a retinue. Seeing him, the man who was going to the king asked his friend, "Is that the king?" The friend said with a smile, "No." Next he passed through the other gates one after another and in each successive gate he saw persons sitting surrounded

with greater and greater pomp and show. The more he advanced into the interior of the palace the more was the grandeur of the people whom he saw. And at every succeeding stage he thought that he beheld the king and so questioned his friend. But when he crossed the seventh gate, and came face to face with the king himself, he felt no necessity of asking his friend whether the man was the king. For he was dumbfounded by the very sight of the immense grandeur of the king, and felt sure that he was standing in the august presence of royalty.

REALISATION OF THE DIVINE

1113. A Certain devout lady, who was also a faithful wife, lived with her husband, serving him and their children with a loving heart, and at the same time keeping her mind fixed on the Lord. At her husband's death, as soon as the cremation was over, she broke her glass bangles and wore a pair of gold bracelets in their place. People wondered at her unnatural conduct, but she explained to them, "Hitherto my husband's body was fragile like the glass bangles. That ephemeral body is now gone, and he is therefore like one unchangeable and whole in every respect. His body is no longer fragile. So I have discarded the fragile glass bangles and put on ornaments of a permanent nature."

1114. Once there came to Dakshineswar two Sadhus who were father and son. The son had attained true Knowledge, but the father had not. Both were sitting in the room where Sri Ramakrishna lived and were talking

with him. In the meantime, a young cobra came out of a rat-hole and bit the son. Seeing that, the father was terribly frightened and began to call all the people around. But the son sat quiet, and that puzzled the father still more. When he asked the son why he was sitting quiet, the son laughed and was heard to explain, "Which is the snake and whom has it bitten?" He had realised the Unity, and hence he could not make any distinction between a man and a snake.

1115. An outcaste was carrying baskets of meat from a slaughter-house. On the way he met Sankaracharya who was returning after his bath in the sacred Ganges. It chanced that the outcaste touched the person of the holy man. Sankara was offended and cried out, "You have touched me, sirrah!" The outcaste replied, "Sir, neither have I touched you, nor have you touched me! Please reason with me and say whether your true Self is the body or the mind or the intellect; tell me what you truly are. You know that the true Self is not attached to any of the three Gunas of Nature, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas." Then Sankara was abashed and had the true awakening.

1116. Once a Sadhu placed his disciple in a magnificent garden with the intention of imparting to him the knowledge of the real Self and went away. After a few days he came back and asked the disciple, "Do you feel any want, my boy?" On being answered in the affirmative, he left with him a fair woman named Shyama, and advised him to take fish and meat freely. After a considerable time he came again and asked the same question as before. This time the disciple replied, "No, I have no want, thank

you." The Sadhu then called both the disciple and Shyama to him and pointing to Shyama's hands, asked the disciple, "Can you tell me what these are?" "Why, these are Shyama's hands," replied the disciple. He put the same question several times, pointing to Shyama's eyes, nose and other parts of the body, and the disciple gave appropriate answers. Presently the idea struck the disciple, "I am talking of everything as Shyama's 'this' and Shyama's 'that'. What then is this Shyama?" Bewildered, he asked his Guru the question, "But who is this Shyama to whom belong these eyes, ears and the rest?" The Sadhu said, "If you wish to know who this Shyama is, come with me, and I will enlighten you." So saying, he revealed to him the secret.

1117. A certain father had two sons. When they were old enough, they were admitted to the first stage of life (Brahmacharya), and placed under the care of a religious preceptor to study the Vedas. After a long time the boys returned home, having finished their studies. Their father asked them if they had read the Vedanta. On their replying in the affirmative, he asked, "Well, tell me what is Brahman." The elder son, quoting the Vedas and other scriptures, replied: "O Father, It is beyond words and thought. It is so and so. I know it all." And to support what he said, he again quoted Vedantic texts.

"So you have known Brahman!" said the father, "you may go about your business." Then he asked the younger son the same question. But the boy remained silent; not a word came out of his mouth, nor did he make any attempt to speak. At this the father remarked: "Yes, my boy,

you are right. Nothing can be predicated of the Absolute and the Unconditioned. No sooner do you talk of It than you state the Infinite in terms of the finite, the Absolute in terms of the relative, the Unconditioned in terms of the conditioned. Your silence is more eloquent than the recitation of a hundred verses and the quoting of a hundred authorities."

1118. A learned Brahmin once went to a wise king and said, "I am well-versed, O king, in the holy scriptures. I intend to teach you the Bhagavata." The king, who was the wiser of the two, knew well that a man who had really studied the Bhagavata would seek to know his own Self rather than go to a king's court for wealth and honour. So the king replied, "I see, O Brahmin, that you yourself have not mastered that book thoroughly. I promise to make you my tutor, but first learn the scripture well." The Brahmin went his way, thinking, "How foolish it is of the king to say that I have not mastered the Bhagavata, seeing that I have been reading the book over and over all these years." However, he went through the book carefully once more and appeared again before the king. The king told him the same thing again and sent him away. The Brahmin was sorely vexed, but thought that there must be some meaning in the behaviour of the king. He went home, shut himself up in his room and applied himself more than ever to the study of the book. By and by hidden meanings began to flash into his mind and the vanity of running after the bubbles of riches and honour, kings and courts, wealth and fame, appeared to his unclouded vision. From that day forward he gave himself up

entirely to attaining perfection by the worship of God, and never thought of returning to the king. A few years after, the king thought of the Brahmin and went to his house to see what he was doing. Seeing him, now radiant with Divine light and love, he fell upon his knees and said, "I see that you have now realised the true meaning of the scriptures. I am ready to be your disciple if you will duly condescend to make me one."

1119. There was a Hindu monastery in a certain village. The monks used to go out every day with begging bowls to gather food. One day, a monk, while going on his rounds, saw a Zemindar (landlord) severely beating a poor man. The holy man, being very kindhearted, entreated the Zemindar to stop beating the man. The Zemindar, blind with rage, immediately turned on the monk and vented all his anger upon him. He belaboured him so heavily that the monk fell down unconscious on the ground. Another man, seeing the condition of the monk, went to the monastery and told what had happened. His brethren ran to the spot where he was lying. They carried him to the monastery and laid him in a room; but the holy man still remained unconscious for a long time. Sorrowful and anxious, the Brothers fanned him, bathed his face with cold water, poured milk into his mouth, and did all that was possible to revive him. Gradually he regained consciousness. When he opened his eyes and looked at the monks, one of them, desiring to know whether he could recognise his friends, asked him in a loud voice, "Revered sir, do you recognise him who is feeding you with milk?" The holy man answered in a feeble voice, "Brother, he

who beat me is now feeding me." One cannot realise this oneness of Spirit unless one has reached God-consciousness and has gone beyond good and evil, and virtue and vice.

1120. Once in a certain village there lived a young man named Padmalochan, who was nicknamed as Podo by the villagers. In that village there was an old dilapidated temple. There was no sacred image of God inside the temple, and the whole building was overgrown with shrubs and trees, and formed a convenient residence for birds and bats. One evening, all of a sudden, people heard the sounds of song and conch issuing from the deserted temple. Men, women and children all ran eagerly to the place, thinking that some devotee might have newly installed an image of God, and was performing the evening service. With folded hands they all waited outside to see the image listening to the sacred sounds. But one of them, more inquisitive than the rest, had the courage to peep in through the doors. To his surprise he saw that it was Podo who was ringing the bell and blowing the conch inside. The floor of the shrine room was as dirty as before, and there was no image to worship. He then called out saying, "O Podo, you have no image of Madhava in your temple! And behold! you have not even taken the trouble of cleansing and purifying the temple! Day and night the eleven bats screech there. Ah, for nothing you have raised all this clamour by the loud blowing of the conch!" So if you want to install the sacred image of God within the temple of your heart, that is, if you want to realise Him, what is the use of merely blowing your conch for nothing?

First purify your heart. When the mind becomes pure, the Lord Himself comes and makes it His seat. No image of God can be set up in a dirty place. The eleven bats referred to above are the eleven senses (the five organs of knowledge, the five organs of action and the mind). First dive deep within your own self and get the gems lying hidden there. After that you can have everything else. First you have to enshrine Madhava in the heart; then you can have enough of lecturing and preaching.

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Introduction

A Brief Life Sketch of Thakur Sri Ramakrishna

Birth of Sri Ramakrishna – father Khudiram and mother Chandramani – primary school – worship of Raghuvir – company of sadhus and listening to the Puranas – beholds a miraculous light – comes to Calcutta, and company of sadhus at Kali Temple in Dakshineswar – sees a miraculous divine form – Thakur like one mad – company of sadhus, Bhairavi Brahmani, Totapuri and Thakur's listening to Vedanta at the Kali Temple – practices spiritual disciplines according to the Tantra and the Puranas – Thakur's talk with the Mother of the Universe – goes on pilgrimage – Thakur's inner circle – Thakur and his devotees – Thakur and the Brahmo Samaj – reconciliation of all religions: Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and so on – Thakur's women devotees – his family of devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna was born to a pious brahmin family in the inland village of Kamarpukur on the second lunar day of the bright fortnight of Phalgun. The village is in the Hooghly district, about eight miles west of Jehanabad (Aram Bag) and about twenty-six miles south of Burdwan.

There is a difference of opinion on the date of his birth.

During Sri Ramakrishna's illness, Ambika Acharya read his horoscope and dated his birth on the third of Kartik, 1286 B.Y., A.D. 1879. This gives a date of 1756 Shaka, the 10th of Phalgun, Wednesday, the second day of the bright fortnight,

Purva Bhadrapada Nakshatra. His calculation is: 1756/109/59/12. On the other hand Kshetra Nath Bhatt's calculation in 1300 B.Y. is 1754/10/9/0/12. According to this calculation it is 1754 Shaka, the 10th of Phalgun, Wednesday, the second day of the bright fortnight, Purva Bhadrapada, 1239 B.Y., 20 February 1833. All tally. At this time there is a conjunction of the sun, the moon, and Mercury. It is the sign of Aquarius. Because of the conjunction of Jupiter and Venus, he would be the chief of a religious sect.

Narayana Jyotirbhushan made a new horoscope (at Belur Math). According to his calculation**,** 1242 B.Y., 6th of Phalgun, Wednesday; 17 February 1836, 4 a.m., the second day of the bright fortnight of Phalgun, when there is a conjunction of the three planets, all the points tally except the 10th of Phalgun given by Ambika Acharya: 1757/10/5/59/28/21. Sri Ramakrishna lived for fifty years. Thakur's father**,** Sri Khudiram Chatterji**,** was a man of firm faith and great devotion. His mother**,** Chandramani Devi**,** was the personification of simplicity and kindness. They had lived in a village called Dere about three miles from Kamarpukur**,** but because of problems relating to Khudiram's refusal to give evidence in a lawsuit in favour of the landlord at Dere, he moved to Kamarpukur with his family.

Sri Ramakrishna's childhood name was Gadadhar. He learned elementary reading in primary school but the arithmetic book by Shuvankara confused him, so he left school to stay at home and attend to the household deity,

Raghuvir. He himself plucked flowers for worship and performed the daily puja.

His voice was exquisitely sweet, and he could sing almost all the songs he heard in theatrical performances.[1] He was cheerful from childhood. Everyone in the neighbourhood – men and women and children – loved him dearly and felt the attraction of his cheerful nature.

Holy men frequently visited a guesthouse at the garden of the Lahas, near Gadadhar's home. He would visit them there and serve them. And when the storytellers read from the Puranas, he would listen with rapt attention. In this way he learned all the stories of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Srimad Bhagavata.

One day when he was eleven years old, Thakur crossed a field to Anur, a nearby village. He later narrated how he had suddenly lost all sense-consciousness when he saw a miraculous light. People thought he had fainted, but he had attained the superconscious state of bhava samadhi.

After the death of his father, Khudiram, Thakur came to Calcutta with his elder brother. He was then seventeen or eighteen years old. In Calcutta he spent some days at Nathair Bagan and a few days at the house of Govinda Chatterji in Jhamapukur. He performed puja there, as well as at the house of the Mittra family in Jhamapukur.

Rani Rasmani dedicated the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, which is about five miles from Calcutta**,** on the 18th of Jaishtha, 1262 B.Y., on the

1. Yatras.

Snana Yatra[1] day, Thursday, 31 May 1855.[2] Sri Ramakrishna's elder brother, Pundit Ramkumar, was appointed the first priest of the Kali Temple. Thakur used to go there often from Calcutta. Intime he also was engaged for the puja work. He was at that time twenty-one or twenty-two years old. His second brother, Rameswar, also sometimes performed puja in the Kali Temple. He had two sons, Ramlal and Shivaram, and a daughter, Lakshmi Devi.

After Sri Ramakrishna had performed the worship for some time, a change came over him. He would remain sitting before the image of the Mother, completely absorbed.

Soon after this, his family arranged his marriage. They thought that marriage might change his state of mind. He was married in 1859 to Saradamani Devi, the daughter of Ramchandra Mukherji of Jayrambati, a village about four miles from Kamarpukur. Thakur was twenty-two or twenty-three years old; Saradamani was six.

After his marriage, Sri Ramakrishna returned to the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Within a few days, his state of mind suddenly changed. When worshiping Mother Kali, he began to have wonderful divine visions. He would perform arati but not bring the arati to a close. He would sit down to perform puja but the puja would not end.

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1. Ceremonial procession when Lord Jagannath goes out for a bath.
2. Information is taken from the deed of sale of Rani Rasamani's Kali Temple: Deed of conveyance, date of purchase of the temple grounds: 6 September 1847; date of registration: 27 August 1861; price: 2 lakhs, 26,000 rupees.

At times he offered flowers on his own head. Sometimes he could not carry on the puja, but would wander around like a madman.

Rani Rasmani's son-in-law, Mathur, began to revere him as a great man and to serve him. He arranged for another priest to perform Mother Kali's worship and for Hriday Mukherji, Thakur's sister's son, to be his attendant.

After this, Thakur neither attended to the duties of a priest, nor did he enter into the life of a householder. His marriage was in name only. Day and night "Mother, Mother" was on his lips. First he would be like a wooden figure, then he would move around like a mad person. Sometimes he would appear like a child; sometimes he would hide himself at the sight of worldly people attached to 'lust and greed.' He liked nothing but divine talk and continually murmured, "Mother! Mother!"

In the Kali Temple compound there was (and still is) a free kitchen. Holy men and sannyasins would frequently visit it. Totapuri stayed there for eleven months and expounded the philosophy of Vedanta to Thakur. Within only a few days, Totapuri observed that Thakur went into nirvikalpa samadhi. About the year 1866 the Bhairavi Brahmani (who had come in 1859) led Thakur through several Tantric practices. Looking upon him as Sri Chaitanya, she read him Sri Charitamrita and other Vaishnava holy books. When she saw him listening to Vedanta from Totapuri, the Brahmani warned him, "Baba, don't listen to Vedanta. It will dilute your ecstasy and love for God."

Vaishnavcharan, a pundit of the Vaishnava sect, often visited Sri Ramakrishna. It was he who took Thakur to an assembly of Chaitanya's devotees in Calootola. He was president of the group. In this assembly, Sri Ramakrishna experienced the state of God-consciousness and stepped up to occupy the seat of Sri Chaitanya.

Vaishnavcharan had said to Mathur, "This madness is not ordinary; it is the madness of love. He is mad for God." Vaishnavcharan and the Brahmani had seen Thakur's state of divine ecstasy.[1] Like Chaitanya Deva he sometimes passed into samadhi, the state of superconscious awareness, appearing like a piece of wood, unmindful of the world around him. Then he passed through semi-consciousness and returned again to normal consciousness.

Thakur always talked to the Divine Mother and took instructions from Her. He would also weep, calling out, "Mother, Mother." He would say, "O Mother, I shall hear You and You alone. I don't know the sacred books, nor do I know scholars. If You explain to me, only then will I believe." Thakur knew**,** and he would say**,** that He who is the Supreme Being, indivisible Sat-chit-ananda, is the Mother.

The Divine Mother told him, "You and I are one. Live in love and devotion[2] to God for the good of mankind. Many devotees will come to you. Then you won't have to see only worldly-minded people.

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1. Mahabhava.
2. Bhakti.

There are many devotees who are pure and free from worldly desires. They will come."

In the temple at the time of arati, when bells and cymbals rang, Sri Ramakrishna would go to the roof of the kuthi and cry out in a loud voice, "O you devotees, who are you? Where are you? Come soon!"

Thakur looked upon his mother, Chandramani Devi, as another form of the Mother of the Universe and served her with this same spirit. When his elder brother, Ramkumar, passed away, the bereaved mother was stricken with grief. Within three or four years, Thakur asked her to come and stay with him at the Kali Temple. He would go to see her every day, take the dust of her feet, and ask about her welfare.

Thakur went on pilgrimage twice. The first time he took his mother with him. Ram Chatterji and some of Mathur's sons accompanied them on the first railway line laid to Kashi. This was in 1863, within the period of five or six years of the change in his spiritual state. At that time he was either in samadhi day and night, or he remained overwhelmed and intoxicated in ecstasy. During the pilgrimage, after visiting Vaidyanath, he visited Kashi and Prayag.

His second pilgrimage took place five years later, in January 1868, with Mathur Babu and his wife**,** Jagadamba Dasi. This time Thakur's sister's son**,** Hriday**,** was with him. During the journey he visited Kashi, Prayag, and Vrindavan. In Kashi he went into samadhi at the Manikarnika ghat and had a divine vision of Lord Vishvanath whispering

the name of Tarak Brahman into the ears of the dying. He also met and spoke to Trailanga Swami**,** who had taken a vow of silence. In Mathura at the Dhruva ghat, he saw Sri Krishna on the lap of Vasudeva; in holy Vrindavan he saw Sri Krishna with his cows returning in the evening from across the Jamuna. Such sport he saw with his spiritual eye. In Nidhuvan he was overjoyed to meet and talk with Mother Ganga**,** who was immersed in love for Radha.

One day in 1875 Sri Ramakrishna went with his nephew, Hriday, to see Keshab Sen at Belgharia. Keshab was meditating in his garden house with his disciples. By this time Vishwanath Upadhyaya, the Captain from Nepal, had begun to visit him. Gopal of Sinti (the Elder Gopal[1]), Mahendra Kaviraj, Kishori of Krishnanagar, and Mahimacharan had also met Thakur by this time.

The devotees of Sri Ramakrishna's inner circle began coming to him in 1879-80. When they met him, he had almost passed the state of "divine madness." He was like a child then, calm and always cheerful. But he was almost always in the state of samadhi, sometimes in jada samadhi (appearing inert, like a piece of wood, unmindful of the world around), at other times in bhava samadhi (immersed in God). Even when not in samadhi, he remained in a state of ecstasy. He seemed like a five-year-old child, always saying, "Mother! Mother!"

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1. Later Swami Advaitananda.

Ram and Manmohan met Thakur toward the end of 1879. Kedar and Surendra came next, as well as Chuni, Latu, Nityagopal, and Tarak. During the end of 1881 and the beginning of 1882, Narendra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, Baburam, Balaram, Niranjan, M., and Yogen came. Kishori, Adhar, Nitai, the younger Gopal, Tarak of Belgharia, Sarat, and Sashi came in 1883 and 1884. In the middle of 1884 Sanyal, Gangadhar, Kali, Girish, Devendra, Sarada, Kalipada, Upendra, Dwija, and Hari came. Subodh, the Younger Narendra, Paltu, Purna, Narayan, Tejchandra, and Haripada came in the middle of 1885. Likewise came Hara Mohan, Yajneshwar, Hazra, Kshirode, Yogen of Krishnanagar, Manindra, Bhupati, Akshay, Navagopal, Govinda of Belgharia, Ashu, Girendra, Atul, Durgacharan, Suresh, Prankrishna, Nabai Chaitanya, Hari Prasanna, Mahendra (Mukherji), Priya Mukherji, Sadhu Priyanath (Manmath), Vinod, Tulasi, Harish Mustafi, Basakh, Kathak Thakur, Sashi of Bali (Brahmachari), Nityagopal (Goswami), Vipin of Konnagar, Bihari, Dhiren, and Rakhal (Haldar) came – one after another.

Ishwar Vidyasagar, Shashadhar Pundit, Dr. Rajendra, Dr. Sarkar, Bankim (Chatterji), Mr. Cook from the United States, devotee Williams, Mr. Missir, Michael Madhusudan, Krishnadas (Pal), Pundit Dina Bandhu, Pundit Shyamapada, Dr. Ramnarayan, Dr. Durgacharan, Radhika Goswami, Shishir (Ghosh), Navin (a clerk), and Nilkantha had all met Thakur by 1885. He had visited Trailanga Swami in holy Kashi and Mother Ganga in Vrindavan. Taking him as (the incarnation of)

Radha (divine love), Mother Ganga had not wanted Thakur to leave Vrindavan.

Before the devotees of the inner circle came, Krishnakishore, Madhura, Sambhu Mallick, Narayan Shastri, Gauri Pundit of Indesh, Chandra, and Achalananda were frequent visitors to Thakur. The court pundit of the King of Burdwan, Padmalochan, and Dayananda (the founder) of the Arya Samaj also met Thakur. Many devotees of Thakur's native village, Kamarpukur, and of Sihore and Shyambazar had been drawn to him.

Many members of the Brahmo Samaj met Thakur. Keshab, Vijay, Kali (Bose), Pratap, Shivanath, Amrit, Trailokya, Krishna Bihari, Manilal, Umesh, Hirananda, Bhavani, Nanda Lal, and many other Brahmo devotees often visited him. Thakur also visited them. During Mathur's lifetime, he and Thakur went to Devendranath Tagore's house and paid a visit to the Adi Brahmo Samaj during service hours. Later he went to see Keshab's Brahmo temple and the Sadharan Samaj during the time of worship. He would frequently visit Keshab's house. How much he would rejoice in the company of Brahmo devotees! Keshab visited him frequently, sometimes with devotees, sometimes alone.

At Kalna he met Bhagavan Das Babaji. Seeing Thakur's state of samadhi, Babaji said, "You are indeed a great spiritual soul. Only you are fit to take the seat of Chaitanya Deva."

Thakur practiced the disciplines of the Vaishnavas, the Shaktas, the Shaivas; he also recited the name of Allah and meditated upon

Christ. He realized that they all led to the same goal. In his room there were pictures of gods and goddesses and an image of the Buddha. There was also a picture showing Jesus Christ saving Peter from drowning. These pictures can still be seen if you go to that room. English and American devotees can now be seen meditating upon Thakur in the room.

One day he implored the Divine Mother, "O Mother, I would like to see how your Christian devotees pray to You. Please take me to a place where they worship You." In a few days, he went to Calcutta and watched a Christian service, standing at the entrance to the church. When he returned, Thakur said to the devotees, "I didn't enter the church to sit for fear of the steward [of the Kali Temple]. I said to myself, 'Maybe he wouldn't allow me to enter the temple.'"

Thakur had many women devotees. He called Gopal's Mother "Mother" and referred to her as "Gopal's Mother." He looked upon and worshiped all women as incarnations of Bhagavati (the Divine Mother). He said, "As long as a man cannot see a woman as Mother Herself, he cannot have pure love for God." He warned men to guard themselves against women till that stage is reached. He went so far as to forbid young men to keep the company of even the most devout woman. He once said to the Divine Mother, "Mother, I will run a knife across my throat if any lustful thought arises in my mind."

Thakur's devotees are countless. Some are known, others unknown. It is impossible to name all of them. The names of many of them will be

found in *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita.* Those who visited him during their boyhood are: Ramakrishna, Paltu, Tulasi, Shanti, Sashi, Vipin, Hiralal, Nagendra Mitra, Upendra, Surendra, and Suren. A number of little girls also saw Thakur. Now they, too, are his devotees.

Many became his devotees after he ended his divine play and others are still coming. In Madras, Sri Lanka, Uttar Pradesh, Rajputana, Kumaon, Nepal, Bombay, Punjab, Japan, and also in America and England – at all these places the family of devotees continues to grow.

Janmashtami
1310 B.Y., A.D. 1903

Section I

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar

Chapter One

The Kali Temple and garden

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar Kali Temple – chandni (portal) and the twelve Shiva temples – brick courtyard and the Vishnu temple – Sri Sri Bhavatarini Mother Kali – natmandir (the music pavilion) – the store, the pantry, the guest house and the place of sacrifice – the office rooms – Sri Ramakrishna's room – nahabat, bakultala and panchavati – jhautala, beltala and kuthi – ghat for washing utensils, Gazitala, the main gate and the back gate – Hanspukur, stable, cowshed, and flower garden – the verandah of Sri Ramakrishna's room**,** the "Abode of Joy."

It is Sunday. The devotees have a day off from work, so they are coming in great numbers to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar to see the Paramahamsa Deva, Sri Ramakrishna. His door is open to all. Thakur talks freely with all the visitors: sadhus,[1] paramahamsas,[2] Hindus, Christians, Brahmos,[3] Shaktas,[4] Vaishnavas,[5] men and women – they all visit him. Blessed you are**,** Rani Rasmani! It is because of your virtue that such a beautiful temple

1. Wandering monks.
2. One belonging to the highest order of knowers of Brahman.
3. Member of the Brahmo Samaj.
4. Hindus who worship God as the Primal Divine Energy.
5. Hindus who follow the path of devotion and worship God as the Preserver (Vishnu), or divine incarnation such as Rama and Krishna.

has come into being. Besides, there is a living image! People are able to come here to meet and worship a great spiritual personality.

The chandni and the twelve Shiva temples

The Kali Temple is located about five miles north of Calcutta on the bank of the Ganges. Arriving by boat and climbing toward the east up a broad staircase, one enters the Kali Temple. It is at this very ghat that Sri Ramakrishna takes his bath. Just up from the staircase is the chandni. Watchmen of the temple live there. Their cots, mango-wood chests, and one or two jugs and such things are lying around. When the gentlemen of the neighbourhood come to the temple garden to take their bath in the Ganges, some of them sit here and gossip while they have an oil massage. Some of the sadhus, fakirs, and Vaishnavas who come to have prasad[1] from the guest house wait here for the bell announcing the food offerings.[2] At times a bhairavi (woman worshiper of the Mother), dressed in ochre cloth and holding a trident in her hand, is seated here. She, too, will go to the guest house for food when the bell rings. The chandni is situated in the center of the twelve Shiva temples – six temples to the north and six to the south. People passing by in boats, seeing the twelve temples from a distance, exclaim, "That is the temple garden of Rani Rasmani!"

1. Offered food.
2. Bhoga.

The brick courtyard and the Vishnu temple

There is a cemented brick courtyard to the east of the chandni, and then the twelve Shiva temples. In the center of the courtyard are two temples facing each other. To the north is the temple of Radhakanta. Directly south of it is the temple of Mother Kali. In the Radhakanta Temple, the images of Radha and Krishna face west. One enters up a flight of stairs. The floor of this temple is paved with marble, and a chandelier hangs in its vestibule. Not in use now, it is protected by a red linen cloth. A watchman keeps vigil in the temple, and canvas screens protect the deities from the midday sun in the western sky. Passages left open between the rows of columns in the vestibule are covered by screens. Toward the southeast corner is a pitcher of Ganges water, and near the threshold of the door is a vessel containing holy water.[1] Devotees bow down before the deities and then take a few drops of the water. Inside the temple the statues of Radha and Krishna sit on a raised seat. Sri Ramakrishna's first duties as priest in 1857 and 1858 were at this temple.

Sri Sri Bhavatarini Mother Kali

In the southern temple is the beautiful stone image of Kali, the Divine Mother. She is called the Saviour of the World.[2] The floor of the temple is paved in black and white marble. Steps ascend to a raised platform on which there is a silver lotus of a thousand petals. On this lotus Shiva lies on His

1. Charanamrita.
2. Bhavatarini.

back, His head to the south and feet to the north. The image of Shiva is made of white marble. On His breast stands the stone image of the very beautiful three-eyed Shyama Kali. She is dressed in a Benares sari and decorated with jewels of many kinds. On Her lotus feet are tinkling anklets,[1] ornaments,[2] red china roses, and bel leaves. One of the anklets is called panjeb and is worn by women of the west (Punjab and Uttar Pradesh). This ornament was procured by Mathur Babu at the special desire of Sri Ramakrishna. The Mother's arms are adorned with broad bangles[3] and armlets made of gold. Her lower arm wears the bracelets known as "coconut flowers," paincha, bauti, and bala. On Her upper arms She wears armlets called tarr, tabiz, and baju. The last one has a pendant attached to it.

Around Her neck the Divine Mother wears a golden cheke, a pearl necklace of seven strings, a golden necklace of thirty-two strings, a "chain of stars," and a golden garland made of human skulls. On Her head She wears a crown. Her ears are adorned with kanbala and kanpash, golden earrings that look like flowers, and also round golden earrings[4] and the "golden fish." She wears a pearl nose ring. The three-eyed Goddess holds a decapitated human head and a sword in Her upper and lower left hands. Her upper right hand makes the sign of fearlessness and the lower offers boons. Around Her waist She wears a garland of human

1. Nupur.
2. Gujai, panchem, panjeb, and chutaki.
3. Bauti.
4. Chaundani.

arms, as well as golden waist-chains called neem fruit and komarpata.

In the northeast corner of the temple is a beautiful bed where the Mother rests. On a side wall hangs a chamara[1] with which Sri Ramakrishna fanned Her. On a lotus stand on the altar is water in a silver water glass. Rows of vessels that hold water for Mother to drink are on the steps. On a silver lotus seat to the northwest is a lion made of eight metals. Images of an iguana and a trident are to the east. Toward the southwest of the platform is a vixen, to the south is a black stone bull, and to the northeast is a swan. On one of the steps leading to the platform is an image of Narayana[2] on a small silver throne. On one side of him is an image of Ramlala, the boy Ramachandra, made of eight metals, which the Paramahamsa Devaobtained from a holy man. There is also an emblem of Shiva, as well as some other gods.

The Divine Mother faces south. Directly in front of Her, to the south of the platform, is a pitcher. After puja this pitcher[3] is dabbed with vermilion, covered with various kinds of flowers, and decorated with flower garlands. On another wall is a copper pitcher filled with water to wash the Mother's face. Above, in the temple canopy behind the image, a beautiful piece of Benares silk hangs. Adding to the beauty of the image are silver

1. A fan made of the white hair from the tail of the yak called Chamari.
2. God the Preserver.
3. Mangal-ghat.

columns on the four sides of the platform with a costly canopy spread over them.

The temple is of medium size. Some of the gates of the vestibule are protected by strong doors. A guard sits near one of the doors. Nearby is a small vessel containing holy water. The top of the temple is adorned with nine pinnacles. Four of the pinnacles rise from the lower corners of the roof, four from the middle, and above them one pinnacle rises from the center peak. It is now broken. The Paramahamsa Deva performed puja in this shrine as well as in the shrine of Radhakanta.

The natmandir (the theatrical hall)

In front of Kali's shrine – that is, to the south – is a beautiful and spacious natmandir on which Shiva[1] and his attendants, Nandi and Bhringi, are depicted.

Before entering the Mother's temple, Sri Ramakrishna would fold his hands and bow to Shiva, as though entering the temple after taking His permission. Two rows of high columns stand north-south of the natmandir with a roof over them. To the east and west of the row of columns are two portions of the natmandir. During festivals, especially on Kali Puja day, theatrical performances are performed in the natmandir. It was there that Mathur Babu, the son-in-law of Rasmani, at the request of Sri Ramakrishna, carried out a donation to the poor called "the

1. Mahadeva.

ceremony of the mound of grain."[1] It was here that Sri Ramakrishna worshiped Bhairavi.

Store, pantry, guest house, and place of sacrifice

To the west of the courtyard are the twelve Shiva temples, and on the three other sides are single-storied rooms. The rooms to the east include the storeroom, a room for keeping luchis (fried bread), a room for the food offerings for Vishnu, a room for preparing fruit and other offerings, and a room for cooking the offerings for the Divine Mother, as well as the guest house for feeding guests. If guests and visiting sadhus do not eat here, they must go to the office of the steward of the temple for permission to take rations from the store. To the south of the natmandir is the place of sacrifice.

Food prepared for Vishnu's shrine is vegetarian, but not so for Kali. There is a separate kitchen for preparing food for Her. In front of the kitchen of the Divine Mother, maidservants cut fish with big knives. On the dark night of the month[2] a goat is sacrificed. The food offering is over before noon. In the meantime beggars, sadhus, and guests take plates made of sal leaves from the guest house and sit down in rows. Brahmins are allotted a separate corner and the brahmins working here have different seats as well. Prasad for the steward is sent to his room. The descendents of the founder of the temple, Rani Rasmani, stay in the kuthi when

1. Dhanyameru.
2. Amavasya.

they visit the temple; their prasad is taken to them there.

Office rooms

In the row of rooms on the south side of the courtyard are offices and the residences of officials. The steward and clerks stay here, and the storekeeper, maidservants, men servants, priests, cooks, brahmin cooks, and gate keepers are generally found walking in and out. Some of these rooms, which contain property of the temple, such as carpets and tents, are locked. Some of the rooms are used as storerooms on the birthday celebrations of the Paramahamsadeva. The cooking for this great celebration is done on the ground to the south.

There is another row of single-storied rooms to the north of the courtyard. In its center is the main gate. As in the chandni, here, too, gatekeepers keep watch. Shoes must be taken off before entering both places.

Sri Ramakrishna's room

In the northwest corner of the courtyard, just north of the twelve Shiva temples, is Sri Ramakrishna's room. Due west of his room is a semicircular verandah. It was from here, facing west, that Sri Ramakrishna often watched the Ganges. Next to this verandah is a path, and to its west, a flower garden and terrace, alongside which flows the pure, sweet, melodious waters of the Ganges, the symbol of all pilgrimages.

Nahabat (the music pavilion), bakultala and panchavati

Just north of the Paramahamsa Deva's room is a rectangular verandah. To its north is a garden path and flower garden. And beyond that is the nahabat (the music pavilion). The revered mother of Sri Ramakrishna and later the Holy Mother lived in the lower room. Next to the nahabat are the grove of bakul trees and river ghat where the women of the neighborhood take their bath. It was at this ghat that the venerable mother of the Paramahamsa Deva breathed her last, with the lower half of her body immersed in the holy waters of the Ganges.

A little north of the bakultala is the panchavati (a grove of five trees). It was in the panchavati that the Paramahamsa Deva practiced many religious austerities. He would often stroll around the area with his devotees. At times, deep at night, he would rise and go there. This grove consists of five trees: the bata (Indian fig), peepal, neem, amalaki, and bel trees which Thakur himself planted. On returning from Vrindavan, Sri Ramakrishna scattered the dust of that holy place at the panchavati. Directly east of it, Sri Ramakrishna had a thatched hut built. It was here that he meditated and practiced many austerities. This hut has since been replaced by a room made of brick.

In the center of the panchavati are a banyan tree and a peepal tree which have grown together and now appear as one. Being very old, the tree has many holes in it, which have become the living places of many birds and animals. Below it is a

brick-built circular platform with steps. Seated on the northwestern side of the platform, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna carried out many devotional exercises. With great yearning he called upon God like a cow cries for its calf. Now, across the hallowed seat, a branch of the peepal tree has fallen, though it has not completely broken away from the parent bata tree. It seems to say that no great man worthy to sit on that platform has yet been born again.

Jhautala, beltala, and kuthi

A little north of the panchavati is a railing made of iron wire. On the other side of it is the jhautala, where rows and rows of willow trees stand. A short distance east from the jhautala is the beltala. Here, too, the Paramahamsa Deva practiced many difficult austerities. Beyond the jhautala and the beltala is a high wall and just north of it is the government magazine.

Going north from the main gate of the courtyard, one comes to the two-storied kuthi. Whenever Rani Rasmani and her son-in-law, Mathur Babu, and other members of the family visited the temple, they would stay at the kuthi. During their lifetime, the Paramahamsa Deva lived in a western room on the ground floor. A path from this room leads to the bakultala ghat, from where there is a splendid view of the Ganges.

Ghat for washing utensils, gazitala, and gates

Going east on the path between the main gate of the courtyard and the kuthi is a fine reservoir with a specially built, paved ghat. This ghat, which

borders the east side of Mother Kali's temple, is used for washing utensils. A short distance north from the main gate path is another ghat, to the side of which is a tree called gazitala. A little further east on this path is another gate. It is the main exit from the garden. People from Alambazar or Calcutta visit the temple through this gate. People from Dakshineswar come in through the back gate. There, too, a watchman is stationed. When the Paramahamsa Deva used to return to the Kali Temple from Calcutta at midnight, the watchman at this gate would unlock it. The Paramahamsa Deva would call him to his room and give him luchis, sweets, and other items of prasad.

Hanspukur, stable, cow sheds, and lower garden

To the east of the panchavati is another reservoir called the Hanspukur (Goose Tank). At its northeast corner are a stable and a cow shed. East of the cow shed is the back gate. It leads to the village of Dakshineswar. It is used by priests and temple officials and their families who live in Dakshineswar.

There is a flower-bordered path along the Ganges running north from the southern extremity of the garden to the bakultala and the panchavati. An east-west path from the south of the kuthi is also flanked by flowers. From the gazitala to the cow barn, the stretch of land to the east of the kuthi and the Hanspukur also has flowering plants of different species, fruit trees, and another reservoir.

Very early in the morning when the eastern sky is turning red, one can hear the sweet sounds of the

morning arati and morning music played on the sanai. At this time flowers from Mother Kali's flower garden are plucked for worship. On the bank of the Ganges in front of the panchavati are vilva trees and fragrant beds of pagoda flowers. Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of tulips, madhavi (myrtle), and gulachi flowers. He brought a madhavi creeper from Vrindavan and planted it here. On the eastern bank of the Hanspukur and the kuthi are champak plants and at a little distance are plants of jhumka, hibiscus, roses, and kanchan (gold flower). Aparajita grows on hedges, and close by are jasmine and shafalika flowers. Along the western wall beside the twelve Shiva temples are red and white oleander, roses, and both large and small jasmine. Interspersed are datura, which provide large and fragrant white blossoms used in the worship of Shiva. At intervals there are basil plants growing on high brick-built platforms. To the south of the nahabat are larger jasmine, gardenia, and roses. Not far from the brick-built ghat are lotus oleander[1] and the cuckoo-eyed. Near the Paramahamsa Deva's room are a couple of coxcomb, and close by are double jasmine, gardenia, roses, tulips, white and red oleanders, double hibiscus, and Chinese hibiscus.

Sri Ramakrishna used to gather flowers for worship himself. One day when he was plucking the leaves of a bel tree in front of the panchavati, a small portion of the bark of the tree came off. He felt as if the one who lives within all things had received a severe pain. Thenceforth, he could no

1. Padmakarvi.

longer pluck bel leaves. Another day when he was walking around picking flowers, he was suddenly aware that the various flowering plants were but so many bouquets adoring the great image of Shiva. Shiva was thus being worshiped day and night. Henceforth, he ceased to pick flowers.

Verandah of Thakur Sri Ramakrishna's room

Two adjoining verandahs extend east and south from Sri Ramakrishna's room. It was in the south wing of these verandahs which faced the courtyard that Sri Ramakrishna often sat with the devotees. There he would talk to them about God and sing devotional songs with them. In the northern wing, devotees also gathered to celebrate his birthday and to sing hymns with him. At times he would take prasad with them there. It was also on this verandah that Keshab Chandra Sen visited him and would talk for long hours like a disciple. They would enjoy themselves with puffed rice, coconut, luchis, and sweets. It was here, also, that Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi at the sight of Narendra.

The Abode of Joy

The Kali Temple has become the Abode of Joy. Radhakanta, Bhavatarini, and Mahadeva are worshiped here daily. Offerings for worship are made and guests served. On one side the sacred view of the Bhagirathi (the Ganges) stretches far into the distance; on the other is a unique and varied flower garden that charms everyone with its abundant fragrance and beauty. As well, there is the God-man, intoxicated day and night with love

for God. And there is the perennial festival of the ever-joyful Divine Mother. Music emanates from the nahabat at the sacred time of the dawn arati and again when worship starts about nine in the morning. At noon it sounds after the food offering, when the deities retire to rest. It is again played at four o'clock when they rise after their rest. Music is heard again from the nahabat at the time of evening arati and last of all, at nine at night, when, after the evening offerings of food, the deities go to bed.

Chapter Two

Tava kathāmṛtaṁ taptajīvanaṁ kavibhir īḍitaṁ
kalmaṣāpaham ।
śravaṇamaṅgalaṁ śrīmad ātataṁ bhuvi gṛṇanti te
bhūridā janā ।।

[The nectar of Your story revives the parched soul of man. Poets (men of knowledge) praise it. It wipes away our sins. To hear it is, in itself, auspicious. It is pervasive, limitless, and beautiful. Only those who have been generous in their past lives understand it.]

– Srimad Bhagavata X:31:9

The first meeting – month of February 1882

The Kali Temple at Dakshineswar on the bank of the Ganges. It is springtime in February 1882. On Thursday, 23 February, one day after his birthday, Sri Ramakrishna went for a cruise on a steamer with Keshab Sen and Joseph Cook. It is now a few days later, and evening is approaching. M. comes to Sri Ramakrishna's room. It is his first visit.

He sees a roomful of people seated motionless, drinking in the nectar of his words. Thakur is seated on his bed, facing east and talking about God with a smiling face. The devotees are sitting before him on the floor.

When does renunciation of work take place?

M. looks in and is speechless. He wonders if it is Sukadeva telling the story of the Lord and if at that spot all the places of pilgrimage have gathered together. Or is it Sri Chaitanya sitting in the holy land of Puri singing the names and glories of Bhagavan[1] with Ramananda, Swarup, and other devotees seated before him?

Sri Ramakrishna is saying, "When your hair stands on end just at the name of Hari or Rama, and tears flow from your eyes, know for certain that sandhya[2] and other daily observances are no longer necessary. They are over for you. You have then gained the right to give up work. Indeed, karmas fall off of their own accord. In that state mere repetition of the name of Rama or Hari, or the Omkara[3] is enough." And he adds, "Sandhya ends in Gayatri[4] and Gayatri in Om."

M. has walked here, from garden to garden, with Sidhu[5] from Baranagore. It is Sunday, 26 February, 15th Phalgun, a holiday, and he has come out for a walk. A little earlier he was strolling in Prasanna

1. The beloved Lord.
2. Daily service morning, noon, and evening, as laid down for the twice-born.
3. Om, the Vedic symbol for the Supreme Being.
4. The ancient Vedic mantra (sacred text) that the brahmins and other twice-born Hindus repeat everyday while meditating on the Supreme Being.
5. Siddheswar Majumdar. His home is in north Baranagore.

Bannerji's garden. It was there that Sidhu said, "There is a beautiful garden on the bank of the Ganges. Would you like to see it? A paramahamsa lives there."

Entering the garden through the main gate, M. and Sidhu come directly to Sri Ramakrishna's room. M. is speechless as he watches. He thinks, how charming this place is, how charming this man is, how sweet is his talk – I don't feel like leaving. After a while he says to himself, But let me first look around and see where I have come. I will then come back and sit down.

As he comes out of the room with Sidhu, the sweet sound of arati[1] begins with cymbals, bells, and drums all sounding in unison. Music comes from the nahabat on the southern side of the garden. Floating over the bosom of the Ganges, it seems to fade somewhere far, far away. The spring breeze is gentle and fragrant with the sweet smell of many flowers. In the spreading moonlight, preparation for the arati of the deities is taking place all around. Watching the arati in the twelve Shiva temples and in the temples of Radhakanta and Bhavatarini, M. is filled with supreme joy. Sidhu says, "This is Rasmani's temple. Here the gods are worshiped every day from morning till evening. Many holy guests and the poor come here."

After passing through a grand brick quadrangle, they emerge from the Bhavatarini Kali Temple, talking. When they reach Sri Ramakrishna's room, the door is closed. Incense was burnt a little while before.

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1. Waving of lights before sacred images along with singing of hymns.

Having been educated in English ways, M. cannot enter a room that is closed. The maidservant, Vrinde, is standing at the door. M. asks, "Is the holy man[1] in the room now?"

Vrinde: "Yes, he is inside."

M.: "How long has he been here?"

Vrinde: "Oh, many, many years!"

M.: "Well, does he read many books?"

Vrinde: "Oh dear, books and things like that are all on his tongue!"

M. is fresh from college. He is very surprised to hear that Sri Ramakrishna does not read books.

M.: "Well, perhaps he is now performing evening devotions. Can we enter the room? Will you please tell him about us?"

Vrinde: "Why, go in, my children. Go inside and sit down."

Thereupon they enter the room and see that no one else is there. Sri Ramakrishna is seated alone on the bedstead. Incense is burning and all the doors are closed. M. folds his hands in greeting as he enters the room. At the bidding of Sri Ramakrishna, M. and Sidhu sit on the floor. Thakur asks, "Where do you live? What do you do? What has brought you to Baranagore?" M. answers all his questions, but he notices that in the course of conversation, Thakur's mind wanders away to something on which he is meditating. Later, M.

1. Sadhu maharaj.

hears that this is called bhava samadhi.[1] It is like a man sitting with a fishing rod in his hand, waiting to catch a fish. The fish comes and begins to bite at the bait and the float trembles. The man is all attention. He grasps the rod and looks at the float with a concentrated mind, talking to no one. Sri Ramakrishna's state is exactly like this. Later, M. hears and sees that Thakur goes into this state after his devotions. At times, he loses all external consciousness.

M.: "You will now perform your evening worship.[2] Perhaps we should leave."

Sri Ramakrishna (*in ecstasy*): "No evening worship. No, it is not that."

After some conversation, M. salutes Thakur and takes his leave.

Thakur says, "Come again."

On his way home, M. wonders to himself, Who may this god-man be? How is it that my soul longs to see him again? Can a man be great without reading books? How strange that I feel like visiting him again. He said, "Come again." I shall come tomorrow or the day after, in the morning.

1. God-consciousness, ecstasy.
2. Sandhya.

Chapter Three

akhaṇḍamaṇḍalākāraṁ vyāptaṁ yena carācaram ।
tatpadaṁ darśitaṁ yena tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ ।।

[Salutations to the guru who has made it possible to realize Him who pervades this entire universe of the moving and unmoving.]

– Vishveshwara Tantra 2

Second meeting and conversation between the guru and the disciple

The second meeting is at eight o'clock in the morning. Thakur is going to have a shave. The winter cold still lingers, so he wears a moleskin shawl hemmed with muslin. Seeing M., he says, "So you have come! Good. Sit here."

They are on the southeast verandah with the barber. Thakur sits for a shave and talks to M. He wears the shawl, and slippers on his feet. He is smiling. He stammers a little when he talks.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, where do you live?"

M.: "In Calcutta, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Who have you come to see who lives around here?"

M.: "I came to Baranagore to visit my elder sister at Ishan Kaviraj's house."

Keshab Chandra – Sri Ramakrishna weeps before the Divine Mother

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, how is Keshab these days? He was seriously ill."

M.: "I also heard that. I hope he is well now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I made a vow to offer a green coconut and sugar to the Divine Mother for Keshab's recovery. Sometimes I used to wake up at midnight and cry to Her, saying, 'O Mother, please let Keshab get well! If he doesn't live, whom shall I talk to when I go to Calcutta?' That's why I vowed to offer green coconut and sugar.

"A Mr. Cook came here. Does he lecture? Keshab took me on board a steamer. Mr. Cook was there."

M.: "Yes, I did hear of him, but I haven't attended
any of his lectures. I don't know much about him."

Household and the duty of a father

Sri Ramakrishna: "Pratap's brother came here and stayed for some days. He had no work to do. He said that he wanted to stay here. He had left his wife, son, and daughter in the care of his father-in-law. He has many children. I took him to task. Look, he has so many children! Should they be fed and looked after by neighbours? He's not ashamed for somebody else to take care of his family and that they are a burden to his father-in-law! I scolded him rather severely and told him to look for work. After that he left here."

Chapter Four

ajñānatimirāndhasya jñānāñjanaśalākayā ।
cakśur unmīlitaṁ yena tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ ।।

[Salutations to the Guru who, with the collyrium stick of knowledge, has opened the eyes of one blinded by the disease of ignorance.]

– Vishveshwara Tantra 3

M. is reprimanded – his egotism is crushed

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Are you married?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (*startled*): "I say, Ramlal![1] Ah me, he has already taken a wife."

M. is confused and sits speechless, hanging his head as though he were guilty of a serious offence. He thinks to himself, Is marrying so bad?

Thakur then asks, "Have you any children?"

M. can hear the beating of his own heart. He says fearfully, "Yes sir, I have children."

Thakur rebukes M. all the more, saying, "Alas, you have children too!"

M. is stunned by the blow. His egotism is being crushed.

After a while Sri Ramakrishna looks at him kindly and speaks affectionately, "See, you have some good signs. I can tell by looking at a person's eyes and forehead.

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1. Ramlal, nephew of Sri Ramakrishna and the priest of Kali Temple.

"Well, what kind of wife do you have? Is she vidyashakti or avidyashakti?"[1]

What is jnana? – image worship

M.: "Sir, she is good, but ignorant."[2]

Sri Ramakrishna (*sharply*): "And you are wise!"[3]

What jnana is and what ajnana is, M. does not know. Until now he has only known that a jnani is one who has received an education and can read books. This false notion was afterwards destroyed when he learned that to know God is jnana and not to know Him is ajnana. Thakur had said, "Do you think you have attained wisdom?" M.'s egotism again received a hard blow.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?"

M. (*confused, to himself*), Is it possible to have faith in the formless God and believe at the same time that He is with form? How can it be that while believing God to be with form, one can think of Him as formless? Can the two contradictory states coexist in the same substance? Can white things like milk also be black?

M.: "I like the formless God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's all right. Having faith in either of the two points of view is enough. To think of God as formless is quite right. Even so, don't think that only this idea is true and all others are false. Know this: that the formless God is true

1. Vidyashakti, the power of spiritual wisdom, leading to God and light; Avidyashakti is its opposite, keeping one immersed in ignorance, darkness, and bondage.
2. Ajnani.
3. Jnani.

and so is God with form. You must hold to that which you believe."

> Hearing again and again that both ideas are true, M. is speechless. Never has he read such a thing in any of his books. His egotism has been crushed for a third time, but it is not yet completely knocked out. So he advances with his reasoning a little further.

M.: "Well sir, let one believe that God is with form, but surely He is not an earthen image."

Sri Ramakrishna: "My dear sir, why earthen? It is the image of spirit!"

M. does not understand the significance of the "image of spirit." He says, "Well, should one not make it clear to those who worship images that God is not the image and that while worshiping, they should keep God in view and not worship the clay?"

Lecture and Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna (*sharply*): "It is fashionable for Calcutta people to lecture and bring others to light! How to bring light to themselves, they do not know. Who are you to teach others? The Lord of the Universe will teach – He who has made this universe of moon, sun, seasons, human beings, and beasts. He who has provided food for men and beasts, and parents to rear and love their young ones – He Himself will teach. He has made all this; will He not provide for it, too? If there is a need to know, God Himself will surely make it understood. He is the inner controller.[1] You say it is wrong to worship a clay image. Does He not know that He

1. Antaryamin.

Himself is being called upon? He is pleased with this very worship! Why should you have a headache over it? Only seek for yourself, that you may gain knowledge and develop love and devotion."

This time M.'s egotism is completely crushed. He says to himself, What he says is certainly true. Why do I need to go around preaching to others? Have I myself known God? Have I developed love and devotion for Him? It is like the proverb says: "Bidding my friend Shankara to lie down on my bed when there is no bed for myself to lie on." Knowing nothing, listening to no one, and yet going out to preach to others! It would be shameful, indeed great folly. Is this mathematics or history or literature that you can teach to others? It is the science of God! Whatever he says fully appeals to me.

This was M.'s first and last attempt to argue with Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You were talking of worshiping clay images. Even if made of clay, there is need for this kind of worship. God Himself has provided various methods of worship. He who has created the universe has provided different forms to suit people with different understanding. A mother provides food so that her children get what agrees with each.

"Say a mother has five children and she has fish to cook. She makes different dishes out of it to suit each of her children. Pulao[1] with fish for one, fish with sour tamarind for another, charchari[2] for yet another, and fried fish for still another – she

1. A highly spiced fish dish of rice and meat boiled in clarified butter.
2. Dry fish with spiced vegetables soaked in oil.

prepares exactly what they like, exactly what agrees with their stomachs. Understand?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Chapter Five

saṁsārārṇavaghore yaḥ karṇadhārasvarūpakaḥ।
namo 'stu rāmakṛṣṇāya tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ।।

[Salutations to Sri Ramakrishna, salutations to that Guru who is the pilot to take one across the deep sea of the world.]

– Vishveshwara Tantra 3

How to gain love and devotion for God

M.: "How may one fix the mind on God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "By chanting His names and glories without ceasing. And keeping the company of the holy. One must frequently go to God's devotees, or sadhus. The mind doesn't fix itself on God while living day and night in the midst of worldly activities and family life. So one must go into solitude now and then to meditate on God. In the first stage it is very hard to fix the mind on God without frequently going into solitude.

"When a plant is young, it needs a fence around it. Without the fence, goats and cows devour it.

"The mind, a solitary corner, and the forest are the places to meditate. And you must always have good thoughts in your mind. God alone is real, the eternal substance, and all else is unreal, transitory. Discriminating in this way, you will shake off attachment to the perishable things of the world."

M. (*humbly*): "How to live in the household?"

Sannyasa in the household – the way – sadhana in solitude

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do all your duties, but keep your mind fixed on God. Wife, son, father, and mother – live with them all and serve them as if they are your own, but know in your heart that they are really not yours.

"A rich man's maidservant attends to all her duties, but her mind is always on her own home in the village. She nurses her master's children as if they were her own; she calls out, 'My Rama, my Hari,' but all the while she knows full well they are not hers.

"A tortoise moves around in water, but do you know where its mind dwells? On the bank of the river, on dry land where its eggs are laid. Attend to all your worldly work, but take care that your mind rests in God.

"If you enter the world before you have acquired love and devotion for God, you will surely become entangled more and more. Misfortune, grief, and other ills of the world will make you lose your mental balance. The more you think of worldly matters, the more attachment will come.

"Rub your hands with oil before you break a jackfruit; otherwise, its milky juice will stick to your hands. First acquire the oil of love for God, and then engage in the affairs of the world.

"But to acquire love for God, solitude is needed. If you want to make butter, the curds have to be set

in a quiet corner. The curds will not set if they are disturbed. You have to sit in a quiet place, giving up all other work, and churn the curds. Only then can you get butter.

"By giving your mind to God in solitude, you gain spiritual knowledge,[1] dispassion,[2] and love for Him. But if you give the same mind to the world, it becomes coarse. In the world there is nothing but thoughts of 'lust and greed.'

"The world is like water, and the mind like milk. If milk is poured into water, it will get mixed with the water and become one with it. You will not be able to get pure milk, however much you try. But if the milk is turned into curds, the butter that is made from it will then float on water. So first get the butter of spiritual knowledge and love for God by practicing spiritual disciplines in a solitary place. This butter, when put in the water of the world, will not mix with it. It will float on its surface.

"Along with this, the practice of discrimination is necessary. 'Lust and greed' are transitory; God is the only reality. What does money give? It gives us food, clothes, and a place to live – that much, no more. It does not help us to attain God. So money cannot be the end of life. This is the process of discrimination. Do you see this?"

M.: "Yes, sir. I have recently read about discrimination in *Prabodha Chandrodaya* [a Sanskrit play]."

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1. Jnana.
2. Vairagya; non-attachment.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, discrimination. Just think, what is there in money or in a beautiful body? Think about it: the body of a beautiful woman only consists of bones, flesh, fat, urine, and excreta. Why does a man give his mind to such things and lose sight of God? Why does he forget God?"

How to see God

M.: "Sir, can God be seen?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. There is no doubt about it. Going into solitude from time to time, chanting His name and glories, practicing discrimination – these are what you have to do."

M.: "What state of mind leads to God-realization?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Cry with a deep yearning in your heart and you will see God. People shed pitchers full of tears for wife and children, they weep streams of tears for money, but who cries for God? Call out to God with a longing and yearning heart. Saying this, Thakur sings:

Cry out with yearning, O mind, and see how

Mother Shyama can withhold Herself from you!

How can Shyama stay away? How can Kali remain away?

O mind, if you are in earnest, bring bel leaves and red hibiscus flowers,

Touched with the sandal paste of devotion, and offer them at Her feet.

"A yearning heart brings the dawn; soon after, the sun is visible. After longing comes God-vision.

"You can see God if you have these three attachments combined: the attachment of a worldly man to things of the world, the attachment of a mother to her child, and the attachment of a chaste wife to her husband. If these three attachments are united, their combined power makes it possible to see God.

"The real thing is that you must love God the way a mother loves her son, a chaste wife her husband, and a worldly man the things of the world. When your love for God has the combined intensity of all these three, you will see Him.

"One should call upon God with a yearning heart. A kitten knows only how to cry out to its mother, 'Mew, mew.' Wherever the mother puts it, it remains, whether in the kitchen, on the floor, or on the bed. When it feels hurt, it simply cries 'mew, mew' and knows nothing else. Wherever the mother may be, she comes when she hears its mewing."

Chapter Six

sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cātmani ।
īkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ ।।

[His mind being harmonized by yoga, he sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself; he sees the same in all.]

– Bhagavad Gita 6:29

Third meeting – Narendranath, Bhavanath, and M.

M. was then staying at his sister's house in Baranagore. Ever since he met Sri Ramakrishna, he had been constantly thinking of him. The same joyful

> image always appeared before his eyes as he remembered Thakur's words, sweet as nectar. He wondered to himself, How has this poor brahmin learned all these deep truths? M. had never before seen anyone explain all these things so clearly. Day and night he wondered, When shall I go and see him again?

Not long after this, at four o'clock on Sunday, 5 March, M. reaches the garden of Dakshineswar with Nepal Babu of Baranagore. He finds Sri Ramakrishna in the same room, seated on the smaller bed. The room is filled with devotees since on Sunday, they have time to come see him. M. does not yet know any of them. He takes a seat on one side of the group and watches Thakur talk to the devotees with a smile on his face.

Addressing a young man of nineteen, Thakur speaks to him joyfully about a number of things. The young man is Narendra.[1] He is a college student who often visits the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. His words are full of spirit. His eyes are bright with the look of a devotee.

M. sees that the subject of the talk is the conduct of worldly men attached to the pleasures of the world, and people who ridicule those who seek God and religion. Also how many wicked people there are in the world and how to deal with them. Such is the topic of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "What do you say, Narendra? Worldly men say all sorts of things. But see, when an elephant walks by, many animals roar and howl and bark, but the elephant doesn't

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1. Later Swami Vivekananda.

even look at them. If someone condemns you, what will you think of him?"

Narendra: "I'll think that dogs are barking at me."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "No, my child, you mustn't go that far. Know that God is in all things. But you must mix with the good and keep a distance from the bad. God is present even in a tiger, but surely you can't hug him for that reason. (*Laughter.*) If you say, 'The tiger is also God, why should I run away?' the answer is, 'He who says, "Run away!" is also God. Why should you not listen to him?

"Listen to a story:

"A sadhu lived in a forest. He had a number of disciples. He had taught them, 'Narayana is in all things. Knowing this, offer salutations to all.' One day a disciple went out to collect firewood for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly there was a shout, 'Run! Run away wherever you can! A mad elephant is coming!' Everyone ran except this disciple. He reasoned, There is Narayana in the elephant, too, so why should I run away? Thinking this, he stood still and saluted the elephant. He started to offer prayers. The mahut (elephant driver) shouted, 'Run away, run away!' Still the disciple did not move. Finally the elephant came and seized him with its trunk. It threw him on the ground, and then went on its way. The disciple, cut and bruised, lay unconscious on the ground.

"Hearing what had happened, his guru and brother disciples came and carried him back to the

ashrama and applied medications. After some time, when he came to, one of them asked, 'Why didn't you move away when you heard that a mad elephant was coming?' He answered, 'Because our master told us that Narayana Himself is present in all living creatures. Seeing the elephant coming as Narayana, I did not leave.' His guru replied, 'My son, indeed it is true that the elephant as Narayana was coming – but, my child, Narayana as the mahut warned you! If everybody is Narayana, why did you not listen to the mahut Narayana? You should have listened to the driver's words.'

"The scriptures say, 'Apo Narayana *(*water is God).' But some water is used for worship of God and some only for washing the face, mouth, hands, and clothes. The latter water cannot be used for drinking or for worship. Similarly, Narayana is in the hearts of the unholy as well as the holy, in the hearts of devotees and non-devotees. But one cannot have dealings with the unholy and wicked or be close to them. With some, one may only have a nodding acquaintance, while with others, even that is not possible. One must live apart from such people."

A devotee: "Sir, when a bad person tries to harm us or actually does so, should we do nothing?"

The household and spirit of resisting evil

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you live in the world, to protect yourself from bad people, you must make a show of tamas. But it isn't right to harm anyone just because you think he may harm you.

"A cowherd boy used to graze his cattle in a field where a terribly venomous snake lived. Everybody was very cautious because of the danger. One day a brahmachari was passing through the field. The cowherd boys ran up to him and said, 'Revered sir, please don't go this way. There is a terribly venomous snake here.' The holy man said, 'Child, never mind. I'm not afraid of it. I know a mantra to ward off this danger.' Saying this, he went into the field. Out of fear, no cowherd boy accompanied him. And here came the snake with its hood raised, moving swiftly. But as it came near, the holy man uttered the mantra and lo! the snake fell at his feet like an earthworm. 'Well,' he asked, 'why do you go around harming others? Come here. I'll give you a mantra to repeat so you'll develop love for God. Then your desire to harm others will leave you.' Saying this, he gave the mantra to the snake. The snake bowed before the guru and asked, 'Sir, please tell me what spiritual practice I should carry out.' The guru said, 'Repeat this mantra and don't harm anyone. I will come again.' Then he left.

"Some days passed and the cowherd boys noticed that the snake no longer tried to bite them. Even when they threw stones at it, it did not react – it had become like an earthworm. One day one of the boys went to it and caught hold of its tail. He whirled it around and around and dashed it several times on the ground. The snake vomited blood and fell unconscious. It could not move. The boys thought it was dead, so they left.

"Late that night, the snake regained consciousness and slowly dragged itself with great difficulty

into its hole. Its body was broken and it had no strength to move. After a few days, when it was reduced to a mere skeleton, the snake came out of its hole during the night to look for food. Being afraid of the boys, it did not come out during the day. After its initiation with the mantra, it ceased to harm anyone. It lived as well as it could on leaves and fruits fallen on the ground.

"After almost a year had passed, the brahmachari came that way again. He looked around for the snake, but the cowherd boys said it was dead. The brahmachari found that hard to believe. He knew that the snake had received a mantra, so death was out of the question before it had seen God. He searched where he had seen it last and called out for it by the name he had given it. Hearing the voice of its guru, the snake came out of its hole and bowed down reverently before him. The man asked, 'How are you?' The snake replied, 'I'm quite well, sir.' Again he asked, 'But why are you so weak?' The snake said, 'Holy sir, you asked me not to harm anybody. So I live on leaves and fruit. Perhaps this is the reason why I have grown weak.' The snake had developed the quality of sattva,[1] you see. That's why it didn't get angry with anyone. It had forgotten that the boys had tried to kill it. The holy man said, 'Lack of food alone could not have brought you to this pass. Surely there is something else. Just think about it.' The snake then remembered that the boys had once whirled it around and around and dashed it on the ground, so it said, 'Holy sir, now I remember. One day the

1. Serenity.

cowherd boys threw me violently on the ground, but they didn't know what change had come over my mind. How could they know that I wasn't going to bite them or do any harm?' The holy man said, 'Fie! You are so stupid! You don't even know how to save yourself! What I forbade was your biting. I didn't ask you not to hiss! Why didn't you frighten them away by hissing?'

"You should hiss at bad people to frighten them so they don't harm you. But you must not inject poison into others and injure them."

Are all men equal? Their natures differ

"In the Lord's creation there are different types of creatures and plants. Among animals, there are bad as well as good. There are beasts like tigers that kill others. Among trees, some bring forth fruit as sweet as nectar, but others yield poisonous fruit. In the same way, there are good men and bad men, holy and unholy, men attached to the world, and also devotees.

"People can be divided into four classes: those bound to the world, seekers after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-free.

"The ever-free, like Narada and others, are those who live in the world for the good of mankind, to teach truth to others.

"Bound souls are attached to worldly things. They forget God and never give a thought to Him.

"Seekers after liberation struggle for liberation. But only some of them attain it.

"The liberated are not attached to 'lust and greed' – for example, sadhus and great spiritual personalities. There is no attachment to worldly things in their minds. They always meditate on the lotus feet of God.

"Suppose a net is cast into water. Some of the fish are too clever to be caught in the net. They can be likened to ever-free souls. However, most of the fish get caught. Of these, some try to escape. They are like the seekers after liberation. But not all the fish can escape. Only a few are able to leap out of the net. The boys then shout, 'Look! A big fish has escaped!' But most of the fish caught in the net don't escape – they don't even try to. What is more, they hold the net in their mouths and lie quietly, trying to hide themselves in the mud at the bottom. They think, We are quite safe now; there is no danger. They don't know that the fishermen will haul them up with a jerk and throw them out on the river bank. They may be compared to worldly men."

Worldly men – bound in fetters

"Worldly men remain bound to 'lust and greed.' Although they are bound hand and foot, they still think they can find happiness and security in the world, in 'lust and gold.' They don't know that they will only die there. When a worldly man is on his deathbed, his wife says to him, 'You are departing. What have you done for me?' Besides, the influence of maya is such that, seeing a lamp burning for a long time, a bound man says, 'Too much oil is being used! Lower the wick!' And here he is, lying on his deathbed!

"A worldly man doesn't think of God. Even when he has leisure, he either indulges in empty talk or engages himself in useless activities. He says, 'I'm not able to sit idle, so I'll plant a hedge.' When time hangs heavy, he might even start playing cards." (*All laugh*.)

Chapter Seven

yo mām ajam anādiṁ ca vetti lokamaheśvaram |
asaṁmūḍhaḥ sa martyeṣu sarvapāpaiḥ pramucyate||

[He who knows Me as unborn and beginningless, the great Lord of the worlds, is no more deluded among mortals and is freed from all evils.]

– Bhagavad Gita 10:3

The way – faith

A devotee: "Sir, is there no way out for such a worldly man?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Certainly there's a way. To now and then seek the company of holy men, and at times to meditate on God in solitude. And you should practice discrimination and pray to God: 'Grant me love and faith!'

"Once you acquire faith, your work is done. There is nothing higher than faith.

(*To Kedar*) "You have heard how powerful faith is. The Purana says that Ramachandra, the perfect incarnation of Brahman and Narayana, had to build a bridge to reach Lanka. But Hanuman had such great faith in the name of Rama that, taking

Rama's name, he was able to jump across the sea. He had no need for a bridge. (*All laugh*.)

"Bibhishana wrote Rama's name on a leaf and tied it in the folds of the cloth of a man who wanted to cross the sea. Bibhishana said to him, 'Fear not. Have faith and walk across the sea. But mind you, as soon as you lose your faith, you will drown.' The man walked easily onto the water, but he was seized with intense curiosity to see what was tied in the folds of his cloth. He untied it and saw that it was just the name of Rama written on a leaf. He said to himself, 'What! Just the name of Rama?' In the instant that he lost faith, he sank.

"One who has faith in God can be saved from the vilest of sins, no matter what he may have done – killed a cow, a brahmin, or a woman. Let him only say, 'I shall not do so again.' Then he need not be afraid of anything."

Saying this, Thakur sings:

Mother, can I but die with Durga's name upon my lips,

I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end you cannot refuse to rescue me.

Should I have killed a Brahmin or a cow, or destroyed a child in the womb, or indulged in drink, or slain a woman,

For all those heinous deeds I care not in the least; still may I aspire to Brahman.

Narendra – the homa bird

"You all see this boy. He acts one way here. When a naughty boy is in the presence of his father, he behaves meekly, as if there were a goblin present. But when he plays in the chandni, he is quite different. A boy like this belongs to the class of the

ever-perfect. They never become attached to the world. When they are a little older, they feel an awakening within the heart and move directly towards God. They come to the world to teach mankind. They have no love for the things of the world. Their minds never go toward 'lust and greed.'

"A bird called homa is mentioned in the Vedas. It lives high up in the sky. There it lays an egg, and the egg begins to fall. But it is so high up that it goes on falling for days. During the fall, a young chick breaks out of the shell with its eyes open and its wings ready for flight. When it sees the earth fast approaching, to avoid being smashed on the ground, it suddenly swoops upward toward its mother high above."

Narendra rises and leaves. Kedar, Prankrishna, M., and many others remain in the room.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You see, Narendra excels in everything – singing, playing musical instruments, reading, and writing. The other day he had a discussion with Kedar. He just destroyed Kedar's arguments. (*Thakur and all the others laugh*.) (*To M.*) Is there a book in English on reasoning?"

M.: "Yes, sir. It's called *logic* in English."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, give me some idea of it."

M. now finds himself in a difficult situation. He says, "One part of logic is reasoning from the general proposition to a particular. For example: All men will die. Pundits are men. So pundits will die.

"Another part deals with reasoning from a particular illustration or event to a general proposition. Such as: This crow is black; that crow is black; all the crows I see are black; hence, all crows are black.

"But to arrive at a conclusion in such a way is open to fallacy. When you're looking for crows, you might find a white one somewhere. Another illustration is: Where there is rain, there must be clouds. The general proposition is that rain comes from clouds. Yet another illustration is: This man has thirty-two teeth. That man has the same number. Everybody we see has thirty-two teeth. Thus all men have thirty-two teeth.

"There are such general propositions in English logic."

Sri Ramakrishna listened to it all but, since his mind was elsewhere, there was no further talk on the subject.

Chapter Eight

śrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niścalā ।
samādhāvacalābuddhis tadā yogam avāpsyasi ।।

[When your intellect, perplexed by what you have heard, has become poised and firmly fixed in the Self; then you shall attain yoga.]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:53

In samadhi

The meeting ends. The devotees walk around here and there. M. strolls around the panchavati and other places. Returning to Sri Ramakrishna's room about five o'clock, he comes upon a strange sight on the small verandah north of the room:

Sri Ramakrishna is standing still. Narendra is singing a hymn, and devotees are standing around. M. is charmed with the song. Other than Thakur's, never and nowhere has he heard such a sweet voice. As he looks at Thakur, he becomes speechless. Thakur is standing motionless, his eyes unmoving. It is difficult to say whether or not he is breathing. When asked, a devotee tells him that this state is known as samadhi (superconscious awareness).

M. has never seen or heard of anything like this. He wonders to himself, Is it possible that the thought of God can make one lose outer-consciousness? How great must one's love and faith be to enter into such a state!

The song is as follows:

Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,
The essence of consciousness, free from all impurity.

Without equal is His glory, enchanting is His form!
How beloved is He in the hearts of His devotees.

The fresh beauty of newly awakened love
Casts into shade the effulgence of a million moons!

His glory flashes like lightning,
And His devotees' hair stands on end in sheer delight.

Sri Ramakrishna is deeply touched when this line of the hymn is chanted. The hair on his body stands on end. His eyes swim with tears of joy. Now and then he smiles, as though he were seeing

something. What vision of unequaled beauty might he be enjoying that would put into shade the effulgence of a million moons? Is this what is called the vision of God? What must the intensity of spiritual discipline and austerities be, how much love and faith must one have, to bring about such a vision!

The song goes on:

With a mind made pure and eyes sparkling with love,
Worship His holy feet in the lotus of your heart,
And gaze upon the peerless beauty of His beloved form.

That bewitching smile once more! His body becomes motionless in the same manner. Eyes fixed, it seems as if he is beholding a strange inner vision, seeing which he is swimming in supreme joy.

The song comes to an end. Narendra sings:

Spellbound in love divine, O mind, be ever immersed in Him, the fount of consciousness and love's sweet bliss.

Carrying in his heart this unique picture of samadhi and the bliss of love, M. leaves for home. Intoxicating sweet music bubbles up from time to time in his heart:

Spellbound in love divine, O mind, be ever immersed in Him, the fount of consciousness and love's sweet bliss.

Chapter Nine

yaṁ labdhvā cāparaṁ lābhaṁ manyate nādhikaṁ tataḥ |
yasmin sthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate ||

[And having gained which, he thinks there is no greater gain than that, therein established he is not shaken by even the profoundest affliction.]

– Bhagavad Gita 6:22

Fourth visit – joy and fun with Narendra, Bhavanath, and others

The next day, 6 March, is also a holiday. M. has come again at three o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller bed in his room. A mat is spread on the floor, on which Narendra, Bhavanath, and two other devotees are sitting. Some are young men, nineteen or twenty years old. A smile plays on Thakur's face as he talks happily with the devotees.

Seeing M. enter the room, Thakur laughs loudly and says to the devotees, "Look, he's here again!" They all join him in laughter. M. comes in and salutes Sri Ramakrishna, prostrating himself on the floor. Then he takes a seat. He had formerly saluted Thakur with folded hands, in the manner of English-educated people, but today he has learned to salute by lying face-down before him. As he sits down, Sri Ramakrishna tells Narendra and the other disciples what has made him laugh.

"Listen, some opium was given to a peacock at four o'clock in the afternoon. The next day the same peacock arrived punctually at four in the afternoon.

It had become an opium addict, so it came at the same time for another dose." (*All laugh*.)

> M. thinks to himself, He is right. I go back home, but my mind, day and night, is fixed on him, thinking, When shall I see him? When shall I see him? It's as if someone has pulled me here. I can't go anywhere else; even if I want to, I have to come here.

While M. is thinking this, Thakur amuses himself with the young men as if he were their age. Peals of laughter begin to fill the room, making it a centre of joy.

> M. is speechless as he looks at this unique character. He says to himself, Is this the same person I saw yesterday in samadhi, absorbed in a bliss of divine love that I have never seen before? Is this the same man behaving like an ordinary person today? Is it he who scolded me on my first visit, teaching me that God with form and the formless God are both true? Didn't he tell me that God alone is real and all else in the world is transitory? Didn't he advise me to live in the world like a maidservant?

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna is having great fun and glances at M. every now and then. He sees M. sitting in silence. Addressing Ramlal, he says, "You see, he's a little older, therefore somewhat serious. These people are laughing and having fun, but he sits quietly." M. was then about twenty-seven years old.

During the conversation, they talk of Hanuman, the great devotee. There is a picture of Hanuman on the wall of Thakur's room. Thakur says, "Just think of Hanuman's state of mind! He wanted neither wealth nor honour nor bodily comforts. He longed only for God. When he was running away

with the Brahmastra (a heavenly weapon of Brahma) taken from the crystalline pillar, Mandodari showed him many kinds of fruit. She thought that, tempted by fruit, he might climb down and drop the weapon. But Hanuman could not be tricked. He sang:

> Do I want for any fruits?
>
> The fruit that makes my life fruitful, that I have,
>
> For in my heart is planted the tree that bears the fruit of liberation – Sri Rama.
>
> Sitting beneath Sri Rama's wish-fulfilling tree,[1] whatever fruit I desire is mine.
>
> But the fruit of which you speak, my friend – for that common fruit I bargain not.
>
> I depart, leaving to you the bitter fruit of your deeds.

In samadhi

Singing this song, Thakur again goes into samadhi. Again his body is motionless, his eyes are fixed, and he sits still. He is seated the same as in the photograph. Only a moment ago the devotees were laughing and having fun; now they all gaze silently at him in this unique state. It is the second time that M. has observed Thakur in the state of samadhi. After some time a change comes: his body is relaxed and a smile plays on his face. His senses begin to function again in the normal way. Shedding tears of joy from the corners of his eyes, he repeats the name, "Rama! Rama!"

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1. Kalpataru.

M. says to himself, Is this the same great saint who was having such fun with the boys? Then he acted like a five-year-old child.

Returning to his normal state of mind, Thakur behaves like an ordinary man again. He says to M. and Narendra, "I would like to hear both of you talk in English. Question and reason among yourselves."

M. and Narendra both laugh at his words. They talk a little, but in Bengali. It is not possible for M. to argue any more in front of Thakur. His entire tendency to argue has been erased by Thakur's grace. How can he argue now? Thakur presses them once again, but talk in English does not come about.

Chapter Ten

tvam akṣaraṁ paramaṁ veditavyaṁ tvam asya viśvasya paraṁ nidhānam ।
tvam avyayaḥ śāśvatadharmagoptā sanātanas tvaṁ puruṣo mato me ।।

[You are the imperishable, the Supreme Being to be realized. You are the great resting place of this universe; You are the imperishable guardian of the eternal dharma. I deem You to be the ancient Purusha.]

– Bhagavad Gita 11:18

With his intimate disciples – 'who am I?'

It is five o'clock. Many devotees have gone, each one to his own home. Only M. and Narendra have remained. Narendra goes to the Hanspukur and the jhautala with a pitcher for washing. M. walks on

the path around the temple. After a while, he goes toward the Hanspukur near the kuthi. He finds Sri Ramakrishna standing on the steps of the staircase south of the tank. Narendra has washed his face and stands with the pitcher in his hands. Thakur is saying, "Look, you must come here more often. You are a newcomer, you see. After the first acquaintance, people meet more often, like a newly wedded husband. (*Narendra and M. laugh*.) Won't you come?" Narendra belongs to the Brahmo Samaj. He laughs and says, "Yes sir, I will try."

They all go back to Thakur's room by way of the kuthi path. Near the kuthi, Thakur says to M., "You know, peasants go to market to buy bullocks. They know a good bullock from a bad one easily. They touch the tail. Some bullocks lie down on the ground as soon as their tails are touched. Peasants don't buy such bullocks. They choose only those who spring up with a start as soon as their tails are touched. Narendra is a bullock of the latter class. There is a lot of mettle in him." Saying this, Thakur smiles and adds, "But there are so many who are soft, like puffed rice soaked in milk – no strength within, no grit. Soft and slippery."

It is dusk. Thakur is meditating on God. He says to M., "Go and talk to Narendra and tell me what sort of boy he is."

The arati is over. After quite some time, M. meets Narendra west of the chandni. They talk for a while. Narendra says, "I belong to the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. I am a college student," and so forth.

When night falls, M. decides to leave. Something, however, seems to hold him back, so when he leaves Narendra, he looks around for Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur's songs have charmed his heart and mind. He longs to hear him sing again. At last, he finds him alone, pacing up and down the natmandir in front of Mother Kali's temple. There are brilliant lights burning on both sides of the Mother in Her temple. The vast natmandir, however, has only one light, and it is rather dim, blending light and darkness.

M. is beside himself, spellbound like a snake, when he hears Thakur's songs. He asks Thakur humbly, "Will there be any more songs today?"

Thakur thinks for a moment and says, "No, there will be no more singing today." As he says this, it seems as if he is reminded of something and says immediately, "But you can do this. I'm going to Balaram's house in Calcutta. Come there. There you will have songs."

M.: "All right, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You know him, Balaram Bose?"

M.: "No, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Balaram Bose. His house is in Bosepara."

M.: "Very well, sir. I will find it."

Sri Ramakrishna (*as he walks in the natmandir with M.*): "Well, let me ask you something: what do you think of me?"

M. remains silent.

Thakur says again, "What do you feel? How many annas[1] of knowledge do I have?"

M.: "Annas! I don't understand. But never have I seen anywhere such knowledge, such love for God, such faith, such dispassion,[2] and such universality."

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna laughs.

After this conversation, M. bows and takes his leave.

He comes to the main gate but, remembering something, returns immediately. He goes to Sri Ramakrishna in the natmandir. Thakur is still walking up and down in that dim light – alone, with no companion, like a lion, the king of beasts, who walks alone in the forest. Atmarama,[3] the lion rejoices in being alone, in moving around companionless. M. stands, speechless, and again looks at the great man.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You've come back."

M.: "Sir, they may not let me enter the rich man's house. So I think I won't go there. It is here that I'll come to see you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, my dear sir, why not? You can mention my name. Say that you want to see me. Someone there will surely lead you to me."

Saying, "As you please," M. bows down again and leaves.

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1. Anna – sixteen annas make one rupee.
2. Vairagya; non-attachment.
3. Rejoicing in the Self within.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna's Steamer Trip with Keshab Chandra Sen In Joy and Conversation

Chapter One

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna – in samadhi

Today is the day of the Kojagar Lakshmi Puja,[1] Friday, 27 October 1882. Thakur is seated in his room at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar, talking with Vijay Goswami and Haralal. Someone comes in to tell him that Keshab Sen has come in a steamer and is waiting for him at the ghat.

Keshab's disciples salute Sri Ramakrishna and say, "Sir, the steamer has arrived. Please come for a little excursion. Keshab Sen is on board and has sent us to invite you."

It is 4 o'clock when Thakur boards the steamer from a smaller boat. Vijay accompanies him. As Sri Ramakrishna steps aboard, he loses outer consciousness and goes into samadhi.

M., who had boarded the steamer at 3 o'clock in Calcutta, looks at Thakur in samadhi. He is very eager to witness the meeting between Thakur and

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1. Kojagar Lakshmi Puja: the full-moon night of the dark fortnight of Aswin. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, is worshiped in North India on Diwali night. In Bengal Lakshmi is worshiped fifteen days prior to Diwali. On Diwali, the festival of lights, people worship Kali in Bengal.

Keshab, to observe their joy and to hear their conversation.

By his saintly character and eloquence, Keshab has captivated the minds of many young Bengali men like M. Regarding Keshab as their own, many have given him their heart's love. Keshab is British-educated and well versed in English philosophy and literature. He has often described the worship of gods and goddesses as idolatry. It is rather strange that such a man looks upon Sri Ramakrishna with reverence and admiration and visits him occasionally. M. and others are curious to find on what common ground they agree. Though Thakur believes in the formless God, he also holds that God is with form. He meditates on Brahman, but at the same time worships gods and goddesses with flowers, incense, and other offerings. Then again, diving deep in intense love for God, he sings and dances. He sits on his bed, which is covered with a bedspread. He wears a red-bordered dhoti, shirt, socks, and shoes, but he is not a householder. His prevailing mood[1] is entirely that of a sannyasin, hence people call him a paramahamsa. On the other hand, Keshab believes in God without form, has a wife and children, and lives the life of a householder, delivering lectures in English, publishing a paper, and attending to worldly affairs.

Toward the east are a cement ghat and the chandni, the portal of the temple. On either side of the chandni stands a row of twelve Shiva temples, six on the right and six on the left. On the canvas of the blue autumn sky are visible the pinnacle of the temple of Bhavatarini and to the north, the top of the trees of the panchavati and the willowgrove. Near the bakultala is a music pavilion and to the south of the Kali Temple is another music pavilion. Between them are garden paths and rows of flowering plants. The blue of the sky is reflected in the holy waters of the

1. Bhava.

Ganges[1] and a serene atmosphere prevails. The same serenity is in the hearts of the Brahmo devotees. Above is the beautiful, dark blue, infinite sky; in front, the beautiful temple; and below, the holy water of the Ganges.

On the banks of the sacred river Aryan rishis have meditated on God since ancient times. Now again a special Great Soul[2] has come, an incarnation of the Eternal Religion.[3] It is not the fortune of most men to observe such a sight. Seeing such a great soul in samadhi, who would not but feel the stirring of love for God? Whose stone-like heart would not melt?

Chapter Two

vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni gṛhṇāti naro
'parāṇi |
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāni anyāni saṁyāti navāni
dehī ||

[As a man, having cast away old garments, puts on new ones, so, having cast away worn-out bodies, the soul enters into new ones.]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:22

In samadhi – the imperishable Atman – Pavhari Baba

The boat has come alongside the steamer. There is a big crowd, all eager to see Sri Ramakrishna. Keshab is very anxious that Thakur be brought safely aboard the steamer. With great difficulty he is brought back to normal consciousness and taken inside the cabin. He is still in divine ecstasy and

1. Jahnavi.
2. Mahapurusha.
3. Sanatana Dharma.

leans on a devotee as he walks. As he enters the cabin, his feet move without his awareness. Keshab and the other devotees salute him, but he has no sense-consciousness. Inside the cabin are some chairs and a table. Thakur is made to sit on a chair. Keshab sits on another, and Vijay also has taken a seat. Other devotees sit wherever they find a place, even on the bare floor. Many don't find a place but peer in from outside. Thakur, after sitting down, again goes into samadhi, absolutely devoid of outer consciousness. All eyes are on him. Keshab sees that so many people are in the cabin that Thakur might need more air. As the air in the room is stuffy because of the crowd of people, Keshab opens the windows.

Keshab is also a little embarrassed to see Vijay, who had left the Brahmo Samaj and joined the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj instead. Vijay spoke against many of Keshab's activities, such as the early marriage of his daughter. Keshab leaves his seat to open a window of the cabin.

The Brahmo devotees look fixedly at Sri Ramakrishna. He comes down from samadhi but is still fully absorbed in divine fervour.[1] He speaks in a voice that is hardly audible, "Mother, why have You brought me here? Shall I be able to save them from their prison?"

> Does Thakur look upon men of the world as though they are in prison, unable to come out, unable to see the light outside? All of them are bound hand and foot by worldly affairs. They only see the things that are within their prison and think the aim of life is only to

1. Bhava.

enjoy physical comfort, worldly work, "lust and greed." Is it for this reason that Thakur says, "Mother, why have You brought me here? Shall I be able to free them from their prison?"

Thakur gradually regains outer consciousness. Nil Madhava of Ghazipur and a Brahmo devotee begin to talk about Pavhari Baba.

Brahmo devotee (*to Thakur*): "Sir, they have all seen Pavhari Baba. He lives in Ghazipur. He is another holy man like yourself."

Even now Thakur is not in a position to speak. He smiles gently.

Brahmo devotee (*to Thakur*): "Sir, Pavhari Baba has your photograph in his room."

Thakur smiles and says, pointing to his body, "This pillow case!"

Chapter Three

yat sāṅkhyaiḥ prāpyate sthānaṁ tadyogair api
gamyate।
ekaṁ sāṅkhyaṁ ca yogaṁ ca yaḥ paśyati sa
paśyati ।।

[The state reached by the jnani is also attained by the yogi. He indeed sees rightly who sees that jnana and yoga are one.]

– Bhagavad Gita 5:5

Harmony of jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, and karma yoga

The pillow and its pillow case – the soul and the body. Is Thakur saying that the body is perishable, that it won't last, that only the soul within the body is imperishable? So what is the use of having a

photograph of the body? The body is transitory. Why have regard for it? Rather, it is right to worship only the antaryamin, God who is present within the human heart.

Thakur has returned partially to the normal state of consciousness. He says, "But there is one thing. The heart of the devotee is His dwelling place. It may be that God is manifest in all things, but He is manifest in a special sense in the heart of a devotee of God. For example, a landlord can be seen any place on his estate. Still, people say that he is usually seen in a particular drawing room. The heart of the devotee is the Lord's drawing room." (*All rejoice.*)

One Lord with different names –
the jnani, the yogi, and the devotee

"The same Being whom jnanis call Brahman (the Absolute) is called Atman (Universal Soul) by yogis and Bhagavan (Personal God with divine attributes) by devotees.

"A brahmin is one and the same person. When he worships, he is called a priest; when employed in the kitchen, he is called a brahmin cook. The jnani holds to jnana yoga by reasoning, 'Not this, not this.' That is, Brahman is neither this nor that, neither the individual soul nor the external world. When, as a result of this reasoning, the mind becomes steady, it vanishes, and one goes into samadhi. Then one attains brahmajnana.[1] The knower of Brahman truly realizes that Brahman is real and the world unreal; names and forms are all

1. Knowledge of the Absolute.

but dreams. What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words, nor can He be said to be a person.

"Jnanis say the same as the Vedantists. But devotees accept all the states of consciousness. They look upon the waking state as real, and they do not consider the external world a dream. Devotees say that this world is the glory of God. The sky, the stars, the sun, the moon, the mountains, the ocean, men, birds, and beasts – all are created by God. These are His 'riches.' He is both within the core of the heart and He is without. The superior devotee says, 'God Himself has become the twenty-four categories[1] – living beings and the universe.' The devotee does not want to become sugar, but to taste it. (*All laugh*.)

"Do you know how a devotee feels? 'Oh Lord, You are the Master, I am Your servant. You are my Mother, I am Your child. And again, You are both my Mother and Father. You are the whole, I am Your part.' The devotee doesn't like to say, 'I am Brahman.'

"The yogi[2] seeks to see the Paramatman. His aim is union of the embodied soul with the

1. The twenty-four categories or cosmic principles enunciated in the Samkhya Philosophy are: *mahat*, cosmic intelligence; *buddhi*, the discriminating faculty; *ahamkara*, the sense of ego; *manas*/mind-stuff/*chitta*, the recording faculty; five organs of sense-perception (hearing, touch, sight, taste, smell); five organs of action (hands, feet, speech, organ of excretion, organ of generation); five *tanmatras* (sound-potential, touch-potential, sight-potential, taste-potential, smell-potential), the finer materials of the gross elements which, combining and recombining produce the five gross elements (ether/akasha/space, air, fire, water, and earth).
2. The aspirant who seeks union with God through raja yoga, the path of meditation.

Supreme Self.[1] The yogi withdraws his mind from worldly objects and tries to fix it on the Paramatman. So to begin with, he meditates on Him in solitude, in a fixed posture, with a concentrated mind.

"But It is one and the same Substance. The difference is only in name. He who is Brahman is Himself the Atman and also God. He is the Brahman of the Brahmajnani,[2] the Paramatman of the yogi,[3] and the Lord of the devotee."[4]

Chapter Four

tvameva sūkśmā tvaṁ sthūlā vyaktāvyaktasva-
rūpiṇī|
nirākārāpi sākārā kastvaṁ veditum arhati||

[You are the subtle and You are the gross; You, O Mother, are manifest as well as unmanifest. You are both with form and formless. Who has the capacity to know You?]

– Mahanirvana Tantra 4:15

Harmony of Veda and Tantra – glory of the Primordial Power

The steamer is on its way to Calcutta. Those who are having the darshan of Sri Ramakrishna and listening to his nectar-like words in the cabin are not even conscious of the movement of the steamer. Does a bee buzz when it rests on a flower?

---

1. Paramatman.
2. Monist.
3. The seeker of union.
4. Dualist.

Dakshineswar, with its beautiful Kali temple, has slowly vanished from sight. As the steamer plows through the holy waters of the Ganges that reflect the blue firmament above, the waves are broken into crests of foam, making a rushing sound. But the murmurs of the waves are now lost on the ears of the devotees. Spellbound, they gaze at the smiling, joyful, sweet face and loving eyes of this wonderful yogi. They see in him an all-renouncing and loving vairagi[1] intoxicated with love for God and knowing nothing other than God. In the meantime Sri Ramakrishna talks to them.

Sri Ramakrishna: "The followers of non-dualistic Vedanta say that creation, preservation, dissolution, living beings, and the world are all playful manifestations[2] of Shakti (the Divine Power). If you reason it out, you will find that they are all illusory, like dreams. Brahman alone is the Reality, all else is unreal. Shakti is also like a dream, unreal.

"But you may reason a thousand times and you will not go beyond the jurisdiction of Shakti without attaining the state of samadhi. 'I am meditating,' 'I am thinking' – all this is within the jurisdiction of Shakti.

"That's why Brahman and Shakti are inseparable. Belief in one implies belief in the other – like fire and its burning power. If you consider fire, you must consider its burning power. Fire cannot be thought of apart from its burning power, nor can its burning power be thought of apart from the fire. The sun's rays cannot be conceived of apart

1. One who is dispassionate for everything but God.
2. Lila.

from the sun, nor can the sun be conceived of apart from its rays.

"What is milk like? Well, it is something white. Its whiteness cannot be conceived of apart from the milk, nor can the milk be conceived of apart from its whiteness.

"Thus, Shakti cannot be thought of apart from Brahman, nor can Brahman be thought of apart from Shakti. Nitya (the Absolute) and lila (the relative phenomenal world) cannot be thought of apart from each other.

"The Primordial Divine Energy[1] creates, preserves, and dissolves. She is known as Kali (the Mother of the universe). Kali is Brahman and Brahman is Kali, one and the same substance. When She is inactive – neither creating, nor preserving, nor destroying – I call her Brahman. When She performs all these activities, I call Her Kali, I call Her Shakti. But the Being is the same, only the names and forms are different. For example – jal, water, and pani. A reservoir may have three or four ghats. At one ghat Hindus drink water and they call it jal. At another ghat Muslims drink water and they call it pani. At another ghat the English drink water and call it water. These three are one and the same. Only the names are different. Some call Him Allah, some God, some Brahman, some Kali, again some call Him Rama, Hari, Jesus, and Durga."

Keshab: "Please tell us in what different ways Kali manifests Herself."

---

1. Adya Shakti.

Talk with Keshab – Mahakali and mode of creation

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "She plays in various ways. She Herself is Mahakali (the Goddess, unconditioned, Absolute, without form), Nityakali (the everlasting Goddess), Shmasanakali (Goddess of the cremation ground), Rakshakali (the Goddess that blesses and is ready to preserve) and Shyamakali (the Mother of dark blue complexion, the consort of Shiva, the God of eternity and infinity). The Tantras speak of Mahakali and Nityakali. When there was no creation, no moon, no sun, no planets, no earth – nothing but deep darkness – then there was only the formless Divine Mother Mahakali living with Mahakala.

"Shyamakali has a very tender heart. She is the bestower of fearlessness. She is worshiped in households. In times of epidemics, famine, earthquakes, drought, and floods, you should worship Rakshakali. Shmasanakali has the form of destruction. She lives in the midst of dead bodies, jackals, and dakinis and yoginis[1] in cremation grounds. Streams of blood pour from Her mouth. She wears a garland of skulls around Her neck, and at her waist She wears a girdle of human hands. At the time of the total dissolution of the world,[2] the Mother preserves all the seeds of creation, just as the mistress of the house has a hodgepodge pot in which she keeps things of all kinds. (*Keshab and the others laugh.*)

1. The spirits of destruction.
2. Mahapralaya.

(*Smiling*) "Yes, my friend, the mistress of the house does have such a pot in her possession. In it she keeps sea-foam in a solid state, small packets containing the seeds of cucumber, pumpkin, gourd, and so on. All types of seeds are kept carefully. She brings them out when needed. In the same way the Divine Mother keeps all the seeds at the time of the dissolution of the world. After the creation, the Primordial Divine Energy lives very much in the world. Giving birth to the world, She lives within it. The Vedas talk of the Urnanabhi – the spider and its web. The spider creates a web out of itself and then lives in that same web. The Lord is both the container and the contents of the world."

Kali is Brahman – with form and without form

"Is Kali dark? She seems to be of dark complexion because She is far off. When you know Her, She does not appear dark.

"The sky appears to be blue because of distance. When seen up close, it has no colour. Sea water appears blue from a distance. When you go near it and take some in the palm of your hand, it has no colour."

Saying this, drunk with the wine of divine love, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing a song:

> Infinite is the garment that She wears! She illumines the lotus of the heart!

Chapter Five

tribhir guṇamayair bhāvair ebhiḥ sarvam idaṁ
jagat।
mohitaṁ nābhijānāti mām ebhyaḥ param
avyayam ।।

[Deluded by the three gunas, this world does not know Me, who am beyond them and immutable.]

– Bhagavad Gita 7:13

Why does this world exist?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and others*): "She is the creator of both bondage and liberation. Due to Her maya (illusion), worldly man is bound with the chains of 'lust and greed.' And then he is liberated by Her mercy and grace. She is the Being who takes bound souls across the sea of the world by removing their fetters."

Saying this, Thakur sings a song by Ramprasad in a voice sweeter than the gods of the heavens[1] who sing the glories of the Most High:

In the world's bustling marketplace, O Shyama, You fly kites that soar on the wind of hope, held fast by maya's string,

Kites made of bone, nerve, and skin, all fashioned from the gunas three. How intricate is their workmanship!

With worldliness have You imbued their strings, rubbed with a paste of powdered glass to make them sharp and strong.

Among a hundred thousand kites only one or two break free. And then, O Mother, how you laugh and clap your hands!

1. Gandharvas.

> Says Ramprasad, A kite set free will swiftly ride the favouring wind across this world's ocean and soon alight on the other shore.

"The Mother is always in Her sportive mood. This world is Her sport. She has Her own way and She is full of joy. She liberates only one among millions."

A Brahmo devotee: "Sir, She can free everyone if She so desires. Why has She bound us with the chains of the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is Her pleasure! It is Her desire to sport with all this. If a player touches the "granny" (in the game of hide and seek), he no longer has to run about. If all the players touch her, how will the game continue? If everyone should touch the "granny," she would be unhappy. The "granny" is happy for the game to continue. That's why She (the Mother of the Universe) is happy and claps Her hands when She cuts the string of one or two kites (bound souls) out of a hundred thousand. (*All laugh*.)

"With a wink of Her eye, She has directed the mind to go and enjoy the world. How can it be the fault of the mind? Again, by Her grace, when She turns that mind from the clutches of worldliness, one is liberated. Then the mind goes to Her lotus feet."

Thakur sings, assuming the position of a man of the world, expressing his complaint to the Divine Mother:

> This is the grief that weighs on my heart: though You, my Mother, are here and I am wide awake, thieves of passion rob my house.

> Time and again I resolve to repeat Your holy name, yet at the proper hour forget. Now I understand: this is all Your trick!
>
> As You have not given, so have You not received. Am I to blame? Had You but given, surely You would have received. Out of Your own gifts would I have given to You.
>
> Glory and infamy, the bitter and the sweet – all these are Yours. O Mother, ever immersed in your own sweet bliss, why do you break my tender feelings?
>
> Says Ramprasad, You have given me this mind and turned it, with a wink, to seek enjoyment in the world. And so I wander, as if cursed by an evil eye, taking the bitter for the sweet and the unreal for the real.

"Baffled by Her delusion, man has become worldly. Ramprasad says, 'You have given me this mind and have turned it, with a wink, to seek enjoyment in the world.'"

Instruction about karma yoga – the world and selfless work[1]

A Brahmo devotee: "Sir, isn't it possible to realize God without renouncing everything?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Of course. Why do you have to renounce everything? You are fine and happy as you are. You are all right at 'do, re, mi' (lower notes of the musical scale). (*All laugh*.) Do you know the game of nax (a game of cards)? I have been 'burnt.' I have scored too many times, so I am out of the game. You are very clever. Some of you are at ten points, some at six, and others at five (out of the seventeen needed to win). You didn't score more, so you have not been 'burnt' like me. The game is going on nicely! (*Everybody laughs*.)

1. Nishkama karma.

"Truly, I tell you, there is nothing wrong in living as a householder, as you are. However, you have to fix your mind on God. Otherwise, it won't do. Do your work with one hand and hold onto God with the other. When you finish your work, you will hold God with both hands.

"It is the mind that matters. If the mind is bound, you are bound; if the mind is free, you are free. The mind gets dyed in the colour into which it is dipped. It is just like a laundered white cloth. You can dip it in any colour – red, blue, or green. It gets the colour you dip it into. Just see, if you study a little English, you start speaking English in spite of yourself: Foot-fut, it-mit. (*All laugh.*) And also putting on shoes (English boots), whistling and singing – all these actions follow. If a pundit studies Sanskrit, he starts quoting slokas. If the mind is kept in bad company, it adopts the same style of conversation and thoughts. If you keep it in the company of devotees, and if you meditate on God, then talk about God will follow.

"It is, indeed, the mind that matters. You have a wife on one side and a child on the other. The attraction for the wife is of one kind, the affection for the child is another. But the mind is the same."

Chapter Six

sarvadharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja।
ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣyayiṣyāmi mā
śucaḥ।।

[Relinquishing all duties, take refuge in Me alone. I shall liberate you from all sins; grieve not.] – Bhagavad Gita 18:66

Instruction to Brahmos – Christianity, Brahmo Samaj, and the concept of sin

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Brahmo devotees*): "It is the mind that binds and it is the mind that liberates. I am a free soul, I may live in the household or in the forest, there is no bondage for me. I am a child of the Lord, the son of the King of Kings; who will bind me then? When bitten by a snake, if you say with con-viction, 'There is no poison!' you are rid of the venom. In the same way, if you say emphatically, 'I am not bound, I am free!' you become so. You become liberated."

The earlier story of his life – Sri Ramakrishna listens to the Bible – Krishnakishore's faith

"Someone gave me a book on Christianity. I asked him to read it to me. It contained sin and sin alone. (*To Keshab*) Your Brahmo Samaj also speaks of sin and sin alone. One who constantly says, 'I am bound, I am bound,' that rascal really becomes bound! He who repeats day and night, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner,' does become a sinner.

"One should have such faith in the name of God that one feels: 'I have chanted His name. How can I still be a sinner? What sin is there for me? What bondage for me?' Krishnakishore is a pious Hindu, a brahmin who worships the Lord with single-minded devotion. Once he went to Vrindavan. Walking around one day, he felt thirsty. He came to a well where a man was standing. He said to the man, 'Brother, will you please give me some water? Of what caste are you?' The man replied, 'Revered sir, I belong to a low caste – a cobbler.'

Krishnakishore said, 'Just say "Shiva" and then draw water for me.'

"By chanting the name of God, both the body and mind become pure.

"Why talk of sin and hell? Just say but once, 'I shall not repeat the wrongs I have done,' and have faith in His name."

Thakur, overwhelmed with love, sings of the power of God's name.

Mother, can I but die with Durga's name upon my lips,

I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end You cannot refuse to rescue me?[1]

"I prayed to my Divine Mother for pure love of God. Holding flowers in my hands I offered them at Her lotus feet and said, 'O Mother, take Your sin and Your merit, and grant that I may have only pure love for You. Take Your knowledge and take Your ignorance, and grant me pure love for You. Here is Your purity, and here Your impurity; grant me pure love. Take Your righteousness[2] and Your un-righteousness,[3] and grant me pure love.'"

(*To the Brahmo devotees*) "Listen to a song by Ramprasad."

Come, O mind, let us go for a walk to Kali, the wish-fulfilling tree, and gather there the four fruits of life.[4]

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1. For complete song see Section I, Chapter VII of this book.
2. Dharma.
3. Adharma.
4. Four fruits: Dharma (good works), artha (wealth), kama (desires), moksha (liberation).

Of your two wives, Desire[1] and Dispassion,[2] take only Dispassion along, and ask her eldest son, Discrimination,[3] for the truth about Reality.

When will you lie down happily between your wives, Purity and Defilement? When you see no difference between these two, then shall you see the Divine Mother Kali.

Drive out your parents, Ego and Ignorance, and should Delusion attempt to drag you into its pit, hold fast to the post of Patience.

Tie the goats of Virtue and Vice to the post of Unconcern, and should they become unruly, kill them both with the sword of knowledge.

Admonish, O mind, the children of your first wife, Desire, and tell them to keep their distance. Should they not obey you, then drown them in the sea of knowledge.

Ramprasad says: If you can do this, you will render a proper account to the Lord of Death, and I shall be pleased to call you my dear one, a mind after my own heart.

"Why should God-realization not be possible while living in a household? King Janaka realized God. This world is a 'structure of dreams,' Ramprasad said. After attaining love and devotion at His lotus feet:

The world is indeed a source of joy, so let me eat, drink, and be merry!

Was King Janaka in any way below a holy man who has given up the world?

Oh no, he was loyal to both matter and Spirit, having realized God while he drank his cup of milk. (*All laugh*.)

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1. Pravritti.
2. Nivritti.
3. Viveka.

Brahmo Samaj and King Janaka – the way of the household – to live in solitude and discrimination

"But one cannot become King Janaka all at once. King Janaka performed austerity in solitude for a long time. Even while living in the family, one must go into solitude at times. It's good if one can cry for God even for three days in solitude, away from home. But even if a man goes into solitude for a day when he gets the opportunity, and thinks of Him, that too is good. People shed pitchers full of tears for wife and children, but who cries for God, tell me? One should go into solitude at times and perform spiritual practices[1] to realize God. In the beginning there are many difficulties in making the mind steady while attending to all the duties of the world. The mind, in the initial stage, is like a young tree on the footpath; it may be eaten by goats or cows. A fence is needed to protect it. When, however, the trunk grows big and strong, no fence is needed. Then even an elephant tied to the trunk will not harm it.

"Take the disease of typhoid. There is a pot of water and tamarind pickles in the room where a patient is lying. If you want to cure this patient, you'll have to remove him from the room. A worldly man is a typhoid patient, worldly things are pots of water, and the desire for sense enjoyments is his thirst. The mouth begins to water at the mere thought of tamarind pickles. They should not be placed near the patient. Such things are present in the household – the company of a woman and so on.

1. Sadhana.

That is why living in solitude is necessary for a cure.

"One can enter family life after attaining discrimination and dispassion.[1] In the ocean of the world are the crocodiles of passion – anger and so forth. If you enter the water after smearing your body with turmeric, you need not fear the crocodiles. Discrimination and non-attachment are the turmeric. Knowledge of what is real and what is unreal is known as discrimination. God alone is real and eternal. All else is unreal, transitory, lasting just a few days. One must realize this and develop love for God, attachment to God, devotion to Him. The gopis had such an attraction for Krishna. Here is a song:"

The way – love for God – attachment, or attraction like that of gopis

Listen! The flute plays in yonder wood.

There I must go, where Krishna[2] awaits me on the path.

Tell me, dear friends, will you not come along?

To you, my friends, Krishna is but a mere name, an empty name,

But to me He is an ache in my heart.

You hear His flute with only your ears, but I hear it playing in my heart:

Krishna's flute that beckons, "Come, O Radha!

Without you there is no beauty in the grove."

Singing this song with tears in his eyes, Thakur says to Keshab and the other devotees, "You may or

1. Viveka and vairagya.
2. Shyam, of dark blue complexion.

may not accept Radha and Krishna, but make their feelings of attraction and attachment your own. Who has such yearning for God? Make an effort. Only when you yearn for God, will you realize Him."

Chapter Seven

saṁniyamyendriyagrāmaṁ sarvatra samabuddha-
yaḥ ।
te prāpnuvanti mām eva sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ ।।

[Having restrained the multitude of senses, even-minded in everything, rejoicing in the welfare of all beings, they indeed come to Me.]

– Bhagavad Gita 12:4

Steamer trip with Keshab Sen – engaged in the welfare of all beings

It is ebb tide and the steamer is progressing rapidly toward Calcutta. The captain has given orders to go a little farther down the river to the Botanical Gardens on the other side of the bridge. How far the steamer has gone is not known to many, they have been listening to Sri Ramakrishna's words with such rapt attention. They have no idea of time.

They are all eating puffed rice with coconut that they have kept in the folds of their cloths. It is a festivity of joy. Keshab had arranged for the puffed rice. At this moment Thakur sees that Vijay and Keshab are not at ease in each other's company. Now he will make them compromise, as if they are two innocent boys. He is engaged in the welfare of all beings.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab*): "Look, Vijay is here. Your disputes and differences are like battles between Rama and Shiva. (*Laughter.*) Shiva is

Rama's guru. They had a fight, and then they made up. But the fighting and gibberish between Shiva's ghosts and Rama's monkeys has no end! (*Loud laughter*.)

"You are the same flesh and blood. Yet, you know, such things can't be avoided. Lava and Kusha (Rama's sons) fought a war with their father. And, you know, a mother and her daughter observe Tuesday's fast and prayers separately. It's as if the good fortune of the mother and the daughter were different. In fact, the mother's Tuesday observance brings good fortune to the daughter, just as her daughter's separate observance does for her mother. In the same way, Keshab has a samaj (religious society) of his own and Vijay thinks he must have a separate samaj. (*Laughter*.) Still, it is necessary. You may ask, 'When the Lord Himself enacts His sport why is there need for Jatila and Kutila?'[1] Without troublemakers like Jatila and Kutila, the sport doesn't develop. (*All laugh*.) And without Jatila and Kutila, there is no fun. (*Loud laughter*.)

"Ramanuja was a believer in the doctrine of Vishishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism). His guru believed in Advaitavada (non-dualism). In the end they had differences. The guru and the disciple started criticising each other's views. This happens quite often, even though people are our own flesh and blood."

1. Troublemakers who disturb the peace.

Chapter Eight

pitāsi lokasya carācarasya tvam asya pūjyaśca gurur
garīyān ।
na tvatsamo 'sty abhyadhikaḥ kuto 'nyo lokatraye
'py apratimaprabhāva ।।

[You are the Father of the moving and the unmoving universe. You are adored by this world, You are the revered Guru. In the three worlds there is none who can surpass you. You, O Being of incomparable power!]

– Bhagavad Gita 11:43

Advice to Keshab – gurudom and Brahmo Samaj – Sat-chit-ananda alone is Guru

All are rejoicing. Thakur says to Keshab: "You do not examine the nature of your disciples before accepting them. That's why they break away like this.

"Men are the same in appearance, but they differ in nature. In some, sattvaguna[1] dominates, in others rajoguna,[2] and again in others tamoguna.[3] Puli (a kind of stuffed sweet) may all have the same look. But some contain sweetened condensed milk, some the kernel of coconut sweetened by treacle or sugar, and some have kalai pulse boiled without any sweetening added. (*All laugh*.)

"Do you know what I think about it? I go on eating and drinking, and the Divine Mother knows

1. Qualities that lead Godward.
2. Qualities that incline one to multiply work and duty.
3. Qualities that cause ignorance and laziness and turn the mind away from God.

all. There are three words that prick me – guru, doer, and father.

"There is only one Guru, who is Sat-chit-ananda. It is Sat-chit-ananda alone who teaches. For my part, I feel like a child. You can find lakhs of men as gurus. Everyone wants to be a guru. Who wants to be a disciple?

"Teaching mankind is very difficult. It is only when God manifests and gives a commission that it is possible. Narada, Sukadeva, and others received that command to teach. Sankaracharya also was commissioned by God. If you are not commissioned, who will listen to you? You know the minds of Calcutta people. So long as there is fire, the milk continues to boil. As soon as the fire is withdrawn, it stops boiling. The people of Calcutta are so impatient. For need of water, they start digging a well, but give up when they find a few rocks. Then they start digging at another place. If they find sand there, they become discouraged and look once again for another place to dig. This is what they do.

"Again, it's not enough to imagine that you have received God's command. Such an idea is quite mistaken. God actually appears before you and speaks to you. Only then do you receive the command. What a weight such words carry then! They can move a mountain. Mere lecturing? People will listen for a few days and then forget. They won't act on the instruction."

Earlier story of his life – ecstatic vision of Haldarpukur

"In the countryside (at Thakur's native village) is a pond called Haldarpukur. People used to defecate on its bank every morning. Others would shout abuse, yet the same thing would happen the next day. The defecation didn't stop. People then ap-proached the Company (Municipality). They, in turn, sent out an official to put up a notice that said, 'Do not relieve yourself here.' The nuisance stopped immediately. (*Everybody laughs.*)

"To teach others, a person must have the badge of authority. Without it, the teaching is ridiculous. We do not teach ourselves, but go preach to others instead! It is like the blind leading the blind. (*Laughter.*) It brings more harm than good. Only when you have seen God can you see through other people and understand what diseases of the soul they have been stricken with. Only then can you instruct them."

Clouded by egotism one thinks that he is the doer[1]

"You must have a direct command from God. Otherwise, it will only be self-assertion to say, 'I teach mankind.' Self-assertion is the offspring of ignorance. Out of ignorance one feels, 'I am the doer.' One becomes a jivanmukta only by realizing, 'God is the sole actor in the three worlds. I am a mere instrument in His hands.' All troubles, all

1. Ahamkār vimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate। Bhagavad Gita 3:27.

want of peace, come from the notion, 'I am the doer, I am a free agent.'"

Chapter Nine

tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara ।
asakto hyācarankarma param āpnoti pūruṣaḥ ।।

[Therefore, constantly perform your own duties without attachment; for by doing duties without attachment, man verily obtains the Supreme.]

– Bhagavad Gita 3:19

The steamer trip – instruction to Keshab and other Brahmo devotees on karma yoga

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and the other devotees*): "You talk of doing good to the world. I ask you, is the world so small? Who are you to do good to the world? Attain God by performing spiritual prac-tices. Attain Him. He will give you power. Only then will you be able to do good to others; otherwise not."

A devotee: "Should we give up all work until we realize God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, why should you give up work? You will have to do all this: meditate on God, chant His names and glories, and perform your daily devotions."

A Brahmo devotee: "But what about worldly work? Worldly affairs?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you should attend to that too, as much as is necessary to run the household. But you must cry in a lonely corner and

pray to God so that you do all these works selflessly.[1] And you should pray, 'O Lord, please lessen my worldly work, because O Lord, I see that when I am engrossed in too much work, I forget You. I think that I'm doing the work in a selfless way, but it turns out to be with a motive.[2] A desire for name and fame can crop up when I increase my giving in charity and distributing free meals.'"

The earlier story of his life – talk on activities such as charity with Sambhu Mallick

"Sambhu Mallick brought up the topic of hospitals, dispensaries, schools, roads, and reservoirs. I said to him, 'You should do only that which comes your way and which appears to be of pressing necessity – this too in the spirit of not expecting any reward. Don't seek more work. If you do, you will lose sight of God. Say you go to the Kalighat Temple and busy yourself in distributing alms – but you miss the darshan of Kali! (*Laughter*.) First of all, have the darshan of Kali, even if you have to push your way through to reach Her. Afterwards you may or may not practice charity. If you like, give as much as you can. After all, work is meant for realizing God. That's why I said to Sambhu, 'Suppose the Lord appears before you, what will you say to Him? "Please build a number of hospitals and dispensaries?"' (*Laughter*.) A devotee never asks for such things. Instead he says, 'Lord, grant me a place at Your lotus feet, always keep me with You, grant me pure love and devotion to Your lotus feet.'

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1. Nishkama.
2. Sakama.

"Karma yoga is very hard indeed. The rituals laid down in the sacred books are very hard to practice in the Kaliyuga. Life is dependent on food. Too much work is not possible. It will all be over for the patient suffering from fever if he's given a slow-acting treatment as prescribed by an old-fashioned Hindu physician[1] – he cannot last long. These days he needs the fast-acting fever mixture of D. Gupta.[2] In the Kaliyuga one should practice Bhakti Yoga, chanting the Lord's name and His glories, and prayer. Indeed, Bhakti Yoga is the law of this age. (*To the Brahmo devotees*) You Brahmos also practice Bhakti Yoga. You repeat the name of God and chant the glories of the Divine Mother. You are indeed blessed! Your path is really fine. You are not Vedantists. You don't say, 'The world is like a dream.' You are not such brahmajnanis; you are devotees. You believe that God is a person. This is very fine. You are devotees. You will certainly attain God when you call upon Him with a yearning heart."

Chapter Ten

Surendra's house – with Narendra and others

The steamer has now returned to the Kayalaghat (Calcutta). All prepare to land. Coming out of the cabin, they see that the full moon of Kojagar (the month of Aswin) is shining brightly. The bosom of the Ganges[3] sparkles in the moonlight. A carriage is called for Sri Ramakrishna. In a little while he enters it with

1. Kaviraj.
2. A patent medicine.
3. Bhagirathi.

M. and some other devotees. Nandalal, Keshab's nephew, also gets in. He will accompany Thakur for some distance.

When they all are seated in the carriage, Thakur asks, "Where is he?" meaning Keshab. Soon Keshab appears alone, smiling. He asks who is accompanying Thakur. After everyone is seated in the carriage, Keshab prostrates on the ground and takes the dust of Thakur's feet. Thakur bids him an affectionate goodbye. The carriage rolls along the beautiful main thoroughfare of the English neighbourhood. Lighted mansions adorning both sides of the road seem as if they are in repose in the mellow, serene rays of the full moon. Near the main gates are gaslights. In almost every home English ladies are singing to the accompaniment of the harmonium or piano. Thakur smiles joyfully as he passes. Suddenly he says, "I'm feeling thirsty. What can be done?" What to do! Nandalal stops the carriage near the India Club, goes upstairs to get water, and brings back a full glass tumbler. Thakur asks sweetly, "Has the tumbler been well washed?" Nandalal says, "Yes, it has." Thakur drinks the water from the tumbler.

Thakur has the nature of a child. When the carriage starts again, he puts his head out of the window to look at the people and the horses and carriages in the moonlight. He is happy to see them all.

Nandalal gets down at Calootola. Thakur's carriage stops in Shimuliya Street at Suresh Mitra's house. Thakur calls him Surendra. He is a great devotee of Thakur's.

But Surendra is not at home. He has gone to his new garden house. The members of the household open a room on the ground floor for the guests. The carriage fare needs to be paid. Who will pay it? Had Surendra been there, he would have paid it. Thakur says to a devotee, "Ask the ladies of the house for the fare. Don't they know that their men are frequent visitors?"

Narendra lives nearby. Thakur sends for him. Meanwhile, Thakur is led to a room on the second story. The floor of the room is covered by a sheet, and a few bolsters are lying on it. On the wall is an oil painting in which Thakur is showing Keshab the harmony of all religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism, as well as Vaishnava, Shakta, and Shaiva sects. Surendra had had it painted.

Sitting there, Thakur talks happily. As Narendra enters, it is as if Thakur's joy is doubled. He says, "I went on a steamer trip with Keshab Sen. Vijay was there and also all these people." Pointing to M. he adds, "You may ask him how I told Vijay and Keshab about 'Tuesday' for the mother and the daughter and that God's sport is not nourished without Jatila and Kutila – all these things. (*To M.*) Was this not so?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

It is getting dark, but Surendra has not yet come back. Thakur must return to Dakshineswar and cannot wait any longer. It is 10.30 at night. The road is bathed in moonlight.

A carriage arrives and Thakur gets in. Narendra and M. salute him and return to their homes in Calcutta.

Section III

Visit to the Sinthi Brahmo Samaj Joyful Conversation with Shivanath and Other Brahmo Devotees

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna at a religious festival

The Paramahamsa Deva has come to visit the Brahmo Samaj at Sinthi. It is Saturday, 28 October 1882, the second day of the dark fortnight in the month of Aswin.

It is the semiannual celebration of the Brahmo Samaj, and grand festivities are going on today. Sri Ramakrishna has been invited, together with a number of other devotees. At three or four in the afternoon they arrive at the beautiful garden house of Sri Veni Madhava. They have come by carriage from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. It is in this garden house that the Brahmo Samaj conducts meetings. Sri Ramakrishna has great love for the Brahmo Samaj, and its devotees love and revere him in return. Only yesterday, Friday evening, he enjoyed a steamer trip on the Ganges, from the Kali Temple to Calcutta, with Keshab Chandra Sen and his disciples.

Sinthi is near Paikpara, about three miles north of Calcutta. Located far from the din of the city, the beautiful garden house is particularly suitable for the worship of God. The owner of the garden house organizes two festivals a year – one in the autumn and the other in the spring – and invites many devotees from Calcutta and the nearby village of Sinthi.

Shivanath and other devotees from Calcutta have come. Most of them attended the morning service and are now waiting for the evening service. They are particularly interested because they have heard that a great saint will be there in the afternoon. They want to see his happy figure and imbibe the nectar of his words, and they want to hear his sweet devotional songs and watch him dance full of love for God. Such a dance is rare even among the gods.

By afternoon a large crowd has gathered in the garden. Some are sitting on wooden benches under the shadow of vines. Others are walking with their friends along the bank of a beautiful artificial lake. Many have already taken their seats in the Samaj house, awaiting Sri Ramakrishna's arrival. There is a betel leaf shop at the entrance to the garden. Entering the garden, one feels that it is a place of worship. In the evening there will be a musical play. In all four directions the blue autumn sky reflects joy. Since early morning, a current of delight has passed through the trees, vines, and shrubs of the garden – as though they, together with the sky and all creatures, are singing one melody. Even the breeze seems divinely propitious, carrying such joy into the hearts of the devotees.

Everyone is thirsty for the appearance of the Paramahamsa Deva when his carriage arrives in front of the house. They all rise to welcome the great saint and form a circle around him.

A platform has been built in the middle of the main hall of the Samaj building. The place is filled with people. In front is the vestibule where the Paramahamsa Deva and others are seated. People also occupy the two rooms on both sides of the vestibule. Others are standing at the doorways, craning their necks to see. Even the steps leading up to the vestibule are crowded with devotees. Two or three trees near the steps support a canopy of vines and a number of benches offer seating for a few

devotees, who also strain their necks to see the great saint and try intently to hear him. Nearby a path stretches between many rows of flower beds and fruit trees. The trees gently wave in the whispering breeze, as if bowing in joy to offer Sri Ramakrishna a hearty welcome.

When the smiling Paramahamsa Deva, Sri Ramakrishna, takes his seat, the sight of all those within spontaneously falls upon this happy and most joyful figure. Until the start of the play, the rest of the devotees walk around, some alone and others with friends. Some chew betel leaf or tobacco or smoke cigarettes. Some laugh, others engage in worldly discussions on one thing or another, but as soon as the curtain rises, all talk ends and the full attention of the audience is directed to the play. Like so many bees when the lotus blooms, their attention is drawn from the other flowers of the garden, and they swarm to the nectar of the lotus.

Chapter Two

māṁ ca yo 'vyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevate ।
sa guṇān samatītyaitān brahmabhūyāya kalpate ।।

[He who serves Me with unswerving devotion goes beyond the three gunas and is fit to merge in Brahman.]

– Bhagavad Gita 14:26

Conversation with devotees

Smiling, Sri Ramakrishna looks at Shivanath and the other devotees and says, "Look! Here is Shivanath! You see, you are a devotee, so I feel very happy to see you. This is the nature of a man who is addicted to smoking hemp. He feels happy when he meets another hemp smoker. He may even embrace him." (*Shivanath and the others laugh*.)

Nature of a worldly man – the great importance of name

"When I see a person whose mind is not on God, I tell him, 'Please go sit over there.' Or I say, 'Go see the beautiful buildings! Go see them.' (*All laugh.*)

"And I see that some people who come with the devotees are not of a serious nature. They are worldly-minded; they don't like spiritual talk. Devotees like to talk about God for a long time, but these men can't sit long. They become restless and whisper into their friend's ear, 'When are you leaving?' The devotee sometimes says, 'Wait a while. We'll be leaving shortly.' But they are impatient and say, 'All right, carry on. We'll wait in the boat.' (*All laugh.*)

"If you ask worldly people to renounce everything and devote themselves to God, they don't listen to you. That's why, to attract worldly people, Gaur[1] and Nitai,[2] the two brothers, thought up a stratagem that involved soup of magur fish, the embrace of a young woman, and repeating the name of God. In the beginning, many people came to chant the name of God, tempted by the first two. Then, having tasted a bit of the nectar of the Lord's name, they realized that the fish soup was nothing compared to the tears that fall for the love of God. And that 'a young woman' meant the earth – the 'embrace of a young woman' meant to roll around in the dust for love of God.

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1. Chaitanya.
2. Familiar name of Nityananda, disciple and companion of Chaitanya.

"Nitai, in one way or another, found a way to make people repeat the name of God. Chaitanya Deva said that there is great importance in the name of the Lord. It may not show immediate results, but sooner or later it does yield fruit. For example, suppose there is a seed on the cornice of a house. After a long time, the house falls down. The seed will then fall to the ground, develop into a tree and, in time, bear fruit."

Man's nature and the three gunas – sattva, rajas, and tamas of devotion

"Just as there are the three gunas of sattva, rajas, and tamas in worldly people, in the same way there are the three qualities of sattva, rajas, and tamas of devotion, too.

"You know what kind of sattva a worldly man has? His house is somewhat in shambles, but he doesn't get it repaired. There are pigeon droppings in the vestibule of the shrine, and moss grows in the courtyard, but he is unaware of it. Household furniture may have grown old, but he doesn't polish or replace it. He dresses in simple clothes. Such a man is very calm, polite, compassionate, and peaceful. He does no harm to anyone.

"There are also signs of rajas in a worldly man. A watch with a chain, and two or three rings on his fingers. The furnishings of his house are in tip-top shape. On the walls hang a picture of the queen and a picture of the prince – or of some great personage. His house is well plastered and so forth; there is no stain anywhere. He has a large closet of fine clothes, and uniforms for his servants.

"The tamas of a worldly man also has its signs: sleep, lust, anger, pride, and so on.

"Devotion also has its sattva. The devotee who possesses the quality of sattva meditates secretly. Perhaps he meditates inside his mosquito net. Everybody thinks he is either sleeping or that he did not sleep well during the night and is late getting up. His attachment to his body is only to the extent of filling his stomach – a simple dish of rice with spinach suffices for him. There is no fuss and bother about his meals, nor in his dress or household furnishings. And a sattvic devotee never flatters anybody for money.

"When a person has devotion of the rajasic type, he may wear a holy mark on his forehead and a rosary of rudraksha[1] interspersed with gold beads. (*Everybody laughs*.) When he worships, he dresses himself in a silk cloth."

Chapter Three

klaibyaṁ mā sma gamaḥ pārtha naitat tvayyupa-
padyate।
kṣudraṁ hṛdayadaurbalyaṁ tyaktvottiṣṭha paraṁ-
tapa।।

[O Partha (Arjuna), do not yield to cowardice. It does not befit you. Give up your despicable faint-heartedness and arise, O vanquisher of foes!]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:3

1. The kernel of a berry used for beads in rosaries.

The great importance of name, and sin – three kinds of teachers

Sri Ramakrishna: "A man with the devotion of tamas has burning faith. Such a devotee forces the Lord like a dacoit forces a man to part with his wealth. 'Tie him up! Beat him! Kill him!' Such is the disposition of a dacoit."

Sri Ramakrishna looks upward and sings in a voice infused with love:

> Why go to Gaya, Ganga, Prabhas, Kashi, or Kanchi, if I can breathe my last chanting Kali's name?
>
> Of what use are rituals[1] for one who utters Kali's name at dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his footsteps, never catching up.
>
> Charity, vows, and almsgiving no longer appeal to Madan's mind. His worship alone is surrender at the Mother's blessed feet.
>
> Lord Shiva Himself, the God of Gods, with all His powers, sings Her praises. Who, then, can conceive of the power of Her holy name?

Thakur sings, intoxicated in ecstasy as if he is initiated in agnimantra:[2]

> Mother, can I but die with Durga's name upon my lips,
>
> I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end you cannot refuse to rescue me.

"Why, I have chanted Her name! How can there be any sin in me? I am Her son! I am the inheritor of Her power and glory! Such must be the spirit.

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1. Sandhyas performed at dawn, noon, and twilight.
2. A mantra that makes one determined to achieve an extremely difficult and daunting task.

"If you can give a turn to your tamoguna, you can use it to realize God. Force your demands on Him! He's no stranger. Indeed, He is our own. And then see how the quality of tamas can be used for the welfare of others.

"There are three types of physicians – superior, mediocre, and inferior. The physician who comes, feels the patient's pulse, and then says to him, 'Brother, please take this medicine,' and leaves – he is an inferior physician. He doesn't bother to find out if the patient has taken the medicine. The physician who persuades the patient in many ways to take the medicine, who says in a sweet voice, 'Oh brother, how can you be cured unless you take the medicine? Dear brother, please take it. See, I myself am mixing it for you. Now take it,' – he is a mediocre physician. And the physician who sees that a patient stubbornly refuses to take the medicine, puts his knee on the patient's chest, and forces the medicine down his throat – he is a superior physician. This is the tamoguna of the physician. It helps the patient; it does not harm him.

"Like physicians, religious teachers[1] are also of three types. Those who instruct their disciples on spiritual matters and then make no inquiries about their progress are of the inferior type. Those who repeat their teachings again and again for the good of their disciples so that they may internalize the instructions, who make requests in various ways, and show love – these are the mediocre type of

1. Acharyas.

teacher. And those who use force when they find that the disciples do not listen, I call superior."

Chapter Four

yato vāco nivartante । aprāpya manasā saha ।

[Where mind and speech cannot reach.]

– Taittiriya Upanishad 2:4

What Brahman is cannot be expressed by speech

A Brahmo devotee asked, "Is God with form or formless?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "One cannot limit God. He is formless and then with form, too. For a devotee, He is with form. For a jnani, that is to say, one who considers the world a dream, God is formless. The devotee thinks that God is one and the world is another. That is why the Lord manifests to him as a person. Jnanis such as Vedantists reason, 'Not this, not this.' By so reasoning, the jnani has the inner feeling and experience[1] that his individuality is an illusion, so the world also is like a dream. The jnani feels the consciousness of Brahman within. But what God is, he cannot express in words.

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1. Bodhebodha: An intellectual, literal, imaginative, inner feeling of the real nature of Brahman (Atman). The Vedanta illustrates it in this way (taken from Vol. III of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, 24 August, 1882): A person is lying in a room in the dark. Somebody gropes in the dark to reach him. His hand touches a couch and he says, "No, this is not he." Then he touches the window. "This too is not he." Then he touches the door and again says to himself, "No, not he. Not this, not this, not this." At last his hand touches the person. Then he says, "That's it. That is the person." This means that he has reached the person, but he hasn't known him intimately.

"Do you know what it's like? It's like a shoreless ocean of Sat-chit-ananda.[1] Water in the ocean turns into ice at places with the cooling influence of love. This ice takes a form. In other words, at times God manifests and takes a physical form for the devotee. When the sun of knowledge rises, the ice melts. Then God does not appear as a person. Also His form is not visible. What God is cannot be expressed in words. Who is there to express Him? He who would describe Him has disappeared. You cannot find his 'I,' even if you search for it.

"When one continues to reason, one's 'I-ness' vanishes completely. First you peel off the outer red skin of an onion, then the soft white one. One continues to peel in this way until nothing of the onion remains.

"When 'I-ness' vanishes, who remains to look for it? Who is there to tell what the inner feeling and experience[2] of the real nature of Brahman is?

"A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. As soon as it went into the water, it melted and became one with it. Then who was there to tell about it?

"A sign of the highest spiritual knowledge[3] is that a person becomes silent. The salt doll of 'I-ness' gets dissolved in the sea of Sat-chit-ananda – not a trace of differentiation remains.

"As long as reasoning is not complete, man continues to indulge in endless discussions. But no

1. Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.
2. Bodhebodha.
3. Purna jnana.

sooner does one stop reasoning than one becomes silent. The gurgling sound of water stops when the pitcher is filled with water – that is to say, when the water in the pitcher becomes one with the water of the pond the pitcher is dipped in. There is a gurgling sound only so long as the pitcher is not filled with water.

"In the olden days people used to say that a ship does not return if it reaches 'black waters.'"

But 'I-ness' does not vanish

"When the ego vanishes, all troubles cease. You may reason a thousand times, but the ego does not disappear. For you and me, it is good to cherish the 'I' of a devotee of God.

"For a devotee, Brahman is with qualities.[1] In other words, God is visible as a person with a form. And it is He who listens to prayers. All your prayers are addressed to Him alone. You are not Vedantists, nor are you jnanis; you are devotees. Whether you accept God with form or not does not matter. It is enough to feel that God is a person who listens to your prayers, who creates, preserves, and dissolves – a person who is infinitely powerful.

"It is easier to reach God by the path of love and devotion."

1. Saguna.

Chapter Five

bhaktyā tv ananyayā śakya aham evaṁvidho ʻrjuna।
jñātuṁ draṣṭuṁ ca tattvena praveṣṭuṁ ca paraṁ-
tapa।।

[But by unswerving devotion that form of Mine can be known and seen in reality and also entered, O scorcher of foes.]

– Bhagavad Gita 11:54

Vision of God – with form or without form

A Brahmo devotee asked, "Sir, can we see God? If so, why don't we see Him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, surely He can be seen. He is seen with form and He is seen without form, too. How can I explain this to you?"

The Brahmo devotee: "By what method can one see Him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Can you weep for Him with great longing?

"People shed pitchers full of tears for son, wife, and money. But who weeps for God? As long as a baby remains distracted with his pap, his mother attends to cooking and all her household chores. But when the child tires of the pap and throws it away, screaming for its mother, she takes the rice pan off the fire, comes running, and picks the baby up in her arms."

The Brahmo devotee: "Sir, why are there so many ideas about God's form? Some say that God is with form, some say that He is formless. And even

among believers in God with form, we hear of so many different forms. Why such confusion?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Whichever form of God a devotee sees, he believes in that alone. In reality, there is no confusion. If God is attained by any means, He will Himself explain everything. If you have never been to a particular neighbourhood, how can you know everything about it?

"Listen to a story. A man went out to relieve himself. He saw a creature in a tree. On his return he said to another man, 'I saw a beautiful red animal on that tree.' The other man replied, 'When I went there, I also saw it. But it's not red, it's green.' Yet another man said, 'No, no, I also saw it. It's yellow.' In the same way others said, 'No, it is the colour of tobacco, or eggplant, or blue, and so on.' All this led to a quarrel. Then they went to the foot of the tree and saw a man sitting there. When asked about it, he said, 'I live under this tree. I know it very well. Whatever you say is true. It is sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow, sometimes blue, and also of many more hues. It has many colours, and sometimes it has no colour at all. Now it has qualities, now it has none.'

"This means that only the man who is always thinking of God can know His real nature. That person alone knows that God is seen in different forms and in different aspects. He is with qualities, and He is also without qualities. Only he who lives under the tree knows that the variegated chameleon has different colours, and that sometimes it has no colour at all. Other people just argue, quarrel, and trouble themselves.

"Kabir used to say, 'The One without form is my Father and with form, my Mother.'

"God reveals Himself in the form the devotee loves most – gracious loving Lord of the devotee[1] that He is. The Purana says that God assumed the form of Rama for the sake of his heroic devotee, Hanuman."

Explanation of the forms of Kali and Shyama – the Infinite is incomprehensible

"In Vedanta philosophy there are no forms. Its ultimate principle is that Brahman is the only Reality, and the phenomenal universe made of names and forms is illusory. As long as one cherishes the idea, 'I am a devotee,' it is possible to have a vision of the form of God and to see Him as a person. From the standpoint of reasoning, the feeling 'I am a devotee' keeps him somewhat away from God.

"Why are the forms of Kali and Shyama three and a half cubits high? Because of distance. On account of distance, the sun seems small. If you go near, it will look big beyond your imagination. So why are Kali and Shyama black? Because of distance. Again, water in a lake appears green, blue, or black from a distance, but if you go near and take some water in your palm, you will find that it has no colour. The sky from a distance appears blue, but if you go near it, it has no colour.

"So I say that according to the Vedanta philosophy, Brahman is without attributes. What its real nature is cannot be expressed in words. But

1. Bhakta vatsala.

as long as you as a person are real, the world is also real. Then the names and forms of God are also real. And feeling Him to be a person is real, too.

"Yours is the path of love and devotion for God. It is a very good and easy path. Can the Infinite be known? Besides, what is the need to know It? Having the rare privilege of being born as human beings, we should develop devotion to His lotus feet by any means possible.

"If I can quench my thirst with one glass of water, what need is there for me to measure the quantity of water in the lake? I get intoxicated with half a bottle of wine. What is the need to know the quantity of wine in the wine shop? In the same way, what is the need to know the Infinite?"

Chapter Six

yastvātmaratireva syād ātmatṛptaś ca mānavaḥ ।
ātmanyeva ca saṁtuṣṭas tasya kāryaṁ na vidyate।।

[For the one who rejoices in the Self, is satisfied with the Self, and is centred in the Self, for that person there remains no duty to act.]

– Bhagavad Gita 3:17

Signs of God-realization – seven planes and the knowledge of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Vedas describe the different states of a knower of Brahman. However, this path, the path of knowledge, is a very difficult path. If the least trace of worldliness – attachment to 'lust and greed' – persists, one cannot attain knowledge. This path is not for the Kaliyuga.

"Regarding this, the Vedas talk of the seven planes, or states of mind. When the mind is attached to the world, it dwells in the sex organ or the organ of evacuation or the navel. It does not look upward in this state. Its only concern is 'lust and greed.' The fourth plane of the mind is the heart. It is here that the mind gains initial spiritual awareness. One sees light all around. Seeing the divine light, one is amazed and exclaims, 'What is this? What is this!' The mind then does not go downward [toward the world].

"The fifth plane of the mind is at the throat. When the mind of a person rises to the throat, he is freed from all ignorance and illusion. He does not like to talk or hear about anything but God. If someone talks of other things, he leaves the place. The sixth plane of the mind is at the forehead. When the mind reaches there, one sees a divine form all twenty-four hours of the day. However, a bit of 'I-ness' exists even then. Such a person feels intoxicated at the vision of that supreme and unique form. He tries to touch and embrace the form, but cannot. It is like the light in a lantern. One feels that one can touch the light, but because of the glass in between, one cannot touch it. At the top of the head is the seventh plane. When the mind rises to it, one goes into samadhi and the follower of the path of knowledge has the direct vision of Brahman. But in this state, the body does not last for many days. The person remains unconscious and can eat nothing. If milk is poured into the mouth, it runs out. On this plane of consciousness, death comes in twenty-one days.

This is the state of the Brahmajnani.[1] Yours is the path of love and devotion to God. It is a very good and easy path."

Actions drop off after samadhi – an earlier story of his life – how Thakur gave up karmas such as offering drinking water to the deities

"Once a person asked me, 'Sir, can you teach me samadhi?' (*Everybody laughs*.)

"All actions drop off after samadhi. Actions like worship, japa, and all worldly activities drop off. In the beginning one is very active, but as a man advances towards God, the outer display of actions becomes less – so much so that even singing His names and glories ceases. (*To Shivanath*) Before you arrived at the meeting, people talked a great deal about your good name, qualities, and so on. But as soon as you arrived, all that stopped. Now everybody takes joy at the sight of you and says, 'Here is Shivanath Babu!' All other talk about you stops.

"After this state of mine I noticed that at the time of offering Ganges water to the deities, it trickled through my fingers. I began to cry and asked Haladhari, 'Brother, what has happened?' Haladhari told me that it is called the fingers of the hand remaining apart.[2] After the vision of God, actions such as offering water to the deities[3] drop off.

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1. Knower of Brahman.
2. Galitahasta.
3. Tarpana.

"In the group singing of hymns, one first sings, 'Nitai is my mad elephant.' As this mood deepens, one simply utters, 'Elephant, elephant.' Next it is only, 'Elephant.' And lastly, while saying, 'Ele,' one goes into bhava samadhi. Then the person who was singing says not a word.

"It is the same as at a feast given to brahmins. In the beginning there is so much activity. When they sit down with leaf plates in front of them, much of the noise ceases. One hears only, 'Bring some luchis, bring some here.' And again, when they begin eating the luchis and vegetables, seventy-five percent of the noise subsides. When they have curds, you can hear only one sound, 'sup, sup' (from smacking their lips). (*All laugh*.) One can say that nobody utters a word. The feast over, the next step is to go to sleep. Then there is absolute silence.

"Therefore, I say that in the beginning there is a lot of activity, but the more you advance on the path towards God, the less your activities will be. At the end, all work drops away and samadhi follows.

"When a housewife is pregnant, her mother-in-law reduces her duties. In the last month, she is almost free from work. When the child is born, there is complete renunciation of work. The mother only has to look after the baby. All chores in the household are attended to by the mother-in-law, the husband's sister, or his elder sister-in-law."

Avatars and the like live after samadhi for instruction of mankind

"After samadhi, a person usually dies. But some, like Narada, and avatars like Chaitanya Deva, live to instruct mankind. After digging a well, most people throw away the spade and basket. But there are some who keep them, thinking that they may, perhaps, be needed by their neighbours. In the same way, highly spiritual personalities feel greatly concerned for the suffering of others. They are not so selfish as to be satisfied with their own illumination. You know well how selfish people behave. If you ask them to urinate here, they won't, lest it should later do you good. (*All laugh*.) If you ask them to bring sandesh for a pice from a shop, they'll lick it on their way back. (*All laugh*.)

"There is a special manifestation of divine power in some. An ordinary man is afraid to give instruction to others. Old and worn out wood[1] may float on water, but it sinks the moment a bird sits on it. Sages like Narada are like huge logs[2] that will not only float on water, but also carry men, bullocks, and even elephants."

1. Habate wood.
2. Bahaduri wood.

Chapter Seven

adṛṣṭapūrvaṁ hṛṣito ‘smi dṛṣṭvā bhayena ca pravyathitaṁ mano me ।
tad eva me darśaya deva rūpaṁ prasīda deveśa jagannivāsa ।।

[I rejoice that I have seen what was never seen before, but my mind is shaken with fear. Show me that form I once saw, O God; have mercy, O God of gods and Abode of the Universe.]

– Bhagavad Gita 11:45

Prayer system of the Brahmo Samaj and talk on God's powers and glory

An earlier story of his life – theft of an ornament from the Radhakanta Temple at Dakshineswar

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shivanath*): "Yes, my dear sir, why do you dwell so much on the glories and powers of God? I said the same to Keshab Sen. One day they all came to the Kali Temple. I said, 'I would like to hear how you lecture.' A meeting was then arranged in the chandni (portal) on the Ganges ghat and Keshab began to lecture. He spoke so well, I went into samadhi. Later I said to him, 'Why do you talk so much about all this: "Oh Lord, what beautiful flowers You have made! You have created the sky, the stars, the sea, and so on!" Those who love splendour, love to talk about God's splendour.' When Radhakanta's ornament was stolen, Mathur Babu[1] went to the Radhakanta Temple and said to the deity, 'Fie on you, Lord! You couldn't guard your own ornaments!' I said to

1. Son-in-law of Rani Rasmani.

Mathur Babu, 'What [low] intelligence you have! He who has Lakshmi herself for his handmaid, he whose feet she massages, how can he lack splendour? Jewelry is very precious to you, but for the Lord it is just a few clods of earth. Fie on you! You should not talk so stupidly. What riches can you give to God?' That is why I say that a man seeks a person in whom he finds joy. What use is it to find out from him where he lives, how many buildings and gardens he owns, how much wealth, how many relatives, how many male and female servants he has? When I see Narendra, I forget everything. I've never asked him, even by mistake, where he lives, what his father does, how many brothers he has, and so on. Dive deep into the sweetness of God's love. What need is there for us to find out about God's infinite creation, His limitless splendours?"

Sri Ramakrishna again sings a song full of sweetness with a voice that surpasses the voices of the celestial musicians[1] who sing there the glories of the Most High:

> Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty, and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the gem of Love.[2]
>
> Go seek, go seek, O mind, the blessed Vrindavan within your heart, the abode of the Lord of Love. Then in your heart the unceasing light of knowledge will ever shine.
>
> Who is it that steers your boat over solid ground? It is your guru, says Kabir. Listen, and meditate on his holy feet.

---

1. Gandharvas.
2. Prema.

"Even so, after the vision of God, the devotee wants to witness His lila. After slaying Ravana, Ramachandra entered Lanka. Nikasha, Ravana's old mother, tried to run away. Lakshmana said, 'Brother Rama, how strange this is! This Nikasha is such an old woman, she's suffered so much at the loss of her sons, yet she's terrified of losing her own life and is taking to her heels.' Ramachandra, giving assurance of safety to Nikasha, called her to him and asked her about it. She replied, 'Rama, I have been able to watch all this lila of yours because I'm alive. I want to live longer so that I may see more of it.' (*All laugh*.)

(*To Shivanath*) "I like to see you. What shall I live for if I don't see pure-souled ones? The reason? I feel that pure-souled ones are my friends from a previous incarnation."

A Brahmo devotee asks, "Sir, do you believe in rebirth?"

Rebirth – O Arjuna, you and I have passed through many births[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, they say there is rebirth. How can we of tiny intellect understand the actions of God? Many people have said it is so, so I don't disbelieve. Bhishma Deva lay dying on his bed of arrows. All the Pandavas were standing by with Sri Krishna. They saw tears flowing from Bhishma Deva's eyes. Arjuna said to Sri Krishna, 'Brother, how strange it is! Pitamah, who is Bhishma Deva himself, who has truly conquered

1. bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni tava cārjuna। Bhagavad Gita 4:5.

his senses – a jnani and one of the eight Vasus[1] – even he weeps at the time of his death because of maya. When Sri Krishna asked Bhishma about it, Bhishma replied, 'Sri Krishna, you know very well that I'm not weeping because of that. When I see that there is no end to suffering, even of the Pandavas who have the Lord Himself as their charioteer, I weep, thinking that I have not been able to understand anything of the ways of God.'"

In the joy of devotional singing with the devotees

Now the evening worship begins in the Samaj building. It is about half past eight. After four or five dandas,[2] the moon lights up the night. The trees and leaves of the creepers in the garden seem to float in the clear autumnal moonbeams. In the meantime devotional singing[3] has begun in the prayer hall. Sri Ramakrishna is dancing, intoxicated with love for God. Brahmo devotees holding drums and cymbals dance around him. Everyone is intoxicated, in bhava, as if having the vision of God. The sound of God's name rises to a crescendo. Villagers all around listen, their minds full of gratitude to Veni Madhava, the devotee owner of the garden.

At the end of the kirtan, Sri Ramakrishna prostrates on the ground to salute the Mother of the Universe. While doing so, he says, "Bhagavata, Bhakta, Bhagavan! Salutations at the feet of jnanis, salutations at the feet of devotees, salutations at the feet of the devotees of God with form, salutations at the feet of the devotees of God

1. A group of eight devas (gods).
2. According to Vedic astrological calculations, the twenty-four hours of a day and night are divided into sixty dandas.
3. Kirtan.

without form, salutations at the feet of the knowers of Brahman of old, salutations at the feet of the knowers of Brahman of today's Brahmo Samaj."

Veni Madhava has provided various kinds of delicious dishes for the enjoyment of the assembled devotees. Full of joy in their company, Sri Ramakrishna also partakes of the prasad.[1]

1. Sacramental food offered to the deity.

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna Instructs Vijaykrishna Goswami and Other Brahmo Devotees

Chapter One

na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā
vā na bhūyaḥ ।
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato ʻyaṁ purāṇo na hanyate
hanyamāne śarīre ।।

[The Atman is neither born nor does it die. Coming into being and ceasing to be do not take place in it. Unborn, eternal, constant, and ancient, it is not killed when the body is slain.]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:20

Is it suicide if a liberated person ends his life?

It is the month of Agrahayana, the fourth day of the bright fortnight, Thursday, 14 December 1882. Vijaykrishna Goswami has come to see Sri Ramakrishna at the Kali Temple garden at Dakshineswar. He is accompanied by three or four Brahmo devotees. They have come from Calcutta by boat with Balaram, a great devotee of the Paramahamsa Deva.

At midday, Sri Ramakrishna is resting. On Sundays people come in large numbers to see him, but devotees who want to have a personal talk with him usually visit on other days.

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on his wooden cot. Vijay, Balaram, M., and some of the other devotees sit on a

mat facing west, others on the bare floor, in front of Thakur. The Ganges is seen from the western door of the room. Its winter waters are calm and clear. Just beyond the door is the western semicircular verandah. Beyond it are flower gardens and then the embankment. Along the western side of the embankment flows the holy Ganges, the purifier of sins, as if joyfully washing the feet of the temple of the Lord.

It is winter, so all are dressed in warm clothes. Vijay is suffering from colic and has brought medicine in a small glass bottle. He is to take the medicine at prescribed times.

Vijay is a salaried preacher in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and delivers sermons from the pulpit. He now finds himself involved in different controversies with the Samaj, but is not allowed the freedom to act on or to express his independent views. He feels helpless because he has accepted the assignment. Vijay comes from the very pious family of Advaita Goswami, a jnani who meditated upon the formless Brahman; at the same time he displayed the highest intensity of divine love. He was a foremost and intimate disciple of Lord Chaitanya Deva. Mad with love for God, he used to dance with such fervor that he would lose outer consciousness, often dropping the cloth that he was wearing. Vijay, having joined the Brahmo Samaj, meditates on the formless Parabrahman, but the blood of the great devotee, Advaita Goswami, flows through his veins. The seed of God's love lies ready to sprout within him; it is only a matter of time. That is why he has been charmed to see the state of Sri Ramakrishna's divine fervour, stemming from love for God, a state rare even among the gods. Just as a snake charmed by music continues to sit beside the snake charmer, Vijay, charmed by the divine words emanating from the holy lips of Sri Ramakrishna, stays by his side. And when he dances like a child with love for God, Vijay dances with him.

A boy named Vishnu who lived in Ariadaha has recently committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor. Today this topic comes up first.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay, M., and the other devotees*): "Look, this boy has ended his life. When I heard about it, I felt very bad. He used to come here. He was a schoolboy, but he'd often say that he had no liking for the world. He had lived for a few days with some relatives in the west (west of Bengal, i.e. Uttar Pradesh or Punjab). He used to meditate in a solitary field or forest or in the hills. He used to tell me that he had strange visions of various forms of God.

"I believe it was his last birth. In his previous birth he must have accomplished a lot. Perhaps only a little was left undone and he finished that in this life.

"One must admit the tendencies of one's past birth.[1] There is a story about a man practicing spiritual discipline on a corpse[2] in a deep forest. He was worshiping the Divine Mother[3] and he began to have frightful visions. Finally a tiger carried him away. There was another man who had climbed up a nearby tree in fear of the tiger. Seeing the dead body and arrangements for worship, he came down, took some holy water, and sat on the corpse. He had performed only a little japa when the Divine Mother appeared before him and said, 'I am pleased with you. Ask for a boon.' Bowing low at the lotus feet of the Mother, he said, 'Mother, may I just ask

1. Samskaras.
2. Shava sadhana.
3. Bhagavati.

You one thing? I am amazed at Your action. After that other man made so many arrangements for worship and practiced spiritual disciplines laboriously for so many days, You did not bless him. But I who know nothing and hear nothing – I never repeat Your name or practice any spiritual discipline, I have neither spiritual knowledge nor love and devotion for You – yet I receive Your grace!' The Divine Mother laughed and said, 'Child, you don't remember your past lives. You practiced austerities for me for so many births! It is because of the strength of those austerities that all these things were arranged for you. It is also for that reason that you are blessed with my vision. Now tell me, what boon do you want?'"

A devotee: "I feel frightened to hear of the suicide."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Suicide is a great sin. A person who commits suicide will have to return and again suffer the world's trials and tribulations.

"But if a person ends his life after having the vision of God, it is not suicide. There is no harm in giving up the body that way. Some people end their lives after attaining Knowledge. After a gold image has been cast in a clay mould, the mould may be preserved, or, if it is cracked, it can be thrown away.

"Many years ago a boy named Gopal Sen used to come here from Baranagore. He was about twenty years old. He would experience such deep emotions that Hriday had to hold him. He later did fall and break some bones. One day the boy suddenly touched my feet and said, 'Sir, I won't be able to

come here any more, so I take your leave.' A few days later I heard that he had given up his body."

Chapter Two

anityam asukhaṁ lokam imaṁ prāpya bhajasva
mām ||

[Having come to this impermanent and unhappy world, worship Me.]

– Bhagavad Gita 9:33

Four classes of men – attachment to "lust and greed" is a sign of the worldly

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are four classes of human beings – bound souls, seekers after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-free. The world is like a fishing net. Individual souls are the fish, and God, whose maya is the world, is the fisherman. When fish fall into the net, many of them try to tear it to free themselves. They are like those seeking liberation. However, not all who try to escape are able to do so. Only a few fish slip out with a splash. Then people cry out, 'There goes a big one!' Those few are the liberated ones. Some fish are so cautious by nature that they never fall into the net. Narada and other such saints are ever-free; they never fall into the net of the world. But most fish are unaware that they have fallen into the net and will die there. They dart straight ahead, taking the net along with them, and try to hide in the mud. They make no attempt to escape; rather, they dig deeper into the mud. They are like bound souls. They live in the net and think, 'We are

quite happy here.' Bound souls remain attached to the world, that is, to 'lust and greed.' They remain sunk in the sordid sea and think they are very happy. Those who seek liberation and those who are liberated look upon the world as a deep well. They don't like it. Some of them who attain Knowledge, the vision of God, give up their bodies. But giving up the body in this way is very rare.

"Bound creatures, the worldly, do not wake up. They suffer so much misery, so many trials, so many sorrows. Even then they do not awaken.

"A camel likes thorny bushes, but the more it eats, the more its mouth bleeds. Yet it keeps on eating the same thorny bush; it doesn't stop. The worldly suffer so much agony, so much sorrow, yet they revert back to the old self quite soon. If a man's wife has died, or she has proved unfaithful to him, he marries again. Perhaps he has lost a son and suffered much sorrow, but he forgets all this in a few days. The mother of the boy, beside herself with grief, ties up her hair again and bedecks herself with jewelry. In the same way, though people spend all they have on the marriage of their daughters, they continue giving birth to more children year after year. They lose everything in litigation, yet they go again to court. They can't feed the children they have, neither can they educate them, nor can they look after them properly. Still they have more children every year.

"At times their state can be likened to that of a snake trying to swallow a mole. The snake can neither swallow the mole nor give it up. The bound soul may have realized that there is no substance to

the world – that it is like a hog plum containing nothing but stone and skin – yet he cannot give it up, cannot turn his mind to God.

"A fifty-year-old relative of Keshab Sen was playing cards – as if the time was not yet ripe for him to think of God!

"There is yet another sign of a bound soul. If he is lifted from worldly life to a spiritual environment, he will pine away to death. The worm that lives in dung only feels happy there – only there does it thrive. If you put that worm in a pot of rice, it will die." (*All laugh*.)

Chapter Three

asaṁśayaṁ mahābāho mano durnigrahaṁ calam ।
abhyāsena tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa ca gṛhyate ।।

[O mighty armed, the mind is undoubtedly restless and hard to control, but by practice and non-attachment, O son of Kunti, it can be controlled.]

– Bhagavad Gita 6:35

Deep dispassion[1] and bound souls

Vijay: "What must be the state of mind for a bound soul to attain liberation?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When one develops deep dispassion by the grace of God, one can be freed from the attachment to 'lust and greed.' What is deep dispassion? Mild dispassion is to let whatever is continue as it is, just to go on repeating the name

1. Vairagya: non-attachment.

of God. But in one who has deep dispassion, the prana (life breath) becomes restless for God, like a mother restless for the child in her womb. A person who has deep dispassion does not want anything but God. That person sees the world as a deep well and feels that he is drowning in it. He looks upon his relatives as venomous snakes and wants to run away from them. And he does run away. He doesn't think, 'Let me first make arrangements for my family and then I will think of God.' He has great resolve.

"What is deep dispassion like? Listen to a story. Once there was a drought in a certain part of the country. All the farmers were busy digging canals to bring water from a distance. One farmer had great determination. He resolved that he would go on digging until water from the river flowed along his whole canal. When the time came for his bath, his wife sent their daughter with some oil. The daughter said to him, 'Father, it's time for your bath. Massage your body with the oil and take your bath.' He replied, 'Please go away, I have some work to do.' It was past midday, and the farmer was still at work in his field. He had forgotten all about his bath. Now his wife came to the field and said, 'Why haven't you taken your bath yet? Your rice is getting cold. You always overdo things. If the work is not finished yet, do it tomorrow, or do it after your meal.' Taking his spade in hand, the farmer drove her off, scolding and shouting, 'You have no sense! There's been no rain. There is no crop. What will the children eat? Without food, we will all starve to death! I have vowed that I will bring water to the field today. After that, I will think

about bathing and eating.' Seeing his determination, the woman left. The farmer worked very hard throughout the day and joined the canal to the river in the evening. Then he sat on the bank and enjoyed watching the water gurgle into his field. He was now at peace and full of happiness. He went home and called to his wife, 'Now bring some oil and prepare a smoke.' In a carefree mood he took his bath, ate his meal, and retired to bed where he snored happily. This kind of determination illustrates deep dispassion.

"There was another farmer who was also trying to bring water to his field. His wife said to him, 'It's already late. Come on now. There's no need to work so hard.' Without much protest, this fellow put down his spade and said, 'Since you say so. I'm coming.' (*All laugh*.) This farmer could never bring water to his field. This is an example of mild dispassion.

"Just as a farmer can't bring water to his field without great determination, in the same way, only with great effort does a man realize God."

Chapter Four

āpūryamāṇam acalapratiṣṭhaṁ samudram āpaḥ
praviśanti yadvat ।
tadvat kāmā yaṁ praviśanti sarve sa śāntim āpnoti
na kāmakāmī ।।

[He into whom all desires enter as waters enter the full, unmoving sea, he attains peace; not so the desirer of desires.]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:70

Slaving for 'lust and greed'

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): "You used to come here so often. Why not recently?"

Vijay: "Sir, I want to come very much, but I'm not free. I have accepted work in the Brahmo Samaj."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): "'Lust and greed' bind a man. One loses one's freedom. When there is a woman, you need 'gold,' and for that, you have to be a slave to another person. A man loses his freedom and cannot act as he wishes.

"The priests of the Govindaji temple in Jaipur didn't used to marry. They had great spiritual and mental powers then. The king once sent for them, but they refused to go to him. Instead, they sent a message, 'Let the king come here.' After consulting his counselors, the king arranged for their marriage. Now the king no longer needed to send for them. They would come to him of their own accord, saying, 'Sir, I have come to shower my blessings. Here are some sacred flowers; please accept them.' They had to go to the king for everything – building a house, celebrating the rice-taking ceremony of their sons, putting their children through school, and so on.

"Twelve hundred nedas[1] and thirteen hundred nedis[2] – you know this story.[3] Nityananda Goswami's son, Virabhadra, had thirteen hundred nedas as his disciples. When they became

1. Shaven-headed Vaishnava monks.
2. Shaven-headed Vaishnava nuns.
3. Re: Bengali proverb '*Tar sakshi udam sari.*'

spiritually perfect, Virabhadra was alarmed. He thought, They have all become spiritually perfect, so anything they say will come true. There was reason to fear: wherever they went, people might come to grief by offending them unwittingly. Thinking this, Virabhadra called them to him and said, 'Go to the Ganges, perform sandhya and worship, and then come to see me.' The nedas had attained such spiritual perfection that they would go into samadhi when they meditated. When the flood tide came, they would not be aware of it. They would remain absorbed in meditation even when the ebb tide had receded. Now one hundred of the thirteen hundred nedas anticipated what Virabhadra would ask them to do. Thinking that they should not disobey their preceptor, they disappeared, never to see Virabhadra again. The remaining twelve hundred went to Virabhadra, who said to them, 'These thirteen hundred nedis will serve you. Please marry them.' 'As you please,' they said, 'but one hundred of us have disappeared.' So each of the twelve hundred nedas, had one nedi to serve him. After this, regardless of the strength of their austerities, their spiritual powers lessened. Living with women, they lost their powers because in their company they lost their independence.

(*To Vijay*) "You yourself have seen what happens when you accept employment under others. Many scholars who have studied English and passed many examinations are trampled every morning and evening under the feet of their [English] masters. The reason for this is lust. Having married and enjoyed the happy household fair, they now can't escape. That's why they put up

with so much suffering – from slavery and humiliation."

After God-realization women are worshiped as Mother

"Once you develop deep dispassion and realize God, you will no longer have attachment to women. Even if you live in the household, you won't feel that attraction – there is no danger then. Say there's a big magnet and a small one. Which will attract the iron with greater force? Surely the big one will exert a stronger pull. God is the big magnet. Compared to Him, woman is a small magnet. What can she do?"

A devotee: "Sir, should we hate women?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Those who have realized God do not look upon women with lustful eyes, so they have nothing to fear. They actually see that women are but manifestations of the Mother of the Universe, so they worship them all as the Mother.

(*To Vijay*) "Do come here now and then. I like to see you very much."

Chapter Five

The real religious teacher is one who has received the command of God

Vijay: "I have to do the work of the Brahmo Samaj, so I can't come often. I'll visit whenever possible."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): "Look here, the task of a religious teacher is very difficult. You can't teach people without having a direct command from God.

"If you preach without receiving a direct command, people won't listen. Such teaching carries no force. First of all one must attain God by practicing religious disciplines, or by any other means. Only after receiving His command can one teach. In Kamarpukur there is a pond called Haldarpukur. Every day people used to defecate on its banks. Those who came to the pond in the morning would shout at the offenders with foul language and in general create a great fuss. This did not stop the nuisance. The following day the banks would be covered with filth again. At last a government worker put up a notice: 'Stop defiling the banks. Offenders will be prosecuted.' After the sign was posted, nobody defecated there again.

"After receiving a command from God, one can be a religious teacher and give lectures anywhere. He who receives God's authority also receives power from Him. Only then can he perform the difficult task of a religious preceptor.

"When a simple tenant went to court against a big landlord, people knew there had to be a powerful man behind him. Perhaps another big landlord was fighting the case through this man. Man is insignificant. He cannot perform the difficult duty of a religious teacher without receiving direct power from God."

Vijay: "Sir, don't the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj liberate people?"

**Sat-chit-ananda Himself is the Guru –
It is He who liberates**

Sri Ramakrishna: "How is it possible for one man to liberate another from the bondage of the world? Only He who is the creator of this world-bewitching maya can liberate man from maya. Except for Sat-chit-ananda Guru, there is no refuge. How is it possible for those who have neither realized God nor received His command, who have not become powerful with His power, to liberate an embodied soul from the bondage of the world?

"One day I was going from the panchavati to the jhautala [pine grove] to answer the call of nature. I heard a bullfrog croaking loudly. I thought it must have been seized by a snake. After quite some time, when I was returning, I heard the frog still croaking, so I looked to see what was the matter. I saw that a nonpoisonous snake had seized it. It could neither release the frog nor swallow it. There was no end to the frog's agony. I said to myself, 'Had it been a cobra, the frog would have been silent after three croaks.' But it had been seized by a nonpoisonous snake, so the snake and frog were both suffering.

"The ego of an embodied soul ends with just three cries if one has a real teacher.[1] But if the guru is unripe, both the guru and the disciple undergo suffering. The disciple doesn't get rid of his ego or his bondage to the world. Falling into the hands of an unripe guru, the disciple does not attain liberation."

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1. Sadguru

Chapter Six

ahaṅkāravimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate||

[Deluded by egotism one thinks, 'I am the doer.']

– Bhagavad Gita 3:27

Liberation or God-realization comes as soon as maya, the veil of ego, goes

Vijay: "Sir, why are we bound like this? Why can't we see God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The very ego of man is maya. This egotism has veiled everything. 'All troubles cease when "I-ness" dies.' If by the grace of God a man realizes, 'I am not the doer,' he becomes a jivanmukta.[1] Then he has nothing to fear.

"Maya, or 'I-ness,' is like a cloud. The sun is not visible if there is even a patch of cloud. As soon as the cloud passes, one can see the sun. If, by the grace of the guru, the feeling of 'I-ness' vanishes, one sees God.

"Sri Ramachandra, the Lord Himself, was only two-and-a-half cubits away from Lakshmana, but maya in the form of Sita stood between them. The individual soul, Lakshmana, could not see the Lord. Just see, I'm creating a barrier in front of my face with this hand towel. You cannot see me, though I am so near. Similarly, God is so near to us all! Even then, we can't see Him because of the veil of maya.

"An embodied being is of the essence of Sat-chit-ananda, but because of maya or ego, it is covered

1. Liberated in this very life.

with various unreal qualities[1] and has forgotten its own real Self.

"Every unreal quality changes a person's nature. A man who wears a black-bordered dhoti is at once found to hum the love songs of Nidhu, or he begins to play cards, or automatically he picks up a stick to go for a walk! Even a sickly person begins to whistle as soon as he puts on English boots. And when he climbs stairs, he jumps from one step to the other like an Englishman. If a man is holding a pen in his hand, he begins to scribble the moment he finds a piece of paper.

"Money is also a great upadhi. As soon as money comes to a man, he becomes so different – he is no longer the same man.

"A brahmin who was outwardly very humble used to come here. After a few days I went to Konnagar. Hriday was with me. When I got off the boat, I saw the same brahmin sitting on the bank of the Ganges, probably enjoying the breeze. Seeing us, he said, 'I say, how are you, Thakur?' Hearing his tone, I said to Hriday, 'Oh Hriday, this man has acquired some money. That's why he is talking this way.' Hriday laughed.

"A frog had a rupee which he kept in a hole. One day an elephant walked over the hole. Rushing out angrily, the frog raised its foot at the elephant and cried, 'How dare you walk over me!' Such is the pride money breeds!"

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1. Upadhis: limiting adjuncts.

The seven planes – when does "I-ness" vanish – the state of brahmajnana

"You can get rid of I-consciousness when you attain spiritual knowledge. Attaining it, you go into samadhi, and only in samadhi does 'I-ness' disappear. But it is very difficult to attain spiritual knowledge.

"The Vedas say that 'I-ness' vanishes only when the mind ascends to the seventh plane. 'I-ness' only disappears upon attaining samadhi. Where does the mind generally dwell? In the first three planes – at the organs of sex, and of evacuation, and at the navel. At these planes the mind remains only attached to the world, to 'lust and greed.' When the mind dwells in the heart, one sees a divine light. Seeing it, one exclaims, 'Oh, what is this? What is this!' The next plane is at the throat. At this plane one likes to hear and speak only of God. When the mind goes to the forehead, between the eyebrows, one sees the form of Sat-chit-ananda. One has the desire to embrace and touch this very form, but cannot. Though the flame in a lantern can be seen, it cannot be touched. You feel as if you are just touching it – but you cannot. When the mind ascends to the seventh plane, 'I-ness' vanishes, and one goes into samadhi."

Vijay: "When the mind reaches there, one attains brahmajnana. What does one see then?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What happens when the mind ascends to the seventh plane cannot be described in words. Once a ship enters dark waters, it doesn't return. No one knows what happens to

the ship – and it cannot give us any information about the sea.

"Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the sea. No sooner did it enter the water than it dissolved. Now who could tell how deep the sea was? The one who was to tell had itself dissolved. The mind vanishes at the seventh plane and one attains samadhi. What one feels then cannot be described in words."

'I-ness' does not vanish – 'rascal I' and 'servant I'

"The 'I' that makes one worldly and attaches one to 'lust and greed' is the 'rascal I.' Because of it, the individual soul and the Atman appear apart. If a stick is put on water, the water appears to be divided into two. In reality the water is one, but it appears to be two because of the stick.

"'I-ness' is the stick. Remove the stick and the water will become one as before.

"What is the 'rascal I?' That which says, 'Don't you know me? I have so much money. Who's greater than I?' If a thief steals ten rupees, the victim first snatches the money back and then gives the thief a good beating. He doesn't leave him even then. He hands him over to the police and gets him punished. The 'rascal I' says, 'Don't you know who you robbed of ten rupees? Such impertinence!'"

Vijay: "If you can't experience samadhi and be freed from attachment to the world without getting rid of I-consciousness, it seems better to follow the path of brahmajnana to attain samadhi. If 'I-ness' persists in the path of devotion, it would seem better to take to the path of knowledge."

Sri Ramakrishna: "One or two can get rid of I-consciousness by experiencing samadhi, but usually 'I-ness' does not go. You may reason a thousand ways, but this 'I-ness' still finds its way back to you. Cut the ashwattha tree today, tomorrow morning you will see it sprouting again. So if 'I' does not go, let the rascal remain as the 'servant-I': 'O Lord, You are my Master, I am Your servant.' Live with this attitude. 'I am the servant,' 'I am the devotee' – there is no harm in this kind of 'I-ness.' Sweetmeats cause acidity in the stomach. But sugar candy is not counted among sweetmeats.

"The path of knowledge is very difficult. Knowledge can't be attained without ridding yourself of the conviction that you are the body. In the Kaliyuga life depends on food. With the conviction that I am the body, 'I-ness,' does not disappear. So the path of devotion is enjoined for the Kaliyuga. It is an easy path. If you sing His names and glories and pray to Him longingly from the core of your heart, you will attain God. There is no doubt about it.

"It's like drawing a line on the surface of water without placing a bamboo stick on it. You find that the water has been divided into two parts – but this line does not last. The feeling of the 'servant-I' or the 'I of a devotee' or the 'I of a child' is only like a line drawn on water."

Chapter Seven

kleśo 'dhikataras teṣām avyaktāsaktacetasām ।
avyaktā hi gatir duḥkhaṁ dehavadbhir avāpyate ।।

[It is more difficult for those whose minds are attached to the Unmanifest, because it is very hard for the embodied soul to reach the Unmanifest.]

– Bhagavad Gita 12:5

The path of loving devotion to God is the law of this age – the path of knowledge is very difficult – 'servant I,' 'I of a devotee,' 'I of a child'

Vijay (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Sir, you ask us to renounce the 'rascal I.' Is there any harm in the 'servant I'?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "One should have this ego – the 'servant I.' That is to say, 'I am the servant of the Lord, I am His devotee.' There's no harm in that. Rather, it leads to God-realization."

Vijay: "Well, sir, what is the nature of the feelings of lust and anger of a man who has the 'servant I?'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is only the semblance of lust and anger in the man if he has the right feeling. If he retains the feeling of the 'servant I' or the 'I of a devotee' after having God-realization, he can do no harm to others. After a sword has touched the philosopher's stone, it becomes gold; it has the semblance of a sword, but it can't kill anybody.

"The fronds of a coconut tree dry up and drop off, leaving only a mark [on the trunk]. One can

make out from these marks that there were once palm fronds there. Similarly, the ego of one who has realized God only leaves a mark, only a semblance of lust and anger. He is then like a child. A child is not subject to the three gunas [qualities] of sattva, rajas, and tamas. It takes the same amount of time for a child to give up something as it does for him to be attracted to it.

"You can take a child's piece of cloth worth five rupees by tempting him with a half-a-pice doll. He may first say firmly: 'No, I won't give it to you! My father bought it for me!' But everything is the same to a child; there is nothing big or small to him. He has no feeling of caste. His mother says, 'He is your elder brother.' Then even if he is a carpenter [low caste], the child will sit with him and eat from the same plate. A child hates no one; he has no feeling of purity and impurity. He doesn't bother to clean his hands with mud after relieving himself.

"Even after attaining samadhi some people live with the 'I of a devotee' or the 'I of a servant.' The devotee retains the feeling of 'I-ness': 'I am Your servant, You are my Master,' 'I am Your devotee, You are my Lord.' Even after God-realization one retains this 'I-ness.' One's 'I-ness' does not vanish completely. The practice of this feeling of 'I-ness' leads to God-realization. This is what is known as the path of devotion.

"By following the path of devotion, one can attain the knowledge of Brahman, too. God is omnipotent. He can also impart the knowledge of Brahman to a follower of the path of devotion. But generally speaking, a devotee does not seek the

knowledge of Brahman. He wishes to retain the 'I-ness' of 'I am Your servant, You are my Master,' 'I am Your child, You are my Mother.'"

Vijay: "Will the people who reason according to Vedanta also attain Him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, He can also be attained by the path of reasoning and discrimination. This is known as Jnana Yoga. The path of reason is very difficult. I told you about the seven planes. When the mind reaches the seventh plane, one attains samadhi. On genuine realization that Brahman is real and the world illusory, the mind merges, and it experiences samadhi. But in the Kaliyuga, the life of a man depends on food. Then how can he understand that Brahman is real and the world illusory? Such awareness does not come without getting rid of body consciousness: 'I am neither the body, nor the mind, nor the twenty-four cosmic principles.[1] I am beyond pleasure and pain. How then can I have disease and sorrow, old age and death?' Such a realization is difficult in this Kaliyuga. However much you may reason, the conviction that I am the body creeps in somehow and shows itself. You may cut down an ashwattha tree and think its roots are dead, but the very next morning you will see that a new sprout has appeared. The feeling of the body does not go away. Thus the path of devotion is a good and easy path in this age.

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1. Twenty-four cosmic principles: see Section II, Chapter III.

"I don't want to become sugar, I want to taste it. I never feel like saying, 'I am Brahman.' I say, 'You are my Lord and I am Your servant.' It is good to play between the fifth and sixth planes. After crossing the sixth plane, I have no desire to stay on the seventh plane for long. My desire is to sing His name and glories. The attitude of the Master and the servant is very good. Look, everybody says that the wave belongs to the Ganges, not the Ganges to the wave. The feeling 'I am He' is not good. If a person entertains such a feeling of 'I-ness' but retains identification with his body, it will bring great harm to him – he won't advance further. And because he cannot understand his own predicament, he deceives others as well as himself. He gradually goes down spiritually."

Two kinds of devotion – most eligible aspirant – means to God-realization

"Devotion alone does not enable you to realize God. Unless you have intense love for God,[1] you cannot attain Him. Passionate devotion[2] is another name for intense love. Without intense love, you cannot realize God. Without loving God, you cannot attain Him.

"There is another kind of devotion known as ritualistic devotion.[3] You have to repeat the name of God a fixed number of times. Along with this, you must fast, go on pilgrimage, worship in a prescribed manner, make so many sacrifices, and so

1. Prema bhakti.
2. Raga bhakti.
3. Vaidhi bhakti.

on. These are all part of ritualistic devotion. By practicing it you gradually gain raga, intense devotion. But God cannot be realized as long as you don't have this intense love for Him. You must have love for Him. When your worldly way of thinking disappears completely and your mind goes to Him one hundred percent, only then do you attain God.

"But some people acquire loving devotion naturally. They are born that way. Being perfect from childhood, they weep for God at an early age, as Prahlada wept for Vishnu. Ritualistic devotion is like moving a fan to make a breeze. You need a fan to create a breeze. You will eventually attain love for God by repetition of the name, austerity, fasting, and such practices. But when the southern breeze blows of itself, you can put the fan aside. When intense love[1] for God comes of itself, rituals like repetition of the name, and so on drop off. When you are mad with love for God, how can you perform rituals?

"As long as you haven't acquired love for God, your devotion is unripe. When you have love for Him, your devotion is called ripe.

"A person who has unripe devotion cannot internalize spiritual instructions or talk about God. It is only when the photographer's glass is coated black with love for God, so to speak, that it catches an image and is retained. You may throw a thousand images on ordinary glass and not one of them will stay. As soon as the object is removed, the glass becomes the same as it was. You cannot

1. Prema.

internalize spiritual instruction unless you have developed love for God."

Vijay: "Sir, is love for God enough to attain Him, to have His vision?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you can see God through love alone – but it must be ripe, prema bhakti, or raga bhakti. Only after gaining that kind of love can you love God as the son loves his mother, or the mother loves her child, or the wife loves her husband.

"When you have such love for God, you don't feel the attraction of maya – for wife, children, or dear relatives. You only retain compassion for them. The world then appears to be a foreign land, a land of duty alone. It's like having your home in a village and your place of work in Calcutta. You may have to live in a rented house in Calcutta for work. When you've gained love for God, you are completely rid of attachment to the world and of so-called worldly wisdom.

"If there is just a trace of worldliness, you can't see God. If a match-stick is wet, you may strike it a thousand times and it won't ignite; you will only waste a pile of matches. The mind attached to the world is like a wet match stick.

"When Srimati (Radha) said, 'I see Krishna everywhere,' her gopi friends[1] said, 'How? We can't see him. Are you delirious?' Srimati said, 'Friend, apply the collyrium of love to your eyes and you will be able to see him.' (*To Vijay*) A song of your

1. Sakhis.

Brahmo Samaj says: 'O Lord, is it possible to know You without love, however much one may perform sacrifices, worship, and the rest?'

"If you but once acquire this love, this longing, this ripe devotion, you will see Him both with form and without form."

God-vision not possible without His grace

Vijay: "How can one see God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not until the mind is purified. Attached to 'lust and greed,' the mind remains soiled, it remains covered with dirt. If a needle is covered with mud, a magnet can't attract it. But when the mud and dirt are washed off, the magnet attracts. You can wash the dirt of the mind with the tears from your eyes. If you weep with tears of repentance, crying, 'O Lord, I shall never do such a thing again!' then this dirt is washed away and the magnet of God can attract the needle of the mind. You then go into samadhi and have the vision of God.

"But though you try a thousand times, nothing is achieved without God's grace. Without His grace, you cannot see Him. Is it easy to gain His grace? You have to get rid of your ego completely. When you have the feeling that you are the doer, you cannot see God. Suppose a man is in charge of the storeroom and somebody comes and says to the master of the house, 'Sir, please give me some provisions from your storeroom.' The master says, 'There's a man in the storeroom. I don't have to go there.' God doesn't appear easily in the heart of the person who feels himself to be the doer.

"Only after gaining God's grace can you have His vision. He is the sun of knowledge. With just one of His rays, this whole world is illumined. That's how we're able to know one another and acquire different kinds of knowledge in the world. If God only once brings His light to His own face, we can see Him. A police sergeant goes around at night with a lantern in his hand. Nobody can see his face. But in this light he can see everybody else's face, and others can see each other.

"If you want to see the sergeant, you must ask, 'Sir, be kind enough to turn the light on your own face so that I may see you.'

"You must pray to God, 'Lord, be kind enough to turn the light of knowledge on Your own face so that I may see You.'

"If there is no light in a house, it means poverty. You must light the lamp of knowledge in the heart: 'Lighting the lamp of knowledge in the house, behold the face of the all-blissful Mother.'"

Vijay has brought medicine with him and wishes to take it now. The medicine has to be taken with water, so Thakur asks that some be brought.

Thakur is a sea of motiveless grace. Vijay cannot afford a carriage or the boat fare to go to see Sri Ramakrishna, so now and then Thakur sends someone to bring him. This time he sent Balaram, who paid for the carriage in which Vijay accompanied him. In the evening Vijay, Nava Kumar, and others of Vijay's companions go to Balaram's boat. Balaram will take them to the Baghbazar ghat. M. takes the same boat.

The boat reaches the Annapurna ghat in Bagbhazar. When they are close to Balaram's residence in Baghbazar, the moon begins to cast a mellow light.

Today is the fourth day of the bright fortnight. It is winter and a bit chilly. Pondering the nectar-like teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and carrying his blissful image in their hearts, Vijay, Balaram, M. and the others return home.

Section V

Conversation with Amrita, Trailokya, and Other Brahmos at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi

It is the fifth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Phalgun, Thursday, 19 Chaitra (29 March 1883). After his midday meal, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna is resting in his room at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. The Ganges is flowing west in front of the temple. Its flood tide started at two o'clock. A few devotees have arrived. Among them are the Brahmo devotee Amrita and the singer Trailokya, whose sweet songs of the glories of divine play have charmed the minds of young and old many times in Keshab's Brahmo Samaj.

Rakhal is not well. Sri Ramakrishna tells the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look, Rakhal isn't well. Would soda water be of any help? I don't know what will happen. Rakhal, take some of Jagannath's prasad."

As he speaks, Sri Ramakrishna goes into an extraordinary state.[1] Perhaps he is seeing the Lord Himself taking the form of a boy in the body of Rakhal, who is sitting in front of him. This young devotee, pure in spirit, has renounced 'lust and greed.'

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1. Bhava.

Sri Ramakrishna, who himself remains inebriated day and night with the love of God, looks at him lovingly. The attitude of parent and child,[1] is natural to him, so perhaps he is looking upon this young boy, Rakhal, with the attitude of a mother toward her child. He begins to chant 'Govinda, Govinda' tenderly. He seems to be feeling the same emotion Yashoda felt when she saw Baby Krishna.

The devotees watch this amazing scene. Suddenly everything becomes very still. Uttering the name "Govinda," Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi. His body becomes as motionless as a picture, his sense organs seem to have ceased working, and his eyes are fixed on the tip of his nose. It is impossible to know if he is breathing. Only his body seems to be left on earth, the bird of his soul having soared into the sky of God-consciousness.

Where is he who was worrying with a mother's tenderness over her child? Is this amazing transformation of feeling known as samadhi?

Just then, dressed in the ochre cloth[2] of a monk, an unknown Bengali enters the room and sits on the floor.

Chapter Two

karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya ya āste manasā smaran ।
indriyārthān vimūḍhātmā mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate ।।

[He who sits, restraining the organs of action while letting his mind dwell on sense objects, deludes himself; he is called a hypocrite.]

– Bhagavad Gita 3:6

1. Vatsalya bhava.
2. Gerua.

The gerua cloth and sannyas –untruth is not good even in acting

Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi is gradually coming to an end. He talks in a state of ecstasy, as if to himself.

Sri Ramakrishna (*at the sight of the gerua cloth*): "Why this gerua? What can be achieved by merely wearing the cloth? (*Laughter*.) Somebody said, 'Giving up the Chandi, I have taken to the drum.' He used to sing the hymns of the Chandi, now he beats the drum. (*All laugh*.)

"Dispassion[1] is of three or four kinds. Having become burnt by the fire of the world, one puts on gerua. Such dispassion does not last long. Or perhaps a man is out of work, so he puts on the ochre cloth and leaves for Kashi. After three months his family gets a letter, 'I have a job now. I shall return home in a few days. Please don't worry.' And then there is the man who has everything, who lacks nothing, but does not enjoy anything. He weeps only for God. This kind of dispassion is genuine dispassion.

"Any untruth is bad. Even false garb is not good. If one's dress does not correspond to one's mind, it gradually brings complete ruin. By speaking lies or practicing falsehood, one gradually loses the fear of it. It is better to wear white clothes. When there is attachment in the mind and lapse of the ideal within while wearing gerua – this is dreadful!"

1. Vairagya.

Visit to Keshab's house and watching the *Nava Vrindavan*

"The point is that even while acting in a play, virtuous people should not use false words or do anything that's not true. I went to Keshab Sen's house to watch the play *Nava Vrindavan.* A person brought something on the stage called a cross, and then he began to sprinkle water, saying, 'It is the water of peace.' I also saw a man staggering around acting intoxicated."

A Brahmo devotee: "It was Ku-Babu."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's not good for a devotee to even play such a part. Keeping the mind on such matters for any length of time brings harm. The mind is like a fresh white cloth. It takes on the colour it's dipped in. By keeping the mind in falsehood for any length of time, it will take on the colour of falsehood.

"Another day I went to see the play *Nimai Sannyasa*[1] at Keshab's house. Some flattering disciples of Keshab spoiled the whole drama. One of them said to him, 'You are the Chaitanya of Kali.' Keshab looked at me and said with a smile, 'And what about him?' I said, 'I am the servant of your servants, the dust of your dust.' Keshab has a desire for name and fame."

1. The play depicting the sannyas of Sri Chaitanya.

Narendra and others are ever-perfect – they have inborn love and devotion

(*To Amrita and Trailokya*): "Narendra, Rakhal, and these youngsters are ever-perfect. They are devotees of God in every birth. Ordinary devotees attain a little devotion after practicing spiritual disciplines and austerities, but these boys have felt love for God since their birth. They are like the natural image of Shiva which comes from the earth and is not made by man.

"The ever-perfect are a class by themselves. Not every bird has a crooked beak. They are never attached to the world. There is the example of Prahlada.

"Ordinary people practice spiritual disciplines and have love for God, but they are also attached to the world, they are enchanted by 'lust and greed.' They are like a fly that sits on a flower, on sandesh,[1] and also on filth. (*All are still and silent*.)

"The ever-perfect are like bees, which sit only on flowers to sip honey. The ever-perfect drink the nectar of the Divine; they never seek worldly pleasures.

"The love and devotion of the ever-perfect is not like the ordinary devotion acquired by practicing spiritual disciplines. Performing so much repetition of the name and so much meditation is worshiping in a prescribed manner, is ritualistic devotion. It's like going around a rice field along the outside ridge to reach the other side. Or it's like going to a

1. A Bengali sweet.

village in a roundabout way along the banks of a winding river.

"When raga bhakti,[1] prema bhakti,[2] or love for God as one's near and dear one develops, one doesn't have to practice rituals any more. It's like crossing a rice field after the harvest. One doesn't have to walk along the ridge of the field, but can go straight across.

"When a river floods, you don't have to walk along its winding banks; when the field is pole-deep with water, you can go straight across it in a boat.

"You cannot realize God without that kind of passionate love, intense devotion."

The essence of samadhi – savikalpa and nirvikalpa

Amrita: "Sir, what do you experience in the state of samadhi?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Haven't you heard about the cockroach becoming a beetle by meditating on a beetle? Do you know how I feel? Like a fish released from a pot into the Ganges."

Amrita: "Isn't there the least trace of ego left then?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, usually a little ego remains. However much you may grind a little piece of gold on a grindstone, a small grain of it remains. Another example is a big fire and its spark. Outer consciousness disappears, but usually a bit of 'I-ness' remains for enjoyment. Enjoyment

1. Loving devotion for God.
2. Ecstatic love.

is only possible when there is 'I' and 'you.' But sometimes He effaces even this 'I-ness.' This is called jada samadhi – nirvikalpa samadhi. What this experience is cannot be described in words. A salt doll went to measure the depth of the sea, but it only went in a little way before it was dissolved. It became just like the sea. Then who was there to come back and give an account of how deep the sea is?"

Section VI

Conversation with Devotees about the Essence of Brahman and Primal Power at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple

Talk on Vidyasagar and Keshab Sen

Chapter One

It is Sunday, the third day of the dark fortnight in the month of Ashadha, 22 July 1883. The devotees have come again to see Sri Ramakrishna. They do not generally have the leisure to come on other days of the week. Adhar, Rakhal, and M. arrived at the Kali Temple from Calcutta at about one or two in the afternoon. They came in a hired carriage. Sri Ramakrishna has taken a little rest after his midday meal. Mani Mallick and some other devotees are also there.

The temple of Radhakanta and the temple of Bhavatarini[1] are located in the eastern part of the large courtyard of Rasmani's Kali Temple. The twelve Shiva temples are in the western area. Directly to the north of the row of Shiva temples is Sri Ramakrishna Deva's room. To the west of his room is a semicircular verandah. Looking west from there he watches the Ganges. Between the embankment of the Ganges and the verandah is an extensive flower garden belonging to the temple. It stretches from its southern boundary to the panchavati in the north where Sri Ramakrishna practiced austerities. On the east of the garden are

1. Saviour of humankind, a name of the Divine Mother.

two entrances. By the Paramahamsa Deva's room are a few poinciana trees.[1] Nearby are gardenia, kokilax, and white and red oleanders. On the inner wall of Sri Ramakrishna's room hang pictures of gods and goddesses, among them a picture of Christ holding Peter's hand to save him from drowning. There is also a stone image of the Buddha. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on a wooden cot, facing north. Devotees are sitting, some on the floor, some on a mat, and others on small carpets.[2] All of them are gazing at the great man's blissful figure. Not far from the room, along the western side of the embankment, the holy river Ganges flows south. It is as though the strong current of the rainy season is rushing to meet the sea, glancing on the meditation room of the great saint and touching it on its way.

Mani Mallick is a Brahmo devotee, sixty or sixty-five years old. A few days ago he visited Kashi.[3] Today he has come to see Thakur and is giving him an account of his visit.

Mani Mallick: "I met another sadhu. He said, 'Without control over the senses, nothing can be achieved. How does it help merely to cry, 'Lord, Lord?'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you know what people like that sadhu believe? That one must first practice spiritual disciplines: tranquility (shama), self-control (dama), and forbearance (titiksha). These people strive for nirvana. They are Vedantists. They only meditate on this: 'Brahman is real and the world illusory.' It is an extremely difficult path. If the world is illusory, then you too are illusory. Those who say so are also illusory, and

1. Krishnachuda, or gulmohar.
2. Asanas.
3. Benares, a place of pilgrimage.

what they say is also like a dream. It is a very abstruse philosophy.

"Do you know how it is? Like burning camphor that leaves no trace. When you burn firewood, you still get an ash residue. After ultimate reasoning comes samadhi. Then there is no awareness of 'I,' 'you,' and 'the universe.'"

Meetings with Pundit Padmalochan and Vidyasagar

"Padmalochan was a man of great spiritual knowledge. He had great respect for me, even though I repeated 'Mother, Mother.' Padmalochan was the court pundit of the King of Burdwan. He came to Calcutta and stayed in a garden house near Kamarhati. I felt some desire to visit the pundit, but I sent Hriday to find out if he had any vanity. I was told that the pundit had no ego. So I met him. Such a great jnani and such a pundit! Yet he began to weep when he heard me sing a song of Ramprasad's. The satisfaction I found in talking with him, I have never found with anybody else. He said to me, 'Give up your desire for the company of devotees. All these different people will bring your downfall.' Once he had a written discussion with Utsavananda, Vaishnavcharan's guru. He said to me, 'Let me tell you about it.' There was a discussion at a meeting about who was the greater, Shiva or Brahma. At the end of the discussion the pundits consulted Padmalochan. Padmalochan was so guileless he replied, 'Not one of my ancestors for fourteen generations ever saw Shiva or Brahma.' Hearing about my renunciation of 'lust and greed,' he said to me one day, 'Why have you given them up? This is money and that is clay. Such a feeling

of difference is the result of ignorance.' What could I say to him? I said, 'I don't know, my dear! I don't relish money and the like.'"

Charities of Vidyasagar, but gold lies buried within

"There was a pundit who was very vain. He didn't accept God with form. But who can understand the ways of God? He revealed Himself to the pundit in the form of Primordial Power. The vision made the pundit unconscious for a long time. After regaining a little consciousness he could only utter, 'Ka! Ka! Ka!' (that is, Kali) – just that syllable."

A devotee: "Sir, you have met Vidyasagar. What do you think of him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Vidyasagar has scholarship, and he is kind, but he lacks insight. Gold lies buried within him. Had he discovered this gold, much of his external activities would have been reduced. Finally he would have given them up completely. Had he known that God resides inside, in the heart, his mind would have been directed to Him in meditation and contemplation. Some people develop dispassion after performing selfless work[1] for a long time. Their mind goes to God, and becomes absorbed in Him in the end.

"The kind of work Ishwar Vidyasagar does is very good. It is good to have compassion for others. There is, however, a great difference between compassion [daya] and attachment [maya]. Compassion is good; attachment is not good. Maya

1. Nishkama karma.

is love for one's own near and dear ones – wife, son, brother, sister, brother's son, sister's son, father, and mother – love for these. Compassion, however, is love for all beings equally."

Chapter Two

guṇatrayavyatiriktaṁ sacchidānandasvarupam ।

[The real nature of Sat-chit-ananda is beyond the three gunas.]

Brahman is beyond the three gunas, beyond speech

M.: "Is compassion [daya] also bondage?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That is a very subtle concept. Compassion comes from sattvaguna. Sattvaguna preserves, rajoguna creates, and tamoguna destroys. But Brahman is beyond the three gunas – sattva, rajas and tamas. It is beyond nature.[1]

"The gunas cannot really reach Brahman. They are like robbers who cannot go out in the open, afraid that they might be arrested. Sattva, rajas, and tamas – all three gunas – are robbers. Let me tell you a story:

"Once a man was going through a forest when three robbers came and caught hold of him. They robbed him of all he possessed. One of the robbers said, 'Why keep this man alive now?' Saying this, he stepped forward with a sword to kill him. The second robber then said, 'No brother, what use is it to kill him? Let's tie his hands and feet and leave him here.' Doing so, the robbers left him and went

1. Prakriti.

on their way. After a while one of them returned and said, 'Oh, you're suffering so much! Let me free you from the bonds.' Untying the man, he said, 'Come with me. I'll take you to the main road.' After a long time, when they reached the road, the robber said, 'Follow this road. See, there is your house.' The man then said to the robber, 'Sir, you have been very kind to me. Please come with me to my house.' The robber said, 'No, I can't go there. The police will come to know.'

"The world itself is a forest. In this forest sattva, rajas, and tamas are robbers. They rob a person of spiritual knowledge. Tamoguna wants to destroy him, and rajoguna binds him to the world. But sattvaguna saves him from rajas and tamas. By taking refuge in sattvaguna, one is saved from lust, anger, and other such evil effects of tamas. Besides, sattvaguna loosens the bonds of the world. But even sattvaguna is a robber. It can't give spiritual knowledge. What it does is put you on the road to God. Putting you on the road, it says, 'Just look, there is your home.' But sattvaguna remains at a great distance from the knowledge of Brahman.

"What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words. He who attains Brahman cannot give information about Him. There is a saying, 'A ship never returns once it reaches the black waters.'

"Four friends taking a walk came upon a high wall. Curious to know what was on the other side, one of the men climbed up to look. As he peeped over the wall, he exclaimed with wonder, 'Ah! Ah!' and he fell in. He gave no information. Each of

them climbed up and cried out, 'Ah! Ah!' and jumped in. Who could then tell what they saw?"

Jadabharata, Dattatreya, and Sukadeva – all knowers of Brahman

"After realizing Brahman, Jadabharata and Dattatreya could give no information about It. One's I-consciousness vanishes after passing into samadhi, after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. So Ramprasad says: 'If you cannot attain (the knowledge of Brahman) yourself, O mind, take Ramprasad with you.' The mind must dissolve. After that, Ramprasad, that is, the ego, must merge. Only then does one attain knowledge of Brahman."

A devotee: "Sir, didn't Sukadeva attain Ultimate Knowledge?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Some say that Sukadeva only saw and touched the ocean of Brahman but did not dive deep into It. That's why he could return and impart spiritual instruction. According to others, he returned after attaining the knowledge of Brahman in order to teach mankind. He had to narrate the Bhagavata to Parikshit and also teach people in various ways. So God didn't merge his 'I' altogether. His 'I of knowledge' was retained."

Instruction to Keshab – organization (sectarianism) is not right

A devotee: "Can one keep an organization intact after attaining the knowledge of Brahman?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I talked to Keshab Sen about the knowledge of Brahman. Keshab said, 'Please

elaborate further.' I said, 'If I talk further, you will not be able to keep your organization intact.' 'Then please don't tell me any more, sir!' Keshab replied. (*All laugh*.) Then I said to him,"'I and mine" – these indicate ignorance. "I am the doer, this is my wife, that is my son, these are my possessions," honour, respect, and so on – such feelings arise because of ignorance.' Thereupon Keshab said, 'Sir, if you give up the "I," nothing whatsoever will remain!' I said, 'Keshab, I'm not asking you to renounce your "I" altogether. Only give up your "unripe I." "I am the doer, this is my wife or son, I am the guru," and so on – this pride is the "unripe I." Give it up. Renounce it and keep the "ripe I" – "I am His servant, I am His devotee, I am not the doer, He is the doer."'"

It is right to preach religion only when one has received God's command

A devotee: "Can the 'ripe I' create an organization?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I said to Keshab Sen, 'I am the leader of the organization, I have made it, I impart instruction to mankind' – this 'I' is the 'unripe I.' It is very difficult to propagate religion. Without the command of God it cannot be done. His command is needed. For example, Sukadeva received the command to narrate the story of the Bhagavata. There's nothing wrong in preaching and instructing mankind after seeing God and having received His command. The 'I' of such a person is not the 'unripe I' – it is the 'ripe I.'

"I asked Keshab to renounce the 'unripe I.' There is no harm in having the 'I of a servant' or the 'I of a devotee.'

"You're talking about your organization. Many people are leaving it. Keshab said, 'Sir, during the last three years people from my group have returned to the other group. They spoke unkindly when they left.' I said, 'Why didn't you see their natures? This is what comes of making disciples indiscriminately.'"

Instruction to Keshab: accept the Primal Power

"And I said to Keshab, 'Accept the Primal Power. Brahman and Shakti (His power) are inseparable. He who is Brahman is Himself Shakti. So long as there is body consciousness, you are conscious of duality. They are two only in name.' Keshab later accepted Kali (Shakti).

"One day Keshab came here with his disciples. I said to him, 'I'd like to hear you lecture.' He delivered his lecture seated in the chandni. Then we sat at the ghat and had a long talk. I said, 'He who is Bhagavan[1] is Himself the devotee in another form. He Himself is also the Bhagavata (a scripture) in yet another form. You Brahmos, please say, "Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan." Keshab said it and his disciples also repeated together, 'Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan.' When I said, 'Please say, "Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava," Keshab said, 'Sir, not that far. If I say that, people will call me orthodox.'"

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1 . The Personal God as Lord.

Past story of his life – Sri Ramakrishna swoons on seeing the ways of maya

"It is very difficult to go beyond the three gunas. It is not possible before God-realization. The embodied soul lives in the domain of maya. This maya doesn't let one know God; it keeps a human being in ignorance. Hriday once brought a little calf. One day I saw that he tied it in the garden to graze. I asked him, 'Hriday, why do you tie it there every day?' Hriday replied, 'Uncle, I will send this calf to the village. When it grows, it will be yoked to the plough.' As he said these words, I became unconscious and fell down. I said to myself, 'Such are the ways of maya!' Kamarpukur and Sihore are so far from Calcutta! This little calf will tread so long a path! It will grow there. And later, after so many days, it will pull the plough – this is what is called the world, and this is what is called maya.

"It was after a long time that I regained consciousness."

Chapter Three

In samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna merges in samadhi day and night. How his days and nights pass! At times he talks of God or takes part in singing hymns with the devotees. At about three or four o'clock M. sees him seated on his smaller cot, lost in ecstasy. After some time he begins to talk to the Divine Mother.

Talking to the Mother, Thakur says, "Mother, why have You given him only one kala (one sixteenth part of divine power)?" He remains silent for a moment. Then he says, "I understand, Mother.

This one kala will be enough for him. Only one kala will enable him to do Your work – to preach to mankind."

> Does Thakur transmit spiritual powers to his inner and intimate disciples in this way? What is it all about? Later these disciples will teach humankind. Is he making arrangements for this?

Besides M., Rakhal is also there. Thakur is still in a divine mood. He says to Rakhal, "You were angry with me. Why did I reprimand you? There was a reason for it: to make the medicine work. When disease of the spleen advances, a leaf of mansa (a medicinal herb) has to be applied."

After a while he says, "I have seen that Hazra is like a dry piece of wood. Yet he lives here. Why? There's a reason for this. Without Jatila and Kutila (the trouble-making mother and sister-in-law of Radha), the play does not develop.

(*To M.*) "You must accept the forms of God. Do you know the significance of the Divine Mother in the form of Jagaddhatri? It is She who supports the world. If She doesn't support it, doesn't protect it, the world will fall, it will perish. Jagaddhatri only dawns in the heart of one who can tame the elephant of the mind."

Rakhal: "Mana-matt-kari." (The mind is a mad elephant.)

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's why the lion of Simhavahini (Durga, riding a lion) keeps the elephant under its control."

At dusk arati is performed in the temple. Sri Ramakrishna chants the names of the gods and

goddesses in his room. Incense has been burnt in the room. With hands folded, he is seated on the smaller cot, meditating on the Divine Mother. Govinda Mukherji of Belgharia and some of his friends enter the room, offer their salutations, and take their seats on the floor. M. and Rakhal are sitting there.

Outside the moon is shining and all of nature is still; it seems to be smiling. Inside, everyone is sitting quietly, gazing at the serene image of Sri Ramakrishna. He is absorbed in ecstasy. After a while, still in a state of ecstasy, he begins to talk.

The form of Shyama – Purusha and Prakriti – Yogamaya – Shiva and Kali, and Radha and Krishna – explanation of the forms – superior devotee – the path of reason

Sri Ramakrishna (*in ecstasy*): "Tell me if you have any doubt. I will explain everything to you."

Govinda and other devotees are thoughtful.

Govinda: "Revered sir, why is Shyama[1] dark?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's because She's at a distance. Go near and you'll find that She has no colour. The water in a pond looks dark from a distance. Go near it, take some in your hand, and you see that it has no colour. The sky appears blue from a distance. Look at the sky near you and you see that it is colourless. The nearer you go to God, the more you will realize that He has neither name nor form. Move a little away from Mother Shyama and you will find that She is the colour blue, like

1. Goddess Kali.

grass flowers. Is Shyama Purusha[1] or Prakriti?[2] A devotee was performing worship. Another man came and saw the deity wearing a sacred thread. He said, 'You have put the sacred thread round the Mother's neck!' The worshiper said, 'Brother, you alone have recognized the Mother. As for me, I have never been able to know whether She is male or female. That is why I have put a sacred thread round her neck.'[3]

"The One who is Shyama is also Brahman. The One who has form is also formless. The Being who has attributes is also without attributes. Brahman is Shakti, and Shakti is Brahman. They are inseparable – the male Sat-chit-ananda and the female Sat-chit-ananda."

Govinda: "What is the meaning of yogamaya?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yogamaya means the union of Purusha and Prakriti. Whatever you see is the union of Purusha and Prakriti. In the image of Shiva and Kali, Kali stands on Shiva; he lies like a corpse while Kali looks down at him. All this is the union of Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha is inactive, so Shiva is lying like a corpse. It is in conjunction with Purusha that Prakriti performs all Her actions. She creates, preserves, and dissolves.

"The dual image of Radha and Krishna [both Radha and Krishna in one piece] also signifies the same. Because of this union they are bent towards

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1. The Self, the Absolute, Spirit. Pure Consciousness, the witness of the changes of Prakriti.
2. Primordial Nature, composed of the gunas, the material of the universe of mind and matter.
3. Only the images of male deities wear a sacred thread.

each other. To denote this very union, Sri Krishna wears a pearl in his nose and Radha a blue stone in hers. Radha has the fair complexion of a bright pearl, while Sri Krishna is of dark complexion. It is for this reason that Radha wears the blue stone. Furthermore, Sri Krishna's apparel is yellow; that of Radha is blue.

"Who is the best devotee? The one who, after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, sees that God alone has become the universe and the twenty-four cosmic principles. One first reaches the roof by discriminating, 'Not this, not this.' Then he realizes that the steps are made of the same material as the roof – brick, lime, and brick-dust. Then he sees that Brahman Himself has become all living beings and the universe.

"Mere reasoning! I spit on it! I spit on it! It is of no use. (*Thakur spits on the ground.*) Why make yourself dry by reasoning? As long as you have the consciousness of 'I' and 'you,' you must have pure love and devotion at His lotus feet.

(*To Govinda*) "At times I say, 'You are I, and I am You.' And sometimes 'You' remains. The 'I' has then disappeared and is not traceable.

"It is Shakti that becomes the avatar. According to one school of thought, Rama and Krishna are but two waves of the Ocean of Bliss and Consciousness.[1]

"After attaining the knowledge of non-duality (advaita jnana) comes spiritually awakened consciousness (chaitanya). Then one sees that God

1. Chidananda.

alone exists in all things as Consciousness. After this realization comes ananda (bliss). Advaita, Chaitanya, and Nityananda.[1]"

The Lord has forms – longing for Him comes after desire for enjoyment vanishes

(*To M.*) "I say to you, don't disbelieve in the forms of God. Have faith that God has forms and meditate on the form that you love most.

(*To Govinda*) "Do you understand? As long as the desire for enjoyment remains, so long does one not feel the yearning to know God and attain His vision. A child plays with his toys, forgetting everything else. Cajole him with sandesh, he will eat just a piece of it. When he neither likes his toy nor enjoys the sandesh, he says, 'I want to go to my mother!' He doesn't need more sandesh. If a person he doesn't know and has never seen says to him, 'Come with me, I'll take you to your mother,' the child goes with him. He goes with anyone who will carry him in his arms to his mother.

"You develop yearning for God when you're finished with the enjoyment of worldly things. Then your only concern is to attain Him. You listen to anything anyone tells you about God."

M. (*to himself*), One yearns for God only when one has finished with desire for worldly enjoyment.

1. Non-duality, Consciousness, and Eternal Bliss.

Section VII

With Devotees at Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter One

Talk on Vedanta

Sri Ramakrishna is with the devotees at the Dakshineswar temple. It is Sunday, 19 August 1883, the first day of the dark fortnight in the month of Shravana. Only a short time ago the sanai[1] was played during the worship while food was offered to the deities.[2] The doors of the temple have been shut. Sri Ramakrishna has taken a rest after his midday meal and is now sitting on the smaller cot in his room. It is noon. M. enters and bows to him. After a while Sri Ramakrishna begins to talk to him about Vedanta.

Belief of Vedantists – talk about Krishnakishore

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Listen, the Ashtavakra Samhita talks about Self-knowledge. The knowers of the Self say 'So 'ham'; that is, 'I am that Paramatman (the highest Self).' This is the view of the sannyasins of the Vedantic school. But it is not suited for householders. They feel they perform all actions and duties themselves, so how can they say, 'I am that Paramatman beyond all action?' According to Vedantists, the Self has no attachment to anything. Pleasure and pain, virtue and vice, none of these can harm the Self. But they

1. A double-reed wind instrument, similar to an oboe.
2. Bhoga arati.

do afflict those who identify themselves with their bodies. Smoke soils a wall, but it cannot affect space. Krishnakishore used to talk like a jnani and say, 'I am kha,' that is, like space – but then he's a real devotee and can say that. It is not appropriate for others."

Vice and virtue – maya or compassion

"But to cherish the idea 'I am free' is very good. If you say again and again, 'I am free, I am free,' you become free. On the other hand, if you constantly say, 'I am bound, I am bound,' you indeed become bound. He who repeats 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner,' that wretch is sure to have a fall. Rather, one should say, 'I have chanted the name of God, what evil can befall me, what bondage?'

(*To M.*) "Look here, my mind is upset. Hriday[1] has written me a letter saying he is very ill. Is my concern maya or daya (compassion)?"

What can M. say? He remains silent.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you know what maya is? Love toward your relatives: toward father and mother, brother and sister, wife and son, nephew and niece – that is maya. But daya means love for all created beings. Well, what is it in my case – maya or daya? Hriday has done so much for me, served me so well. He has cleaned my excrement with his own hands. But he was equally hard on me

1. Hriday served Sri Ramakrishna for almost twenty-three years at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, until the day of Snana Yatra Festival (the ceremony of Jagannath's going out in procession for a bath) in 1881.

at the end. He became so harsh that once I went to the embankment to throw myself into the Ganges to drown. But he has done a lot for me. If he could get some money, my mind would be at rest. But whom can I ask for it? I don't want to ask any of the gentlemen who come to see me."

Chapter Two

Clay image of the Divine Mother – vision of the Divine Mother Mrinmayi in Vishnupur

At two or three o'clock in the afternoon the great devotees Adhar Sen and Balaram Bose arrive. They prostrate before Sri Ramakrishna and sit down, asking him how he is. Sri Ramakrishna says, "Well, my body is all right, but my mind is a little disturbed."

He does not mention anything about Hriday's trouble.

The conversation turns to Goddess Simhavahini[1] in the house of the Mallicks of Burrabazar.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I went to see Simhavahini at the house of the Mallicks in Chashadhopa Para. The family lives in a dilapidated house in straightened circumstances, with pigeon droppings here, moss there, and lime and sand plaster crumbling off the walls. The prosperity that I have seen in the houses of other Mallicks was not in this one. (*To M.*) Tell me, what does this mean? Please tell me."

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1. The Divine Mother seated on a lion.

M. remains silent.

"Do you know what? Everyone must reap the consequences of his past actions. One has to accept that there are tendencies from past births[1] and the fruits of these actions are now being played out.[2]

(*To M.*) "And in that dilapidated house, I saw the face of Simhavahini beaming with glory. You have to believe in the divine presence in an image of the Deity.[3]

"Once I went to Vishnupur. The king has a beautiful temple there. There is an image of the Divine Mother called Mrinmayi. There are several lakes near the temple: Krishna-bandh, Lal-bandh and so on. Now tell me why I smelled the ointment used by women for their hair. I didn't know at the time that women devotees offer the goddess this ointment when they go to have Her darshan. I went into bhava samadhi near the lake, before I had seen the image. In that ecstatic state I had the vision of Mrinmayi from the waist up."

Pleasure and pain of the devotee – stories of the Bhagavata and Mahabharata

By this time some other devotees have arrived. The conversation turns to the coup and war in Kabul. One of them says, "Yakub Khan has been deposed." Addressing the Paramahamsa, he says, "Sir, Yakub Khan is a great devotee."

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1. Samskaras.
2. Prarabdha karma.
3. Avirbhava – manifestation, visible presence.

Sri Ramakrishna: "The fact is that pleasure and pain are the characteristics of embodiment. In Kavi Kankan's Chandi it is said that Kaluvir was sent to jail and stones were placed on his chest, though Kaluvir was a highly favoured child of the Divine Mother, Bhagavati. When one takes on a body, pleasure and pain come with it.

"Srimanta was a great devotee. And the Divine Mother had great affection for his mother, Khullana. Yet Srimanta suffered so much. He was taken to the cremation ground to be cut into pieces!

"A woodcutter was another great devotee. The Divine Mother granted him Her vision. She loved him immensely and bestowed on him much grace. Yet the woodcutter was not freed from work. He still had to earn his living by cutting wood. Devaki had the vision of the four-armed Lord Vishnu holding conch, discus, mace, and lotus, but her imprisonment did not end."

M.: "Why speak only of ending the imprisonment? This body is the source of all the trouble. It would have been better for her to be freed from the body."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The fact is that one reaps the fruit of those past actions which are producing results in this life.[1] One has to remain in the body until the results of those past actions wear out. Once a blind man had a dip in the Ganges. He was freed from all his sins, but his blindness was not cured. (*All laugh*.) It was the fruit of actions in his past life, so he had to bear it."

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1. Prarabdha karma.

Mani: "The arrow once shot is no longer under one's control."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Whatever the pleasure and pain of the body may be, a devotee's spiritual knowledge, the wealth of his love and devotion for God, endures. This treasure is never lost. Just see what calamities the Pandavas suffered! But they never once, in all their troubles, lost their spiritual consciousness. Where can you find such men of knowledge and devotion?"

Chapter Three

In samadhi – arrival of the Captain and Narendra

Just then, Narendra and Vishwanath Upadhyaya arrive. Vishwanath is the emissary of the king of Nepal and the representative of that kingdom. Thakur calls him Captain. Narendra is twenty-two years old and is studying for his B.A. He comes to Sri Ramakrishna at times, particularly on Sundays.

They salute Sri Ramakrishna and sit down. The Paramahamsa Deva asks Narendra to sing. A tanpura (stringed instrument) is hanging on the western wall of the room. Now, all eyes turn toward the singer while the banya[1] and the tabla are being tuned. They are all anxious for the singing to start.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Listen, this one doesn't sound as good as it did before."

Captain: "It's filled to the brim, so there's no sound. (*All laugh*.) Like a pitcher filled to the brim with water.[2]"

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1. A semi-circular percussion instrument played along with tabla.
2. Purna kumbha.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Captain*): "But what about Narada and sages like him?"

Captain: "They spoke because they were moved by the sufferings of others."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. Narada and Sukadeva came down from samadhi out of compassion. They spoke for the good of others."

Narendra begins to sing:

Truth, goodness, and beauty[1] shine in the temple of my heart.

When will dawn that day when my mind, gazing on Him raptly, will dive deep into the ocean of that beauty divine?

When, O Lord, will infinite knowledge illumine my heart,

And this restless mind, made dumbfounded, take shelter at Your feet?

When, O Friend of my soul, will this mind be surrendered at the feet of the King of kings,

Where it will find peace and goodness without equal? Only there will the goal of my life be attained!

Where else can I find the grace of heavenly bliss while in this very body, in this very life?

O Lord, at the sight of Your pure, unblemished form, at the sight of Your radiance, the darkness of sin will flee, even as darkness is dispelled by light.

Just as the chakor[2] frolics in delight at the rising of the moon,

So too does bliss, like embodied nectar, well up in my heart as I, O Lord, become intoxicated with Your light.

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1. Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram: Absolute Truth, Absolute Good, and Absolute Beauty, which are one.
2. A red-legged partridge.

O, Friend of the lowly, fulfil my desire and light in my heart a blazing faith, as bright and steady as the polestar.

Then shall I remain immersed both night and day in the joy of love, forgetting myself in the finding of You.

But when will dawn such a day?

When Sri Ramakrishna hears the words 'bliss, like embodied nectar,' he goes into deep samadhi. He sits with his hands folded, facing the east. His body erect, he dives deep into the ocean of beauty – the All-Blissful Mother. He has lost all external consciousness. One cannot even tell if he is breathing. He is still and unblinking, sitting like an image drawn on canvas, gone from this kingdom.

Chapter Four

Ways to attain Sat-chit-ananda – difference between a man of knowledge and a devotee

Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi comes to an end. When he was in samadhi, Narendra had left the room and gone to the eastern verandah where Hazra was sitting on a blanket with a rosary in his hand. Narendra and he had begun to talk. By now Sri Ramakrishna's room is full of devotees. He looks around at them when his samadhi is over. He finds that Narendra is not there. The tanpura is lying on the floor. All the devotees gaze at him with curiosity.

Sri Ramakrishna: "He has lit the fire. Now it does not matter whether he stays or goes. (*To Captain and the others*) Give your mind to the

Being of bliss and consciousness[1] and you will also feel joy. The bliss of God-consciousness is always there, it is only hidden by a veil. The less you are attached to the senses, the more the mind will go towards God."

Captain: "The more you proceed toward Calcutta, the farther you go from Kashi; and the more you proceed toward Kashi, the farther you will be from your home."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The more Radha advances toward Krishna, the more she smells the sweet fragrance of his body. The more one advances towards God, the more one gains fervour[2] and loving devotion to Him. The more a river advances to the sea, the more one sees its ebb and flow.

"The Ganges flows only in one direction within a man of knowledge. For him everything is like a dream. He always dwells in his own true Self. Within a devotee the Ganges does not flow only in one direction; it has its ebb and flow tides. The devotee laughs and weeps, sings and dances. The devotee wants to enjoy God. Sometimes he swims; sometimes he dives; other times he rises – just as a piece of ice floats up and down in water." (*Laughte*r.)

1. Chidananda.
2. Bhava.

**Sat-chit-ananda and Sat-chit-anandamayi –
Brahman and Primal Power are inseparable**

"The jnani wants to know Brahman, but the devotee wants the Almighty Lord possessed of the six kinds of spiritual wealth. The fact is, Brahman and Shakti are inseparable. He who is Sat-chit-ananda is Himself Sat-chit-anandamayi.[1] For example, take a jewel and its lustre. When you talk of the lustre of a jewel, you think of the jewel – and when you talk of the jewel, you think of its lustre. Without knowing the jewel, you cannot know its lustre. Without knowing the lustre of a jewel, you cannot know what the jewel is.

"There is but one. Sat-chit-ananda is associated with different adjuncts because of differing manifestations of power. God has many forms – 'Thou art He, O Mother.'[2] Where there is action (of creation, preservation, and dissolution), there is Shakti (Power). It is water, whether it is still or has ripples and bubbles over its surface. The same Sat-chit-ananda is Himself the Primal Power who brings about creation, preservation, and dissolution. When Captain is not working, he is still Captain, and when he is worshiping, he is the same being. When Captain goes to the Governor General, he is still the same – he is only assuming a particular role."[3]

Captain: "Quite right, sir."

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1. All-Knowing, All-Intelligent and All-Blissful Mother of the Universe.
2. Tara.
3. Adjunct.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I said the same to Keshab Sen."

Captain: "Keshab is deficient. He is self-willed; he is a gentleman, not a sadhu."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Captain doesn't want me to visit Keshab."

Captain: "Sir, I can't do anything about your going."

Sri Ramakrishna (*irritated*): "You can go to the Governor General for money but I can't go to Keshab Sen! He meditates on God and chants His name. You yourself say that one God has become all living beings and the universe, 'Ishwara maya jiva jagat.' "

Chapter Five

With Narendra – synthesis of Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

Saying this, Thakur leaves the room abruptly and goes to the northeast verandah. Captain and the other devotees wait for him to return. M., however, accompanies him to the verandah, where Narendra is talking with Hazra. Sri Ramakrishna knows that Hazra, who is given to dry reasoning, says, "The world is like a dream; all worship and offerings are mental delusions. One's only aim is to meditate on one's own true Self: 'I am That.'"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Well, what are you talking about?"

Narendra (*smiling*): "We're talking about all kinds of things. We've been talking a long time."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "But pure knowledge and pure devotion are the same. Pure devotion takes you to the same place that pure knowledge does. But the path of devotion is smooth and easy."

Narendra (*quoting a song*): "'I have no need to reason. Mother, grant that I may be mad with Your love!' (*To M.*) Look, I've read Hamilton. He wrote, 'A learned ignorance is the end of philosophy and the beginning of religion'".

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What does that mean, brother?"

Narendra: "When one completes the study of philosophy, one becomes a 'learned fool.' Then he begins to talk on religion. His religion starts then."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Thank you, Thank you[1]!" (*Laughter.*)

Chapter Six

Chanting the name of God as evening approaches – many qualities of Narendra

After some time, seeing the evening draw nigh, most of the people depart. Narendra also leaves.

It is getting late, almost evening. The temple lighting attendants[2] are arranging for light all around. Two priests of the Kali and the Vishnu Temples are standing waist-deep in the Ganges to purify themselves, body and soul, before they perform the evening arati and offer the evening meal to the deities. Young men of Dakshineswar village, some

1. Sri Ramakrishna actually used these English words.
2. Faras.

> with walking sticks, some with friends, have come out for a stroll in the garden. They walk along the embankment to enjoy the pure evening breeze made fragrant with flowers and to watch the slightly undulating breast of the fast-flowing Ganges in this month of Shravana. Some, perhaps more reflective than others, are strolling through the solitary panchavati. Sri Ramakrishna stands on the western verandah watching the Ganges for a while.
>
> By the time darkness has fallen, the lamp men have lighted all the lamps. A maidservant comes to Sri Ramakrishna's room, lights his lamp, and burns incense.
>
> In the meantime arati has begun in the twelve Shiva temples. Soon after, it begins in the temples of Vishnu and Kali. Cymbals, gongs, and bells begin to ring in sweet solemnity, as the murmuring Ganges flows close by.
>
> It is the first day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana. In a short time the moon appears. The big courtyard and the tops of the trees in the garden are bathed by rays of moonlight as is the water of the Ganges flowing so joyfully.

When evening falls, Sri Ramakrishna bows to the Mother of the Universe and chants 'Haribol,' clapping his hands. In his room are images of many gods and goddesses: of Dhruva, Prahlada, King Rama, Mother Kali, and Radha-Krishna. He bows down to all the deities, repeating their names, and then he says, "Brahman-Atman-Bhagavan, Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan, Brahman-Shakti, Shakti-Brahman; Veda, Purana, Tantra, Gita, Gayatri. My only refuge, my only refuge. Not I, not I, but You, only You. I am just the instrument, You are the Being who uses the instrument," and so on.

After repeating these divine names, Sri Ramakrishna meditates on the Divine Mother, his hands folded. Some of the devotees walk on the bank of the river. Soon after arati is over, they come, one by one, and assemble in the Paramahamsa's room. He is sitting on the bed. M., Adhar, Kishori and others are sitting in front of him on the floor.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Narendra, Bhavanath, and Rakhal are ever-perfect souls. They belong to the class of the ishvarakoti.[1] Teaching them is not necessary. For example, Narendra doesn't care for anybody. He was with me in Captain's carriage. When Captain asked him to take a comfortable seat, he didn't even look at him. He is independent even of me. And he doesn't say what he knows lest I tell others in his presence that he is very learned. He has no delusion, no attachment – free from bondage. He is very talented in so many things – vocal and instrumental music, reading and writing. At the same time he has control over his senses. He says that he won't marry. There is a great affinity between Narendra and Bhavanath – as between husband and wife. Narendra doesn't come here very often. That is good. I become overwhelmed if I see him too often."

1. Eternally free and perfect souls.

Section VIII

Visit of Sri Ramakrishna to Sinduriapatti Brahmo Samaj

Conversation with Vijaykrishna Goswami and others

Chapter One

In samadhi

The eleventh day of the dark fortnight in the month of Kartik, 26 November 1883. The Sinduriapatti Brahmo Samaj holds its sessions at the house of Manilal Mallick on Chitpur Road. It is at the southern corner of Harrison Road, a little north of the shops that sell pomegranates, apples, other fruits, and pistachios. The Samaj holds its session in the first floor hall on the side of the house near the main road. Today is its annual session and Manilal has made suitable arrangements for the occasion.

The worship room is full of joy today, decorated inside and out with green leaves and various flowers and garlands. Devotees sitting in the hall are waiting for the worship to begin. There is not enough space for everybody in the room, so a number of them are pacing the western roof or are sitting on the beautifully made colourful benches placed here and there. At times the master of the house and family come to greet the devotees with sweet words. The devotees have begun to arrive in the late afternoon, inspired with a special zeal today because Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa Deva is to come. He is loved by the Brahmo devotees because of his great affection for their leaders – Keshab, Vijay, Shivanath, and others. He is intoxicated with the wine of divine love for God. This love, together with a burning faith,

childlike conversations with the Divine Mother, tearful yearning, a worship of women as Mother, avoidance of all worldly talk, and his incessant talk about God like an unbroken flow of oil, his harmony of religions and absence of the least trace of contempt for other religions, his tearful cry for the devotees of God – all these things have attracted the minds of Brahmo devotees. That is why so many people have come from distant places to have his darshan.

Shivanath and speaking truth

Sri Ramakrishna talks happily with Vijaykrishna Goswami and other Brahmo devotees. The assembly room has been lighted. Worship is to begin soon.

Sri Ramakrishna says: "Brother, why isn't Shivanath coming?"

Brahmo devotee: "Well, he is very busy today. He will not be able to come."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I feel very happy when I see Shivanath. He seems drenched in the bliss of love for God. Besides, when so many respect him, there is certainly some divine power in him. But Shivanath has a serious defect: he does not keep his word. He once told me he would come to the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar, but he didn't show up. He didn't even send word. That isn't right. It is said that truthful speech is the austerity in this Kaliyuga. By sticking to truth, one realizes God. By not sticking to truth, one gradually loses everything. Keeping this in mind, if I say I'm going to answer the call of nature but then feel no need to, I take a wash pot and go to the jhautala anyway. My concern is that I might ultimately lose my regard for truth. In this state of mind, I took

flowers in my hand and said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, here is your knowledge, and here is your ignorance; take them both, and grant me pure love. Here is your purity, and here is your impurity; take them both, and grant me pure love. Here is your good, and here is your evil; take them both, and grant me pure love. Here is your virtue, and here is your vice; take them both, and grant me pure love.'

"When I said these things, I could not say, 'Mother, take your truth and take your untruth.' I could give up everything to the Divine Mother – but I could not give up truth."

The worship starts according to the Brahmo system. The preacher is on the platform; a lantern illumines him. After the initial ceremony, he chants verses from the Vedas on the supreme Brahman. The Brahmo devotees begin to chant together the ancient words of the Aryan rishis. They chant: "Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, and the Infinite. It shines as Bliss and Immortality. It is Peace, All-Good, One without a second. It is pure and untouched by sin."

The chanting, filled with the sound of 'Om,' resounds in the hearts of the devotees. Most of them have almost entirely relinquished worldly desires. Their minds have become quite steady and meditative. They all sit quiet for some time, eyes closed in contemplation of the qualified Brahman of the Vedas.

The Paramahamsa Deva is overwhelmed with divine emotion. His body still as a picture, his eyes fixed, he is speechless. The wings of his soul are

flying elsewhere in joy. Only his inert body remains, as if emptied out.

As soon as his samadhi is over, Sri Ramakrishna opens his eyes and looks around. He notices that everyone at the meeting is sitting with closed eyes. With the words "Brahman! Brahman!" he suddenly stands up. Then, as the worship ends, and with the accompaniment of drum and cymbals, the devotees sing. Intoxicated with the joy of ecstatic love,[1] Sri Ramakrishna joins them in dance. Everyone is charmed to watch his graceful dance. Vijaykrishna and other devotees also begin to dance, encircling him. Watching this wonderful scene and enjoying the communal singing, many forget the world for some time. Drunk with the wine of God's name, they have begun to feel that worldly joy is, indeed, bitter; they forget worldly pleasure for a while.

When the devotional singing ends, they all sit around Thakur to hear what he is going to say.

Chapter Two

Advice to householders

Sri Ramakrishna addresses the assembled Brahmo devotees: "It is very difficult to lead a householder's life without attachment. Pratap used to say, 'Sir, we follow King Janaka. He lived a householder's life, but without attachment. We shall do the same.' I said, 'Can you become King Janaka just by wishing to? King Janaka gained spiritual knowledge after much austerity! He

1. Prema.

returned to his family only after undergoing extremely hard austerities – like standing on his head for years.'

"Does that mean there is no way for householders? Certainly there is. A householder should practice religious disciplines in solitude for some days. By doing so, a person develops love and devotion for God and gains spiritual knowledge. After this, there is nothing wrong in going back and leading a family life. When a man practices spiritual disciplines in solitude, he must separate himself completely, by all means, from the household – from wife, son, daughter, mother, father, brother, sister, near relatives. No one should stay with him. During solitary spiritual practice, he should say to himself, 'I have no one in the world to call my own. God is my all in all.' He should weep persistently and pray for spiritual knowledge and love and devotion for Him.

"If you ask how many days you should live away from the family, even one day is good, but three days are still better. You can live for twelve days, a month, three months, a year – as long as possible. After gaining knowledge and loving devotion to God, there is not much danger in living a householder's life.

"If you rub your hands with oil before you cut a jackfruit open, its sticky juice won't stick to your hands. When playing the game of hide and seek, you are safe if you touch the granny. Touch the philosopher's stone once and you become gold. After turning into gold, something may be buried

underground for a thousand years and will still be gold when you take it out.

"The mind is like milk. If you keep it in the water of the world, the milk will get mixed with water. You must transform the milk into curds in a lonely corner to take the butter from it. When, by practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude, you've taken out the butter of spiritual knowledge and love for God from the milk of the mind, then that butter can easily be kept in the water of the world. It will never get mixed with the water. It will float on the surface, free from any attachment."

Chapter Three

Solitary spiritual disciplines of Vijaykrishna Goswami

Vijay Goswami has recently returned from Gaya. He spent quite a few days in solitude and lived in the company of sadhus. He has now taken to wearing the ochre cloth. He is in a very good state of mind – as if always drawn within. He keeps his head bent before the Paramahamsa Deva, as if absorbed in contemplation of God.

Looking at Vijay, Sri Ramakrishna asks him: "Vijay, have you found a place to stay?

"Listen to this. Two sadhus came to a city during their wanderings. One of them was looking with curiosity at the bazaar, shops, and residential quarters of the town when he came across the other sadhu. The latter said, 'You're going around the city agape. Where is your luggage?' The first sadhu replied, 'I found a place to stay.[1] I've locked my

1. Vasa.

belongings there. Now I've come out to wander around the city without having to worry about them.' That's why I'm asking whether you've found a place to stay. (*To M. and the others*) Look, the fountain within Vijay has been covered for so long. Now it's open."

Vijay and Shivanath – selfless work – sannyasin's renunciation of desire

(*To Vijay*) "Look, Shivanath has so many problems. He has to write for the newspaper, among many other things. Worldly work causes restlessness and brings anxiety and worry to the mind.

"The Srimad Bhagavata talks about the twenty-four gurus of the Avadhuta (Rishi Dattatreya), one of which was a kite. Some fishermen were catching fish at a certain place when a kite came swooping down, grabbed one of the fish, and carried it away. Seeing it, some thousand crows flying in formation followed the kite, cawing and creating a great nuisance. Whatever direction the kite flew with the fish, the crows followed. The kite flew south and the crows went south. When it flew north, the crows did the same. When the kite flew to the east or to the west, they followed. At last when the kite became confused and began flying around in circles, it dropped the fish. The crows left the kite and flew after the fish. The kite then sat on the branch of a tree and thought to itself, That fish created all this trouble. Now that I have no fish, I am at peace.

"The Avadhuta learned from the kite that as long as one has the fish of desire, there is work to

do. And because of work, there is worry, anxiety, and restlessness. As soon as one gives up desires, work no longer binds[1] and one is at peace.

"That is why working without expectation of any reward is good. It does not bring restlessness. But it is very difficult to do. I may think that I'm doing selfless work, but somehow selfish motivation creeps in, from where I don't know. Only with the power that comes from a great deal of spiritual disciplines are a few able to work selflessly. After God-realization, selfless work comes automatically. With God-realization, a person can almost give up work. Only one or two (like Narada) keep working to teach others."

Sannyasin will not hoard – renunciation of work only after developing intense love for God[2]

"The Avadhuta had another guru, a bee. The bee collects honey by labouring hard for days on end, but the honey is not its own. Someone comes and breaks the honeycomb and takes away the honey. The Avadhuta learned from the bee that one should not hoard. Sadhus should depend one hundred percent on God. They should not accumulate things.

"However, this is not true for householders. A householder must take care of his family, so he has to save. Birds and sadhus don't lay things away – but a bird does accumulate when it has a chick; it collects food in its beak for its chick.

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1. Karmakshaya.
2. Prema.

"Look here, Vijay. If you see a sadhu with baggage or a bundle of things tied with fifteen knots, don't trust him. I saw such sadhus under the banyan tree. Two or three of them were sitting there. One was separating good lentils from bad, the other was repairing his dhoti,[1] and they were talking of feasts given by rich men. They were saying, 'I say, that gentleman has spent hundreds of thousands of rupees. He fed the sadhus so well! He prepared puris, jilibis, peras, barfis, malapuas, and all sorts of things.'" (*All laugh.*)

Vijay: "Yes, I saw sadhus like that in Gaya, too. In Gaya, sadhus swindle." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): "When you develop ecstatic love for God, work falls off automatically. Let those act whom the Lord makes act. Your time has come now. Giving up everything, you should say: 'O my mind, may you and I behold Her and no one else!'

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sings in his exquisitely sweet voice, showering the sweetness of God:

> Cherish the beloved Mother Shyama in your heart.
>
> O mind, may you and I alone behold Her, and let no one else intrude. Leaving behind all passions, anger and such vices, come, O mind, and let us behold her in solitude,
>
> Taking with us only the tongue, that it may call on Her now and then, repeating, "Mother, Mother!"
>
> O mind, allow neither baseness nor enticement to draw near, but let the eyes of knowledge, ever alert, keep watch.

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1. A wearing cloth.

(*To Vijay*) "You have taken refuge in God. Now shun the feelings of shame, fear, and the like. Give up the feeling that if you dance and sing the name of God, people will say things about you."

Feeling of shame, contempt, and fear

"When you have the feelings of shame, hatred, and fear, you cannot succeed. Feelings of shame, hatred, fear, pride of caste, secretiveness, – these are all bonds. The embodied soul is liberated only when he is free of them.

"He who is bound is embodied (jiva), and he who is free from bonds is divine (Shiva). Love for God is very rare. If you have single-minded devotion[1] to God, like a wife has for her husband in the beginning, only then do you develop love for God. Pure selfless love is very difficult to attain. In it, the soul and mind lose themselves in Him.

"Then comes the state of bhava.[2] In bhava man becomes speechless. His breathing stops – he automatically experiences suspension of breath,[3] as happens when a man fires a gun. A marksman firing a bullet becomes speechless, and his breathing stops.

"Attaining intense love for God is very rare. Chaitanya Deva attained it. When you have ecstatic love for God, you forget external objects, you forget the world. You forget even your own body which is so dear to you."

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1. Nishtha bhakti.
2. Ecstasy.
3. Kumbhaka.

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing again:

When will dawn that day when tears stream from my eyes as I repeat Lord Hari's name?

When will dawn that day when worldly desires disappear from my heart?

When will dawn that day when my body thrills and my hair stands on end?

When will dawn that day?

Chapter Four

Bhava and suspension of breath – vision of God when spiritual current rises

While the conversation continues, many other invited Brahmo devotees arrive. Several are learned, some occupying high positions in the government. One of them is Rajni Nath Ray.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "In a high spiritual state,[1] breathing stops." He further says, "When Arjuna aimed at his target, his sight was fixed solely on the eye of the fish. He didn't see anything else. He didn't see any other part of the fish but the eye. In such a state, breathing stops and a person experiences retention of breath.

"There is another sign of God-vision: The spiritual current[2] from within rushes up toward the brain. At that time, if you attain samadhi, you realize God."

1. Bhava.
2. Mahavayu.

Mere learning itself is deceptive – riches, power, honour, and rank all illusory

(*Looking at the Brahmo devotees who have just arrived*) "Those who are merely learned and have no love for God say conflicting things. There was a pundit, Samadhyayi by name, who said, 'The Lord is totally devoid of love, joy, sweetness, and bliss.[1] Make Him sweet[2] by your intense love and devotion for Him.' He who is called the Essence of Bliss[3] in the Vedas was termed devoid of sweetness by this fellow. This only shows that the man didn't know at all what God really is. That is why he talked so absurdly.

"Somebody said, 'There is a cowshed full of horses in my maternal uncle's house.' From this you understand that there was not a single horse – horses are not kept in cowsheds. (*All laugh*.)

"People are proud of wealth, possessions, property, honour, rank, and so on. But these last for only a few days; nothing will accompany you at death. A song goes like this:

> Consider this, O mind: no one is your own. In this world there is mere illusion.
>
> Do not forget the beneficent Mother by getting ensnared in Her maya's net.
>
> Think of those over whom you fret almost unto death: in death would they accompany you?
>
> Even your beloved wife would deny you and shun your corpse as something impure.

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1. Neeras.
2. Saras.
3. Rasasvarupa.

Just for a day or two do people call you lord and master; they will cease to call you so when the master called Death arrives for you.

The great remedy for pride –
there are others greater than you

"You shouldn't be proud of your money. If you think you're wealthy, another is wealthier than you, and still others wealthier than he. After dusk a firefly comes out and thinks it lights the world. But as soon as the stars appear, its pride takes a fall. The stars then begin to think that they are lighting the world. After some time, when the moon appears, the stars are dimmed in shame. The moon then begins to think that the whole world is smiling because of its light, that it is lighting the world. But not much later comes the dawn. And then the sun rises and now the moon is dim. In a short time it is invisible.

"If wealthy people were to think this way, they wouldn't take pride in their wealth."

Manilal has arranged for a big feast in connection with the festival. He serves food to Sri Ramakrishna and the assembled devotees with great love and attention, and to their heart's content. It is quite dark when they begin to leave for home, but no one feels inconvenienced.

Section IX

Visit to the House of Jaygopal Sen

Chapter One

Family life and Sri Ramakrishna

It is 28 November 1883. At about four or five in the afternoon, Sri Ramakrishna went to the Lily Cottage of Keshab Chandra Sen. Keshab has been ill and will soon leave this world. After visiting him, Thakur comes with some devotees to the house of Jaygopal Sen on Mathaghasha Street. It is after seven in the evening.

The devotees are thinking about many things: We see Thakur day and night overwhelmed with the love of God. He is married but has not established a conjugal relationship with his wife. He has love and devotion[1] for her and worships her, but he only talks about God with her. He sings of God, worships God, meditates on Him; he has no worldly connection. He sees that God is the only Reality and all else is unreal. He cannot touch money or any metal object – jug or bowl. He cannot touch a woman; if he does, his body shivers at the spot as if stung by a singi fish. His hand twists when money or gold is placed in his palm, like a cripple, and his breathing stops. When he throws them away, he begins to breath normally, as before.

The devotees think of many questions, such as: Will we have to renounce the world? What is the need for studying anymore? If we don't marry, we won't have to get a job. Will we have to leave our parents? Or: I

1. Bhakti.

have married, I have children, I have to take care of my wife – what about me? I also want to remain absorbed in the love of God day and night. When I see Sri Ramakrishna, I say to myself, What I am doing? Day and night he meditates on God, like an unceasing flow of oil. But I am running around all the time thinking about worldly things. Just his presence is like a small spot of light in a sky overcast with clouds. Oh, how can I solve the problem of my life?

He has given the example of his own personal practice. Why do I still have doubts?

Shall I break this dam of sand and fulfill my desire? Is this (world) really a sand dam? If so, why can't I give it up? I see that I'm not strong enough. When I have developed that sort of love for Him, I won't calculate. If a tide flows in the Ganges, who can stop it? If one has just a drop of the ecstatic love[1] which made Sri Chaitanya put on the loin cloth, or the intense love for God that moved Christ to go into exile without consideration of anything else and made him give up his body after having a vision of the face of his loving Father, or the ecstatic love that made the Buddha give up his princely luxury and become a renunciate,[2] then the transitory world can be cast away.

So what is the way for those who are weak, who have not developed ecstatic love, who are worldly beings tied by the fetters of maya? I won't leave the company of this great soul intoxicated with love for God, who looks for nothing but God. Let me see what he says.

All these thoughts occupy the minds of the devotees. Thakur is sitting in Jaygopal's drawing room. Seated in front of him are Jaygopal, his family, and some of his neighbours. One neighbour, ready for discussion, starts the conversation. Vaikuntha, Jaygopal's brother, is also there.

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1. Prema.
2. Vairagi.

Family life and Sri Ramakrishna

Vaikuntha: "We are worldly people, please tell us something."

Sri Ramakrishna: "After knowing God, keep one hand on His lotus feet and attend to your worldly duties with the other."

Vaikuntha: "Sir, is this world unreal?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is unreal until you know God. Man forgets Him and thinks, 'Mine, mine.' Bound by maya, deluded by 'lust and greed,' he goes down and down. Entangled so in maya, he has lost his senses. He can't find a way out, even when there is a way. There is a song that says:

> With her magic what a spell Mahamaya casts! Even Brahma and Vishnu have lost their senses. What, then, can mere mortals hope to know?
>
> When a trap for fish is set, they enter, and though the way out is clear, they fail to emerge.
>
> The silkworm spins its own cocoon and surely can escape; yet by Mahamaya's delusion bound, it emerges not but remains within to die.

"You yourselves are able to see that the world is transitory. Why don't you see this very family as transitory? So many people have come and then departed, so many born and then died. The world now is and then is not – it is ephemeral. They whom you call 'my' and 'mine' are not there as soon as you shut your eyes at death. A person might not have close relations – but still does not go to Kashi because of a grandson: 'What will happen to my Haru?' There is a way out, yet the fish do not

escape. The silkworm dies in its own secretions. This world is unreal, it is impermanent."

Neighbour: "Sir, how can I hold to God with one hand and the world with the other? If the world is transitory, why should I hold onto it with even one hand?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you live in the world after knowing Him, the world is no longer ephemeral. Listen to this song:

O mind, you do not know how to farm.

The field of your life lies fallow; were you to cultivate it, you would reap a golden harvest.

Fence it around with Kali's name, and your crop will not be harmed.

That fence of the Mother with long flowing hair is strong indeed: not even Death himself dares come near.

Not today or in a hundred years will your crops be snatched away.

Work now, O mind, to reap your harvest to the full. Sow the seed, your guru's gift,[1] and shower it with the water of love.

If you cannot do so by yourself, take Ramprasad along.

Chapter Two

How to realize God in family life

Sri Ramakrishna: "Did you hear the song, 'Fence it around with Kali's name, and your crop will not be harmed'? Take refuge in God and you'll get everything. This fence of the Divine Mother with long flowing hair is very strong. Not even

1. Mantra.

Yama, the God of Death, dares to approach it. It is a very strong fence. If you can realize God, the world will appear unimportant. Whoever knows God sees that He Himself has become the world, its creatures, and all that. You will feed your boy as though you were feeding Gopal.[1] You will see your father and mother as God and the Divine Mother, and you will serve them as though they were. If you live in the family after knowing God, you won't maintain a worldly relationship with your wife. Both of you, being devotees, will talk only of God, only of divine matters. You will serve the devotees of God, knowing Him to be present in all existence. Both of you will serve God."

Neighbour: "Sir, such a husband and wife can be found nowhere."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, there are such people, but they are rare. Worldly people cannot recognize them. But both of them have to be good to reach that state. This is possible only when both derive divine joy from it. For this, God's special grace is necessary. Without it, there is always misunderstanding between them, and one of them has to leave. There is great discord if they don't agree. The wife may possibly complain day and night, 'Why did father give me away in marriage to this family? Neither have I myself eaten well, nor have I been able to feed my children. Neither have I good clothes to wear, nor do my children. You have given me not a single piece of jewelry. What joy of life have you given me in this house? You keep on

1. Baby Krishna.

repeating 'Lord, Lord' with your eyes closed. Give up this type of madness!'"

Devotee: "There are such obstacles, of course. Then the sons may be disobedient! How troublesome that is! So what is the way, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is very difficult to practice spiritual disciplines while living in the family. There are so many hindrances. I don't have to tell you about these – disease, sorrow, poverty, discord with wife, and sons who are disobedient, ignorant, and foolish.

"Even so, there is a way. Occasionally you must go into solitude and pray to God. You should make an effort to attain Him."

Neighbour: "Should one leave the family?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's not necessary. But whenever you are free, go to a solitary place and live there for a day or two so that you are detached from family affairs and don't have to talk of worldly things to any worldly person. Either live in solitude or keep the company of the holy."

Neighbour: "How do we recognize a holy person?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A holy person is one whose mind, heart, and soul are merged in God. He who has renounced 'lust and greed' is a holy person. A man who is holy doesn't see a woman with a carnal eye. His mind is always drawn within. If he happens to be near a woman, he looks upon her as Mother and worships her. A holy person is always thinking inwardly of God. He talks of nothing but Him. And knowing that God is present in all

existence, he serves Him. Broadly speaking, these are the characteristics of a holy person."

Neighbour: "Does one always have to live in solitude?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Think of a tree on a footpath. As long as it's small, it has to be fenced on all sides; otherwise, a goat or a cow might eat it. But when the plant develops a thick trunk, no fence is needed. Then, even if an elephant is tied to it, the tree doesn't break. If you can develop the trunk, there's no worry, no fear. First try to gain discrimination. If you rub your hands with oil before you cut open a jackfruit, its milky sap will not stick to your hands."

Neighbour: "What is discrimination?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That only God is real,[1] all else is unreal.[2] Thinking this way is discrimination. 'Real' means eternal, and 'unreal' means transient. Whoever has attained discrimination knows that God is the only reality, that all else is unreal. When you've developed discrimination, you want to know God. If you are inclined to the unreal, you like physical comforts, name and fame, money, and all these things. You don't feel the need to know God, who is Reality Himself. When you know the difference between the real and the unreal, only then will you want to seek God. Listen to this song:

> Come, O mind, let us go for a walk to Kali, the wish-fulfilling tree and gather there the four fruits of life.

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1. Sat.
2. Asat.

Of your two wives, Worldliness and Dispassion, take only Dispassion along, and ask her eldest son, Discrimination,[11] for the truth about Reality.

When will you lie down happily between your wives, Purity and Defilement? When you see no difference between these two, then shall you see the Divine Mother Kali.

Drive out your parents, Ego and Ignorance, and should Delusion attempt to drag you into its pit, hold fast to the post of Patience.

Tie the goats of Virtue and Vice to the post of unconcern, and should they become unruly, kill them both with the Sword of Knowledge.

Admonish, O mind, the children of your first wife, Worldliness, and tell them to keep their distance. Should they not obey you, then drown them in the Sea of Knowledge.

Ramprasad says: If you can do this, you will render a proper account to the Lord of Death, and I shall be pleased to call you "my dear one," a mind after my own heart.

"You attain discrimination only when dispassion comes to the mind. When you have attained discrimination, you begin to think of the truth. Then the mind has the desire to stroll under the kalpataru (wish-fulfilling tree) of Kali. When you are under this tree, when you are near God, the four fruits come to you effortlessly. You have only to pick them up – the fruits of dharma (righteousness), artha (wealth), kama (fulfillment of legitimate desires) and moksha (liberation). When a householder attains Him, whatever he needs – dharma, artha, or kama – he gets."

Neighbour: "Why is the world called maya?"

Vishishtadvaitavada (Qualified Non-dualism) and Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna: "As long as you have not realized God, you must renounce, saying, 'Not this, not this.' Those who have realized Him know that He has become all – God, maya, individual souls, and the universe.[1] Then they perceive that the world and its beings are nothing but God. If you were asked to weigh a bel fruit, having its shell, kernel, and seeds separated out, would you remove its shell and seeds and weigh only the kernel? No, you would also have to take into account the shell and the seeds – all these – while weighing. You can tell the weight of a bel fruit only when you weigh all of it. This world is the shell, creatures are the seeds. While reasoning, the world and its creatures are called anatman (not the Atman); they are considered unreal. While discriminating, you feel that only the kernel is important, not the shell and the seeds. But then we consider that the shell and the seeds belong to the same substance to which the kernel belongs. Understand the illustration of the bel fruit and you will understand.

"It is the process of evolution and involution. Butter goes with buttermilk and buttermilk goes with butter. If there is buttermilk, there is butter; if there is butter, there is also buttermilk. If there is Atman, there is anatman (non-Atman) too.

"The Absolute belongs to the same Being as the phenomenal world, and the phenomenal belongs to the same as the Absolute. He who is called Ishvara

1. Ishvara, maya, jiva, and jagat.

has Himself become the individual being and the world. He who has understood this knows that God Himself has become all – father, mother, son, neighbour, man and beast, good and bad, purity and impurity."

Sense of sin and responsibility

Neighbour: "So, there is no sin and no virtue?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "They are, and yet are not. If God keeps the ego in you, He also keeps your sense of differentiation and the knowledge of virtuous and sinful acts. However, in a few, God completely erases the sense of I-consciousness. Such people go beyond virtue and vice, good and bad. As long as a person doesn't realize God, the sense of differentiation and the knowledge of good and bad are bound to persist. You may say that vice and virtue have become one for you, that you do only what He makes you do, but in your heart you know that these are mere words. When you do evil deeds, your heart palpitates.

"However, even after God-realization, if He so wills, He lets you retain the 'servant I.' In that state the devotee says: 'I am Your servant, You are my Master.' Such a devotee likes to hear talk about God, likes to work for God. He doesn't like people who are opposed to God; he doesn't like work, except work for God. When this comes about, God lets such a devotee retain a sense of differentiation."

Neighbour: "Sir, you say that we should live in the world after knowing God. Can we know Him?"

The Unknown and the Unknowable

Sri Ramakrishna: "He cannot be known by the senses or the mind. He can only be known by the pure mind, the mind that has no worldly desires."

Neighbour: "Who can know God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Who can really know Him? It is enough to know as much as one needs. What is the need for a whole well? A jug of water is enough. An ant went to a mound of sugar. What need had it for the whole mound? A grain or two made it happy."

Neighbour: "What can a single jug of water do for the delusions[1] we have? I want to know God fully."

The world – aberration and its remedy – take shelter in Me

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, that may be true. But there is a remedy for the delusion of the world."

Neighbour: "What is the remedy, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The company of the holy, chanting His name and glories, and constant prayer to Him. I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I don't want knowledge. Take Your knowledge and take Your ignorance. Mother, kindly grant me only pure love at Your lotus feet. I want nothing else.'

"As is the disease, so is the remedy. The Lord says in the Gita, 'O Arjuna, take refuge in me, I shall free you from all your sins.' Take refuge in

1. Vikara; A bodily or mental condition which obstructs God-realization.

God. He will grant you right understanding. He will take up your whole burden. Then all your defects and aberrations will be wiped away. Can you understand Him with this intellect of yours? Can a one-seer jug contain four seers of milk? Besides, can anybody understand God unless He makes him understand? So I say, take refuge in God. Let Him do what He wills. He has His own way in everything.[1] What power does man have?"

1. Icchamaya.

Section X

Festival in Surendra's Garden

Chapter One

Thakur rejoices with the devotees

Today Thakur has come to Surendra's garden. It is Sunday, 15 June 1884, the sixth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Jaishtha. Thakur has been enjoying the company of the devotees since nine in the morning.

Surendra's garden is in the Kankurgachi district near Calcutta. Not far away is Ram's garden,[1] which Thakur visited some six months ago. Today there is a festival in Surendra's garden.

Group singing of devotional songs[2] began earlier in the morning. The songs are about the life of Sri Krishna in Mathura. They describe the ecstatic love of the gopis and the sorrow of Radha at her separation from Sri Krishna. Every now and then Thakur is overwhelmed with ecstasy.

The devotees stand in rows in the garden house. The singing is going on in the main hall of the garden house. A white sheet has been spread on the floor, with bolsters here and there. The hall is flanked on the east and west by rooms, one on each side, and there is a verandah running north and south. In front of the garden house – that is, to the south – is a beautiful pond with specially built brick steps. Between the hall and the steps, a garden path runs

1. Sri Ramakrishna had mentioned the garden as an ideal place for meditation, so Ram named it "Yogadyan" (a place for practicing yoga).
2. Sankirtan.

east-west. On both sides of the path are flower bushes, croton trees, and other plants. Another path runs from the eastern edge of the garden house to the north gate. It is surfaced with red brick dust and is bordered on both sides with various flowering bushes and croton trees. Near the gate and to the east of the path is another pond with cement steps. The men of the neighbourhood take their bath here and fetch drinking water. On the west side of the garden house is a path, and southwest of it is the kitchen. There is a great deal of activity here today in preparation for the feast to serve Thakur and the devotees. Suresh and Ram are supervising.

The devotees have assembled on the verandah of the garden house as well. Others stroll on the bank of the pond mentioned earlier, either alone or with friends. Some stop at the cement steps for a rest during the stroll.

The songs continue. A crowd of devotees has assembled in the hall. Bhavanath, Niranjan, Rakhal, Surendra, Ram, M., Mahimacharan, Mani Mallick, and many others are there. Many Brahmo devotees are also present.

The songs of Mathura are being sung. The singer begins with *Gaur Chandrika* (verses of Chaitanya Deva's adoration). Gauranga had taken sannyas; he was mad with love for Krishna. The devotees of Navadvip wept in distress to see him. The chorus is singing: "Gaur, please come to Nadia."

Thereafter, they sing of Radha's anguish at separation from Krishna. Thakur is overwhelmed with ecstasy. He suddenly stands and adds lines full of pathos to the song: "Friend, either bring me

the beloved of my soul[1] or take me to him." Thakur goes into the mood of Radha. He becomes speechless as he says these words, his body still, his eyes half-closed. He has lost all consciousness. Thakur has gone into samadhi.

After some time he regains normal consciousness. Again, with the same plaintive tone, of the gopis, he says, "Friend, make me your slave and take me to him! I shall become your maidservant forever! It is you who taught me to love Krishna, the beloved of my soul."

The chorus goes on singing. Radha says, "Friend, I shall not go to the holy Jamuna to fetch water. I saw our beloved friend (Krishna) under the kadamba tree. When I go there, I become overwhelmed."

Thakur is again overcome with emotion. Taking a long breath, he heaves a sigh: "Ah! Ah!"

The song continues. Radha says:

> The desire for Krishna's presence has refreshed my feverish body.

Now and then the musicians improvise verses: "Perhaps He will become yours. Please let me see Him once, O friend! The Jewel of Jewels is gone. What need have I now of other jewels? My good days are over. I have fallen again on evil times. Haven't my evil days lasted long enough?"

Thakur adds: "Has that time not yet come?"

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1. Pranavallabha.

The chorus sings: "So much time has passed! Has that time not yet come?"

The singing continues:

O friend! I am surely dying.

To whom shall I leave my Krishna,[1] my priceless treasure?

Friend, do not cremate this, Radha's body, or cast it into the river, this body that has been enjoyed by the Dark One.

Neither cast it into the water, nor consign to the flames, but bind it, when I die, to the tamal tree,

And keep it there, bound close to the tamal's blackness – so that it may keep on getting its touch.

My Krishna is black, and the tamal is black. Black is the colour I dearly love and from my earliest days have cherished.

See that my body be not parted from my Krishna, my Dark One, to whom it belongs.

In her tenth stage, Radha falls into a faint.

Radha, lying fallen on the ground, has lost all outer consciousness while repeating Krishna's name.

How, then, has this joyful play come to such an end?

At this moment her eyes are closed; how has this happened to Radha, who only a moment ago was speaking to us?

Someone anoints her body with sandal paste, while the others lament: "Our beloved soul departs!"

They sprinkle water on Radha's face, hoping to revive her, but can mere water save one who is dying from love for Krishna?

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1. Kanai.

Seeing Radha in a swoon, her friends chant the name of Krishna. Hearing the name, Shyam,[1] she regains consciousness. Then seeing the tamal tree, she thinks that perhaps Krishna himself has come to her.

> By Krishna's name restored to life, Radha looks round and round, searching, searching.
>
> Failing to find her beloved's face, she weeps the bitterest of tears,
>
> Crying "Where is Sri Dam,[2] whose name you chant? Bring him here that I may see Him once, just once."
>
> Then catching sight of the black tamal tree, Radha exclaims, "Behold! There is my Krishna's crest!"
>
> Spying a peacock in the tree, she sighs, 'There you see His feathered crest!"

Her friends decide to send a messenger to Mathura. The messenger makes friends with a resident woman of the city, a woman of her age, who asks for her credentials.

Radha's messenger friend says, "I will not have to call him. He will come on his own." She then goes with the Mathura woman to where Krishna is and calls out, weeping, with a longing heart. "Where are you, O Hari, the life of the gopis, the beloved of my soul, Radha's sweetheart, the allayer of shame? Come show yourself. I have said with great pride that you will come of your own accord."

The song continues:

> A woman of Mathura laughs in scorn, saying,

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1. A name of Krishna.
2. A name for Krishna.

"O lowly milkmaid, how can you, dressed in beggar's rags, hope to see Him,

"The king, who dwells beyond the seventh gate? How, oh how, will you ever reach Him?

I am ashamed at your boldness. Tell me, how will you ever enter there?"

"Alas! Alas!," the milkmaid cries, "O Krishna, the gopis' very life, you philanderer! Where are you? Show Yourself and save now the maid who yearns for You!

"O life of the gopis, where are You? Master of Mathura, show Yourself and save her heart and soul!

"Where are you, Hari, the beloved of Radha! O Hari, allayer of my shame, reveal Yourself and save my honour!"

The messenger woman then calls out, "You, life and soul of the gopis, you philanderer! Where are you, the milkmaids' beloved?"

Hearing this, "Where are you, the life and soul of the gopis," Thakur goes into samadhi. When the songs end, the chorus sings the name of the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna[1] stands up again in samadhi. Regaining consciousness a little, he says, indistinctly, "Kittan, Kittan (Krishna, Krishna)." He is absorbed in divine emotion, so he cannot pronounce the name (of Krishna) properly.

The chorus sings about Radha being united with Krishna.

Thakur adds:

Look, Radha is standing,

Turning round and swaying,

Standing now to the left of Shyam,

1. Prabhu, Master.

Like a creeper embracing the tamal tree.

Now they sing the names of the Lord, accompanying themselves with drums and cymbals: "Victory to Radha Govinda! Victory to Radha Govinda!" All are seized with the madness of love for God.

Thakur dances. The devotees also dance, forming a ring around him and chanting, "Victory to Radha Govinda! Victory to Radha Govinda!"

Chapter Two

Guilelessness and God-realization – service of God and duties of the world

When the music ends, Thakur sits for a while with the devotees. Niranjan arrives and prostrates before him in salutation. Seeing him, Thakur stands up and, with a joyful expression, says, "So you have come!

(*To M.*) "Look, this boy is remarkably simple. Such openness and simplicity doesn't come without a great deal of austerity in previous births. A cunning and calculating person can't realize God.

"Don't you see that wherever God has incarnated Himself, there has been guilelessness?

"How simple was Dasharatha![1] Nanda Ghosh, Sri Krishna's father, was free from guile. The saying goes, 'What a nature he has! Exactly like that of Nanda Ghosh!'"

1. Father of Lord Rama.

The devotees are free from guile. Is Thakur hinting that God has incarnated Himself again?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Niranjan*): "It looks like a shadowy film has spread over your face. This is because you work in an office. You have to keep accounts and perform so many other duties there that you are always worried.

"You have a job, like other men of the world. But there is a little difference. You have accepted the job for the sake of your mother.

"A mother is venerable. She is the very embodiment of the all-blissful Mother of the Universe. If you had taken up a job for your wife or son, I would have said, 'Fie on you! You are accursed! A hundred times shame on you!'

(*To Mani Mallick*) "Just see, this boy is free from guile. He has only one fault: sometimes he tells a fib. One day he said he'd come, but he didn't show up. (*To Niranjan*) That's why Rakhal asked you why you didn't come to see me, even though you came to Ariadaha."

Niranjan: "I only went to Ariadaha a couple of days ago."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Niranjan*): "He's a headmaster. He went to see you. I sent him. (*To M.*) Did you send Baburam to me the other day?"

Chapter Three

Radha and Krishna – the ecstatic love of the gopis

Thakur is talking with three or four devotees in the western room. A number of chairs and tables have been placed together.

Thakur is leaning on a table, half standing and half sitting.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Oh, what love and devotion the gopis had! They would be seized with the madness of love just to see the tamal tree! Such was the fire of separation burning in Radha's heart that tears from her eyes would dry up from its heat – the tears would just evaporate. Sometimes people didn't know of her divine emotion. When an elephant enters a big lake, no one notices."

M.: "Yes sir, it was the same with Gauranga (Chaitanya Deva). When he saw a forest, he thought he was in Vrindavan; when he saw the ocean, he thought it was the Jamuna."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, if a person could receive just a drop of this ecstatic love! What devotion! What love! Not only sixteen annas[1] of love, but five sikas[2] and five annas! This is called the madness of love. The important thing is to love Him, to have longing for Him. Then you may take whatever path you like, whether you believe in God with form or God without form, whether you believe that God incarnates as a man or not. It is enough to have

1. Full complement.
2. One sika equals four annas; sixteen annas make one rupee.

devotion for Him. He Himself will then tell you what He is.

"If you must be mad, be not mad for the things of this world. Be mad for God!"

Chapter Four

Conversation about God with Bhavanath, Mahima, and other devotees

Thakur returns to the hall. They have placed a bolster near his seat. While sitting down, he touches the bolster and murmurs, "Om Tat Sat."[1]

> Worldly people often visit this garden; they all use this very bolster. Perhaps Thakur recites the sacred words to purify it from the contamination of their worldliness.

Bhavanath, M., and some others sit beside him. Though it is already dark, they have not yet laid out the feast.

Thakur has the nature of a child. He says: "Why haven't you fed us? Where is Narendra?"

A devotee (*laughing, to Thakur*): "Sir, Ram Babu is in charge. He is supervising everything." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Ram in charge! That is the reason!"

A devotee: "Sir, it's always like this when Ram Babu is in charge."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Where is Surendra?

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1. The Lord is the only Reality.

"Oh, what a fine temperament he has developed. He is very frank – not afraid to speak up. And how generous he is! He never turns anyone away who asks for his help. (*To M.*) Did you go see Bhagavan Das? How did you find him?"

M.: "Yes sir, I went to Kalna. Bhagavan Das is very old now. I saw him in the evening. He was lying on a cotton bed sheet and someone fed him prasad. He is only able to hear when you speak loudly. Hearing your name, he said, 'What is there for you to worry about now?'

"There is worship of the name of Brahman in that house."

Bhavanath (*to M.*): "You haven't been to Dakshineswar for a long time. He was asking me about you. He said, 'Perhaps M. has developed a distaste.'"

Saying this, Bhavanath begins to laugh. Thakur has been listening to the conversation between them. With eyes full of affection, he says to M.: "Yes, yes. Why haven't you been to Dakshineswar for such a long time? Tell me."

M. stammers a lame excuse.

Just then Mahimacharan arrives. Mahimacharan, a resident of Cossipore, has great reverence for Thakur. He often visits Dakshineswar. He belongs to a brahmin family and has inherited some ancestral property. He lives independently and has not taken a job under anyone. He spends most of his time studying the scriptures and meditating on God. He is a man of

some learning. He has studied a number of books in English and Sanskrit.

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to Mahima*): "What is this? A big ship has arrived! (*All laugh*.) Only canoes come here, but look! This is a ship! (*All laugh*.) But then it is the month of Ashadha (month of rains)."

Thakur talks for a long time to Mahimacharan.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): "Feeding others is also a kind of service to God. What do you say? God is in all beings in the form of the fire of hunger. Feeding someone means making an offering to Him.

"Even so, at [religious] feasts one shouldn't feed a wicked person, such as those who have committed adultery, fornication, and other vile sins, those who are drowned in sensuality. The earth on which they stand is polluted more than seven cubits deep.

"Once Hriday fed people in Sihore, many of them wicked. I said to him, 'Look here Hriday, if you feed these people, I shall leave your house immediately.' (*To Mahima*) Well, I heard that you used to feed many people. Perhaps the expenses have now gone up." (*All laugh*.)

Chapter Five

With Brahmo devotees

Leaf plates are now being placed on the southern verandah. Thakur says to Mahimacharan, "Please go there and see what they're doing. I can't ask you, but maybe you could help a little in serving the food."

Mahimacharan says, "Let them bring the food first. Then I'll see if I can do anything." Hemming and hawing, he goes to the verandah but soon returns.

Thakur sits down to eat with the devotees. He is filled with great joy. After the meal he rests a while. The devotees go to the southern pond, wash, and again assemble near Thakur, who is chewing betel leaves. They all sit down. Pratap, a Brahmo devotee, arrives a little after two o'clock and salutes Thakur. Thakur salutes him as well, bowing down to him. He talks about a number of things with Pratap.

Pratap: "Sir, I went to the hills (Darjeeling)."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But you don't look healthy. Are you suffering from some illness?"

Pratap: "Sir, I'm suffering from the same disease as Keshab."

They begin to talk about Keshab. Pratap says, "Keshab's dispassion[1] was evident even in childhood. He was seldom seen having fun and playing with other boys. He was a student in the

1. Vairagya: nonattachment to the world.

Hindu College, where he became a great friend of Satyendra. Through him, he came in contact with Devendranath Tagore. Keshab had yoga as well as love and devotion. At times, due to excessive love, he would become semiconscious. The main goal of his life was to bring religion to family life."

Ego and fame – 'I the doer,' 'I the guru' – signs of God-realization

The conversation turns to a lady from Maharashtra.

Pratap: "Some women of this province have gone to the West. One such lady from Maharashtra was very learned. She went there, but she has embraced Christianity. Sir, have you heard about her?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, but from what you say, she seems to have had a desire for name and fame. Egotism of this kind is not good. The idea 'I am the doer,' comes from ignorance. 'Oh Lord, You are the doer' – this is knowledge. The Lord alone is the doer and all others are non-doers. You bring upon yourself such trouble if you say, 'I, I.' You can understand if you consider the state of a calf. The calf bellows, 'Hamma, hamma,' that is, 'I, I.' See what troubles befall it! Perhaps it is yoked to a plough from morning till evening, in sun or rain alike. Or perhaps a butcher kills it for people to eat. And then its skin might be tanned into hide. This hide will be used to make shoes and other things. People will put their feet into them to walk. Even then its troubles don't end. From its skin a drum is made and then beaten constantly with a stick. In the end, its intestines are used to make strings for the bow of a cotton carder. Then it makes the

sound, 'Tuhum, tuhum,' (Thou, Thou). Then it no longer says, 'Hamma, hamma.' Only saying 'Tuhum, tuhum' releases, brings liberation. Then it doesn't have to return to the field of activity.

"Similarly, when an embodied soul says, 'O Lord, I am not the doer, You are the Doer; I am an instrument, You are the Being who uses the instrument,' his trials and tribulations in the world cease. Only then is the embodied soul liberated; it doesn't have to return to this field of activity."

Devotee: "How can an embodied soul get rid of his ego?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It disappears only when one has realized God. When a person is rid of his ego, he surely has had a vision of God."

Devotee: "Sir, how can you know if a person has seen God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are signs of God-vision. According to the Srimad Bhagavata, there are four signs of God-vision. One becomes like a child, like an unclean spirit,[1] like an insentient being, or like a madman.

"A person who has seen God develops the temperament of a child. He goes beyond the three gunas.[2] He does not become bound by any of them. He seems to make no distinction between purity and impurity – thus he is like an unclean spirit. And then like a madman he sometimes laughs, sometimes weeps. At one time he may dress himself

1. Pishacha.
2. The three qualities of sattva, rajas, and tamas.

like a gentleman, but soon after he may strip himself naked and begin to wander around with his dhoti under his arm. He seems to act like a mad man. Than again he may sit quietly at one place like an insentient being – an inert, lifeless, material body."

Devotee: "Does one get rid of the ego totally after the vision of God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sometimes God completely erases one's ego, as in the state of samadhi. But generally the person retains a trace of ego. There is no harm in this ego. It's like the ego of a child. A five-year-old child says, 'I, I,' but that ego doesn't harm anybody.

"Iron becomes gold by touching the philosopher's stone. An iron sword becomes a sword of gold. It keeps the shape of a sword, but can't hurt anybody. You can't cut or kill with a sword made of gold."

Chapter Six

Worship of 'gold' in the West — is work or God-realization the aim of life?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "You went to England. What did you see there? Do tell me about it."

Pratap: "In the West people are worshipers of what you call 'gold.' Generally speaking, from one end to the other, activity[1] reigns supreme there – it is the same in America. Still, there are some good people, some who are unattached to worldly life."

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1. Rajas.

The West and Karma Yoga – Karma Yoga or Bhakti Yoga, which one for the Kaliyuga?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "It is not true that attachment to worldly work is only found in the West. It's all over the world. And do you know why? Work is a sign of the first stage of life. God cannot be realized without devotion, discrimination, dispassion, kindness, and the like.[1] The very nature of work[2] involves a person in worldly activities, so it brings a darkness[3] with it. Too much work makes one forget God and leads to greater attachment to 'lust and greed.'

"However, it is not possible to give up work all of a sudden. Your nature will lead you to do it, whether you want to or not. So the instruction is: work without attachment. Work done without attachment means work done without any expectation of reward. For example, you may take to worship, repeating the name of God,[4] and religious austerities, but not for recognition or for earning merit.

"Working unattached in this way is called Karma Yoga. But it is very difficult. In the Kaliyuga attachment creeps in so easily. You may resolve to work without attachment, but attachment enters from somewhere, you don't know from where. Say you have celebrated a big holy feast or served a number of paupers. You may have thought, I am doing all this without any

1. Sattvaguna.
2. Rajoguna.
3. Tamoguna.
4. Japa.

attachment; yet the desire for name and fame enters from somewhere unseen. Thus, it is only possible for those who have seen God to be completely unattached."

Devotee: "What is the way for those who have not seen God? Should they renounce all worldly work?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "For the Kaliyuga, Bhakti Yoga is best suited – the path of love and devotion enjoined by Narada: chanting the name and glories of God and praying with a longing heart, 'O Lord, grant me knowledge and devotion, reveal Yourself to me.' Karma Yoga is very difficult. That's why you must pray to God, 'O Lord, lessen my work. And whatever the work you have for me, may I, by Your grace, be able to perform it without attachment. Besides that, grant that I may have no desire to engage myself in more work.'

"It is not possible to give up work. To meditate – that, too, is work. When you have gained love for God, your worldly work decreases by itself. And then you don't like it anymore. Who likes water sweetened with molasses after having tasted water sweetened with sugar candy?"

A devotee: "Westerners urge us to work more and more. Is work the aim of life?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The aim of life is to realize God. Work is only the first chapter of human life. It can't be the aim of life. Even selfless work[1] is only a means, not the end.

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1. Nishkama karma.

"Sambhu said, 'Please bless me that the money I have may be spent on good causes – in building hospitals, dispensaries, roads, wells, and so on.' I said, 'It's good to do all this work unattached, but it is very difficult. You must always remember, in whatever you do, that the aim of human life is to attain God, not to build hospitals and dispensaries. Suppose God appears before you and tells you to ask for a boon. Will you ask Him to build some hospitals and dispensaries for you? Or will you say to Him, "O Lord, grant me pure love at your lotus feet. May I see You always." Hospitals, dispensaries, and so on are all transient things. God is the only Reality; all else is unreal. When He is attained, one realizes that He alone is the doer and that we do nothing. Why should we forget Him and destroy ourselves with so much work? When He is attained, hospitals and dispensaries may be built if He so wills. I say that work is only the first chapter of human life; it is not the end of life. Take to spiritual practice and go forward. As you practice and advance further, you will come to know in the end that God is the only Reality and all else is unreal – and that the aim of life, truly, is to realize God.

"A woodcutter went to the forest to cut wood. There he happened to meet a brahmachari.[1] The brahmachari said to him, 'My good man, go forward.' On returning home, the woodcutter began

1. A brahmachari is a spiritual aspirant practising control over the mind and preparing for the next step of life – that of the householder, or the ascetic.

to wonder why the brahmachari had asked him to go forward.

"Some days passed. One day he was reminded of the words of the brahmachari. He said to himself, 'Today I will go forward.' As he went deep into the forest, he found numberless sandalwood trees. Full of joy, he brought some sandalwood back. Selling it in the market, he became very rich.

"In this way some days passed, when he was again reminded of the words of the brahmachari, 'Go forward.' Now, as he went farther into the forest, he found a mine of silver near the bank of a river. This he could never have dreamt. He mined the silver and sold it. He made so much money that he became a very wealthy man.

"Some more days passed. One day he again said to himself, 'The brahmachari didn't ask me to go only up to the silver mine. He asked me to go forward.' This time he crossed the river and saw a gold mine. He then said to himself, 'Nice indeed! That is why the brahmachari asked me to go forward.'

"After a few days, he again went farther and lo! he found heaps of diamonds and jewels lying on the ground. Now he became as rich as the god of wealth himself.[1]

"So I say, whatever you may be doing, if you go forward, you will find something better. If you receive inspiration after reaching a particular stage, don't think that you have come to the end. Work is not the goal of life. Go forward and you will

1. Kubera.

be able to work selflessly. But selfless work is very difficult. So pray to God with a longing heart, 'Oh Lord, grant me love and devotion at Your lotus feet and reduce my work. Whatever work you give me to do, grant that I may be able to do it selflessly.'

"If you go further, you will find God. You will have His vision. And gradually you will talk intimately with Him."

The conversation now turns to the dispute about preaching in the temple of the Brahmo Samaj after the demise of Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "I hear that there has been some controversy with you over the pulpit. The ones who started this dispute are insignificant people.[1] (*All laugh*.)

(*To the devotees*) "You see, people like Pratap, Amrita, and some others "blow the conch shell" (make a loud noise). And others produce no sound at all."

Pratap: "Sir, so far as musical sound is concerned, even a mango stone gives sound!"

1. Sri Ramakrishna said "Hare, Pela, and Pancha," which means people of ordinary calibre. The English equivalent would be "Tom, Dick, and Harry."

Chapter Seven

Brahmo Samaj and Sri Ramakrishna – instruction to Pratap

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "Listen, hearing the lectures of your Brahmo Samaj preachers, one can very well understand the inner feeling[1] of the people there. Once they took me to a meeting at the Hari Sabha.[2] The preacher was a pundit named Samadhyayi. He said, 'The Lord has no sweetness.[3] We have to make Him juicy[4] with our loving devotion.' I was flabbergasted to hear this and was reminded of a story. Once a boy said that his maternal uncle had a cowshed full of horses at his home. No horse is kept in a cowshed! Only cows are kept there! Hearing such absurdity, what can one conclude? Just this: that there are no horses or anything else there!" (*All laugh.*)

A devotee: "Not just that there are no horses there; there is not even a cow! (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look, He who is the fountain of love and bliss[5] was said by that man to be totally devoid of sweetness.[6] It only shows that he has never experienced what God is."

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1. Bhava.
2. A meeting hall for religious talks and study of the scriptures.
3. Rasa.
4. Saras.
5. Rasa-swarup.
6. Neeras.

'I am the doer,' 'this is my house' – all this is ignorance – 'diving deep' is the aim of life

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "Listen, I tell you, you are well read, intelligent, and serious-minded. You and Keshab were two brothers, like Gaur and Nitai. You have had enough lecturing, discussions, quarrels, and disputes. Are you interested in these things anymore? Gather your whole mind and concentrate it on God. Just jump into God."

Pratap: "Yes sir, there is no doubt about that. This clearly is my duty now. But I am doing all this to preserve Keshab's name."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "You say you're doing all this to keep his name alive. But after some time this spirit will not last. Listen to a story.

"A person had his house on the top of a hill. It was a small, thatched house. He had laboured hard to build it. After a few days there was a terrible storm. The house began to shake. The man became very worried as to how to save it. He said, 'O, Pavana Deva (the god of wind), please don't destroy my house!' But the god of wind turned a deaf ear to his words. The house began to shake violently. Then he remembered that Hanuman was the son of Pavana Deva. As soon as this thought entered his mind, he cried out, 'O Father, don't destroy this house. It is Hanuman's house! I beseech you!' But the house still shook. Who would listen to him? When he repeated 'Hanuman's house, Hanuman's house' so many times and nothing happened, he began to say, 'Father, it is Lakshmana's house, it is the house of Lakshmana!' This too carried no weight. Then he began to call out, 'Father, it is

Rama's house, it is Rama's! I say Father, don't wreck it! I beseech you!' Even now nothing happened. The house began to collapse. The question now was how to save his own life. Running out of the house, the man cried, 'It is the devil's own house!'

(*To Pratap*) "You don't have to save Keshab's name. Know that everything happens by the will of God. It was there by God's will and it is coming to an end by His will. What can you do? Now your duty is simply to give your whole mind to God, to dive deep into His ocean of love."

Saying this, Thakur begins to sing a song in his uniquely sweet voice:

> Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty, and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the gem of Love.
>
> Go seek, go seek, O mind, the blessed Vrindavan within your heart, the abode of the Lord of Love.
>
> Then in your heart the unceasing light of knowledge will ever shine.
>
> Who is it that steers your boat over solid ground? It is your guru, says Kabir. Listen, and meditate on his holy feet.

(*To Pratap*) "Did you listen to the song? Enough of lectures and quarrels. Now dive deep. Diving into this sea, there is no fear of death. It is the sea of immortality. Don't think that it will make you lose your head. Don't think that a person becomes mad by calling longingly on God. I said this to Narendra."

Pratap: "Who is Narendra?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, he's a young man. I said to him, 'Look here, God is the sea of nectar.[1] Don't you want to dive into that sea? Just imagine a bowl of nectar, and you are a fly. Where will you sit to drink the nectar?' Narendra said, 'I will sit on the edge of the bowl and sip by leaning over it.' I asked, 'Why? Why sit on the edge?' He said, 'If I go farther, I'll be drowned and lose my life.' Then I said, 'My boy, there is no such danger in the sea of Sat-chit-ananda. It is the sea of immortality. By diving into this sea, nobody dies, but instead becomes immortal. One does not lose one's head by being mad for God.'

(*To the devotees*) "'I and mine': this is ignorance. Rasmani built the Kali Temple – everybody says this. Nobody says that God built it. So-and-so founded the Brahmo Samaj – everybody says so. Nobody says that it came into being only by the will of God. 'I am the doer': this is ignorance. 'O Lord, You are the doer, I do nothing; You are the operator, I am the machine': this is knowledge. 'O Lord, nothing is mine. This temple is not mine, the Kali Temple is not mine, the Samaj is not mine – these are all Yours. Wife, son, family – none of these is mine – they are all Yours': this is knowledge.

"People say, 'This is mine, it belongs to me.' Loving all such objects as your own is maya. But loving all things is compassion.[2] 'I love only the members of the Brahmo Samaj,' or 'I love only my family': this is maya. To love only your compatriots

1. Rasa: liquid sweet.
2. Daya.

is maya. To love people of all countries, to love followers of all religions, comes from love of God, from compassion.

"Maya binds man. It takes one away from God. Compassion leads one towards Him. Sukadeva and Narada both had compassion."

Chapter Eight

Instructions to Pratap – Brahmo Samaj and 'lust and greed'

Pratap: "Sir, those who come to you, are they making progress gradually?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You know, there's no harm in leading a family life. But you have to live in the family like a maidservant."

Spiritual practice in the family

"A maidservant refers to her master's house as 'our house,' though she has her own home in another village. Seeing her master's house, she says, 'our house,' but in her mind she knows that this house is not hers and that her own home is in the village. Again she rears her master's son and says, 'My Hari has become very naughty. My Hari doesn't like sweets.' Though she says, 'my Hari,' she knows that Hari is not hers, that he is her master's son.

"Therefore, I say to those who come here, 'Why not live a family life? There is no harm in it. But fix your mind in God while living a householder's life. Know that the house and family are not yours. They are all God's. 'My real home is with God.' And

I also say to them, 'Pray earnestly for love and devotion at His lotus feet.'"

The conversation again turns to foreign countries. A devotee says, "Sir, these days learned men of the West don't accept even the existence of God."

Pratap: "They may be saying that but I don't think any of them is an atheist at heart. Many have admitted that there is some Supreme Power behind the affairs of the world."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's enough if they believe in Power.[1] How are they atheists then?"

Pratap: "Besides, Western scholars also believe in a moral government (which rewards good actions and punishes evil ones)."

After a long conversation, Pratap rises to leave.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "What more can I tell you? I only ask that you not involve yourself in quarrels and controversies.

"And one thing more – it is 'lust and greed' that take a man away from God. They are obstacles to God-realization. Everybody praises his own wife, whether or not she is good. (*All laugh*.) Whether one's wife is good or not, if you ask what kind of a wife he has, a man will immediately say, 'Sir, she is good indeed.'"

Pratap: "May I leave now?"

Pratap leaves. Thakur's sweet words about renunciation of 'lust and gold' have not ended. The

1. Shakti.

leaves of the trees in Surendra's garden are fluttering and murmuring in the southern breeze. All these words mix in their sound, but as they float into the infinite sky, they have struck the hearts of the devotees.

But have these words resounded in Pratap's heart?

After some time Manilal Mallick says to Thakur, "Sir, you must now depart for Dakshineswar. Keshab Sen's mother and other ladies of the house are going there to have your darshan. Not finding you there, they may be disappointed and leave."

Keshab had departed from this mortal world many months ago. His venerable mother, wife, and other ladies of his household are going to visit Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani Mallick*): "Wait a little, brother. I haven't had my nap. Besides, I can't do anything in a hurry. If they have gone there, what can I do about it? They will have a nice stroll in the garden and enjoy it."

After a little rest Thakur is ready to leave for Dakshineswar, but before leaving he prays for the welfare of Surendra. He visits all the rooms, one by one, softly repeating the name of God. He doesn't want to leave anything unfinished. Standing there, he says, "I didn't eat luchis[1] before. Bring me a little now."

He takes a small piece of luchi, eats it and then says, "This means something. If I remembered that

1. Fried bread.

I had not eaten the luchi, I would want to come back for it."

Mani Mallick: "That would have been nice! We, too, could have come with you!"

All the devotees laugh.

Section XI

Sri Ramakrishna's Meeting with a Pundit

Chapter One

Visit to Ishan's House

Today is the Car Festival,[1] Wednesday, 25 June 1884, the second day of the bright fortnight of Ashada. At Ishan's invitation, Sri Ramakrishna has arrived this morning at his house in the Thanthania district of Calcutta. Upon arrival Thakur has come to know that Pundit Shashadhar is staying nearby with the Chatterjis on College Street. He is very keen to meet the pundit, so it is decided that he will go to see him in the evening.

It is now about ten o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with devotees in Ishan's ground floor parlour with some brahmins from Bhattapada, one of them a Bhagavata pundit. Hazra and two devotees have come with Thakur. Ishan's sons, one of them Shrish, and a devotee who worships Shakti and wears a vermilion mark on his forehead are also there. Thakur has a sense of humor. Seeing the vermilion mark, he laughs and says, "He is branded!"

After a while Narendra and M. arrive from their Calcutta homes. After saluting Thakur, they sit beside him. Thakur had told M. previously, "I'll be going to Ishan's house on a certain date. You go too, and bring Narendra with you."

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1. Ratha Yatra.

Thakur says to M., "The other day I wanted to go to visit your house. Where do you live?"

M.: "Sir, now I live at Telipada in Shyampukur, near the school."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Didn't you go to school today?"

M.: "Sir, today the school is closed for the Car Festival."

Since the death of Narendra's father, there have been great problems in his family. Narendra is the eldest of several brothers and sisters. His father had been a lawyer but had not saved anything. Narendra is looking for a job to meet the family's expenses. Thakur has asked Ishan and some other devotees to find him a job. Ishan is a superintendent in the Comptroller General's office. Thakur worries whenever he hears of Narendra's family problems.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "I have spoken to Ishan about you. He was at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar one day. I spoke to him then. He knows many people."

In addition to Thakur, Ishan has invited many friends for the occasion. Songs will be sung to the accompaniment of banya,[1] tabla, and tanpura,[2] and one member of the family has brought very fine flour for the pakhavaj.[3] At about eleven, Ishan asks Narendra to sing.

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1. A semi-circular instrument.
2. A stringed musical instrument.
3. A barrel-shaped drum with membranes placed over each end; the left end is the bass and it is smeared with varying amounts of moist

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "Just fine flour! Then it will be quite some time until our meal is ready."

Ishan: "No sir, it won't take too long."

Some of the devotees laugh. A scholar well versed in the Bhagavata laughs as he recites an uncommon couplet, not written in any book.[1] After reciting the couplet, he explains it:

"Poetry is more pleasing than philosophy. When poetry is recited or heard, schools of philosophy such as Vedanta, Samkhya, Nyaya, and Patanjala all seem dry. But music is more attractive than poetry. Even a heart made of stone melts on hearing music. Then again, if a beautiful woman passes by, the poetry is forgotten and the song loses its flavour. The whole mind goes to that woman. But when you're hungry and craving food, then you want neither poetry nor song nor woman. The thought of food is all-consuming!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is witty indeed."

When the pakhavaj is tuned, Narendra begins to sing, and Thakur goes upstairs to the drawing room overlooking the road for a rest. M. and Shrish accompany him. Kshetra Nath Chatterji, Ishan's father-in-law, built the room.

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flour, dough, to vary the pitch. It has a strap that goes around the neck of the drummer to hold it while standing.

1. *Kavyam darshanam hanti, kavyen giten hanyate,*
Gitancha istrivilasen, sarve hanti bubhukshuta.
Upon obtaining this couplet it was later included in the footnote.

M. introduces Shrish, saying, "He is a learned man, very serene in temperament. He's been my classmate since childhood. He's a lawyer now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "For such a person to be a lawyer!"

M.: "He took up the profession by mistake."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I know a lawyer named Ganesh. Sometimes he comes to the Dakshineswar Kali Temple with some other gentlemen. Panna also comes. He's not handsome, but he sings well. He has great regard for me. He is a simple-hearted man.

(*To Shrish*) "What do you think is the essence of life?"

Shrish: "God exists and He alone does everything. Even so, what we conceive of His attributes isn't right. How can a man conceive of Him? He's infinite!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "How many trees are in a garden and how many branches each tree has – what is the use of such calculation? You've come to the garden to eat mangoes. Eat them and leave. It's only to attain love and devotion to God that you've taken birth as a human being. Eat the mangoes and be satisfied.

"You've come to drink wine. What is the use in knowing how many maunds[1] of wine are in the wine shop? Just a tumbler-full is enough for you.

1. An Indian measurement of weight.

"What is the need for you to know His infinite affairs?

"If you look for His attributes for millions of years, you will still not be able to know even a fraction of them."

Thakur is silent for a while and then he resumes talking. A brahmin from Bhattapada is also there.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "There is nothing in worldly life. As things go, Ishan's is better than most. If his family had not been good, if the boys had been womanizers, drug-addicts, drunkards, or disobedient, there would have been no end to his troubles. In his family everyone's mind is turned towards God. It's a truly religious household. It is rare. I have seen very few homes such as this. Usually there are endless misunderstandings, quarrels, and jealousy. Besides, there are disease, sorrow, and poverty. Seeing this, I said, 'Mother, please turn my mind from the world.' Just see what problems Narendra is facing! His father is dead, the members of his family don't have food to eat, a job is so difficult to find. He's trying hard, but he can't find one. Just see how he is wandering around!

"M., you used to come to Dakshineswar so often. Why have your visits become so few? Maybe you've gotten too attached to your family. Is that why?

"This isn't anybody's fault. Everywhere there is 'lust and greed.' That's why I pray, 'Mother, if I ever have to take a human body again, don't make me a worldly man!' "

The brahmin from Bhattapada: "But sir, household life has been praised in the holy books."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, but it is very difficult."

Thakur changes the subject of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "How wrong of us! They are singing – Narendra is singing – and we've all left the room."

Chapter Two

Bhakti Yoga, not Karma Yoga, is for the Kaliyuga

At about four o'clock, Thakur gets into the carriage. He is very delicate, so his body must be treated very carefully. It is difficult for him to walk on the road; he cannot walk even a short distance. When he gets into the carriage, he is absorbed in bhava samadhi. It is the rainy season and is drizzling. The sky is overcast and the road is muddy. The devotees walk behind the carriage. Being the day of the Car Festival, children are blowing horns made from palm leaves.

The carriage stops at the entrance to the house Shashadhar is visiting. Thakur is warmly received by the host and his relatives.

A staircase leads up to the drawing room. As he goes up, Sri Ramakrishna sees Shashadhar coming to welcome him. The pundit appears to be middle-aged. His complexion is fair and shining and he wears a rosary of rudraksha beads around his neck. Humbly and with great reverence, he salutes Thakur and leads him to the drawing room. Devotees follow and take their seats.

Everyone is keen to sit near Sri Ramakrishna and to listen to the nectar of his words. Narendra, Rakhal, Ram, M., and many other devotees are present. Hazra has also come with him from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple.

Looking at the pundit, Thakur goes into a semiconscious state. After a while, in the same state, he smiles at the pundit and says, "Very well, very well!" He adds, "What kind of lectures do you give?"

Shashadhar: "Sir, I try to explain the teachings of the scriptures."

Sri Ramakrishna: "For the Kaliyuga the path of love and devotion as preached by Narada is enjoined. Where is the time to perform all those rituals mentioned in the scriptures? These days the decoction of ten medicinal roots[1] does not help cure a fever. By the time such a decoction begins to show effect, the patient runs the risk of being carried off. 'Fever mixture' is the medicine for the present age. If you ask them to perform rituals, give them fish minus the head and tail. I tell people that they don't have to perform the sandhya[2] and other such elaborate acts. Recitation of the Gayatri[3] is enough. If you have to talk of rituals at all, do so only to a few, like Ishan."

Lecture to worldly men

"You may lecture a thousand times, and you'll not be able to change worldly men. Can one drive a nail into a stone wall? The nail is what will bend. The wall will remain as it is. What can the blow of a sword do to a crocodile? The bitter gourd water

1. Dashamul pachan, a traditional Hindu prescription.
2. Divine service three times a day.
3. A short text from the Vedas, the repetition of which leads to meditation on God.

pot[1] of a wandering monk goes to the four principle places of pilgrimage in India,[2] yet it remains as bitter as before. Your lectures to worldly men are not helping very much. You will understand this gradually. A calf can't stand all at once. It falls to the ground and then stands up again. That is how it learns to stand up and walk."

First love[3] and then reasoning – karma falls off with God-realization – yoga and samadhi

"You cannot distinguish a devotee from a worldly person. That isn't your fault. During the first burst of a storm, it is not possible to distinguish a tamarind tree from a mango tree.

"Before God-realization one cannot suddenly give up performance of rituals. How long, then, does one have to perform sandhya and such ritualistic worship? As long as tears do not flow and the hair does not stand on end at the sound of God's name. If tears fill the eyes even once when saying 'Om Rama,' know for certain that your karmas are over. You will not have to perform sandhya and other rituals any more.

"The blossom falls off as soon as the fruit appears. Karma is the blossom, and love for God is the fruit. The daughter-in-law of the house can't work much when she's pregnant; her mother-in-law gradually frees her from work. During the last month she barely lets her work at all. When the infant is born, the mother only attends to it and not

1. Kamandalu.
2. Dhams.
3. Nava-anuraga.

to any other work. The sandhya merges into Gayatri and then Gayatri into Om. Om then becomes merged in samadhi – as the sound of a bell 't-o-m.' Following the trail of the sound 'Om,' the yogi becomes lost in the Supreme Brahman.[1] Sandhya and such karmas disappear in samadhi. In this way the duties of the jnani fall off."

Chapter Three

Mere learning is of no use – spiritual practice, discrimination, and dispassion

While talking of samadhi, Sri Ramakrishna goes into an ecstatic mood. A divine light begins to shine from his beautiful face. He has no external consciousness. Not a sound comes from his mouth and his eyes are fixed. Surely he is having a vision of the Lord of the Universe. After a long time he returns to normal consciousness. Like a child, he says, "I'll have some water." Whenever he asks for water after samadhi, the devotees know that he is gradually returning to normal consciousness.

Still in ecstasy Thakur says to the Divine Mother, "Mother, the other day you showed me Ishwar Vidyasagar. After that I said, 'Mother, I want to see another pundit.' That is why You have brought me here."

Glancing at Shashadhar, he says, "Son, gain a little more power. Practice spiritual disciplines for some time more. You have barely started climbing

1. Parabrahman.

the tree before you wish for a bunch of fruit. Of course you do all this for the benefit of others."

Saying this, Thakur salutes Shashadhar by bowing his head.

And he adds, "When I heard about you for the first time, I asked whether this pundit is just a learned man, or if he also has discrimination and non-attachment."

One cannot become a religious teacher without receiving a commission from God

"A pundit without discrimination is no pundit at all.

"If one has received a commission from God, it is all right to teach others. When a person teaches after getting a commission, nobody can confound him.

"Getting only a single ray from the goddess of learning (Saraswati), one attains such strength that even the most learned become like earthworms before him.

"When you light a lamp, swarms of moths come to it by themselves: they don't have to be called. Similarly, one who has received a commission from God doesn't have to invite people by announcing that a lecture will be delivered at a certain time. No message needs to be sent. He has such attraction that people flock to him of their own accord. Then princes and gentlemen come in swarms. And they ask again and again, 'What would you like? I have brought mangoes, sandesh (a Bengali sweet), money, a shawl, and so on. Will you accept them?' I

tell all those people, 'Keep them. I don't care for those things. I don't want anything.'

"Does a magnet invite iron by saying, 'Come near?' It doesn't have to say that; the iron rushes to the magnet because of the magnet's attraction.

"Such a man may not be a pundit, but don't think that he lacks knowledge. Can you acquire knowledge by just reading books? The knowledge of a person who has received a commission from God is inexhaustible. This knowledge flows from God and is never-ending.

"In the countryside, one person weighs paddy while another pushes heap after heap toward him. It's the same thing with the person who has received a commission from God. The Divine Mother keeps on pushing heaps of knowledge toward him from behind. This knowledge never comes to an end. If the Divine Mother but once casts a glance, can there remain any lack of knowledge? That's why I ask whether or not you have received a commission."

Hazra: "Yes, surely he's received a commission. Haven't you, sir?"

The pundit: "No, I haven't received such a commission."

The host: "He may not have received a commission, but he lectures out of a sense of duty."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What will his lectures achieve if he has no commission from God?

"Once a Brahmo preacher said in his lecture, 'Brothers, I used to drink so much liquor! I used to

do this, and I used to do that.' Hearing it, people began to whisper among themselves, 'What is this rascal saying? He used to drink liquor?' His words caused confusion in the audience. A lecture benefits no one if the speaker lacks a good character.

"A high government official[1] from Barisal said, 'Sir, you begin to preach and I will get ready.' I said, 'Brother, listen to a story. In the countryside,[2] there is a pond known as Haldarpukur. People used to defecate on its bank. In the morning people coming to the pond would shout abuses in plenty, but to no avail. The very next morning they would see the bank littered with faeces again. After some days the municipality sent a worker who placed a notice near the pond. What a wonder! The defecation on the banks stopped immediately!

"So I say, a lecture by a worthless person is of no use. When you have the badge of authority, then alone will people listen to you. Unless you receive God's commission, you can't teach others. He who is going to preach must have sufficient spiritual power. In Calcutta there are so many wrestlers like Hanumanpuri. You have to wrestle with them. These people (the congregation) are mere sheep!

"Chaitanya Deva was an incarnation of God. What is left of the work that even he did, just tell me! What good can come out of lectures by those who have not received a commission from God?"

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1. Sub-judge.
2. Kamarpukur village, where Sri Ramakrishna was born and brought up.

How does one receive a commission?

Sri Ramakrishna: "So I say, become absorbed at God's lotus feet."

Saying this and intoxicated with the wine of divine love, Thakur begins to sing:

> Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty, and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the gem of Love.

"By drowning in this sea, one does not die. It is the ocean of immortality."

Instruction to Narendra – God is the ocean of immortality

"I said to Narendra, 'God is an ocean of nectar. Tell me if you will dive into it. Imagine a cup full of sugar syrup and you're a fly. Where will you perch to drink the syrup?' Narendra said, 'I'll sit on the edge of the bowl and stretch my neck to sip from there. If I were to go farther, I would drown.' Then I said, 'My son, this is the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda. There's no fear of death in it. It's the ocean of immortality.' Only ignorant people say you shouldn't overdo your love and devotion for God. Is there any limit to love for God? So I say to you, immerse yourself in the sea of Sat-chit-ananda.

"What worry can there be when you have realized God? Then you will not only receive His commission, but also teach mankind."

Chapter Four

Countless paths for God-realization – Bhakti Yoga is the path for this age

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look here, there are numberless paths to reach the ocean of immortality. Any path you take, it is enough if you can jump into this ocean. Imagine a reservoir of the nectar of immortality. If only a small drop of it somehow falls into your mouth, you become immortal. Whether you jump into it or go into it slowly by a staircase and take a drop of it from there, or if you are pushed into it, the result will be the same. You will become immortal by just tasting a drop of this nectar.

"There are innumerable paths. Among them are the path of knowledge, the path of action, and the path of love and devotion. You will attain God by any path if you have sincere longing for Him.

"There are three kinds of yogas: the yoga of knowledge, the yoga of action and the yoga of love and devotion.

"Jnana Yoga. In the path of knowledge the jnani wants to know Brahman, the Absolute. He says to himself, 'Not this, not this.' He reasons, 'Only Brahman is real and the world unreal.' He meditates on what is real and what is unreal. When his reasoning stops, he goes into samadhi and he gains the knowledge of the Absolute.

"Karma Yoga. The path of action is to keep the mind in God by doing work – this is what you are

teaching. It is the practice of breath control,[1] meditation,[2] and concentration without attachment to results. If householders attend to their duties in life in an unattached manner with devotion for Him and surrender the result of their work to Him, it, too, is Karma Yoga. To perform worship, repetition of God's name, and other such actions, surrendering the result to God, is also the path of action. The goal of this path is also God-realization.

"Bhakti Yoga. The path of devotion, Bhakti Yoga, is in fixing the mind on God by repeating His name and singing His glories. Bhakti Yoga is the easy path for the Kaliyuga. It is indeed the path for the present age.

"Karma Yoga. The path of action is very difficult. In the first place, as I told you earlier, you do not have the time for it these days. Where is the time to perform all the rituals enjoined in the scriptures? Life is short in the Kaliyuga And then it is extremely difficult to work without expectation of reward, to work unattached. One cannot be truly detached without having first realized God. Attachment to results come, one knows not from where.

"The path of knowledge is also very difficult in this age. In the first place, human life is dependent on food. Second, life is short. Third, it is not possible to rid oneself of body consciousness. Spiritual knowledge is impossible without freedom from body-consciousness. The follower of the path of

1. Pranayama.
2. Dhyana.

knowledge says, 'I am Brahman; I am not this body, I am beyond hunger, thirst, disease, grief, birth, death, pleasure, pain, and the like.' If you are aware of disease, grief, pleasure, pain, then how can you be a man of knowledge? When your hand is torn by thorns, you bleed profusely and suffer pain; yet you say, 'No, my hand is not scratched and torn. Nothing has happened to me.'"

The paths of knowledge and action are not the religion of this age

"That is why, for this age, the path of love and devotion is best. One can approach God more easily through it than by any other path. One can reach God by way of knowledge or action and by other paths too, but all these are very difficult.

"Bhakti Yoga is the religion for this age. This does not mean that a lover of God reaches one goal and the followers of the path of knowledge and action reach another. It means that those who want the knowledge of the Absolute will attain it, even if they adopt and tread the path of love and devotion. Remember that the gracious loving Lord of the devotees[1] grants the knowledge of Brahman if He so wishes."

Does a devotee attain knowledge of the Absolute? How does he perform actions and prayer?

"The devotee wants to see God with form. He wants to talk to Him. Usually he doesn't want the knowledge of the Absolute. Even so, God's will is the law. If He wills, He can bestow on the devotee

1. Bhakta-vatsala.

all spiritual wealth. He gives not only love and devotion, but divine knowledge as well. If one can get to Calcutta, one can also see Fort Maidan, the Asiatic Society's Museum – everything.

"Now the question is how to reach Calcutta.

"If you reach the Mother of the Universe, you will get love and devotion as well as spiritual knowledge. In bhava samadhi,[1] you see God with form; in nirvikalpa samadhi, you see akhanda Sat-chit-ananda (indivisible, absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss). Then your 'I-ness' – name and form – do not exist.

"The devotee says, 'Mother, I am afraid of performing work with a motive. In such work there is desire, and the action will yield some fruit. It is very difficult to work with detachment. By doing work with motive, I will forget You. Therefore, I do not want to do it. Until I attain You, may my work decrease. What little I have to do, may I do without attachment, and may I gain greater love and devotion for You. Until I attain You, may my mind not engage itself in any new work. I shall work only when You command me; otherwise not.'"

1. A kind of ecstasy attained by following the path of love and devotion for God.

Chapter Five

Pilgrimage and Sri Ramakrishna – three classes of religious teachers

The pundit: "Sir, how far did you go on your pilgrimage?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "I saw a few places. Hazra went farther and higher; he went to Hrishikesh. (*All laugh.*) I didn't go that far, or that high. Kites and vultures soar very high, but their eyes remain fixed on the charnel pits where carcasses of dead animals are thrown. (*All laugh.*) Do you know what I mean by charnel pits? 'Lust and greed.'

"If you can cultivate love and devotion for God sitting here, what is the need to go on pilgrimage? When I went to Kashi, I saw that the trees were the same, the tamarind leaves were also the same.

"If you do not develop love for God at places of pilgrimage, your visit to those places has been of no use. Love for God alone is the essential thing, the only thing needed. Do you know what I mean by kites and vultures? Many people come here and they talk big and say, 'We have performed many of the rites and duties enjoined by the holy books.' But their minds remain attached to the world. They are busy with money, name and honour, comfort, and so on."

The pundit: "Yes, sir. Going on pilgrimage is like searching for diamonds and jewels while throwing away Vishnu's own gem."[1]

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1. Kaustubhmani.

Sri Ramakrishna: "And you must also know that, though you may preach a thousand things, they will be of no use unless it is the right time. When going to bed, a child says to his mother, 'Mother, please wake me up when I have to go to the bathroom.' The mother replies, 'Child, its pressure itself will wake you up. You don't have to worry about that.' (*Laughter*.)

"Similarly, longing for God comes in its own time."

Preach only to the competent – is God merciful?

"There are three classes of physicians.

"One class feels the pulse of the patient, prescribes medicine for him, and leaves him, saying, 'Take this medicine.' Such physicians are the lowest class. Similarly, some religious teachers give instructions, but they don't check to see whether or not their teachings have done any good. They don't bother to find out.

"Another class of physician arranges for the medicine and asks the patient to take it. If the patient does not want to take it, they reason with him in many ways. These are physicians of the mediocre class. Likewise, there are mediocre-class religious teachers. They preach and also explain to people in many ways so that their advice is followed.

"And then there is the highest class of physician. If gentle persuasion fails to make the patient understand, such physicians even use force. If need be, they put their knees on the patient's

chest and force the medicine down his throat. In the same way, there is a highest class of religious teacher. Such teachers also use force to direct their disciples to God."

The pundit: "Sir, if there are religious teachers of the highest class, why do you say that one doesn't gain knowledge till the right time?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's right. But think: if the medicine doesn't reach the stomach, if it is vomited, what can the physician do? Then even the physician of the highest class is helpless.

"You should instruct only after judging the listener. You people instruct without having examined the receptacle. When a boy comes to me, I ask him about his family. Suppose his father is dead and he has left some debts. How can the boy give his mind to God? Do you hear what I am saying, brother?"

The pundit: "Yes sir, I am listening to everything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Once a group of Sikh soldiers came to the temple at Dakshineswar. I met them in front of Mother Kali's shrine. One of them said, 'God is very kind.' I said, 'Are you sure? How do you know?' He said, 'Why Maharaj, God gives us food. He cares so much for us!' I said, 'What is that to wonder at? God is the father of all. If a father doesn't look after his son, who else will? Will people of the neighbourhood do it?'"

Narendra: "So shouldn't God be called merciful?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Am I stopping you from calling Him merciful? What I mean is that God is our own. He's not a stranger."

Pundit: "Precious words!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "I was listening to your song, but I didn't enjoy it. I got up and left. I said to myself, 'His mind is now set on finding a job, so his singing is dull.'"

Narendra felt ashamed. He blushed and remained silent.

Chapter Six

Departure

Thakur asks for a drink of water. A glass of water had already been placed close to him, but he doesn't drink it. He asks for another glass. It was later heard that a very sensual person had touched the first glass.

The pundit (*to Hazra*): "You live with him day and night. You must be supremely happy."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is a great day for me today. I have seen the moon on the second day of the bright fortnight. (*All laugh*.) Do you understand why I said the moon of the second day of the bright fortnight? Sita said to Ravana, 'Ravana, you are the full moon, and my Ramachandra is the crescent moon of the second day of the bright fortnight.' Ravana did not understand, so he was very happy. But by this, Sita meant that Ravana had reached the limit of his power and that now he would wane every day like the full moon. Ramachandra, being

the moon of the second lunar day, would shine brighter and brighter day by day."

Thakur rises. The pundit salutes him reverently, as do his friends and companions. Thakur and his disciples say goodbye.

Chapter Seven

Return to Ishan's house

Thakur returns to Ishan's house with the devotees. It is not yet dusk. They come and sit in Ishan's ground floor parlour. Some of the devotees, including a Bhagavata pundit and Ishan's sons, are already there

Sri Ramakrishna: "I said to Shashadhar, 'You want the cluster of fruit before you even climb the tree! Practice spiritual disciplines a little more. Then you can teach others.'"

Ishan: "Everybody thinks that he can teach. A glowworm thinks it is illumining the world. Somebody said, 'O glowworm, what light can you give? You only make the darkness more evident.'"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling a little*): "But he is not just a scholar. He also has some discrimination and dispassion."

The Bhagavata pundit from Bhattapada is sitting there. He is between seventy and seventy-five years old. He is watching Thakur.

The Bhagavata pundit (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "You are a great soul."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You can say that about Narada, Prahlada, or Sukadeva. I am like your child.

"But you can say so from the point of view that the devotee of God is greater than God because the devotee carries God in his heart: 'The devotee thinks of Me as small and of himself as great.' (*They all feel joy*.) Yashoda wanted to bind Krishna to her with a rope. She thought that if she didn't look after him, no one else would. Sometimes God is the magnet and the devotee a needle. By His power of attraction, He pulls the devotee. But sometimes the devotee becomes the magnet and God the needle. The devotee's attraction is so strong that, enchanted by his ecstatic love, God Himself comes to him."

Thakur is about to return to Dakshineswar. He goes to the southern verandah of the parlour. Ishan and the other devotees stand there with him. Thakur imparts many instructions to Ishan during their conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "The devotee who calls upon God while living in the household is brave and a real hero. God says: 'He who has renounced the world will naturally call upon Me and serve Me. There is no bravery in that. If he does not call upon Me, others will say, "Shame on him!" But the man who, while living in the midst of worldly duties, calls upon Me and looks after Me – after having pushed away a twenty-maund[1] stone,

1. One ton.

as it were – he is really blessed! He is brave, a hero indeed!'"

Bhagavata pundit: "The holy books say the same thing. There is the story of the pious hunter[1] and the chaste wife. An ascetic thought that he had attained a very high state because he had burned a crow and a crane to ashes [with a glance]. He went to the house of a chaste wife. She had so much love for her husband that she served him day and night. When the husband came home, she would give him water to wash his feet; she would even dry his feet with her hair. The ascetic had come as a guest. When there was delay in getting alms from her, he shouted, 'You will come to no good!' The chaste woman at once replied, 'This is not like burning a crow or a crane to ashes. Wait a little, holy man. Let me finish my service to my husband. Then I'll attend to you.'

"The same ascetic went to a pious hunter to attain the knowledge of the Absolute. The hunter used to sell meat, but he would render service to his parents day and night, looking upon them as God embodied. The ascetic was wonderstruck when he saw him. He thought, 'This butcher sells meat and is a worldly man. What knowledge of Brahman can he impart to me?' But the butcher was a knower of the Absolute."

Thakur is about to enter a carriage. He is standing near the door of Ishan's father-in-law's house. Ishan and the devotees stand close, waiting

1. Dharma Vyadha.

to say goodbye. Thakur again instructs Ishan during the course of conversation.

"Live in the world like an ant. In the world is both the True[1] and the transitory, all mixed up, just as sugar is mixed with sand. Be an ant and take only the sugar.

"Water and milk are mixed together, and so are spiritual joy and worldly pleasures. Like a swan, you must take only the milk and leave the water.

"And be like the waterfowl. When water touches its body, it flutters its wings and shakes it off. Or become like a mud fish. It lives in mud, but look at its body: it is clean and shines brightly.

"In the world[2] there is indeed a mixture of truth[3] and make-believe.[4] Discard the make-believe and take the truth."

Thakur departs for Dakshineswar in a carriage.

1. Nitya; the Absolute; the Eternal.
2. Gol-mal.
3. Mal.
4. Gol.

Section XII

Another Visit to the Sinthi Brahmo Samaj
Instructions to Vijaykrishna and Other Brahmos
Joyful Moments with Them

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna in Samadhi

The Brahmo devotees have again assembled at the Sinti Brahmo Samaj. It is 19 October 1884, the first day of the bright fortnight of the month of Kartik, the day after the Kali Puja. This is the time for the Autumn Festival. A session of the Brahmo Samaj is being held again in the beautiful garden house of Beni Madhava Pal. The morning worship is over. The Paramahamsa Deva arrives at half past four. When his carriage stops in the middle of the garden, groups of devotees immediately encircle him. The pulpit of the Samaj has been set in the first room, before which is the vestibule. Thakur enters the vestibule and sits down. The devotees follow and sit around him. They include Vijay and Trailokya among others. A former member of the Brahmo Samaj, a sub-judge, is also present.

The Samaj house has been beautifully decorated for the great celebration, with multi-coloured flags strung about here and there. Some parts of the building and the ledges of the ventilators have been decorated with green foliage to give the illusion of beautiful and attractive trees. Outside, the blue autumnal sky casts

its reflection in the clear water of the lake mentioned earlier.[1] In the garden, on both sides of the red brick-dust pathways, are rows of flowering trees and fruit trees. Today again the devotees will hear Thakur chant the Vedas; he will chant the same verses which once emanated from the mouths of the Aryan rishis. The same message was heard by the twelve unlettered fishermen disciples from the mouth of Jesus – the supreme sannyasin in human form, his mind and soul fixed in Brahman, solicitous of the suffering of mankind, the gracious, loving Lord of the devotees, God-incarnate, overwhelmed with love for God. A similar chant issued from the Lord Sri Krishna in the form of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* on the holy field of Kurukshetra. These divine words Arjuna,[2] the humble and sincere son of Kunti, heard in thundering sounds from the mouth of Guru Sat-chit-ananda, who had come down in human form and served as his charioteer:

kaviṁ purāṇamanuśāsitāram aṇoraṇīyaṁsamanu-
smaredyaḥ ।
sarvasya dhātāramacintyarūpam ādityavarṇaṁ
tamasaḥ parastāt ।।

prayāṇakāle manasā'calena bhaktyā yukto yoga-
balena caiva ।
bhruvormadhye prāṇamāveśya samyak sa taṁ
paraṁ puruṣamupaiti divyam ।।

yadakṣaraṁ vedavido vadanti viśanti yadyatayo
vītarāgāḥ ।
yadicchanto brahmacaryaṁ caranti tatte padaṁ
saṅgraheṇa pravakṣye ।।

[He who meditates on the Omniscient, the Ancient, the Ruler, smaller than an atom, the

1. Refer Section III of this Volume, 28 October 1882.
2. Gudakesha.

support of all, of inconceivable form and sun-like
like effulgence beyond all darkness; he, with a steady mind at the time of death, with devotion and the strength of yoga, fixing his life-force between the eyebrows, reaches the Supreme Purusha.

To you I shall proclaim briefly, That which the knowers of the Veda call the Imperishable, into which ascetics, freed from passion, enter, and desiring which they lead lives of self-control.]

– Bhagavad Gita 8:9–11

As Sri Ramakrishna sits down, he sees the beautifully decorated pulpit of the Samaj and bows to pay his homage. Since they talk of God from this platform, he feels that it is a holy spot. He sees that they talk of the Imperishable from here, so all holy places meet here. As on seeing a courtroom one thinks of lawsuits and a judge, on seeing where the story of the Lord is spoken, one is inspired with God.

Trailokya sings. Sri Ramakrishna says, "You sing 'O Mother, make me mad' so beautifully. Please sing it."

Trailokya sings:

O Mother, make me mad with Your love.

What need have I for knowledge or reason?

With the wine of Your love make me drunk,

You who steal the hearts of Your devotees!

Drown me in the ocean of Your love.

In this world, Your madhouse, some laugh, some weep, some dance in joy.

Jesus, Moses, Gauranga,[1] – all are drunk with the wine of Your love.

When, O Mother, shall I join their blessed company?

In the heavens too is Your fair of madness: like guru, like disciples.

Who can understand this play of love?

O Mother, You who are mad with love, who are indeed the glory of the mad,

Make this, your beggar Premdas, rich with the treasure of love.

As Sri Ramakrishna hears the song, there is a change in his mood. He at once passes into samadhi – on seeing within himself the Great Essence beyond all essences, beyond the twenty-four cosmic principles, and beyond even mahat.[2] It is as if all his organs of action and of sense, mind, intellect, and ego have vanished. His body is as motionless as a picture. Once, seeing such a state in Sri Krishna, Yudhisthira, the chief Pandava, wept, his soul completely merged in Sri Krishna. At that time Bhishma Deva, the pride of the dynasty of the Aryans, was lying on a bed of arrows meditating deeply on God in his last moments. The Kurukshetra battle had just ended. It was a day when one cried in spite of oneself. Not able to understand Sri Krishna's state of samadhi, he wept. He was afraid that Sri Krishna had left his body.□□□□

1. Sri Chaitanya.
2. The second category in the evolution of the universe; the cosmic mind.

Chapter Two

Talk on spiritual matters – formless God of the Brahmo Samaj

After some time, Sri Ramakrishna comes back to partial consciousness and instructs the Brahmo devotees. His divine mood is so intense that he sounds intoxicated. It gradually diminishes. At last he returns to the normal state of consciousness.

"I shall eat hemp" – the Gita and the eight occult powers[1] – what is God-realization?

Sri Ramakrishna: "Mother, I don't want the joy of the Causal.[2] I shall eat siddhi.

"By siddhi, I mean the attainment of the Essence – not any of the eight occult powers. Krishna spoke of this to Arjuna. He said, 'Brother, listen. If a person has even one of the eight occult powers, he cannot attain Me.' Because with occult power comes pride, and when there is even a trace of pride, a person cannot reach God.

"There are beginners,[3] those who are practicing,[4] the spiritually mature,[5] and the most perfect among the mature ones.[6] He who has just begun spiritual practices belongs to first class. A beginner applies marks of sandalwood paste on his

1. Siddhi, the word for "occult power" also means "hemp." Sri Ramakrishna is making a play on words
2. Karanananda.
3. Pravartakas.
4. Sadhakas.
5. Siddhas.
6. The siddha of the siddhas.

forehead, applies a sectarian mark on his body,[1] and uses a rosary. He shows a lot of external signs like these. The practicing aspirant is more advanced. His tendency to show off is reduced. He has yearning for God and calls upon Him sincerely. He repeats His Name and prays to Him with a guileless heart. Who is a spiritually mature person? One who has a firm conviction that God exists and that He does everything. Such a person has seen God. And who is 'the most perfect among the mature ones?' One who has talked with God – not just seen Him, but talked to Him as a son to his father, or a mother to her child, or a friend to a friend, or as a lover to the beloved.

"It is one thing to have the faith that fire is in wood; it is another to make fire with that wood, to cook rice, and to feel filled and satisfied by eating it.

"There is no end to divine states. There is always a state higher than the one before."

God of worldly men – yearning and realization – be firm

(*In a deep spiritual mood*) "These people are Brahmajnanis and believe in God without form. This is good.

(*To Brahmo devotees*) "Believe firmly in one – either in God with form or God without form. Only then will you realize Him, not otherwise. A man with firm faith in God with form will attain Him, as will one who has firm faith in the formless God.

1. Tilak.

Whether you eat sweet bread straight or sideways, it will taste sweet both ways. (*All laugh*.)

"But you have to be steady and call upon Him with a yearning heart. Do you know what the God of a worldly man is like? Like children imitating a quarrel between a younger aunt and her elder, each saying, 'I swear by God.' It is also like a well-dressed gentleman, chewing betel leaf and holding a walking stick in his hand, who plucks a flower as he strolls in the garden and says to his companion, 'What a beautiful[1] flower God has made!' But the feeling of such a worldly man is only momentary, like a drop of water on red-hot iron.

"You have to be firm in one ideal. Dive. Without diving deep, you cannot reach the gems at the bottom of the sea. It is of no help to swim on the surface."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing in his sweet voice the same song that had charmed Keshab Sen and other devotees. All those present feel as if they are in heaven or in Vaikuntha (the abode of Lord Vishnu).

> Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty, and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the gem of Love.
>
> Go seek, go seek, O mind, the blessed Vrindavan within your heart, the abode of the Lord of Love. Then in your heart the unceasing light of knowledge will ever shine.
>
> Who is it that steers your boat over solid ground? It is your guru, says Kabir. Listen, and meditate on his holy feet.

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1. Sri Ramakrishna actually used this word in English.

Chapter Three

In the company of Brahmo devotees – Brahmo Samaj and talk on the glory of God

Sri Ramakrishna: "Dive. Learn to love God. Forget yourself in intense love for Him. Look here, I have heard your worship. Why do you talk so much of the glory of God in your Brahmo Samaj? 'O Lord! You have made the sky. You have made big oceans. You have created the moon, the sun, the stars, and so on.' What is the need of all this?

"People are struck with wonder when they see a rich man's garden: what beautiful trees, what flowers, what a lake. They stand speechless at the sight of the drawing room and beautiful pictures. But who looks for the owner of the garden? Only one or two people. If you look for God with a longing heart, you can see Him, you can know Him, you can talk to Him just as I am talking to you. I tell you truly, you can see Him.

"But for whom do I speak these words? Who believes them?"

Scriptures and revelation – the law of revelation

"Can one reach God by reading scriptures? By reading scriptures you might at most understand that He exists. But unless you yourself dive deep, you cannot see God. Only when you have dived deep and He lets you know Him are all your doubts removed. You may read a book a thousand times, you may chant a thousand verses, but you cannot comprehend God without earnestly diving into Him. By mere scholarship you may deceive man, but you can't attain God.

"Of what use are scriptures or other holy books alone? Without His grace nothing can happen. Seek for God with a longing heart! By His grace you will see Him. He will talk to you."

Brahmo Samaj and equality – is God partial?

The sub-judge: "Does He shower His grace more on one than another? If that is so, God is guilty of partiality."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you mean! Take the two words *ghorata* and *sarata*.[1] Both have *-ta* as a suffix. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar also said what you are saying. He asked, 'Sir, has God given more power to one than another?' I replied, 'He is present in every being as the all-pervading Spirit,[2] so he is in everything. Just as He is in me, He is in an ant, too. But there is special manifestation of God's power in some. If everybody is equal, why have we come to see you when we hear your name, Ishwar Vidyasagar? Have you two horns that we have come to see? That is not so. You are generous, you are learned. You are well-known because you have more of these qualities than others. You know, there are people who can defeat a hundred men single-handedly; others run away in fear of a single person.'

"If there is no special power, why would people consider Keshab so great?

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1. The two words *ghora* ("horse") and *sara* ("clay plate") both have the suffix .*-ta*. The power of a horse is different from that of a clay plate. Because they both end in *-ta*, they don't become equal. The horse has more power than the clay plate.
2. Vibhu.

"The Gita says: 'If a person is considered great by many, whether it is because of his learning, his ability to sing and play musical instruments, his oratory, or anything else, know it for certain that he has within him a special power of God.'"

A Brahmo devotee (*to the sub-judge*): "Please accept what he says."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the Brahmo devotee*): "What kind of a man are you? Merely accepting without conviction! It is hypocrisy. I see you as a sham."

The Brahmo devotee is very ashamed.

Chapter Four

Brahmo Samaj – Keshab and detachment in family life – renunciation of world

The earlier story of his life – instructions to Keshab – spiritual practice in a solitary place – signs of spiritual knowledge

The sub-judge: "Sir, must one renounce the family?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, why should you have to renounce the family? You can renounce even while living in the family. But in the beginning you must live for some time in a solitary place. You must practice spiritual disciplines in solitude. You should find a place near your home where you can retire and go home only for a meal. Keshab Sen, Pratap, and others told me, 'Sir, we have the same attitude as King Janaka.' I said to them, 'You cannot become King Janaka just by saying so. King

Janaka practiced many austerities in a solitary place, standing on his head. You people must do something! Only then can you become a King Janaka.' Someone may write English very fluently, but could he do that all of a sudden? He was the son of a poor man. He used to live in somebody's house, cooking for him, and ate little. He learned to read and write with great difficulty. That is how he is able to write so fluently now.

"I said something else to Keshab Sen: 'Without going into solitude, how can you get rid of a serious disease? You are a patient with delirium, living in a room in which there are pickled tamarind and a pitcher of water. How can you get rid of the disease?' Look, just by talking of tamarind pickles, my mouth has begun to water! (*All laugh*.) You all know what happens when they are within reach. For men, women are the pickled tamarind. Desire for enjoyment is the pitcher of water. There is no end to the thirst for enjoyment. Because all such things are found in the patient's room, how can the disease of delirium be cured there? You must live for a few days at a different place, where there are no tamarind pickles or pitchers of water. Later, after being cured, you can go back to the family without running any risk. After attaining God, if you live in the family, 'lust and greed' can do no harm. Then you can remain unattached like Janaka. But in the beginning you have to be careful. You have to live in solitude and carry out strict spiritual disciplines. When the ashvattha tree is a small plant, it has to be protected by a fence around it so that cows or goats won't destroy it. However, when it has grown a thick trunk, no fence

is necessary. Then, even if you tie an elephant to it, no harm can come to it. If you practice spiritual disciplines in a solitary place and develop love and devotion to the lotus feet of God and gain strength, then you can go home and live a family life. Then 'lust and greed' will not harm you at all.

"Make curds in a solitary corner, and churn them to bring out the butter. When the butter of knowledge and love for God is taken out of the milk of the mind, it will float unattached on the water of the world. But if you keep the immature mind, which is in the state of milk, in the water of the household, it will not float.

"To attain God while living a family life, hold onto His lotus feet with one hand and do your work with the other. Whenever you are free from work, hold His lotus feet with both hands, live in solitude, meditate on Him alone, and serve Him."

The sub-judge (*joyfully*): "Sir, very beautiful words indeed! There is nothing other than this! What else could be required than to practice spiritual disciplines in solitude? But we forget this. We think we have become King Janaka already. (*Sri Ramakrishna and all the others laugh.*) That there is no need to leave family life, that one can attain God even while living in the family – hearing this, my mind is happy and at peace."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why should you have to renounce? If you have to fight, it is better to fight from within a fort. You have to fight against your senses and against hunger and thirst. It is good that all these are fought while living in the household. Moreover, in the Kaliyuga life depends

on food. If you have nothing to eat, all talk of God will be knocked out of your brain. A person said to his wife, 'I am going to leave the family.' The wife was a somewhat sensible woman. She said, 'Why do you have to wander about? When you don't have to beg your bread from ten homes, go, but if you have to do that, it is better to be in one house.'

"Why do you have to renounce the home? It is convenient there. You don't have to worry about food, and there is no harm in living with your wife. In a family, all your bodily needs are easily met. If you fall ill, you have people to nurse you.

"Janaka, Vyasa, and Vasishtha lived in the family after attaining spiritual knowledge. They wielded both swords – the one of knowledge and the other of action."

The sub-judge: "Sir, how do you know when you have attained knowledge?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you have attained knowledge, you no longer see God at a distance. He is no longer 'He' – He becomes 'this.' Then He is seen in your own heart. God is in everybody. Whoever seeks Him finds Him."

The sub-judge: "Sir, I am a sinner. How can I say that God is within me?"

Brahmo Samaj, Christianity and the doctrine of sin

Sri Ramakrishna: "You Brahmos harp on sin! Maybe it's the view of Christianity also. Somebody gave me a book (the Bible). I asked someone to read me a little. It was all about one thing only – sin and sin. I have chanted His name – Ishvara or Rama or

Hari. How can I be a sinner? You must have such faith as this! You must have faith in the power of God's name!"

The sub-judge: "Sir, how do you have such faith?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Love Him. One of your Brahmo songs says, 'Lord, can one ever know You without loving You, by only performing worship and sacrifice?' Pray! Cry! Weep out loud to Him in solitude that you may gain such attraction for Him, such love for Him! People shed pitchers full of tears when their wives are ill, or they lose money, or for a job. Who weeps for God? Just tell me. I would like to know."

Chapter Five

Give God the power of attorney – how long do you have duties toward family

Trailokya: "Sir, he has no time. He has to work for the British."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the sub-judge*): "Well, give God the power of attorney. If you give your burden to a good person, can he ever do you wrong? Give Him your entire burden with a sincere heart, and then be at peace. Do only the work He assigns to you.

"A kitten doesn't have a calculating mind. It just cries, 'Mew, mew.' If its mother puts it in the kitchen, it lies there. It only mews for its mother. And when the mother puts it on a bed, it is the same: it just repeats, 'Mew, mew.'"

The sub-judge: "We are householders. How long do we have to attend to worldly duties?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Of course you have duties to do – to bring up your children, to provide for your wife, and to save money for her when you are no more. If you don't do these, you are a heartless fellow. Sukadeva and other sages had compassion. A person who has no compassion is not a human being."

The sub-judge: "How long must one look after one's children?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Till they reach adulthood. When a bird grows up and can look after itself, its mother forces it out of the nest with its beak. She doesn't let it near." (*All laugh*.)

The sub-judge: "What is one's duty toward one's wife?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "During your lifetime you must instruct her in religion and must provide for her. If she is chaste, you must make plans for her care when you are gone.

"However, when a person is overwhelmed with spiritual knowledge, he is left with no duties to perform. God takes charge when you are no longer able to do so. When a zemindar dies, leaving behind a minor son, a guardian takes the entire responsibility for the boy. It is a matter of law. You know that quite well."

The sub-judge: "Yes, Sir."

Vijay Goswami: "Ah, beautiful! God Himself takes up the burden of one who meditates on Him

with a fixed mind, who is mad with ecstatic love for Him. A minor at once gets a guardian. Oh, when will such a state of mind come? Whoever experiences such a state is lucky indeed!"

Trailokya: "Sir, is it possible to gain true knowledge of God while living in the world? Can one really attain God?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Why not? You are already completely absorbed in Him! (*All laugh.*) You are already living in the world, and you have given your mind to Him. Why shouldn't it be possible to realize God in the household? Certainly it is."

Signs of a householder jnani – signs of God-realization – free in this very life[1]

Trailokya: "What are the signs of a householder's having attained knowledge of God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Tears flow from his eyes, and the hair on his body stands on end at the name of God. No sooner does he hear the sweet name of God than the hair on his body stands on end and a stream of tears flows from the eyes.

"As long as there is attachment to worldly things, as long as there is attraction for 'lust and greed,' body-consciousness doesn't leave you. The fewer the attachments, the nearer you are to knowledge of the Self,[2] and to the same extent, body-consciousness becomes less. One attains knowledge of the Atman when attachment to the

1. Jivanmukta.
2. Atmajnana.

world has completely disappeared. Then one begins to feel that the soul is one and the body another. It is difficult to separate the kernel of a coconut from its shell with a knife until the water in it has dried up. When the water is dried up, you only have to strike and shake it and the kernel becomes detached. This is called a dry coconut.

"The signs of God-realization are that a man becomes like a dry coconut – he is rid of identification with the body. Pleasure and pain of the body are no longer his concern. He does not seek comforts for the body. He roams about as one liberated in this very life.[1]

"Kali's devotees are free in this very life. They are full of unending joy.

"When you see tears begin to flow and the hair on the body stand on end at the very name of God, know that attachment to 'lust and greed' has disappeared and that one has realized God. If a matchstick is dry, strike it just once, and it will light. If it is wet, you may strike it fifty times, but it won't ignite. You've just wasted the wooden sticks. If your mind is immersed in the liquid of worldly pleasures and is wet with 'lust and greed,' inspiration for God-consciousness will not arise. You may try a thousand times, but all your efforts will be in vain. It is only when the liquid of attachment to worldly pleasures dries up that there is instantaneous inspiration for God."

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1. Jivanmukta.

Yearning is the way – He is your very own Mother

Trailokya: "How do we dry up our craving for worldly pleasures?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Call on the Divine Mother with a longing heart. The liquid of worldly desire dries up on seeing Her; your attachment to 'lust and greed' will fully disappear. It happens at the very moment you realize that He is your own Mother. He is not your stepmother; He is your own Mother! Be earnest and even stubborn with Her! A boy holds onto his mother's sari when he asks her for money to buy a kite. Perhaps the mother is busy talking to other women, and at first she refuses outright, saying, 'No, your father doesn't want me to give you any money. I'll ask him when he comes. You might cause an accident by playing with a kite now.' But when the boy starts crying and refuses to leave, the mother says to her friends, 'Just wait a minute, sisters. Let me pacify this boy. I'll be right back.' Saying this, she opens her cash box with a key and throws a pice to the boy. You also must become stubborn with the Mother. She will certainly grant you Her vision. I said the same thing to some Sikhs. They had come to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. We talked in front of Mother Kali's shrine, and they said, 'God is all compassion.' I said, 'How is that?' They answered, 'Because, Sir, He is always looking after us. He gives us righteousness[1] and wealth[2] – everything. He gives us food.' I said, 'When somebody has children, doesn't he take the responsibility of

1. Dharma.
2. Artha.

feeding them? Does somebody else from the neighborhood take up the duty?'"

The sub-judge: "So is He not compassionate, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why should He not be? I only told them that He is our very own. We can force Him! To our nearest and dearest, we can even say, 'You rascal, are you going to give it to me?'"

Chapter Six

Ego and the sub-judge

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the sub-judge*): "Well, do you think pride and ego come from knowledge or from ignorance? Pride is characteristic of the tamoguna and comes from ignorance. It becomes a veil through which one cannot see God. All troubles cease when the ego vanishes. Pride is of no use. Neither this body nor wealth is going to last. A drunkard was looking at an image of Durga. Seeing her decoration and adornments he said, 'Mother, You may decorate Yourself as much as You like, but after two or three days, they will pull You out and throw You into the Ganges!' So I tell everybody – whether a judge or anybody else – all this is for two days only. So give up pride and ego."

The Brahmo Samaj and equality – people have different natures

"The characteristics of sattva, rajas, and tamas are quite different. The signs of the tamoguna are pride, sloth, gluttony, lust, anger, and so on. A rajoguni has a tendency to involve himself more

and more in work and to dress well. He keeps his house clean and tidy. He also keeps a photo of the queen in the drawing room. When he meditates on God, he puts on a pure silk cloth and a string of rudraksha and gold beads. When someone comes to see the shrine, he guides the visitor, saying, 'Come this way, there is more: see the white marble floor, see the assembly hall[1] with sixteen openings.' And he makes a show of his charity. A sattvaguna person is very calm and quiet. Any clothes do for him. He earns only enough to live on and would never flatter anybody for money. His house remains in want of repair, he doesn't worry about his children's clothing, he makes no effort for name or fame. He meditates and gives away in charity secretly, so that nobody comes to know of it. He meditates inside a mosquito net so people think that he did not sleep at night and is sleeping late into the morning. Sattvaguna is the last step of the staircase. After it comes the roof. After sattvaguna is acquired, God-realization is not far off. Just a little more progress and He is attained. (*To the sub-judge*) You said that all people are equal. Just see how many different natures there are!

"And then there are many other kinds of human being: the ever-free,[2] the liberated,[3] aspirants,[4] and the bound.[5] There are so many different types! Narada and Sukadeva are ever-free. They are like a steamboat which not only crosses over but also

1. Natmandir.
2. Nityajivas.
3. Muktajivas.
4. Mumukshujivas.
5. Baddhajivas.

carries big animals, even an elephant. They are like the superintendent of an estate.[1] Having governed one part,[2] he goes to govern another. Then there are seekers after liberation who try earnestly with all their hearts and souls to free themselves from the net of the world. Only one or two of them escape from the net. They become the liberated. The ever-free are like clever fish: they never become entangled in the net of the world. As for the bound souls, worldly people, they never even become aware that they are in the mesh of the net and bound by it. Such people, when they hear talk about God, leave the place, saying, 'The name of God is taken at the time of death. Why now?' And when he is lying on his deathbed, the worldly man says to his wife and children, 'Why is the lamp burning so brightly? Lower the wick a little. Too much oil is being consumed.' Thinking of his children and wife he weeps, saying, 'Alas, what will happen to them when I am gone?' The bound person repeats those very actions that made him suffer so much in the first place. He is like a camel which bleeds profusely when it eats thorny bushes, but it doesn't give up eating them. His son has died, leaving him in grief, but he produces more children year after year. Everything he has is spent on his daughter's marriage, but he goes on begetting daughters every year. He says, 'I can't help it. It is my fate.' If he goes on pilgrimage, he doesn't find time to meditate on God. He tires himself out just carrying the luggage of his wife and children. In the

1. Tehsildar, a sub-divisional revenue officer.
2. Taluka.

temple all he does is get holy water[1] for his son to drink and make him bow to the Deity and so on. A bound soul takes up service under others to earn a living for himself, his wife, and his children. He earns money by telling lies, cheating, and flattery. Such a person looks down on those who call upon God and meditate on Him, saying they are mad. (*To the sub-judge*) There are so many kinds of men, you see! You said men were equal. But how many varieties there are! Some have more power, some less."

A bound soul does not take the name of the Lord at the time of death

"A bound soul, attached to worldliness, talks only of the world at the time of death. What use is it to superficially count the beads or take a bath in the Ganges or visit holy places? If within oneself is attachment for the world, only the world comes before the eyes at the time of death. What nonsense such a person talks on his deathbed. Perhaps he cries out in delirium, 'Turmeric powder! Five-spiced blend! Cassia leaf!' A parrot might normally repeat 'Radha Krishna' but when a cat seizes it, the only sound that comes out of it is 'Kaa! Kaa!' The Gita says the same thing, that you will carry with you to your next life what you think at the time of your death. King Bharata left his body repeating, 'Deer, deer.' So he was reborn as a deer. If you think of God at the time of death, you attain Him, and then you don't have to return to this world.

1. Charamrita.

The Brahmo devotee: "Sir, say one has meditated on God at other times, but not at the time of death. Does it mean that he will have to come to this world of pleasure and pain again? Why would that be so if he had meditated on God earlier?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A man might meditate on God but have no faith in Him. Time and again he forgets Him and becomes attached to the world. It's like washing an elephant. It soils itself again with mud and dust. The mind is like a mad elephant.[1] But if the elephant is taken to its stable soon after the bath, it can't rub mud and dust on its body. If a person thinks of God at the time of death, the mind is purified. Such a mind does not get another chance to become attached to 'lust and greed.'

"People have no faith in God. That's why they suffer so much from the consequences of actions. People say that when you take a dip in the Ganges, your sins leave you and perch themselves on a tree at the bank of the river. As soon as you return to the bank after the bath, all your sins fly back again to sit firmly on your shoulders. (*All laugh*.) You must prepare beforehand, so that your mind is in God at the time of death. The way is in constant practice.[2] Then you will remember God in your last moments."

The Brahmo devotee: "We've had a nice conversation. Very nice indeed!"

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1. Manamattakari.
2. Abhyasa yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, I've just been talking at random. But do you know my inner state of mind? 'I am the instrument and He is the operator; I am the dwelling and He is the dweller; I am the engine, He is the engineer; I am the chariot, He is the charioteer. I move as He makes me move; I do as He makes me do.'"

Chapter Seven

Sri Ramakrishna joyfully singing God's name

Trailokya sings again, accompanied by drum and cymbal. Sri Ramakrishna is dancing, mad with love for God. He has gone into samadhi a number of times while dancing. Now he stands in samadhi – his body motionless, eyes fixed, face smiling, leaning on the shoulder of a dear devotee. When he comes down a little from that state, he dances like an intoxicated elephant. Regaining external consciousness, he adds his own lines to the song:

Mother, dance around Your devotees,

Dancing Yourself, make them dance too.

O, my Mother, dance in the lotus of my heart.

O Brahmamayi, whose essence is Brahman,

Dance in Your world-bewitching form!

It is a rare sight, the dance of this divine child maddened with love, his soul merged in the Divine Mother. Brahmo devotees dance around him like iron filings around a magnet. They all chant the name of Brahman in a frenzy of love. Then they chant the sweet name of Brahman, the name of Mother. Many of them weep like children as they repeat, "Mother, Mother!"

When the singing ends, they all take seats. The evening worship of the Samaj has not yet been performed. In the joy of singing, all rules had been brushed aside. The plans had been for Vijaykrishna Goswami to take the pulpit after dusk. It is about 8 p.m.

Everyone is now seated, Sri Ramakrishna also has taken his seat. Vijay is sitting in front of him. A message comes that Vijay's old mother-in-law and some other women devotees would like to see Sri Ramakrishna and talk to him, so Thakur goes into another room to meet them.

He returns in a little while and says to Vijay, "What great and loving devotion your mother-in-law has for God! She says, 'I will not talk about worldly things now – there, one wave disappears as another wave arrives.' I said, 'What does it matter to you? You already have knowledge.' At this, your mother-in-law said, 'What knowledge do I have? I have not yet gone beyond vidyamaya (the power of knowledge) and avidyamaya (power of nescience). It is not enough to go beyond avidya. You have to go beyond vidya too. Then alone will you gain spiritual knowledge. You say so yourself.'"

While they are talking, Beni Pal enters.

Beni Pal (*to Vijay*): "Sir, please rise. It is already very late. Please start the worship."

Vijay: "Sir, what is the need of worship now? You have provided the rice pudding first[1] – and then the lentils and other dishes."

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1. Payas.

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "As is the devotee, so is the provision made by him. The sattvic devotee provides the rice pudding, the rajasic one offers fifty dishes to the deity, while the tamasic devotee sacrifices a goat or some other animal."

Vijay ponders whether or not he should go up to the podium for worship.

Chapter Eight

Lectures in the Brahmo Samaj – duties of a religious teacher – God alone is the guru
[Instructions to Vijay]

Vijay: "If you will bless me, I will speak from the pulpit."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's all right if there is no pride. 'I am lecturing, you listen' – it is all right if you don't have this attitude of ego. What are pride and ego? Do they result from knowledge or from ignorance? Only the person who has no pride can attain knowledge. Rainwater flows down from a higher level; it stands at a lower level.

"As long as you have egotism, you cannot gain knowledge. You also can't attain liberation. You will have to come again and again to this world. A calf bellows 'hamba hamba' ('I, I'), so it has to undergo so much suffering! The butcher cuts it up; its skin is used to make shoes and drums. How much beating a drum takes! There is no end to its suffering! Last of all, strings are made with its intestines for the carder's bow. When the sound 'tuhun tuhun' ('you, you') is uttered by the carder's string, only then is it freed. It no longer says, 'I, I,'

only 'you, you.' In other words, 'God, You are the doer; I do nothing. You are the operator; I am the machine. Indeed, You are all.'"

Sri Ramakrishna and being a guru

"Guru, father, and doer – these three words prick my body like thorns. I am His son, His eternal child. How can I be a father? God is the doer; I do nothing. He is the operator; I am the machine.

"If anyone calls me guru, I say to him, 'What guru? Away with you, rascal!' There is no guru other than Sat-chit-ananda (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute). Except for Him, there is no shelter. He alone is the pilot that takes one across the sea of the world.

(*To Vijay*) "It is very difficult to be a spiritual teacher. It is harmful for him to see a dozen men accept him as guru. Crossing one leg over the other and saying, 'Listen to what I say,' is a very bad attitude. Such a person gets that way with the respect of only a dozen people. People will at most say, 'Ah, how well Vijay Babu speaks! He is a great man of knowledge!' I say, 'Don't think this way.' As for me, I say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, You are the mechanic, I am Your instrument. I work as You make me work; I speak as You make me speak.'"

Vijay (*humbly*): "I shall go up to the podium and speak only if you give me permission."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "What can I say? The moon is everybody's uncle. Why don't you ask Him? If you are sincere, there is nothing to be afraid of."

When Vijay requested Sri Ramakrishna yet again, he said, "Yes. Go. Follow the rules. It's okay if you have sincere love for God."

Vijay goes to the podium and offers worship according to the Brahmo custom. He repeats, "Mother, Mother" during his prayer. Everyone is moved.

After worship, preparations are made to serve the devotees. All the cotton carpets and the thick wool ones are removed, and leaf plates are put on the floor. The devotees sit down to eat. Sri Ramakrishna is also given a seat. Full of joy, he sits down and offers to God tasty luchis, kichouris, papad, various kinds of sweets, curd, and the rice pudding brought by Beni Pal. And then he partakes of the prasad.

Chapter Nine

Mother Kali and Brahman are one when one gains the highest knowledge

After the meal, everyone prepares to return home; they all chew betel leaves. Before leaving, Sri Ramakrishna sits in a corner and talks to Vijay. M. is present.

Brahmo Samaj and the Motherhood of God

Sri Ramakrishna: "You prayed to God addressing Him, 'Mother, Mother.' This is very good. They say that one is attracted more by mother than by father. You can force your mother, but you can't force your father. Carts full of money were being brought from the estate of Trailokya's mother with many men in red turbans guarding it

with sticks in their hands. Trailokya was waiting on the side of the road with his people. He forcibly took the whole treasure. You can use a great deal of force when it concerns your mother's treasure. Don't they say that a mother can't go to law against her son?"

Vijay: "If Brahman is the Divine Mother, is He with form or without form?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Brahman is the same as Kali, the Primal Power. When inactive, I call It Brahman. When creating, preserving, and dissolving, I call It Shakti (Power). Still water is an illustration of Brahman. When in motion, that same water is like Shakti, or Kali. Kali is She who communes with Mahakala, Brahman. Kali is with form, and again She is without form. If you believe in the Formless, then meditate on Kali as being formless. Be firm in one ideal. She Herself will make you understand what She is. When you reach Shyampukur, you will also know Telepada.[1] Then you will know that He is not only Existence, but He also speaks to you the way I am speaking to you. Have faith. It will all become clear. And there is one other thing. If you believe in the Formless, be firm in your belief, but don't be dogmatic, don't emphasize that God can be only this and not that. Say, 'I believe that God is formless. What else God is, only He knows. I don't know, and I can't understand.' Can a person with an ounce of intelligence know the nature of God? Can a one-seer container hold four seers of milk? If He, in His

1. The village of Shyampukur neighbours Telepada.

grace, grants His vision and makes one understand, then alone can one understand, not otherwise. That which is Brahman is also Shakti, the Divine Mother."

It is He that I worship as Mother.

Says Ramprasad, shall I give away this secret in the teeming marketplace?

Why not guess, O mind, who that being is, from the hints that have been dropped?

"And then Ramprasad also says:

Knowing now the secret that Kali is one with the highest Brahman,

I've cast off both righteousness and unrighteousness for evermore.

"Adharma, unrighteousness, means engaging in unrighteous acts. Dharma, righteousness, means duties prescribed by the scriptures – so much charity, so much feeding of brahmins."

Vijay: "What remains after one has given up both dharma and adharma?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Pure love of God. I said to the Divine Mother: Here is your dharma and here is your adharma; take them both, and give me pure love. Here is your virtue and here is your vice; take them both, and grant me pure love for you. Here is your knowledge, and here is your ignorance; take them both, and grant me pure love for you.

"Just see, I didn't ask for knowledge, nor did I ask for worldly fame. When one has given up dharma and adharma, that which remains is pure

love – unalloyed love,[1] untainted by desires,[2] love for God that wells up unbidden out of the depths of the immortal soul."[3]

Brahmo Samaj and the Brahman of Vedanta – the Primal Power

A Brahmo devotee: "Is God different from His power?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "After one has attained the highest knowledge,[4] both God and His Power are realized as one and the same, like a jewel and its lustre are inseparable. As soon as the brilliance of a jewel comes to the mind, one thinks of the jewel. Just like milk is inseparable from its whiteness – think of one and you think of the other. But this oneness does not come about until one has attained the highest knowledge. Having attained the highest knowledge, one goes into samadhi and then goes beyond the twenty-four cosmic principles, including the ego. How one feels in samadhi cannot be described in words. Coming down a little, one can give only a hint of it. When I repeat 'Om, Om' after samadhi, I have already come down a hundred cubits. Brahman is beyond the Vedic doctrine. One cannot speak of It. There is no 'I' or 'you' there.

"As long as there is I' and 'you', as long as there is the knowledge, 'I pray or I meditate,' so long does the feeling of 'You (the Lord) listen to my prayer' exist. Then one thinks of God as a person. 'You are

1. Amla bhakti.
2. Nishkama bhakti.
3. Ahehtuki bhakti.
4. Purna jnana.

the Master, I am Your servant; You are the whole, I am Your part; You are the Mother, I am Your son' – this awareness remains within. There is a feeling of difference: I am one, and You are another. This feeling of duality, He Himself gives us. That is why one is aware of being a male or a female. Or why one feels that here is light and there is darkness, and so on. As long as there is awareness of difference, one has to believe in Shakti, the Personal God. He Himself has kept this 'I-ness' in us. Reason a thousand times, but this 'I' does not leave you. And as long as it exists, He manifests as a person.

"As long as there is 'I', as long as you are conscious of duality, you cannot insist that Brahman is without attributes. You must accept Brahman with attributes. This very Brahman with attributes has been called Kali or Primal Power in the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras."

Vijay: "How can we have a vision of this Primal Power? Or how can we have the knowledge of Brahman without attributes?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Pray to Him with a yearning heart and weep. This will purify your mind. In clear water you can see the reflection of the sun. In the mirror of the 'I,' the devotee sees Brahman with attributes, the Primal Power. But the mirror must be perfectly clean. If there is any dirt, it will not catch the correct reflection.

"As long as there is 'I,' you see the sun in the water of 'I.' There is no other way to see the sun. And as long as you have no means to see the real sun and you see only the reflected sun, that

reflected sun is the real sun to you – one hundred percent real. As long as the 'I' is real, the reflected sun is also real – one hundred percent real. This reflected sun is the Primal Power.

"If you want to attain the knowledge of Brahman, proceed toward the real sun through the reflection. Pray to Brahman with attributes, who listens to your prayers. He Himself will grant you the knowledge of Brahman. This is because He who is Brahman with attributes is Himself Brahman without attributes. He who is Shakti is Himself Brahman. One realizes that there is no duality after attaining the ultimate knowledge.

"The Divine Mother grants knowledge of Brahman too. But usually a real lover of God doesn't want it.

"And there is another path, the path of knowledge – a very difficult path indeed. You members of the Brahmo Samaj are not followers of the path of knowledge, you are lovers of God. Those who follow the path of knowledge believe that Brahman is real and the world an illusion, like a dream. I, you, and everything else are like a dream."

Ill-will and the Brahmo Samaj

"God is the inner controller. Pray to Him longingly with a pure mind. He will make you understand everything. Give up egotism and take refuge in Him. You will get everything.

Dwell, O my mind, within yourself,

And enter no one else's house.

If you search within yourself,

You will find there all you seek:

God Himself, the philosopher's stone, is the supreme wealth

That can give you all you want.

At the outer court of the wish fulfilling gem,[1] so many gems lie strewn!

"When you mix with other people, you should be affectionate to them all, be one with them, have no grudge against anyone, whether a person believes in God with form and does not believe in the formless or accepts the formless and does not believe in God with form. 'So-and-so is a Hindu, so-and-so is a Muslim or a Christian' – do not say this; do not turn away or show contempt. God has given them a different understanding. Know that people have different natures. Know this and mix in their company as much as possible, and love them. Then retire to your chamber and enjoy peace and happiness.

Lighting the lamp of knowledge in the chamber of your heart, see the face of the Mother, the embodiment of Brahman.

"You will be able to see your true Self only within your own chamber. When the cowherd boys come out to graze their cows, all the cows mix together in the field and form a single herd. When they return home at dusk, they again separate. Each remains by itself in its stall."

1. Chintamani.

Sannyasins should not accumulate – Beni Pal's good use of wealth

After 10:00 p.m. Sri Ramakrishna enters the carriage to return to the Kali temple in Dakshineswar. He is accompanied by one or two devotees. It is very dark. The carriage is waiting under a tree. Beni Pal comes with some luchis and sweets for Ramlal.

Beni Pal: "Sir, Ramlal wasn't able to come. With your permission I'd like to send some food to him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Babu Beni Pal, please don't send all this with me! It is harmful to me! I can't carry anything with me, I must not accumulate. Please don't be offended."

Beni Pal: "As you please. But please bless me."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It has been a very enjoyable day. He is a real man who holds his wealth as his slave. Those who don't know the right use of money are not men, though they are born as human beings. They only have the looks of a man, but the conduct of a beast. Blessed you are. You have given joy to so many devotees."

Section XIII

With Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter One

In Dakshineswar with Manomohan, Mahima, and other devotees

Come, brother. Let's go again for his darshan.[1] You will see the great man, the child who knows nothing but the Divine Mother and who has come in a human body for our sake. He will tell us how to solve the difficult problems of life. He will instruct the sannyasins, he will instruct householders. His door is open. He is waiting for us at the Kali Temple of Dakshineswar. Come, let us go see him.

He is a man of infinite qualities, of joyful countenance, whose sweet words bring tears to the eyes. Let us go, brother. Let us realize the aim of human life by meeting Sri Ramakrishna, who is intoxicated day and night with love for God, and who is the ocean of motiveless grace.

It is Sunday, 26 October 1884, the autumn season.[2] It is midday on the 7th day of the bright fortnight of the month of Kartik. Devotees have gathered in Thakur's room. There is a semi-circular verandah to its west and then a garden path running north-south further to the west of it. A flower garden for Mother Kali is just beyond this path. And then there is the embankment and the holy river Ganges flowing south.

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1. Seeing, experiencing; paying respect to a holy place or person by a ceremonial visit; also the blessing or purification felt in the presence of holiness.
2. Hemant.

It is a mart of joy here today. Sri Ramakrishna's bliss and love for God are reflected in the faces of the devotees. How wonderful it is! Such joy is not only mirrored in the devotees' faces, but is also reflected in the garden outside, in the leaves of the trees, in the various kinds of flowers, on the vast bosom of the Ganges, in the blue sky lit up by the sun, in the cool breeze carrying drops of Ganges water flowing from the feet of Sri Krishna.[1] How amazing! Truly, even the particles of dust in the garden are filled with sweetness! I wish I could roll in the dust, secretly or with the devotees. I wish I could stand in this garden the whole day, gazing at the sweetly flowing waters of the Ganges. I wish I could embrace and talk with the creepers, bushes, shrubs, and the bright and beautiful trees adorned with leaves and flowers, feeling them my own. Doesn't Sri Ramakrishna stroll this path? Doesn't he walk among these trees, creepers, and shrubs? I wish my gaze could always be on this luminous vault of the sky! I see here the earth and the heavens all swimming in the joy of love.

How is it that the priest, the doorkeeper, and the attendants of the shrine all seem to be my very own? Why does this place appear as sweet as the motherland after a long absence? The sky, the Ganges, the temple of the deity, the garden path, the trees, the creepers, the bushes and shrubs, the attendants, the devotees seated there – they all seem to be made of the same material, the material of which Sri Ramakrishna is made. It is like a garden of wax in which everything – the trees, the plants, the fruits and the leaves – is made of the same material. The garden path, the gardener, the residents of the garden, the houses in the garden – all are made of wax. Everything in this place has been molded of joy!

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1. Murari; M. is alluding here to a Vaishnava belief that explains the origination of the Ganges as Brahma washing the feet of the Incarnation of God, Vamana; in Vaishnava tradition the Incarnation of God is Krishna.

Manomohan, Mahimacharan, and M. arrive first. Then one by one Ishan, Hriday, and Hazra arrive. There are many other devotees besides them. Balaram and Rakhal are in holy Vrindavan, but some new devotees visit these days. Narayan, Paltu, the Younger Narendra, Tejchandra, Binode, Haripada, and Baburam come and stay sometimes. Rama, Suresh, Kedar, Devendra, and other devotees also come frequently – some every week, some every two weeks. Latu lives here permanently. Yogen's house is nearby; he comes almost every day. Whenever Narendra comes, it turns into a mart of joy. He sings the glories and names of God in his sweet and rare voice, rare even for the gods, sending Thakur immediately into various spiritual moods and into samadhi. It becomes a special festival. Thakur wishes that some of the boys would stay with him day and night, for they are pure souls not bound by the ties of marriage and worldly work. He had asked Baburam (later Swami Premananda) to stay on, and sometimes he does stay. Adhar Sen also comes frequently.

The devotees are seated in the room. Sri Ramakrishna stands there, like a child, in a reflective mood. The devotees are watching him.

The Undifferentiated and the differentiated

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Manomohan*): "I see Rama in everyone. You who are sitting here – I see Rama in all of you in different forms."

Manomohan: "Rama has become all forms. But, as you say, 'Apo Narayana' – water is Narayana – but some water is fit for drinking, some only for washing the face, and some only for washing utensils."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, but I see that He alone is everything. He has become the world and its creatures."

Saying this, Thakur sits down on his smaller cot.

Sri Ramakrishna's insistence on truth and aversion to accumulating things

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan*): "I ask you now, is it excessive of me to think that I have to speak only the truth? If I suddenly say I won't eat, I can't eat even if I'm hungry. If I say that so-and-so has to take my wash pot to the jhautala and if someone else does it instead, I have to send that person back. What has happened to me, brother? Is there anything to do about it?

"And then I can't carry anything with me – betel-leaf, food, or anything else – because that would mean keeping things for the future. I can't even carry a lump of clay in my hand!"

Just then somebody comes in and says, "Sir, Hriday[1] has come to Jadu Mallick's garden. He is standing at the gate and wishes to see you." Sri Ramakrishna says to the devotees, "Please stay here. Let me talk to Hriday for a while." He puts on black varnished slippers and walks toward the eastern gate. Only M. accompanies him. They walk eastward along the garden path, which is surfaced

1. Hriday Mukherji is the son of Ramakrishna's cousin. His home is in Seor village near Kamarpukur. For almost twenty-four years Hriday stayed with Thakur, served him, and carried out the worship of Mother Kali at the Dakshineswar Temple. Later, he lost the confidence of the proprietor of the temple garden and therefore was not allowed to remain.

with red brick dust. They pass the treasurer, standing on the path, who bows to Thakur. A bearded gatekeeper sits at the gate of the southern courtyard. To the left is the kuthi, the house of the owners of the temple garden. A nilkuthi[1] used to grow here so it is called the kuthi. Beyond it flowering trees line both sides of the path and not far to the south of the path is a gazitala tree and the beautiful steps of Mother Kali's reservoir. Then comes the eastern gate, the gatekeepers' quarters to the left and the planter of tulasi bushes to the south. Coming out of the garden, Sri Ramakrishna finds Hriday standing near the gate of Jadu Mallick's garden.

Chapter Two

The attendant stands there

Hriday stands there with folded hands. As soon as he sees Sri Ramakrishna, he falls down prostrate on the road. Thakur asks him to stand up. Hriday folds his hands again and starts weeping like a child.

How strange! Sri Ramakrishna also begins to weep. There are tears in his eyes. He wipes them with his hands; yet his eyes look dry, as though he had not shed tears. How is this possible? This fellow Hriday has caused him so much trouble, but he has come so hurriedly to see him and is crying!

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why have you come now?"

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1. Indigo plant.

Hriday (*weeping*): "I have come to see you. To whom else can I tell my sorrows?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling to console him*): "In the world there are problems. Happiness and sorrow are a part of worldly life. (*Pointing at M.*) These people come now and then just for this reason. They come here to hear a word or two about God and find some peace. What is your problem?"

Hriday (*still weeping*): "I've lost your company. That is my grief."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But you said yourself, 'You live the way you want and let me do the same.'"

Hriday: "Yes, I did say that. But what did I know?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Go on home now. We'll sit and talk about it some other day. It is Sunday and many people have come. They're waiting. Did you have a good crop this year in the country?"

Hriday: "It wasn't bad."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Let me say goodbye now. Come again some other day."

Hriday again lies prostrate on the ground in salutation. Thakur returns to his room with M. by the same path.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "He tormented me as much as he served me. When I was reduced to a skeleton with stomach trouble and couldn't eat, he'd say, 'Just see how I eat. You can't eat because of the state of your mind.' And then he'd add, 'Fool, if I weren't here, what would have happened to your self-styled holiness?' One day he troubled me

so much that I went to the embankment to drown myself in the flood tide."

M. is speechless to hear this. He wonders how Thakur could be shedding tears for such a man.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, he did me so much service. How has he come to such a pass? He looked after me just like one looks after a child. I used to lie unconscious day and night. Besides, I was ill for so long. What happened to me was totally in his hands."

What can M. say? He remains silent, saying to himself: Perhaps Hriday didn't serve Thakur selflessly.

Thakur reaches his room while they talk. The devotees are waiting. Thakur goes in and sits on the smaller cot.

Chapter Three

With devotees – talks on various subjects – the profound meaning of ecstasy[1] and the highest manifestation of divine love[2]

Besides Mahimacharan and the other usual visitors, a number of devotees from Konnagar have arrived. One of them talks with Sri Ramakrishna for a long time.

Devotee from Konnagar: "Sir, I heard that you go into ecstasy, that you experience samadhi. Why and how does it happen? Please tell me."

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1. Bhava.
2. Mahabhava.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Radha used to experience the highest manifestation of divine love. When a gopi friend[1] wanted to touch her, another said, 'Her body is enjoying Krishna. Don't touch her. Krishna is sporting in her.' One doesn't attain ecstasy or this highest state of divine love without realizing God. When a fish comes up from deep water, the water splashes up behind it. The bigger the fish, the greater the splash. In ecstasy a man laughs, weeps, dances, and sings.

"One can't remain in ecstasy long. If a person just keeps looking at himself in a mirror, people think he's crazy."

The devotee from Konnagar: "Sir, we hear that you often see God. Please show Him to us."

Vision of God not possible without spiritual practices

Sri Ramakrishna: "Everything happens by the will of God. What can a man do? While repeating His name, sometimes tears flow from his eyes, sometimes they don't. Sometimes when meditating on Him, one feels inspiration; at other times nothing happens.

"You have to work for it. Only then can God be seen. One day I had a vision of the Haldarpukur. I saw that a person of low caste was taking water from it after removing the scum from its surface. Each time he took water in his palm, he examined it. It was as if he was telling me that you can't see the water unless you remove the scum. You can't gain devotion or see God without making an effort.

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1. Sakhi.

Meditation and repetition of name are all work; singing His name and glories is also work. And then, charity and worship are work.

"If you want butter, you have to make curd from milk and then keep it in a quiet place. When the milk is curdled, you have to make the effort to churn it and take out the butter."

Mahimacharan: "Yes sir, no doubt one has to work for it. What can be gained without work? A lot of effort is needed. Only then can one achieve something. How much study is needed! There are so many holy books!"

What comes first: study (knowledge and reasoning) or God-realization?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan*): "How many holy books can you read? What will you gain by only reasoning? First try to attain Him. Putting your faith in the words of the guru, make some effort. If you have no guru, pray to God with a longing heart. He Himself will tell you what He is.

"What will you learn of God by reading books? Until you have reached the marketplace, you only hear noises in the distance. It is quite different when you reach the market. Then you see clearly, you hear clearly: 'Take these potatoes. Pay for them.'

"From a distance you hear only an indistinct sound from the sea. When you go near it, you see many ships sailing, birds flying, and waves rising and falling.

"You cannot experience God by reading books. It is quite different. After realizing God, books, scriptures, science, all seem insignificant, like dry straw.

"You have to introduce yourself to the master of the house. Before that, why are you so eager to know how many houses, gardens, and certificates of company stock he owns? If you go to his servants, they won't help you. What information can they give you of the company shares? On the other hand, try somehow to meet the master, even if you are pushed aside or you have to jump over the fence. He himself will tell you how many houses and gardens and shares he has. When you know the master, the servants, the doorkeeper, and everyone else will salute you."[1] (*Everybody laughs*.)

The devotee: "So, how do we meet the master of the house?" (*All laugh*.)

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's why work for God is necessary. It does no good to say, 'God is,' and just sit there. Somehow you have to approach Him. Call upon Him secretly, pray to Him, 'Please grant me Thy vision. Grant! Please!' Say this and cry with a longing heart. Just as you roam about madly for 'lust and gold,' be a little mad for Him. Let people say that so-and-so person has gone mad for God. Give up everything for some days and only call upon Him secretly.

"What will it help just to say, 'He exists,' and do nothing about it? There are big fish in the

1. Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33)

Haldarpukur. Can you catch them by simply sitting on the bank? To attract them, you have to prepare some food and throw it into the pond. The fish will come up slowly from deep water and ruffle the surface. You will then feel happy. Perhaps you see a little bit of the fish once – and then one suddenly jumps and splashes. You are even happier when you see that.

"Turn milk into curds and churn it. Only then will you get butter.

(*To Mahima*) "What a bother this is! For somebody to show him God while he continues just to sit at ease! To extract the butter and take it to his mouth! (*All laugh.*) What trouble! Someone else must catch the fish and hand it over to him!

"Somebody wants to meet the king. The king is beyond the seven gates. Even before passing through the first gate, he asks, 'Where is the king?' The way is to pass through all the gates one by one."

The way to attain God – yearn for Him

Mahimacharan: "What must we do to attain Him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's not that you can attain Him by doing this and not by doing that. It depends on His grace. Yet you have to take to some action with a yearning heart. Longing for Him brings His grace.

"One needs the opportunity – the company of holy people, discrimination, finding a true

preceptor.[1] Perhaps one's elder brother takes up the responsibility of the household, or the wife is spiritual[2] and very virtuous; or maybe one is not married and has not become entangled in household life. It comes about when there are situations such as these.

"A person was very ill in a man's house, in critical condition. Someone said, 'When it begins to rain when the Svati star is in the ascendant and the rainwater falls into a skull, and if a poisonous snake, while chasing a frog, pounces upon it and, in the process, the frog jumps away and the snake's poison falls into the skull, then if a medicine prepared with this poison is given to the patient, the patient can be cured.' Now, after astrological consultation on the right day, time, and conjunction of the stars, a member of the family of the patient set out with a yearning heart to look for the above conditions. He prayed to God in his heart: 'Lord, only if You let me procure all these will my objective be fulfilled.' Roaming around in this way, he actually saw a human skull, and then, in no time, a rain shower came. The man then said, 'Oh Lord, I have found the skull of a dead person, and it has also rained during the ascendancy of Svati, and the rainwater has also fallen into the skull. Now, Oh Lord, bestow Your grace and procure the rest of the articles.' He was reflecting with a longing heart when he saw a poisonous snake approach. The man was extremely happy. He was so excited that his heart began to thump. He said, 'Oh Lord, now the

1. Sadguru.
2. Vidya shakti.

snake has come and so many articles have been procured. Please get me the remaining articles too!' While he was praying thus, lo! there came a frog. And the snake began to chase it. As soon as it approached the skull to pounce on the frog, the frog jumped over the skull and and the snake's poison fell into the skull. The man then began to clap his hands and dance in joy.

"So, I say that anything can happen if one has the longing for it."

Chapter Four

Sannyas and the household – God-realization and renunciation – who is a real sannyasin?

Sri Ramakrishna: "Until you have completely renounced in the mind, you cannot attain God. A sadhu cannot accumulate things. 'The bird and the sadhu do not hoard.' Birds and wandering monks[1] do not store things for tomorrow. As for me, I can't even carry a clod of earth to clean my hands. I can't carry a betel-leaf in a bag. When Hriday was troubling me so much, I wanted to go to Kashi. I said to myself that I would be able to take a dhoti with me, but how could I carry money? So I didn't go to Kashi. (*Everybody laughs*.)

(*To Mahima*) "You householders have to have 'this' as well as 'that' – to live in the world and also to stick to the spiritual path."

Mahima: "Is it possible to have 'this' as well as 'that?'"

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1. Darvesh.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I threw money into the water on the bank of the Ganges near the panchavati, saying, 'Money and earth – earth is money, money is earth.' But then I became frightened. I said to myself, 'Have I offended Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth)? If Mother Lakshmi stops giving me food, what will happen to me?' Then I bargained like Hazra. I said, 'Mother, please dwell in my heart!' Once Mother Bhagavati, happy with a person's austerity, said to him, 'Ask for a boon.' He said, 'Mother, if you would grant me a boon, grant that I may eat rice on a gold plate with my grandson.' Thus in one boon he asked for everything – grandson, prosperity, and a gold plate! (*Everybody laughs*.)

"When you have renounced 'lust and greed' in the mind, it goes to God and becomes absorbed in Him. One who is now bound can also attain liberation. One is bound by turning away from God. When does the lower needle not point to the upper needle of the goldsmith's scale? The moment there is a load of 'lust and greed' in one of its pans.

"Why does an infant cry when it comes out of the womb? 'I was in the womb, in union with God.' After taking birth, it cries and asks, 'Where am I? Where have I come? I was meditating on God's lotus feet; now where am I?'

"For you [referring to householder devotees], mental renunciation is necessary. Live in your family without attachment."

Is it necessary to renounce the world?

Mahima: "When the mind has gone to Him, do you stay with the family any more?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you saying? Where will you go if you don't stay in the family? I clearly see that I am in Rama's Ayodhya wherever I am. Family life, this world, is Rama's Ayodhya. Having received spiritual instruction from his guru, Ramachandra said, 'I will renounce the world.' Dasharatha called Vasishtha to make Rama change his mind. Vasishtha saw that Rama had acquired deep dispassion. So he said, 'Rama, first reason this out with me; later you may renounce the world. Tell me, is this world without God? If that be so, you may renounce it.' Rama understood that God Himself has become the world, its creatures, everything. It is because of His power that one perceives everything as real. Ramachandra became silent then.

"You have to fight against lust, anger, and so on in worldly life; you have to fight against various desires. You have to fight against attachment. If the fight is from inside the fort, it is convenient. It is better to fight from home. There you get food, and your wife helps you in so many ways. In the Kaliyuga life depends on food. It is better to be at one place than to roam around for food from one place to another. Living at home is fighting from inside the fort.

"And you should live in the world like a torn-off leaf in a storm. The storm sometimes takes it inside a house, sometimes to a garbage heap. The leaf is carried away wherever the wind takes it,

sometimes to a clean place and sometimes to a dirty one. He has put you in the world; it is good that you stay there. Again, He may lift you from there and carry you to a better place. Let it happen as it will."

Resignation in family life – Rama's will

"What can you do if you are kept in the world? Resign, surrender everything to Him. Then there will be no trouble. You will then realize that it is He who does everything. All depends on Rama's will."

A devotee: "'Rama's will' – what is that story?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There was a weaver in a village who was very religious. Everybody trusted him and loved him. The weaver would go to the market to sell his cloth. When a customer asked the price, he would say, 'By Rama's will, cotton thread costs one rupee; by Rama's will labour charges are four annas; by Rama's will, profit is two annas. So the price of the cloth by Rama's will is one rupee, six annas.' People had so much faith in him that they would immediately pay the price and take the cloth. This fellow was a great devotee. After dinner he would sit in the worship hall[1] till late at night, meditating on God and singing His glories. One night – it was very late but this fellow did not feel sleepy – he was sitting there smoking when a group of robbers[2] passed by to commit a robbery. They needed a porter. They came to the weaver and said, 'Come along with us.' They took him by the hand. Then they robbed a house and placed many articles

1. Chandi mandap; a roofed place, usually with the four sides open.
2. Dacoits.

on the weaver's head to carry. Just then the police arrived. The thieves ran away, but the weaver was caught with all those articles on his head. He was kept in the police lock-up that night. The next day he was tried by a magistrate. When the villagers came to know of it, they all came to the jail. They said, 'Sir, this fellow could never commit a robbery.' The magistrate said to the weaver, 'Tell me what happened.' The weaver replied, 'Sir, by Rama's will, I took rice at night. By Rama's will, I sat in the worship hall. By Rama's will, it was very late at night. By Rama's will, I was meditating on Him and was singing His glories when, by Rama's will, a group of thieves passed by. By Rama's will, they pulled me up and took me along with them. By Rama's will, they committed robbery in a house. By Rama's will, they placed a load on my head. Then by His will I was caught. By Rama's will, the police put me in jail. And now this morning, by Rama's will, I have been brought before you.'

"Seeing that the fellow was so religious, the magistrate discharged him. On the way home the weaver said to his friends, 'By Rama's will, I have been discharged.'

"Whether one is living in the world or has taken sannyas, all is Rama's will. So, resign yourself to His will and do your duties in the world.

"What else can you do?

"A clerk was sent to jail. When the period of his sentence ended, he was released from jail. Now, will he dance joyfully to the beat of the drum, or will he return to his job as a clerk?

"A person liberated in this very life,[1] may live as a householder if he so wills. For a man who has attained spiritual knowledge, there is nothing like 'here' and 'there.' It is all the same for him. Everything 'here' as well as 'there' belongs to Him."

The earlier story of his life – conversation with Keshab Sen – liberated in this very life in the world

"When I first met Keshab Sen at a garden house, I said, 'He has cast off his tail.' Everybody in the assembly laughed. Keshab said, 'Please don't laugh. His words have meaning. Let me ask him.' I said, 'As long as a frog doesn't shed its tail, it has to live in water. It can't climb onto dry land and move around. As soon as it loses its tail, it hops out onto the bank. Then it can live both in the water and on the land. Similarly, until a man sheds the tail of his ignorance, he lives in the water of worldliness. When he casts off the tail of ignorance and attains knowledge, he is liberated and can move about anywhere. If he likes, he can live as a householder.'"

Chapter Five

Context of household life – the unattached householder

Mahimacharan and other devotees are sitting and drinking the nectar of Sri Ramakrishna's words, which are like variously-coloured jewels. The devotees pick up as many as they can, but their laps are already full, so heavy that they cannot be lifted. Their capacity is limited; they can contain no more. Sri Ramakrishna is solving all the problems that have arisen in the human heart since the creation of the

1. Jivanmukta.

world. Padmalochan, Narayan Shastri, Gauri Pundit, Dayananda Saraswati, and other scholars of the scriptures sit in silent awe. When Dayananda saw Sri Ramakrishna in the state of samadhi, he lamented, "We have studied so much of the Vedas and the Vedanta, but in this great man we see its manifestation. He proves that the learned only drink buttermilk when they churn the scriptures. Only such great men as he eat the butter." Learned men like Keshab Chandra Sen, educated in English, are also amazed by Sri Ramakrishna. They think how wonderful it is that this illiterate person can explain such matters in rustic language, similar to the words of Jesus Christ. Thakur explains in the same way, by parables, so that all people – men, women, and children – can understand easily. Jesus repeated, 'Father, Father' like a madman. Sri Ramakrishna is mad, crying, 'Mother, Mother!' He has not merely an inexhaustible treasure of spiritual wisdom, but he also pours out endless pots of divine love. And he is a man of renunciation like Jesus. He has the same burning faith. That is why his words are so powerful. When worldly people talk, there is no power because they have no renunciation – no burning conviction in them. Learned men like Keshab Sen also wonder how this illiterate person has developed such broad-mindedness. How wonderful! There is no ill will in him at all. He respects followers of all religions and quarrels with no one.

Today, hearing Thakur's conversation with Mahimacharan, some of the devotees say to themselves, "Thakur hasn't asked anyone to renounce the world. On the contrary, he said that the household is like a fort; you can fight against lust, anger, and the like while staying in this fort." He also said, "Where else will you go if you don't live there? The clerk resumes clerkship when he is freed from jail." In a way he is saying that a person liberated in this life can live as a householder. Keshab Sen was his example. To Keshab he said, "You have shed your tail;

no one else has." But Thakur has said something very special, "You have to live from time to time in solitude. You have to build a fence around a young plant or it will be eaten by goats or cows. When the plant has grown a big trunk, you may remove the fence. Then even if an elephant is tied to it, the tree will not come to any harm. There is no danger if you live as a householder after having lived in solitude and after having attained spiritual knowledge and love for God." That is why he talked so much of living in solitude.

The devotees are reflecting thus. After talking about Keshab, Sri Ramakrishna speaks about one or two other devotees.

Devendranath Tagore – yoga and bhoga (commmunion with God and sense enjoyments)

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan and the others*): "I once went with Mathur Babu[1] to meet Devendra Tagore. I said to Mathur Babu, 'I have heard that Devendra Tagore meditates on God. I would like to see him.' Mathur Babu said, 'All right, sir, I will take you to see him. We were class fellows at the Hindu College. He has special affection for me.' After many days I had the opportunity of meeting him with Mathur Babu. Seeing Mathur Babu, Devendra said, 'You have changed a little. You have developed a paunch.' Mathur Babu introduced me, saying, 'He has come to meet you. He is mad for God.' To find out Devendra's traits, I said to him, 'Let me examine your body.' Devendra took off his shirt. He was fair, and his body was rough, as if sprinkled with vermilion.

1. Sejo Babu – Mathur Nath Biswas, Rani Rasmani's son-in-law. From the very beginning he served Sri Ramakrishna with extreme devotion, like a disciple.

"At first I noticed that there was some pride in him. And why not? He had so much wealth, so much learning, such name and fame. Noticing his pride, I asked Mathur Babu, 'Does pride come from knowledge or ignorance? Does a person who has attained the knowledge of Brahman have pride of learning, or of spiritual knowledge, or of wealth?'

"While talking to Devendra, I suddenly went into a state of mind when I can see what kind of person a man really is. A hearty laugh arose within me. When I am in this state of mind, I feel that the learned are just like pieces of straw. When I see that there is no discrimination and dispassion in a pundit, he appears to me just like a dry piece of straw. I then see him as a vulture flying high but with its eyes on charnel pits below.

"I saw that he had both yoga and bhoga.[1] He had many small children. The family doctor was there. This showed that, though he was man of knowledge, he was occupied with worldly affairs. I said, 'You are the "Janaka" of the Kaliyuga. Janaka held to both the world and spirit while he drank his cup of milk. You live with your family, keeping your mind on God. Hearing that, I have come to see you. Please talk to me about God.'

"He recited some portions from the Vedas. Then he said, 'This world is like a chandelier and every being is a lamp in it.' Once when I was meditating in the panchavati, I had a vision like that. It agreed with Devendra's words, so I thought he was really a great man. I asked him to explain further. He said,

1. Desire for enjoyment of sense objects.

'Who knows this world? God made men to proclaim His glory. If there is no light in the chandelier, it is dark everywhere. You can't even see the chandelier.'"

Incivility and the Brahmo Samaj –
Captain, a householder devotee

"After a long conversation Devendra said to me in a happy mood, 'You have to come to our celebrations.' I said, 'It is all God's will. You can see what the state of my mind is. I never know what state the Divine Mother will put me in.' Devendra said, 'No, no, you have to come. But please clothe yourself in a dhoti and upper cloth. I would be unhappy if somebody made a remark about how casually you dress.' I replied, 'I won't be able to do that. I can't become a gentleman.' Devendra and Mathur Babu both laughed.

"The very next day Mathur Babu received a note from Devendra asking me not to attend the festival. The reason? It would seem rude if I were not able to retain the upper cloth on my body. (*All laugh*.)

(*To Mahima*) "And then there is an another person, Captain.[1] Though a householder, he is a great devotee. You must talk to him.

"Captain knows the Vedas, the Vedanta, Srimad Bhagavata, the Gita, the Adhyatma Ramayana – all these by heart. Just talk to him and see for yourself.

"He has great devotion! He held his umbrella over my head when I was walking along the road

1. Vishwanath Upadhyaya, a resident of Nepal, was the emissary of the king of Nepal and his representative in Calcutta. He was a very orthodox brahmin and a great devotee.

from Baranagore. And how hospitable he is when he takes me to his house. He fans me, massages my feet, and serves me various kinds of vegetables. One day I lost consciousness in the toilet of his home. Even though he is so orthodox, he went into the room and helped me to sit. He is so orthodox, but he didn't feel any repulsion.

"Captain has to spend a lot. His brothers live in Kashi, and he sends money to them. His wife used to be miserly; now she is so hard-pressed with family expenses, she can't spend much on anything.

"Captain's wife told me that he doesn't like household life. She said once that he told her he would leave the world. Several times he said, 'I will leave, I will leave.'

"He comes from a family of devotees. His father was a soldier. It is said that with one hand he would worship Shiva and with the other, he would fight with a bare sword.

"Captain is very orthodox. He didn't come here for a month because I used to go see Keshab Sen. Why? Keshab Sen is not orthodox – he eats with the English, he has married his daughter into another caste, so he has lost his own caste. I said, 'What does all this matter to me? Keshab repeats the name of Lord Hari. I go for that reason. I go to him to hear talk about God. I eat plums, I am not concerned with thorns.' Even then Captain didn't leave me alone. He would say to me, 'Why do you go to Keshab Sen?' Feeling a little irritated, I said, 'I don't go to him for money! I go to him to hear of God! Why do you go to the Governor's house? He is

a mlechchha (non-Hindu). Why do you associate with him?' When I said this, he stopped for a while.

"But he has great love and devotion for God. During worship, he performs arati with camphor, and while he sits on the asana,[1] he sings hymns. At that time he is quite a different man, as if he is completely absorbed."

Chapter Six

The doctrine of maya in Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan*): "According to the Vedanta philosophy the world is all maya, all illusory like a dream. The Supreme Self[2] is the witness – the witness of the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. These conform to your way of thinking. The waking and dreaming states are equally true. Listen to a story. It agrees with your thinking.

"There was a peasant who lived in the countryside. He was a farmer, but spiritually he was very wise. After a long period, his wife bore him a son whom they named Haru. Both parents loved this boy. And why not? He was the precious, bright jewel of the family. The farmer was of a religious nature, and everybody in the village liked him very much. One day he was working on his farm when somebody came and told him that Haru had an attack of cholera. The farmer returned home and arranged for good medical treatment, but the boy died. Everybody in the family was grief-

1. Seat of worship and meditation.
2. Paramatman.

stricken, but the farmer acted as though nothing had happened. He even consoled others, saying that it was no use to grieve. And then he went back to his field to farm. When he returned home, he found that his wife was weeping even more bitterly. She said to him, 'How hard-hearted you are! You have not shed a tear for your son!' The farmer replied gently, 'I'll tell you why I'm not weeping. Yesterday I had a great dream. In it I was a king and the father of eight sons. I was in complete happiness when I woke up. Now I am in great confusion – whether I should grieve for those eight sons or for this one son of yours.'

"The farmer was a man of spiritual knowledge. He could see that the state of waking is as illusory as the state of dreaming. The Atman alone is eternal.

"I accept everything – the fourth state of turiya[1] as well as the states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. I accept all the three states. I accept Brahman as well as maya, living beings, and the world – all. If I did not accept all, I would not get the full weight."

A devotee: "How does it lose weight?" (*All laugh*.)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Brahman is qualified by living beings and the world. In the beginning, when discriminating 'not this, not this,' one has to determine what the individual soul is and what the world is. As long as one has the feeling of 'I-ness,' one feels that God Himself has become everything.

1. The transcendental state.

He indeed has become the twenty-four cosmic principles.

"When a man talks of the essence of a bel fruit, he means the pulp only – not its seeds and shell. But to be able to tell the weight of the bel fruit by simply weighing the pulp alone will not do. One has to take the pulp, the seeds, and the shell together to weigh it. The pulp, the seeds, and the shell all belong to it."

The Absolute belongs to Him and so does the phenomenal world

"So, I accept the Absolute as well as the phenomenal world. I don't do away with the world by calling it maya. If I did, it would lose weight."

The doctrine of maya and Vishishtadvaitavada – Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

Mahimacharan: "Beautifully harmonized! From the Absolute to the phenomenal world, and again from the phenomenal world to the Absolute."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Men of knowledge see everything as an illusion. Devotees accept all the states. The man of knowledge yields milk in droplets. (*All laugh.*) Some cows are very choosy when they graze, so they yield milk in dribbles. But the cows who don't discriminate so much and eat everything give streams of milk. The highest class of devotee[1] accepts both the Absolute and the

1. The highest class devotee:
yo māṁ paśyati sarvatra sarvaṁ ca mayi paśyati ।
tasyāhaṁ na praṇaśyāmi sa ca me na praṇaśyati ।।
Bhagavad Gita 6:30. [He who sees Me everywhere and sees all in Me; I am not lost to him, nor is he lost to Me.]

phenomenal world, so he can enjoy the divine even when his mind comes down from the Absolute. The highest class of devotee yields milk in streams." (*All laugh*.)

Mahima: "But that milk has a particular smell." (*All laugh*.)

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes, it has. It has to be boiled a bit. You must heat it a little on the fire of spiritual knowledge. Then it won't smell anymore."

Om and the union of the Absolute and phenomenal

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): "You explain Om with reference only to *a, u, m*."

Mahimacharan: "*A* for creation, *u* for preservation, and *m* for dissolution."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I explain it with the sound 't-a-a-m' of a brass bell – *t...a...m*. The merging of the relative[1] into the Absolute;[2] the merging of the gross, the subtle, and the causal into the Great Cause; it is the merging into the state of turiya from the states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. The bell rings as if something heavy has fallen into the ocean, giving rise to waves. The relative thus arises from the Absolute. The gross, the subtle, and the causal forms start appearing out of the Great Cause. The states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep emerge from turiya. And again, these waves of the Great Ocean lose themselves again in the Great Ocean. From the

1. Lila.
2. Nitya.

relative to the Absolute, and from the Absolute to the relative. I have been shown this. I use the simile of the sound 't-a-a-m.' I have seen all this clearly. I was shown the Ocean of Consciousness – it is limitless. Everything on the relative plane arises from it and then merges back into it. Millions of universes come into existence in the Ocean of Consciousness, and then they merge back into it. I don't know what your books say."

Mahima: "Those who saw all this have not written the scriptures. They remained absorbed in their realization. Where was the time for them to write? To be able to write, one needs an analytical mind. Others who heard it from them wrote."

How long does attachment to the world remain?
Till the attainment of the bliss of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna: "Worldly people ask why they don't get rid of the attachment to 'lust and greed.' The attachment goes when God is attained.[1] If you once taste the bliss of Brahman, your mind will not run after sense pleasures, wealth, and honour.

"If a moth sees light once, it doesn't go into darkness again.

"Someone said to Ravana, 'You conjure up so many different forms for Sita. Why don't you once assume the form of Rama and go to her?' Ravana replied, 'When I think of Rama, even the seat of Brahma appears unimportant, what to speak of

1. rasavarjaṁ raso'pyasya paraṁ dṛṣṭvā nivartate। Bhagavad Gita 2:59. [The longing for sense objects also turns away when he has seen the Supreme.]

another man's wife. How then could I assume the form of Rama?'"[1]

The more one develops love for God, the less becomes the attachment to the world – Chaitanya's devotees are unattached

"All spiritual practices are done for the sake of attaining Him. The more you meditate on Him, the less will be your attachment for the ordinary things of the world. The more devotion you have for His lotus feet, the less desire you will have for sense objects, and the less your mind will concern itself with physical comfort. Someone else's wife will appear to you as your mother, and you will think of your own wife as your helper in spiritual life. She will be a friend in spiritual life. You will be freed from lower desires, and divine qualities will develop in you. You will be completely detached from the world. Then even if you live in the world, you will move about as one already liberated in life.[2] The devotees of Chaitanya Deva lived in the world without attachment."

Deep secret of the man of knowledge and the devotee

(*To Mahima*) "You may discuss Vedanta a thousand times with a genuine devotee and call the world a dream, but his love for God will not disappear – though he may appear to shed it a little for a while. A pestle was lying in a field of willows. It resulted in the pestle destroying the dynasty. [3]

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1. Tuchham Brahmapadam paravadhusangah kutah.
2. Jivanmukta.
3. Musalam kulanashnam, the story of the pestle: The childhood friends of Samba, one of Krishna's sons, playfully disguised him as a

"One becomes a man of knowledge who is born with an element of Shiva. His mind always goes to that knowledge 'only Brahman is real, the world is an illusion.' If one is born of Vishnu, one possesses loving devotion.[1] This intense love will never leave you. Even if it is diluted a little with reasoning, it returns to gush forth again, just as the pestle destroyed the dynasty of the Yadus."

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pregnant woman by dressing him in female clothes and hanging an iron pestle below his waist. They presented him before a group of ascetics and asked them what sort of child the woman would give birth to. Enraged that a joke had been played on them, the munis proclaimed a curse that the iron pestle would be the ruin of the entire clan of Yadus. Fearfully, the boys took the pestle to the ocean and rubbed it for a very long time. The particles that fell from it, on striking the ground, became strong willow reeds. The boys threw the last piece of pestle into the sea.

In the meantime Krishna's clan, the Yadus, had become overbearingly vain and arrogant and they began to fight among themselves. At last they took the powerful willow reeds sprung from the pestle dust and, with them as weapons, fought each other to the death. Krishna, having decided that it was time that he also pass on, bade his father and his wives farewell and seated himself under a tree for meditation. Only one of his legs was not obscured by the leafy and outreaching branches of the tree. A hunter mistook him for a deer and killed him with an arrow, the point of which was the last piece from the pestle that had been thrown into the sea. Thus did the munis' curse find fulfillment.

1. Prema bhakti.

Chapter Seven

Service to mother and Sri Ramakrishna – Hazra Mahashay[1]

Hazra is sitting on the verandah to the east of Sri Ramakrishna's room, performing japa. He is forty-six or forty-seven years old and comes from the same region as Thakur. For quite a long time he has felt renunciation for the world. He remains away from his home and visits it only occasionally, although he has property in the village, which supplies the needs of his wife, son, daughter, and other family members. But he has incurred a debt of about a thousand rupees, and it continually worries him how to pay it back He often visits Calcutta. Ishan Chandra Mukherji, who resides in Thanthania has great respect for Hazra and serves him like a holy man. Sri Ramakrishna keeps Hazra with him out of compassion. When his dhoti wears out, he gets Hazra a new one. He often enquires after him and talks about God with him. Hazra is very argumentative and is often carried away by his argument. He spends a lot of time on his asana on the verandah, performing japa on his rosary.

News has come of the illness of Hazra's mother. When Ramlal left their village, she held his hand and begged him, "Carry this humble request of mine to your uncle (Thakur), somehow to persuade Pratap (Hazra) to come home just this one time. May he come to see me just this once." Thakur has told Hazra, "Go home and see your mother, and then come back. She spoke about it repeatedly to Ramlal. How can one call upon God

1. Hazra (Pratap Chandra Hazra) left his wife and children in Madagod, near Kamarpukur, in order to lead a spiritual life, when he was approximately thirty-eight years old. Argumentative and critical of others, he nevertheless had extraordinary faith and devotion to Ramakrishna, who joked that he was there to "thicken the plot." He returned to his home and died there in the month of Chaitra, 1306 B.Y. (A.D. 1900) when he was sixty-four years old.

after hurting one's mother? Go, and then you may come back."

When the meeting of the devotees is over, Mahimacharan brings Hazra to Thakur. M. is also present.

Mahimacharan (*smiling, to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Sir, I have to ask you something. Why have you asked Hazra to go home when he doesn't want to go back to his family?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "His mother expressed great grief to Ramlal, so I told him, 'Go for three days. Come back after seeing her once.' Can one practice spiritual disciplines after hurting one's mother? I was going to stay in Vrindavan when all of a sudden I remembered my mother. I said to myself, 'Mother would weep.' So I returned here with Mathur Babu.

"Anyway, what fear can a man of knowledge have to go see his family?"

Mahimacharan (*smiling*): "But sir, only provided one has attained knowledge."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Hazra has attained everything. Only a little of his mind is in the world. He has sons and has incurred some debt. 'The aunt has completely recovered, only a bit of sickness remains.' (*Everybody laughs*.)

Mahima: "But sir, where is his knowledge?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "O brother, you don't know? Everybody knows that Hazra is the only devotee who lives in Rasmani's temple. They

talk of Hazra only. They never talk of this (*pointing to himself*)." (*All laugh*.)

Hazra: "You are unmatched. You can't be compared with anyone. No one understands you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah, so that is why – the matchless one cannot help anybody. Why, then, talk of this (*meaning himself*)?"

Mahimacharan: "Sir, what does he know? He'll just do what you tell him to."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh? You'd better ask him. He tells me, 'I have nothing to do with you.'"

Mahima: "He is very argumentative."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And then he also lectures me from time to time. (*All laugh*.) In a discussion I scolded him. Later, lying inside the mosquito net remembering the language I used, I thought I might have offended him. So I went to salute him. Only then was my mind at peace."

Vedanta and the pure Atman

(*To Hazra*) "Why do you call the pure Atman Ishvara (God)? The pure Atman is beyond all action. It is only a witness to the three states. When I think of creation, preservation, and dissolution I call Him Ishvara. What is pure Self like? It is like a magnet lying at a distance, but the needle still moves toward it. The magnet itself remains unmoved – actionless."

Chapter Eight

Evening music and conversation with Ishan

It is almost evening. Thakur is taking a stroll. Seeing Mani sitting all alone and meditating, he suddenly addresses him lovingly, "Please bring me one or two coarse shirts. I can't accept shirts brought by everybody. I was thinking of asking Captain, but you may give them to me." Getting up, Mani says, "At your service."

It is twilight. Incense is burnt in Sri Ramakrishna's room. He bows to the pictures of gods and goddesses and, having repeated his bija mantra,[1] chants the names of God. There is a unique splendour outside the room. It is the seventh day of the bright fortnight of the month of Kartik and the pure rays of the moon falling on the temple seem to make it smile. As well, ripples play on the surface of the Ganges, which is rising and falling sweetly like a sleeping baby's chest. The flood tide is over. The sound of arati mixed with a melodious murmuring of the bright and refreshing current of the Ganges loses itself in the distance. Three aratis are being performed at the same time in the temples – the Kali temple, the Vishnu temple, and each of the Shiva temples. The priest of the Shiva temples goes from one temple to the other. He holds a bell in his left hand and the lamp with five wicks[2] in the right. An attendant carries cymbals.

The sweet sound of the symphony of sanai and other instruments[3] from the southwest corner of the compound is heard. Evening music[4] is being played in

1. The letter or syllable of a mantra in which the essence of God is concentrated.
2. Panchapradip.
3. Roshan chowki.
4. Raga ragini.

the music pavilion.[1] A perpetual festival of the All-Blissful Mother reminds the devotees never to be unhappy. There are joys and sorrows in the world – let them be. The Mother of the Universe, our Mother, is here. Rejoice. The son of the maid of the house hasn't enough to eat, hasn't enough to wear, no house, no hearth. Even then, there is courage within: he has his mother. He is fearless in the lap of his mother. She is not a step-mother, She is the real mother. Who am I, from where have I come, what will happen to me, where will I go – all this the Mother knows. Why bother the mind about it? My Mother knows – my Mother who has made me a body, mind, life, and self. I don't even want to know. If it is necessary, She will tell me. Why worry about it so much? All children of Mother, rejoice!

Bathed in moonlight, the world outside is smiling. Inside his room, Sri Ramakrishna is seated, filled with the bliss of God's love. Ishan has come from Calcutta. More conversation about God takes place. Ishan has great faith. He says, "With a trident in his hand, Shiva[2] accompanies one who goes on a journey with the name of Durga on his lips. What is there to fear from misfortune when Shiva Himself is the guardian?"

Attainment of God through faith –
instructions on Karma Yoga to Ishan

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "You have firm faith. I don't have that much. (*All laugh*.) One can realize Him by that faith alone."

Ishan: "Yes sir."

1. Nahabat khana.
2. Shulapani.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You perform repetition of the name[1] and daily puja, observe fasts, and perform purascharana[2] and other rites and rituals. This is very good. God makes one who has sincere attraction for Him do all these things. If one is able to perform them all without desire for their fruits, one surely attains Him."

Ritualistic devotion and loving devotion – when do rituals fall off?

"The scriptures instruct us to perform numerous rites, so I perform them. This is called ritualistic[3] devotion. The other is loving devotion.[4] It comes out of an especially deep love for God, such as Prahlada had. When one develops this love, there is no longer the need for rituals."

Chapter Nine

In the heart of the disciple

Before evening, Mani is strolling in the temple garden as he recalls the story of Rama's will. This is very beautiful, he thought. It solves the confusion between predestination and free will, between liberty and necessity. "I was captured by the robbers because of Rama's will; I was smoking, that too by Rama's will; I committed a theft by Rama's will; I was held by the police also by Rama's will. I have become a sadhu by Rama's will. I pray, 'O Lord, may my mind be not impure. May you not goad me to commit robbery.'" This too is Rama's will. The right desire and the

1. Japa.
2. Performance of japa a certain number of times each day, methodically increasing and decreasing the number.
3. Vaidhi bhakti.
4. Raga bhakti.

wrong desire are both given by Him. Even so, there is a special point: Why should He give us the wrong understanding? Why should He give the desire to commit robbery? In answer to this, Thakur said, "Just as He has made the lion, the tiger, and the snake among animals, just as He has made poisonous trees among others, similarly He has also made thieves among men." Why has He made them, who can tell? Who can understand God's ways?

But then, if God has made everything, our responsibility ends. But why would it end? Unless you have realized God, unless you have had His vision, you cannot have one hundred percent faith. As long as you don't have full faith, you will certainly have the feeling of vice and virtue, and the feeling of responsibility. Thakur has explained what "Rama's will" is. Repeating "Rama's will" like a parrot won't do. As long as you don't know God, as long as "my" will and His will don't become one, as long as you don't have the full understanding that I am an instrument, so long does He retain the knowledge of vice and virtue, joy and sorrow, purity and impurity, good and bad, and the sense of responsibility. Otherwise, how can His world of maya go on?

The more I think of Sri Ramakrishna's love of God, the more I am struck with wonder. Keshab Sen repeats the name of Hari and meditates on God, so he (Thakur) immediately runs to meet him. Keshab at once became his own. Then he did not listen to Captain's objection that Keshab went to a foreign land, ate with white men, gave his daughter in marriage into a different caste – all these things. "I take only cherries. I have nothing to do with thorns." In the bond of love for God, believers in God with form and believers in God without form are united. Hindus, Muslims, and Christians – all are united, and also the four castes. Love of God, be victorious! Blessed you are, Sri Ramakrishna! Victory to you! You have

embodied the universal spirit of eternal religion.[1] It is perhaps for this reason that you hold such attraction. You embrace the followers of all religions as your own, without any difference. You have but one test – love for God. You only see if a person has that within, if he has devotion. If that is there, he immediately becomes your very own. If you see love of God in a Hindu, he is at once your own. And if a Muslim has the same love for Allah, he is also your own. If a Christian has love for Jesus, he is also your near and dear one. You say that all rivers coming from different directions flow into one and the same ocean.

Thakur does not consider this world a dream. If that were so, it would lose weight. It is not the doctrine of illusion,[2] it is the doctrine of qualified non-dualism.[3] He does not consider the individual soul and the world imaginary; he doesn't think they are illusions. God is real, and so are men and the world real. Brahman is qualified by living beings and the world. You cannot get the whole of a bel fruit if you take away its seeds and shell.

It is said that the universe manifests itself in the Great Ocean of Consciousness[4] and then merges back into it in time. A wave rises in the Great Ocean and then merges back into it. On the waters of this ocean of joy are an infinite number of waves. Where is the beginning of this sport and where is its end! It cannot be expressed in words. It cannot be thought by the mind. How little is man, how small his intelligence. It is said that great saints have seen this Eternal Supreme Person in the state of samadhi – they have witnessed the Absolute sporting as the ever-playful Lord. This they have surely done because Sri Ramakrishna also says so – but not with these physical eyes. They did it perhaps with what is called

1. Sanatana Dharma.
2. Mayavada.
3. Vishishtadvaita.
4. Mahachidakasha.

the divine eye. Getting this divine eye, Arjuna saw the Universal Form of the Lord. With this divine eye, the rishis realized the Atman, and with this divine eye, Jesus saw his heavenly Father constantly. How can we gain that divine eye? We have heard Thakur say that one can get it by the yearning of the heart. But how to have such yearning**?** Does one have to renounce the world? No, he did not say that today.

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna's Arrival at a Devotee's House

Conversation and Joy with Narendra, Girish, Balaram, Chunilal, Latu, M., Narayan, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

In the company of devotees in a devotee's house

It is the 10th day of the dark fortnight of Phalgun, Purva Ashadha nakshatra, Wednesday, 11 March 1885, the 29th of Phalgun. Arriving from Dakshineswar today at about ten o'clock, Sri Ramakrishna takes the prasad of Sri Jagannath at the home of a devotee, Balaram Bose. Latu and other devotees are with him.

Blessed you are, Balaram! Today your home has become the main centre of Thakur's work. He has bound devotee after devotee with the ties of divine love! How he has danced and sung with them, just as Sri Gauranga himself had established a mart of ecstatic love in the house of Srivasa![1]

Sitting at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, Thakur weeps with longing to see his intimate disciples. He suffers sleepless nights. He says to the Divine Mother, "Mother, he has so much devotion! Please attract him to this place. Mother, do please bring him here. If he

1. An intimate devotee of Sri Chaitanya.

cannot come here, then Mother, take me to him so that I can see him." So he comes running to Balaram's house. To others he says, "Sri Jagannath is worshiped in Balaram's house. The food there is very pure." Whenever he comes, he immediately sends Balaram to invite others. He says, "Please invite Narendra, Bhavanath, and Rakhal. Please invite Purna, the Younger Naren, Narayan – all these devotees. Feeding them is like feeding Narayana Himself. They are not ordinary. They are manifestations of divinity. You will be greatly benefited if you feed them."

It was in Balaram's house that Thakur first met Girish Ghosh. A joyous singing of hymns was held here at the time of the Car Festival.[1] So many times "a festivity of joy in the court of love" has been held at this very place.

Eagerly awaiting your arrival – the Younger Naren

M. teaches in a nearby school. He has come to know that Sri Ramakrishna will come to Balaram's house today at ten o'clock. He finds time to go there during school hours and arrives in the afternoon and salutes Sri Ramakrishna. After his meal Sri Ramakrishna rests for a while in the visitor's room. Every now and then he takes out some powdered spices and cubeb[2] from a small pouch and chews it. Young devotees are sitting around him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "So you have come. Don't you have school?"

M.: "I'm coming from school. There's not much to do there now."

A devotee: "No sir, he has played truant." (*All laugh.*)

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1. Rathayatra.
2. A small, spicy berry from a plant in the pepper family.

M. (*to himself*): "Oh, it is as if someone has dragged me here."

Sri Ramakrishna looks a bit worried. Then he asks M. to sit near him and speaks with him on various subjects. He says, "Can you wring this hand towel of mine and spread my shirt in the sun? My foot is aching a little. Can you massage it gently?" M. doesn't know how to render service, so Thakur teaches him. Rather confused, M. performs these actions one by one. While Sri Ramakrishna instructs him in different things during the conversation, M. gently strokes his feet.

Sri Ramakrishna and the highest point of renunciation – the true sannyasin

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Can you tell me why this has been happening to me? For some time now I haven't been able to touch anything made of metal. Once I put my hand on a metal cup and it felt like I'd been stung by a horned fish. My whole hand began to sting. But you know, you can't get along without touching a wash pot, so I thought I'd cover it with a piece of cloth and see if I could pick it up. No sooner did my hand touch it than it started to twitch with acute pain. So I prayed to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I won't do it again, please pardon me this time.'

"The Younger Naren comes here. Will his family object? He is very pure and absolutely free from lust."

M.: "He is a 'receptacle' of great capacity."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. He also says that he remembers everything he hears about God, even if

he only hears it once. He tells me that when he was a child he used to weep because he couldn't see God."

Sri Ramakrishna talks to M. about the Younger Naren for quite some time. One of the devotees present says, "Master Mahashay, aren't you going back to school?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What time is it?"

A devotee: "Ten to one."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "You had better go. It's getting late. You have already left your work to come here. (*To Latu*) Where is Rakhal?"

Latu: "He has gone home."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Without seeing me?"

Chapter Two

In the afternoon with devotees – incarnation and Sri Ramakrishna

Returning after school has closed, M. sees Thakur seated with a group of devotees in Balaram's drawing room. There is a sweet smile on his face, which is reflected on the faces of the devotees. Seeing that M. has come again and, after he has offered his salutations, Thakur beckons him to sit near. Girish Ghosh, Suresh Mitra, Balaram, Latu, Chunilal, and some other devotees are present.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "Talk to Narendra and see what his views are."

Girish (*smiling*): "Narendra says that God is infinite. All that we see and hear, whether it is a person or a thing – even what we can't describe – is part of Him. What can a portion of infinity be? Infinity can't be split."

Sri Ramakrishna: "God may be infinite, but if He wills, His essence can manifest in man – and it does. That He incarnates Himself cannot be explained by any analogy. One has to experience it. One has to see it himself. Analogy may give some idea. If you touch the horn of a cow, you have touched the cow. And if you touch its foot or tail, you have still touched the cow. But for us the principal thing is the cow's milk, and that comes from the udder.

"In the same way, God assumes a human body from time to time and appears on earth to teach us ecstatic love and devotion."[1]

Girish: "Narendra says, 'Is it possible to comprehend Him completely? He is Infinite.'"

Perception of the Infinite[2]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "Who can comprehend God fully? One can not know any aspect of God, either the whole or a part. And what need is there to know Him fully? It is enough to have a vision of God. Seeing His incarnation is seeing Him. If somebody goes to the Ganges and touches its water and says, 'I have seen and

1. Prema and bhakti.
2. Compare discussion about the order of perception of the Infinite and of the Finite in Max Muller's Hibbert Lectures and Gifford Lectures.

touched the Ganges,' it doesn't mean that he had to touch the whole of the Ganges from Hardwar to Gangasagar with his hand. (*All laugh*.)

"If I touch your feet, I have touched you. (*Laughter*.)

"If you go to the sea and just touch its water, you have touched the sea itself. The element of fire is present in everything, but it is more present in wood."

Girish (*laughing*): "I want the place where I can get fire."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "The element of fire is more in wood. If you are looking for the essence of God, you have to find it in man. God is more manifest in man. If you see deep and burning devotion[1] and ecstatic love[2] pouring forth from a man, if you see him mad for God, crazy in His love, know for certain that God has manifested in him.

(*Looking at M.*) "God is indeed present, but then His power manifests more in some than in others. His power manifests more in an incarnation. Sometimes this power exists in its fullness. It is Shakti[3] that becomes the incarnation of God**.**"

Girish: "Narendra says, 'He is beyond word and intellect.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, He may be beyond this mind, but He is known by the pure mind. He may be beyond this intellect, but He is seen with the

1. Urjita bhakti.
2. Prema bhakti.
3. The power of God.

pure intellect. As soon as one is freed from the attachment to 'lust and greed,' the mind and intellect become pure. Then pure mind and pure intellect are one. He is known by the pure mind. Haven't the sages seen Him? They saw Consciousness with the help of consciousness."

Girish (*smiling*): "I defeated Narendra in the argument."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No. He said to me, 'Girish Ghosh has so much faith in God's incarnation, what could I say? One shouldn't contradict such faith.'"

Girish (*smiling*): "We are all so free with our words, but M. is sitting tongue-tied. What is he thinking? Sir, what do you say?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Mukhahalsa bhetarbunde, kantulse, dighal ghomta nari, pana pukerer sheetal jala manda kari.[1]" (*All laugh*.)

(*Smiling*) "But he is not like that. He is a very deep soul." (*All laugh*.)

Girish: "Sir, what does this saying mean?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Beware of these kinds of people. The mukhahalsa, whose words flow like water. And then the bhetarbunde, who keeps the door of his heart closed to you. Then the kantulse, who shows off his devotion by sticking a sacred tulasi leaf in his ear. Beware also of a dighal ghomta woman, a woman who wears a long veil. People think she is very chaste, when in fact she is not. And of panapukur water – water from a scum-

1. Sri Ramakrishna explains this verse below.

covered tank. When you bathe in it, you get typhoid fever." (*Laughter*.)

Chunilal: "People have been talking about M. The Younger Naren and Baburam are his pupils, and so are Narayan, Paltu, Purna, and Tejchandra. It is being said that he has brought them here, and thus their studies are being neglected. He is being blamed."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Who will believe them?"

Such is the trend of conversation. Now Narayan comes in and salutes Thakur. Narayan is a student, of fair complexion, seventeen or eighteen years old. Sri Ramakrishna is very fond of him and is always eager to see and feed him. He often cries for him in Dakshineswar. He sees in Narayan the very presence of Narayana Himself

Girish (*to Narayan*): "Who told you? I see that it is M. himself who has shot this arrow." (*Everybody laughs*.)

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Stop, keep quiet! M. is already getting a bad name!"

Amazing is the worry over food – result of a brahmin's acceptance of gifts

The conversation again turns to Narendra.

A devotee: "Why doesn't he come as often as he used to?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Worry over food is amazing! It made even Kalidasa lose his wits."

Balaram: "He often visits Annada Guha, Shiva Guha's son."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. Narendra, Annada Guha, all these boys hold meetings of the Brahmo Samaj at the house of an office clerk."

A devotee: "His name is Tarapada."

Balaram (*laughing*): "The brahmins say that Annada Guha is very conceited."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Don't listen to the brahmins in such matters. You know them well. If you don't give them gifts, you are bad; and if you do, you are good. I know Annada. He's a good man."

Chapter Three

Enjoying hymns in the company of devotees

Sri Ramakrishna expresses a desire to hear some songs. The drawing room in Balaram's house is full of people. They are all looking at him (Sri Ramakrishna) to see what he says and what he does.

Tarapada sings:

O Keshava,[1] who roam in Vrindavan's groves, to Your humble servant grant Your grace.

O Madhava,[2] who enchant the mind and steal the heart, playing sweetly on the flute.

(Utter, my mind, the name of Hari! Hari! Hari!)

O youth of Vrindavan, who tamed the serpent-king Kaliya and removed the fear of the distressed,

O You of flashing eyes, a peacock's feather on Your brow, the delight of Radha's heart,

1. An epithet of Krishna, meaning "one with beautiful, long hair."
2. An epithet of Krishna, the descendant of Madhu.

Upholder of the mount Govardhan, with wildflowers adorned!

O Damodara,[1] crusher of Kamsa's pride!

O dark-hued playmate of Vrindavan's gopis!

(Utter, my mind, the name of Hari! Hari! Hari!)

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "Oh, what a beautiful song! Did you compose all these songs?"

A devotee: "Yes, he composed all the songs in *Chaitanya Lila* ('Lord Chaitanya's Divine Play')."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "This song describes it so well!"

(*To the singer*) "Can you sing a song about Nitai?"

Tarapada sings a song by Nitai:

If you wish for young Radha's love, come here: the tide of love flows in.

A hundred waves of love are rising.

Take as much as you desire

Of this love the maiden pours out freely.

Drawn by her love, chant "Hari, Hari, Hari!"

This love sets the heart dancing, maddened with longing.

Come, let us all chant Hari's name, drawn by Radha's love.

Next he sings the song about Sri Gauranga:

Who are you, O golden-hued one, who set my heart at peace?

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1. An epithet given to Krishna because his foster-mother tried to tie him up with a rope (*dama*) around his belly (*udara*).

A storm is raging on the sea of love, sweeping away all fetters of family, birth, and pride.

(Drown, O mind, in the thought of Gaur.)

Becoming a cowherd boy, you tended the cows in Vraja,

Stealing the hearts of the gopis with the sweet flute in your hand.

Lifting Mount Govardhan, you saved Vrindavan,

And your serene face was flooded with tears

As you humbled yourself, holding the wounded gopis' feet.

(Drown, O mind, in the thought of Gaur.)

Everyone tries to persuade M. to sing, but he is shy. In a whisper he asks to be excused.

Girish (*smiling, to Thakur*): "Sir, there is no way to make M. sing."

Sri Ramakrishna (*irritated*): "He can bare his teeth at school, but feels shy to sing a song here!"

M. is ashamed and sits silently.

Suresh Mitra is seated at some distance. Glancing lovingly at him and pointing at Girish Ghosh, Sri Ramakrishna says happily: "What are you compared to him (Girish)!"

Suresh: "Yes, sir. He is my elder brother." (*All laugh*.)

Girish (*to Thakur*): "Well, sir, I didn't study anything in my childhood. Still people call me learned."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Mahima Chakravarty has read and heard so many scriptures! He is a good 'receptacle'. (*To M.*) What do you think?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Girish: "What? Studying! I have seen enough of it. I'm not going to be misled by it anymore."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Do you know the attitude 'here'?[1] Books, scriptures, and the like only show the way to realize God. When you know the way, the means, what need is there for books and scriptures? One only has to act.

"A person received a letter asking him to send a few things to his relatives. It listed what articles were to be sent. When he went to buy them, he couldn't find the letter. He was very confused and began to look for it. For a long time people helped him search, and at last the letter was found. There was no end to his happiness. He carefully held the letter and began to read it, eagerly, to see what was written in it. It said, 'Send five seers of sandesh, a dhoti, and what-not.' Now the letter was of no use to him. He put it away and began to gather the sandesh, dhoti, and other articles. For how long was the letter needed? As long as he didn't know about the sandesh, dhoti, and so forth. When he knew what it contained, he followed its instructions.

"In the scriptures you will find ways to realize God, but after knowing them, you have to get to work. Then only will you attain the goal.

"What use is mere learning? A pundit may know a number of couplets, a number of scriptures. But he who is attached to the world, who has love for

1. Sri Ramakrishna used the pronoun 'I' very rarely. He referred to himself saying 'here,' 'this place,' and similar words.

'lust and greed' in his mind, has not internalized the contents of the holy books. His study has been in vain. The almanac says that it will rain twenty *adas*, but squeeze the almanac and not a drop will come out. Not a single drop!" (*All laugh*.)

Girish (*smiling*): "Sir, will not a drop fall when the almanac is pressed?" (*All laugh*.)

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "The pundits talk grandly, but where is their attention? On 'lust and greed,' on sensual pleasures and money.

"Vultures soar high, but their eyes remain fixed on the charnel pits. (*All laugh*.) Their looks are only on charnel pits, dead animals, and corpses.

(*To Girish*) "Narendra is a very good boy. He is good at singing, at playing musical instruments, at reading and writing, and at studies. Besides, he has conquered his senses: he has discrimination and dispassion. He is truthful. He has a number of good qualities.

(*To M*.) "What do you think? Is he very good?"

M.: "Yes sir, he is very good."

Sri Ramakrishna (*aside to M*.): "See how much love and faith Girish has!"

M. looks at Girish wonderingly. Girish has been coming to Thakur for some time. M. feels as though they have known each other for a long time, that they are very close, like gems strung together on the same thread.

Narayan: "Sir, won't you sing?"

Sri Ramakrishna sings the name and glory of the Divine Mother in his sweet voice:

Cherish the beloved Mother Shyama in your heart.

O mind, may you and I alone behold Her, and let no one else intrude. …

Thakur sings to the Divine Mother, assuming the state of worldly people burned by the three fires complaining like a fretful child.

O Mother, ever blissful as You are,

Deprive me not of bliss.

My mind knows nothing but Your lotus feet.

The king of Death berates me.

Tell me, Mother, what I should say to him.

My one desire is to cross the sea of this world

With Your name, Bhavani, on my lips.

I did not even dream, O Mother,

That you would drown me in this shoreless sea!

I swim night and day taking Durga's name,

Yet to my sorrow there is no end.

If I die this time, O Beloved of Shiva, O Durga,

Nobody will ever repeat Your name!

Then he sings of the Divine Mother ever joyful in the bliss of Brahman:

In Shiva's company the Mother is ever lost in ecstasy;

Though drunk with the wine of bliss, She reels but does not fall.

She stands erect on Shiva's breast, the world trembling at Her tread.

More than mad, both He and She are indifferent to fear and shame.

The devotees listen to the songs in deep silence. They gaze at Thakur, who, in an amazing self-forgetful mood, is intoxicated with love for God.

The song ends. After a while Sri Ramakrishna says, "I could not sing well today. I have a slight cold."

Chapter Four

At the approach of evening

Evening has slowly set in, as if the blue shadows of infinity have fallen on the ocean's breast. Whether in a deep forest or on the peak of a mountain reaching into the sky, at the bank of a river with its water trembling at the touch of wind, or in a vast plain meeting the ends of the earth, the insignificant human being easily feels a change of mood. The sun was illuminating the universe. Where has it gone? wonders a child – and, as well, the childlike saint. It is evening. How amazing! Who has done this? Birds sheltered in the branches of the trees are chirping, men who are spiritually awake are repeating the name of the Supreme Poet, the Primal Being, the Cause of all causes.

Evening has come as they talk. The devotees remain seated while Sri Ramakrishna chants the sweet names of God. Everybody listens to him attentively. They have never heard such sweet chanting, as though a shower of nectar. They have never heard or seen a child calling his mother so lovingly, "Mother, Mother!" What need is there now to gaze at the sky or the hills, the ocean, open spaces, or the forest? What use is there now of seeing the horns or feet or limbs of a cow? Am I seeing with my eyes, here in this very room, "the udders of the cow," which the compassionate guru has spoken of? How peaceful has every restless mind become! How has this joyless

earth become so filled with joy? Why do I see the devotees so at peace, so joyful? Is this loving saint the infinite God in a beautiful form? Is this the place where one's thirst for milk is quenched? Whether or not he is God-incarnate, my heart is sold at the feet of this man and it cannot be withdrawn. I have made him the pole-star of my life. Let me see how the Primeval Supreme Soul reflects Himself in the lake of the heart!

Some of the devotees reflect in this way and feel blessed to hear the names of the Mother and the Lord being chanted from the holy lips of Sri Ramakrishna. After singing the names and glories of God, Thakur prays. It is as if the Lord Himself has assumed a body of love and is instructing the individual soul how to pray. He says:

Mother, I surrender at Your lotus feet, I give myself to You.

I do not seek creature comforts, nor name and fame do I ask,

Nor do I demand the eight occult powers. O Mother,

Only grant that I may have pure love and devotion at Your lotus feet,

That for You I may have pure love, both selfless and without motive.

And grant, O Mother, that by Your world-bewitching maya I be not enchanted.

Never may I have love for 'lust and greed.'

In Your world of maya, there is none else for me but You.

I know not how to chant Your name, O Mother,

I am poor in love, devotion, and knowledge.

Be compassionate and grant me love for Your lotus feet.

Mani thinks: What is worship for him who repeats the name of God at morning, midday, and evening; from

whose holy lips issue forth the Ganges of names ceaselessly, like a flow of oil? Mani later understands that Thakur has assumed a human body to impart instructions to mankind: The Lord Himself came in the guise of a yogi and sang the glory of the name.

Girish has invited Thakur to his home this very evening.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Don't you think it will be too late?"

Girish: "No, you may go whenever you like. I have to go to the theatre tonight. I have to settle a dispute."

Chapter Five

Sri Ramakrishna in a wonderful mood on the road

At Girish's invitation, Thakur is to go tonight. It is 9:00 P.M., and he still has to eat the dinner that Balaram has prepared for him. So that Balaram won't feel hurt later, Thakur tells him on the way to Girish's house, "Balaram, you may send the food you prepared."

As he comes down from the second floor, he becomes filled with divine emotion. He looks drunk. Narayan and M. are with him. Rama, Chuni, and many others follow. A devotee asks, "Who will go with him?" Sri Ramakrishna says, "One person will do." As he descends the stairs, he is overwhelmed with ecstasy. Narayan tries to hold his hand to keep him from falling, but Thakur expresses displeasure. Shortly, he says to Narayan with great

tenderness, "If you hold my hand, people will think I'm intoxicated. I will walk by myself."

They cross a three-way juncture of Bosepara Lane. Girish's house is only a little distance from here. Why is Sri Ramakrishna walking so fast? The devotees are falling behind. Who knows what divine emotion has taken possession of him? Is he walking like a madman thinking of that Being whom the Vedas say is "beyond mind and speech?" Only a short time ago he said at Balaram's house that the Supreme Being is not beyond mind and speech, that He is realized by the pure mind, the pure intellect, and the pure soul. Perhaps at this moment he is beholding that Supreme Being. Is he seeing "whatever is, it is You?"

Just then Narendra is seen coming. Thakur is usually excited, almost to madness, at the sight of Narendra. But now as Narendra appears before him, Thakur is silent. People say, "This is God-consciousness." Did Chaitanya Deva experience this same state?

Who can understand such divine fervour? Thakur has now arrived at the street from which one enters Girish's house. The devotees are with him. He talks to Narendra.

"Are you keeping well, my child? I couldn't speak to you then." His every word is marked with tenderness. He has not yet reached the front door. He suddenly stops.

He looks at Narendra and says, "One word – 'this' (individual soul) is one and 'that' (the world) is another."

The individual soul and the world! Was he seeing all this in ecstasy? Only he knows what he saw in that speechless state. He spoke a word or two – a phrase from the Vedas – as if a word from God, or as if he has gone to the infinite seashore and, standing there

speechless, hears a few echoes of the anahata[1] rising from never-ending waves.

Chapter Six

Thakur in the shrine of a devotee – newspapers – Nityagopal

Girish stands at the door to greet Sri Ramakrishna. As soon as Thakur and his devotees approach, Girish lies prostrate before him. He rises at Sri Ramakrishna's bidding, takes the dust of his feet, and leads him to the sitting room on the second floor. He asks him to sit there, and the devotees quickly sit down. Everyone is eager to be near him and to drink his sweet words.

As he sits down, Thakur notices a newspaper lying there. Newspapers have to do with worldly-minded men, worldly matters, gossip, and running down others, so a newspaper is unholy to Sri Ramakrishna. He makes a sign that it should be removed.

When the newspaper is taken away, he sits. Nityagopal salutes him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Nityagopal*): "Why have you not been to Dakshineswar?"

Nitya: "Sir, I haven't gone to Dakshineswar, because I haven't been well. I had pain."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How are you now?"

Nitya: "I am still not well."

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1. The Anahata sound is produced on its own without two material objects being struck together; hence, it is called "the unstruck sound."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You'd better bring your mind down one or two notes."

Nitya: "I don't like people's company. They say so many things that frighten me. But at other times I feel strong."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's only natural. Who lives with you?"

Nitya: "Tarak.[1] He's always with me. But at times even he bothers me."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Nangta (Totapuri) used to say that there was a person at his monastery who had acquired some miraculous powers. He used to walk around gazing at the sky. But when his companion, Ganesh Garji, left him, he became disconsolate."

While speaking, Sri Ramakrishna goes into ecstasy. In that mood he remains speechless. After a while he says, "You have come? I'm here too."

Who understands these words? Is this the language of the gods?

Chapter Seven

With an intimate disciple – discussion on God-incarnation

Many devotees are sitting near Sri Ramakrishna, among them Narendra, Girish, Rama, Haripada, Chuni, Balaram, and M.

Narendra does not believe that God incarnates in a human body. On the other hand, Girish has

1. Taraknath Ghoshal, later Swami Shivananda.

burning faith that God incarnates in every age, that He assumes a human body and comes down to this mortal world. Thakur wants the two to argue this matter. He says to Girish, "Discuss this for a while in English. I want to listen."

The discussion starts. But not in English – in Bengali with a few words of English interspersed. Narendra says, "God is infinite. It is not possible for us to comprehend Him. He is present within everybody, it is not that He appears in only one human body."

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "I agree with him. He is everywhere. But this is also true, that there is a difference in manifestation of the divine power. He manifests Himself in some as ignorance[1] and in some as knowledge.[2] In some 'receptacles' there is greater power, and in others less. So all men are not equal."

Ram: "What is the use of such idle discussion?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*sharply*): "No, no. It has a special significance."

Girish (*to Narendra*): "How do you know that He doesn't assume a human body?"

Narendra: "He is beyond speech and mind."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, He can be known by the pure intellect. The pure intellect and pure Atman are indeed the same. The rishis realized the pure Atman with their pure intellect."

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1. Avidya shakti.
2. Vidya shakti.

Girish (*to Narendra*): "If God does not incarnate in a human body, who will teach mankind? He assumes a human body to teach knowledge and love for God. If he doesn't, who will?"

Narendra: "Why, He will teach from within the heart!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "Yes, yes. He will teach as our Inner Controller."[1]

Now a heated discussion begins: Can the Infinite have parts? What does Hamilton say? What does Herbert Spencer say? What have Tyndall and Huxley said? This is the discussion.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I don't like such conversation. I see everything as God. What is there to reason about? I see that He is all, that He has become everything. He is this as well as that. In one state the mind and the intellect are lost in the Absolute. When I see Narendra, my mind is absorbed in the Absolute.

(*To Girish*) "What do you say to this? Say something."

Girish (*laughing*): "I have understood nearly everything but this." (*Everybody laughs.*)

Ramanuja and the doctrine of Qualified Non-dualism

Sri Ramakrishna: "And then I can't talk unless I come down two steps. What Shankara understood and taught as Vedanta is true, but then the Qualified Non-dualism[2] of Ramanuja is also true."

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1. Antaryamin.
2. Vishishtadvaita.

Narendra: "What is meant by Qualified Non-dualism?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Qualified Non-dualism is Ramanuja's view that the finite soul and the phenomenal world are parts of the Absolute and not separate from it. The three are one.

"Take a bel fruit. Somebody separates its shell, seeds, and kernel, but now you want to know its weight. Will you be able to weigh it by weighing the kernel alone? The shell, the seeds, and the kernel will have to be weighed together. At first it seems that neither the shell nor the seeds are of any importance – that the kernel is all-important. But when you think about it, you realize that the kernel belongs to the same substance (fruit) as the shell and the seeds. In the beginning you have to reason 'not this, not this'; the finite soul is not permanent, nor is the world: only Brahman is real, all else is unreal. Later, you realize that the kernel belongs to the same substance as the shell and seed. The Absolute is the identical substance from which you derive the concept of the individual soul and the world. The phenomenal must be traced to that very Being, the Absolute must be traced. So Ramanuja says that the individual soul, the world, and Brahman are one. This is called Vishishtadvaita."

Chapter Eight

God-vision – God reveals Himself through the Incarnation

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I see Him before my eyes; what more should I reason about? I'm seeing that God Himself has become everything, that He Himself has become the living beings and the world.

"But without awakening the consciousness within you, you can't realize the Universal Consciousness. How long do you reason? As long as you do not realize Him. Mere talking will not do. I see that He indeed has become everything. One can only gain awakening by His grace. When you awaken, you go into samadhi. Sometimes you forget your body; your attachment to 'lust and greed' vanishes; you don't like anything except talk about God; you feel pained to hear worldly talk."

Revelation – instruction to Narendra – Kali truly is Brahman

"When the consciousness within is awakened, the Universal Consciousness is realized."

At the end of the discussion Sri Ramakrishna says to M., "I have seen that you can know Him in one way through reasoning and in another way through meditation. Again, when God reveals Himself by showing how He plays as man, it is yet a different experience. When He reveals what God-incarnation is, you don't have to reason any more, and nobody has to try to make you understand. Do you know what it's like? It's like striking a match and the place is suddenly illumined. Similarly, if

God suddenly gives you light, all doubts vanish. Can He be known by reasoning?"

Thakur calls Narendra and makes him sit near him. He enquires about him and shows great affection to him.

Narendra (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Alas, I have meditated on Kali for three or four days, but nothing at all has happened."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It will happen gradually. Kali is none other than Brahman. The One who is Brahman is Kali. Kali is the Primal Power. When It is inactive, I call it Brahman. When It creates, preserves, and dissolves, I call It Shakti, I call It Kali. Whom you call Brahman,[1] I call Kali.[2]

"Brahman and Kali are one and the same. They are like fire and its burning power. If one thinks of fire, its burning power immediately comes to mind. When one accepts Kali, one has to accept Brahman. Similarly, by accepting Brahman, one has to accept Kali.

"Brahman and Shakti are one and the same. I call Brahman Shakti, and the same Being I call Kali."

It is dark, and Girish must leave. He says to Haripada, "Brother, please call a cab. I have to go to the theatre."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Look here, see that you bring one!"

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1. The Unconditioned, the Absolute.
2. God in relation to the conditioned.

Haripada (*laughing*): "I'm going to bring it. Why shouldn't I?"

God-realization and work – Rama and work

Girish (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "I have to leave you to go to the theatre."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you have to serve both parties. King Janaka was loyal to both matter and spirit and drank his milk from a full cup." (*All laugh.*)

Girish: "I am thinking of leaving the theatre and everything to the younger fellows."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no. This is all very good. It's helping many."

Narendra (*in a low voice*): "Just a moment ago he was harping on God, on incarnation of God, and now the theatre is drawing him!"

Chapter Nine

In samadhi – Sri Ramakrishna intoxicated with God

Seating Narendra by his side, Sri Ramakrishna looks at him. Suddenly he moves still nearer. Narendra does not believe in incarnations of God. What does that matter? Thakur's love for him knows no bounds. Touching Narendra, he quotes from a song, "'Do you feel that your dignity has been wounded? So be it. We are of the same mind as you, and we feel for you.'[1]

1. These words were addressed by the gopis of Vrindavan to Radha.

One reasons till one realizes God

(*To Narendra*) "As long as there is reasoning, one cannot attain God. You were reasoning. I didn't like it.

"How long is there noise at a feast? As long as people don't sit down to eat. As soon as luchis and vegetables are served, seventy-five percent of the noise disappears. (*All laugh*.) When other dishes are served, it decreases further. When curds are served on leaf plates, one can only hear the sound of sipping. And when the feast is over, they all sleep.

"The nearer you come to God, the less you reason. When He is attained, no words, no reasoning, remains. Then it is sleep – samadhi."

Saying this, Thakur gently strokes Narendra's body and touches his chin. He says, "Hari Om, Hari Om, Hari Om."

> Why is he acting like this? Is Sri Ramakrishna seeing in Narendra the very presence of God? Is this what is known as seeing God in man? Soon Thakur begins to lose outer consciousness, all awareness of the outside world. Perhaps this is what is called the "half-consciousness" that Chaitanya experienced. He has his hand on Narendra's feet, as if he is massaging the feet of Narayan. Again he moves his hand. Why so much caressing of the body and massaging of the feet? Is he serving the Lord, or is he transmitting power to Narendra?

Suddenly his mood changes. What is he saying to Narendra with folded hands? He says, "Sing a song and I will be restored. Then I'll be able to

stand on my own legs. 'Oh, he (my Nityananda) is intoxicated with the love of Gauranga.'"

He is silent for a while and sits speechless, like a figure in a painting. Then overwhelmed with divine emotion, he says, "Beware Radha, lest you fall into the Jamuna, you who are mad with love for Krishna!"

Still overwhelmed with divine emotion, he quotes a song:

Friend, how far is that wood

Where my Shyama Sundara is?

I sense Krishna here!

I can walk no farther.

Now Thakur has lost all consciousness of the world and remembers nothing. Narendra is seated before him, but he is not conscious of Narendra. He has no awareness of the outside world. It is as if his mind and soul have merged in God. *Madgat antaratma.*[1]

"Deeply drunk with the love of Gaur!" Saying this, he stands up with a cry.[2] He sits down again and says: "Yonder a light approaches. I see it but do not know from where it comes."

Now Narendra sings:

By giving Your vision, you have rid me of all sorrows and charmed my soul.

Beholding You, all the seven worlds forget their grief,
What to speak of my poor self so mean and unworthy.

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1. madgatenāntarātmanā, "His inmost self merged in Me." – Bhagavad Gita 6:47.
2. Humkar.

Sri Ramakrishna is losing all consciousness of the external world as he listens to the song. With eyes closed and body still, he goes into samadhi.

Just as a child who has lost his companion is confused; in the same way, after coming out of samadhi, he says, "Who will take me back?"

It is late at night, the tenth day of the dark fortnight of Phalgun. It is very dark when Thakur prepares to return to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. As he is about to get into a carriage, devotees stand nearby. Sri Ramakrishna gets in, helped gently by the devotees. He still remains in a God-intoxicated state.

The carriage leaves and the devotees go, each to his own home.

Chapter Ten

In the heart of the disciple

Overhead shines the starry night sky; upon the canvas of the heart is the wonderful image of Sri Ramakrishna, and in the memory the assembly of devotees. Like a happy dream, the mind's eye is filled with that love. The devotees are going home along the main road in Calcutta. Some of them, enjoying the pleasant spring breeze, sing the same song as they go: "By giving Your vision, You have rid me of all sorrows and have charmed my soul."

Mani walks along, wondering to himself: Does God actually assume a human form and come to earth? Is divine incarnation really true? How does the infinite God become a man three and a half cubits tall? Can the Infinite become finite? I have reasoned enough, but what have I understood? I have known nothing by reasoning.

Sri Ramakrishna has said beautifully, "As long as one argues and reasons, one does not attain the goal, one does not attain God." This is also true: I have only an ounce of intellect. How can I know God with it? Can a one-seer pot contain four seers of milk? But then again, how can one have faith in incarnation? Thakur said, "If God in His mercy shows Himself to you, it is understood in a moment." Goethe, lying on his deathbed, said, "Light! More light!" If God in His compassion strikes a light and shows it to you, then all doubts vanish, the way the illiterate fishermen of Palestine recognized Jesus, or devotees like Srivasa recognized Gauranga as the perfect God-incarnate.

And if God does not reveal Himself by His grace, what can be done? Sri Ramakrishna has said it; I shall put my faith in the incarnation of God. He himself has taught, "Faith, faith, faith! Faith in the words of the guru."

I have made You the pole-star of my life, never shall I lose my way in this sea of the world.

By God's grace I have developed faith in his words. I shall continue to believe what he says. Let others do what they like. Why should I give up such faith, faith that is rare even among gods? I now set aside all reason. Have I to become another Faust with intellectual discussions?

In the deep darkness of the night, a ray of the moon enters the window and Faust is lying alone in the room. "Alas, I have not been able to understand anything. The study of philosophy and science have served me in vain. Shame on me!" Saying this, will I then, like him, take up a vial of poison to commit suicide? Or else, like another person, Alastor, not being able to bare the burden of ignorance, shall I place my head upon a rock and wait for death? No, I need not try to fathom this mystery with an ounce of intelligence like all these tragic savants. There is no need to commit suicide because a vessel of one seer is

not able to contain four seers of milk. A wonderful counsel – "Faith in the words of the guru." Oh God, give me that faith, and let me not wander from here to there for nothing. That which is not bound to happen, don't send me out to find. And what Thakur has instructed, "May I gain pure love and devotion at Your lotus feet – love without alloy and love for God that wells up unbidden out of the depths of the immortal soul.[1] And may I not be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya." Bless me with this, I pray.

Reflecting over Sri Ramakrishna's incomparable love, Mani returns home by the main road on that dark night. He says to himself, "What love he has for Girish! Even when Girish has to go to the theatre, he visits his house. Not only that, he doesn't even ask him to renounce – to forsake home, relatives, worldly activities, all, for him – and embrace sannyas. I understand; it has a meaning. Unless the time is ripe, unless one has developed deep dispassion, renunciation will be painful. Thakur himself says that if you remove the scab from a wound before the wound is healed, it will bleed and be painful. But when the wound has healed, the scab will fall off by itself. Ordinary men who have no insight ask you to renounce the world immediately. This sadguru (real preceptor), this sea of motiveless grace, is the ocean of love. Day and night he cares only to do good to mankind.

And also what faith Girish has! It was just two days after he had seen Thakur that he said, "Lord, you are God indeed. You have come in a human body for my salvation." Girish is right in saying, "How can God instruct like a member of the family without taking up a human body?" Who can make us realize that only God is real and all else unreal? Who can lift the weak child, having fallen on the ground, by holding his hand? Who can make a man attached to "lust and

1. Amla and ahetuki bhakti.

greed" and of the nature of an animal eligible for eternal life? And if He does not live with them as a human being, how will they, whose inmost Self is one with Him who does not want anything but God, spend their lives? That is why:

paritrāṇāya sādhūnāṁ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām ।
dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge ।।

[For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of dharma, I take birth in age after age.]

– Bhagavad Gita 4:8

What love! He is mad for Narendra, weeps for Narayan. He says, "These and the other young men – Rakhal, Bhavanath, Purna, Baburam, and the rest – are Narayana (God) Himself. They have come to earth in a human body for my sake." I say, this love is not born of human intellect. I see it as divine love. These boys are pure souls who have not touched women with carnal intentions. They have not developed greed, pride, envy, and the like by engaging in worldly activities. So there is greater manifestation of God in them. But who has such vision! Thakur has the insight. He sees everything: who is attached to the world, who is simple, who is magnanimous, who is a devotee of God. He serves such devotees as the Lord Himself. He helps them wash, puts them to bed, weeps to see them, and rushes to Calcutta for them. He beseeches others to bring them by cab from Calcutta. He often asks householder devotees, "Invite them to a meal. This will do you good." Is it worldly love, or pure, divine love? One worships God in an earthen image, serving Him with the sixteen articles. Can't He, then, be worshipped in a pure human body? Besides, they are helpers of the Lord in His every divine sport! They are His intimate companions in every incarnation.

As he gazes at Narendra, he forgets the external world; then gradually he forgets the embodied Narendra. He forgets the apparent man and sees only the real man. His mind merges into Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, seeing which he sometimes becomes mute and motionless and sometimes mutters, "Om, Om," or repeats, "Mother, Mother" like a child. He sees more of His manifestation in Narendra. He is mad repeating, "Narendra, Narendra."

Narendra does not believe in God incarnating as man. But what does that matter? Thakur has divine sight. He has seen that it is the pride of personality in him. God is very much our own. He is our own Mother, not an adopted one. Why does He not make us understand? Why does He not strike a light in compassion and show the Reality? Perhaps that is why Thakur said: "Do you feel that your dignity has been wounded? Be it so. We are of the same mind as you, and we feel for you."[1]

If one cannot be difficult with one's dearest of the dear, with whom can one be so? Blessed are you, Narendranath. This supreme person has so much love for you! Seeing you, he becomes inspired by God so easily.'

Reflecting thus, with Sri Ramakrishna in their minds, the devotees return home in the deep of night.

1. These were the words addressed by her companions, the gopis of Vrindavan, to Radha, the greatest lover of God-incarnate Sri Krishna.

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna's Joyous Conversations with Ishan, Doctor Sarkar, Girish, and Other Devotees at the House in Shyampukur

Chapter One

On the householder way of life

It is the fourteenth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Aswin. Celebrations of the three-day worship of Mahamaya[1] on the seventh, eighth, and ninth days are over. The tenth day is Vijaya day. Greetings for this occasion are already over. Sri Ramakrishna is staying with some devotees in the Shyampukur area of Calcutta. He is suffering from a serious disease, cancer of the throat. The Ayurvedic physician, Ganga Prasad, treated him when he stayed at Balaram's house. At that time Thakur asked whether or not his disease was curable. The physician did not reply; he remained silent. Allopathic doctors also hinted that the disease was not curable. Doctor Sarkar is now treating him.

Today is Thursday, 22 October 1885. A bed has been set up in a room on the second floor of the two-storied house in Shyampukur. Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the bed, while Doctor Sarkar, Ishan Chandra Mukhopadhyay, and some other devotees sit in front and around him. Ishan is a very charitable person. Though he lives on a pension, he gives in charity. He is always contemplating God. After hearing of Sri Ramakrishna's illness, he has come to see him.

1. Durga Puja.

Though Doctor Sarkar comes only to treat him, he stays for six or seven hours. He has great love and reverence for Sri Ramakrishna and looks upon the devotees as his very own.

It is about 7:00 p.m. on a moonlit night. It seems as if the full moon, the lord of the night, is raining nectar. Inside, a lamp is lit. Many people have come to be with this great man. They all watch him intently, anxious to hear what he says and see what he does. Looking at Ishan, Sri Ramakrishna addresses him.

Unattached worldly man – the way to be unattached

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "Blessed is the worldly man who attends to his duties in life but has love and devotion for God's lotus feet. He is indeed brave. He is like a man carrying a two-maund load on his head, who watches a bridal procession passing by. The man has a heavy load on his head, yet he sees the bridegroom. Without great power of mind, it is not possible. He is just like a mud fish living in the mud – not a speck of mud soils its body. Or like a waterfowl that is forever diving into water – no water clings to its body when it flutters its wings even once.

"To be able to live unattached in the world, some spiritual practice is necessary. You have to live in solitude for some days – a year, six months, three months – and meditate on God. You must pray to Him earnestly to grant you love and devotion. And you should say to yourself, There is no one in this world who is my own. Those whom I call mine are so for just two days. Only God is my own. He alone is my all. Oh! how can I attain Him?

"You can live in the world after acquiring love and devotion for God. It is like smearing your hands with oil before cutting open a jackfruit. Then its milky sap won't stick to your hands. The world is like water and man's mind is like milk. If you keep milk in water, the milk and water become one. That is why one has to curdle milk in a quiet corner. When the milk is curdled, you can extract butter from it. And this butter, when placed in water, does not dissolve in it, but floats on the surface unattached.

"Some members of the Brahmo Samaj said to me, 'Sir, we have the attitude of King Janaka. We will attend to worldly affairs in an unattached manner like he did.' I said, 'It is very difficult to attend to worldly affairs in an unattached way. You do not become King Janaka just by saying so. King Janaka practiced austerities for a long time, standing on his head with his feet up.' You won't have to stand on your heads, but you do have to practice spiritual disciplines. And you have to live in solitude. When you have gained knowledge and love for God in solitude, then you may go and live in the world. Curds can only be set in a solitary corner. If you disturb the milk, it won't curdle.

"Janaka was unattached. That is why he is known by the name Videha, which means he had no consciousness of the body. Though he lived in the world, he moved around in it like one liberated in this very life.[1] But to be rid of body-

1. Jivanmukta.

consciousness requires spiritual progress. It needs a lot of spiritual practice.

"Janaka was a great hero. He wielded two swords – one of spiritual knowledge and the other of work."

Spiritual knowledge of the householder and of the sannyasin

"If you ask whether there is a difference between the knowledge of a householder and a sannyasin, the answer is that both are the same. The former is a man of knowledge, and so is the latter – just the same. But there is some risk for a householder living in the midst of 'lust and greed.' Living in a sooty room, you cannot escape a little stain, however clever you may be.

"Once you have churned the butter from the milk, if you keep it in a new earthen pot, it runs no risk of spoiling. But if you keep it in a pot of buttermilk, it is risky. (*All laugh*.)

"When parched rice is roasted, a few grains jump out of the frying pan, making the sound 'pat-pat.' They are like a jasmine flower that has no stain. Parched rice in the pot is also good, but not pure white like the flower; the grains have a little stain on them. When either a householder or a sannyasin gains spiritual knowledge, he becomes stainless, just like a jasmine flower. But after gaining spiritual knowledge, if he lives in the frying pan of the world, there may be a little red stain on his body. (*Everybody laughs*.)

"Once a bhairavi[1] went to the court of King Janaka. Seeing a woman, Janaka lowered his head and cast his eyes down. Seeing this, the ascetic said, 'Oh Janaka, you are still afraid of a woman!' When one has attained the highest spiritual knowledge,[2] one's nature becomes that of a five-year-old child. Then one no longer distinguishes between a man and a woman.

"So there may be a stain on the body of a person of knowledge who lives in the world, but this stain does no harm. The moon has stains – they don't obstruct the moonlight."

Work after spiritual knowledge – for the welfare of humanity

"Some people take up teaching mankind after attaining knowledge – for example Janaka, Narada, and others. One must have spiritual power to teach mankind. The rishis attained knowledge for themselves. But religious teachers like Narada moved about for the good of mankind. They were heroes.

"When a bird sits on an old, dry piece of wood floating on water, it sinks. But when a heavy log floats on water, it can carry a cow, a man, and even an elephant across. A steamboat goes across with many passengers.

"Teachers such as Narada and others are like heavy logs of wood, or like steamboats.

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1. Female ascetic.
2. Purna jnana.

"Some people eat, wipe their mouths with a hand towel, and sit down quietly lest others should know that they have eaten. (*All laugh*.) Another, having got a mango, cuts it into pieces to share with others.

"Narada and such religious teachers lived for the welfare of others, even after attaining spiritual knowledge."

Chapter Two

The Religion for the Age – Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

The doctor: "When one has attained knowledge, one becomes speechless. The eyes are closed and tears flow. Then one needs love and devotion."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Bhakti is a woman. So she has access to the inner apartments. Jnana can only go to the visitor's room." (*Everybody laughs*.)

Doctor: "But all women aren't permitted in the inner apartments. Prostitutes can't go there. So knowledge is needed."

Sri Ramakrishna: "If a man doesn't know the right path but has love for God within and wants to know Him, such a person attains God by sheer love and devotion for Him. A great devotee set out to have the darshan of Lord Jagannath. He didn't know the way to Puri. Instead of going south, he went west. He lost his way, so he enquired earnestly from others. They told him, 'Not this way, go that way.' This devotee at last arrived at Puri and had the darshan of Lord Jagannath. Just see, even if you don't know the way, somebody will tell you."

The doctor: "But he did lose his way."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, he did, but in the end he reached his goal."

Somebody asks: "Is God with form or without form?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is with form and also without form. A sannyasin went to Jagannath. After seeing the image, a doubt arose in his mind as to whether God is with form or without form. He had a stick in his hand. He began to feel around with it to see if it touched Jagannath's body. First he moved it from one side to the other and did not feel the image. So he understood that there was no image of the deity before him. But when he moved the stick in the opposite direction, it touched the deity's body. The sannyasin then understood that God is with form as well as without form.

"But it is very difficult to understand this. How can He who is without form be with form at the same time? This doubt does come to mind. Again, if He is with form, why then are there so many forms?"

Doctor: "He who has created forms is Himself with form. He also created the mind, so He is formless. He can be everything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Without realizing God, one can't understand all this. For the aspirant, God manifests Himself in many forms, in many ways. Somebody had a tub for dyeing. Many people used to visit him to get their clothes dyed. The dyer would ask, 'Which colour do you want?' One perhaps says, 'I want it dyed red.' The dyer

immediately put it in his tub. Having dyed it, he says, 'Here is your cloth dyed red.' Maybe another says, 'I want it dyed yellow.' Dipping the cloth immediately in the same tub, the dyer says, 'Here is your yellow cloth. Take it.' When asked to dye it blue, he again dips the cloth in the same tub and says the same, 'Here is your cloth dyed blue.' In this way he dyed everybody's cloths, dipping them in the same tub. There was a person watching this strange affair. The owner of the tub asked him, 'How about you, brother? What colour do you want?' The man answered, 'Brother, please give me the colour of the dye in your vat.' (*Everybody laughs*.)

"Somebody went to defecate [in a forest]. There he saw a beautiful creature on a tree. When he came back, he said to someone, 'Brother, I saw a red-coloured creature on that tree over there.' That person said, 'I've seen it too, but it's not red; it's green.' Yet another person said, 'No, no. It's not green; it's yellow.' Others also spoke out, one saying it was violet, another blue, another black, and so on. This led to a quarrel. Then they all went to the tree. There was a man sitting there, and, when asked, he said, 'I live under this tree, and I know this particular creature very well. You are all speaking the truth. It is sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow, sometimes blue – so many colours. And at times I see that it has no colour at all.'

"Only a person who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature. Only he knows that God reveals Himself in various forms. He is seen in different ways. He has attributes, and then He is without attributes. Only he who lives under the

tree knows that this ever-changing creature has different colours, and at times no colour at all. The others only quarrel and trouble themselves.

"He is with form and He is formless. Do you know what He is like? Imagine an ocean of boundless Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. With the cooling effect of devotion, the water of this ocean freezes at places into icebergs. In other words, God takes a concrete form for the devotee, sometimes with a body. And when the sun of knowledge rises, the ice melts."

Doctor: "When the sun rises, ice melts into water. But then, you know, water turns into formless vapour."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That is to say, when one realizes that the Absolute is the only reality and the world an illusion, one attains samadhi, and all forms vanish. Then one is not aware of Him as a person. What He is cannot be put into words. Who would speak of it? He who is to speak does not exist. His 'I' cannot be found even if you search for it. Then the Absolute is without attributes, and one has only an inner experience.[1] Brahman cannot be known through the mind and the intellect.

"So it is said that bhakti, love of God, is the light of the moon and jnana is the sun. I hear that in the north, as well as the south, there are oceans where it is so cold in certain places that water freezes into ice. A ship is unable to sail there."

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1. Bodhebodhe.

Doctor: "Then one comes across obstacles on the path of bhakti."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, that is true. But it doesn't do any harm. It is that very water of the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda that freezes into ice. And there is no harm if you want to reason further by saying that Brahman is real while the world is an illusion. In that case the ice will melt by the heat of the sun of jnana. Then what remains is the same ocean of Sat-chit-ananda."

The ripe 'I' and the unripe 'I' – the 'I' of a devotee and the I' of a child

"When you have reasoned it out and attained samadhi, your 'I' vanishes. But this is very difficult. The 'I' never wants to disappear – and since it doesn't, you have to return to this world again.

"The bullock bellows, 'Hamba, hamba' ('I, I'). There is so much misery for it. The whole day, in rain or sunshine, it pulls a plough. Or it is slaughtered by a butcher. Even that is not the end. A tanner tans the leather and shoes are made from it. Last of all, strings are made from its intestines. When it falls into the hands of a carder and says, 'Tuhun, tuhun' (you, you), only then is it released.

"When one says, 'Naham, naham, naham' ('not I, not I, not I'), I am nothing, O Lord. I am the servant; You are the Master,' it is only then that he is released, he is liberated."

Doctor: "But one must fall into the hands of a carder." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: "If 'I' simply refuses to go, let the rascal remain as the 'servant I.' (*All laugh*.)

"Some people retain their ego even after attaining samadhi, as the 'servant I,' the 'devotee I.' Shankaracharya retained the 'I of knowledge' to teach people. The 'servant I,' the 'devotee I,' the 'I of knowledge' are all the 'ripe I.' What is the 'unripe I?' 'I am the doer, I am the son of such a big man, I am so learned, I am wealthy, how dare you talk to me in this way?' – such kinds of attitudes. If somebody steals into a man's house and is caught, first of all the stolen articles are snatched from him. Then, after the man gives the thief a good beating, he hands him over to the police, saying, 'Don't you know who you are robbing?'

"After you have realized God, your nature becomes that of a five-year-old child. The 'I of a child' and the 'ripe 'I.' A child is not subject to the three gunas – it is beyond them. He is not subject to any one of the gunas – sattva, rajas, or tamas. See how a child is not governed by tamas. He may quarrel and fight with somebody now, but the next minute he puts his arm around him, shows him love, and plays with him. He is also not under the influence of rajas. He makes a toy house with so much effort! But soon afterward he leaves it and runs to his mother. He may wander around wearing a pretty cloth, but the next moment he lets it falls off into the dust. He may forget the cloth completely, or he may wander around with it under his armpit! (*Laughter*.)

"If you say to this boy, 'You have a pretty cloth, whose is it?' He replies, 'It's mine. My father gave it

to me.' If you say to him, 'Dear one, give me your cloth,' he replies, 'No, I won't give it to you! It's mine. My daddy gave it to me.' Later, if you can cajole him by giving him a doll or a flute, he may give you his five-rupee cloth and leave. A five-year-old child is also not attached to sattva. He is so fond of his neighborhood companions that he can't bear to be separated from them for even a moment. But when he goes away with his parents, he makes new friends and showers all his love on them. He forgets his old companions altogether. And then he has no pride of caste. If his mother has told him that so-and-so is his elder brother, he accepts him as his real brother one-hundred percent. If he is the son of a brahmin, and the other the son of a potter, he will eat with him from the same plate. And then also he has no idea of purity or impurity. He may eat without having washed his bottom after defecating. And he has no sense of shame: he may ask somebody if he has had full evacuation!

"And then there is the ego of an old man. (*The doctor laughs*.) Old people have a number of bonds[1] such as caste, pride, shame, contempt, fear, worldliness, calculation, and deceit. If he has any grudge or ill will toward someone, he can't get rid of it easily – perhaps even as long as he is alive. And then there are pride of learning and the pride of wealth. An old man's 'I' is an 'unripe I.'"

1. The Tantric scriptures list eight bonds or fetters: shame (lajja), hatred or contempt (ghrana), fear (bhaya), pride of caste, rank or race (jati), hesitation or suspicion (shanka), secretiveness (jugupsa), pride of family, ancestry, or lineage (kula), and pride of good conduct, character or piety (shila).

Who cannot gain spiritual knowledge?

(*To the doctor*) "A few people cannot gain spiritual wisdom. People who have the 'I of learning,' the 'I of knowledge,' and the 'I of wealth' do not attain spiritual knowledge. If you tell these people that there is a nice holy man at a certain place and ask them if they would like to visit him, they immediately offer a number of excuses and say they can't go. They think to themselves, I am such a big man. Why should I go?"

The three gunas – sattva leads one to God – the way to discipline the senses

"The nature of tamas is pride. It comes from ignorance.

"The Puranas say that Ravana had more rajas, Kumbhakaran more tamas, and Bibhishana more sattva. This is why Bibhishana could attain Ramachandra. Anger is another characteristic of tamas. In anger one loses the sense of right and wrong. Hanuman set fire to Lanka without thinking that fire could destroy Sita's cottage too.

"Then there is another characteristic of tamas – lust. Girindra Ghosh of Pathuraghat said, 'You can't get rid of enemies like lust and anger, so change their direction.' Desire God. Have intercourse with Sat-chit-ananda. And if you can't get rid of anger, bring the tamas of bhakti: 'What! I have repeated the name of Durga, shall I not be liberated? There is no sin for me, no bondage.' Thereafter, be greedy for God-realization. Fall in love with God's beauty and say, 'I am the servant of God. I am His son.' If you have to be proud, be

proud of this. You can turn the directions of the six enemies[1] this way."

Doctor: "It is very difficult to control the senses. You have to put blinders on both sides of a horse's head. In some cases, you may have to cover both eyes completely.

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is no fear if He bestows His grace once, if the Lord grants you His vision, if you realize the Atman once. Then the six passions can do no harm.

"Ever-perfect saints like Narada and Prahlada don't have to put blinders over their eyes."

Doctor: "But it's not good for a father to hold his boy's hand."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's not true. Spiritually advanced people have the nature of a child. Before God they are childlike; their egos vanish. They derive all their strength from God. It is the strength of the Father – nothing is their own. This is their firm conviction."

The path of reason and the path of joy –
Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

Doctor: "Will a horse move forward unless you put blinders on the sides of its eyes? Unless the enemy[2] is subjugated, can one realize God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What you are saying is called the path of reason, Jnana Yoga. You can realize God this way too. Jnanis say that you must first

1. Lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride and envy.
2. Doctor Sarkar is referring to passions.

purify your consciousness. Spiritual disciplines are needed first, then you can attain knowledge.

"You can attain Him by the path of devotion too. If you once develop love for the lotus feet of God, if you begin to enjoy chanting His name and glories, you don't have to try to control your passions any more. They are subjugated automatically.

"Can a person who loses his son quarrel with anybody on that day? Or can he enjoy a feast? Can he walk around with his head high and enjoy sense pleasures?

"If a moth sees light once, can it then live in darkness?"

Doctor (*smiling*): "No, it does not. Instead, it rushes into the flame, and it perishes there."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, the devotee doesn't burn himself to death like a moth. It is the light of a jewel toward which the devotee rushes. The light of a jewel may be very bright, but it is cool and comforting. This light doesn't burn the body, but creates peace and joy."

Jnana Yoga is very difficult

"You can attain Him by the path of reasoning, by the path of Jnana Yoga. But this path is very difficult. 'I am not the body, or the mind, or the intellect; I am neither disease, nor sorrow, nor restlessness. I am the Self of Sat-chit-ananda, beyond pleasure and pain, not subject to the senses.' It is very easy to say all this in words, but it is very difficult to practice, to make it a part of your being. Your hand is scratched by thorns. It is

bleeding profusely, yet you say, 'Where? My hand is not scratched by thorns! I am all right.' To say this, you first have to burn the thorns in the fire of knowledge."

Knowledge and book learning – Thakur's system of education

"Many people think that without reading books, they can't learn, they can't attain knowledge. But it is better to listen than to read, and it is better to see than to listen. There is a great difference between hearing of Kashi and visiting Kashi.

"And then, a person who plays chess doesn't see his move clearly, while the onlookers can see much better and can suggest moves to the player. Worldly people think they're very intelligent, but they are attached to the world. They are playing the game, so they can't understand their moves well. Holy people who have renounced the world are unattached to worldly things and are more knowledgeable than worldly people. Since they don't play the game themselves, they can tell the moves better from outside."

Doctor (*to the devotees, indicating Sri Ramakrishna*): "He couldn't have gained so much knowledge by reading books. Faraday communed with nature, so he was able to discover great scientific truths. He couldn't have attained all this by knowledge derived from reading books. Mathematical formulae only throw the brain into confusion. They are a great obstacle to original inquiry."

Divine wisdom and book learning

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "When I used to lie on the ground in the panchavati, I would call on the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please show me what the karmis (ritualists) have achieved through their rituals, the yogis through yoga, and the jnanis through reasoning.' I used to say much more. How to tell you all that!

"Oh, what a state I passed through! Sleep was lost to me."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sings:

I've shaken off my sleep; how can I fall into slumber again? For I am wide awake in the sleeplessness of union.

O Divine Mother, made one with You at last, my slumber I have lulled asleep for evermore.

"I have read no books. But you see, I repeat the Divine Mother's name, so they all show me respect. Sambhu Mallick said to me: Here is Santiram Singh quite able to beat anybody even though he carries no sword or shield." (*All laugh*.)

Now the talk turns to Girish Chandra Ghosh's play, *Buddha Charita*. He had invited the doctor to see the play, and the doctor enjoyed it very much.

Doctor (*to Girish*): "You are a very bad man! Shall I have to visit the theatre every day?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What is he saying? I don't understand."

M.: "He liked the play very much."

Chapter Three

Conversation about divine incarnation – an incarnation of God and an ordinary soul

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "You haven't said anything. This man (the doctor) doesn't believe in divine incarnation."

Ishan: "Sir, I can't argue any more. I don't like arguments."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why? Why not speak out about what is right?"

Ishan (*to the doctor*): "Because of our ego, we people have little faith. Kak Bhushundi, the crow, didn't accept Ramachandra as an incarnation of God in the beginning. At last, after it had wandered through the regions of the moon and the gods and had gone to Kailash, it saw that there was no way to free itself from Rama. And so it surrendered itself, taking shelter in him. Rama then took it in his hand and swallowed it. Bhushundi saw that, even though it was still perched on its tree. Pride having left it, it understood that, though outwardly Ramachandra was a human being like others, yet he had the whole universe in his belly – the sky, the moon, the stars, the sun, the planets, the ocean, hills, men, beasts, trees and so on. All these were inside his belly."

Limited powers of the conditioned

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "It is very difficult to understand that He is both limitless and limited. The Absolute belongs to the same Being as the phenomenal world. How can we force ourselves

with our little intelligence to say that He can't become a man? Can our little intelligence realize all these things? Can a one-seer pail contain four seers of milk?

"So you have to put your faith in the words of those holy men and great souls who have realized God. They contemplate God constantly, just as a lawyer remains involved with his lawsuit. Can you believe in the words of Kak Bhushundi?"

Doctor: "I have faith in what I think is right. And once I have faith, I don't doubt. But how can I call Rama an incarnation of God? First, take the murder of Vali. Rama killed him with his arrow and hid himself like a thief. This is how a man acts, not God."

Girish Ghosh: "Sir, only God could do such a thing."

Doctor: "And then remember his forsaking of Sita."

Girish: "Sir, this too could be done by God, not by man."

Science, or the words of saints

Ishan (*to the doctor*): "Why don't you believe in the incarnation of God? You yourself have just said that He who has created forms has form, and He who has created the mind is without form. You have just said that anything is possible for God."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "That God can incarnate in a human form is not mentioned in his science. So how can he believe it? (*All laugh*.)

"Listen to this story. Somebody said, 'Brother, I have just been to a place where I saw a house fall down with a terrible crash.' The listener was an English-educated person. He said, 'Wait a minute. Let me see if it's in the newspaper.' He didn't find news of a house falling in the paper, so he said, 'I say, brother, I don't believe you. It isn't in the newspaper, so it isn't true.'" (*All laugh*.)

Girish (*to the doctor*): "You will have to accept Sri Krishna as God. I won't allow you to look on Him as a man. You will have to call him either God or a demon."

Simplicity of heart and faith in God

Sri Ramakrishna: "Unless you are simple at heart, you can't have faith in God easily. God is very far from a person having a worldly intellect. A worldly intellect creates doubts, and different kinds of pride appear – the pride of learning, the pride of wealth, and so on. But he (the doctor) is simple at heart."

Girish (*to the doctor*): "Sir, what is your opinion? Can a deceitful person ever attain spiritual knowledge?"

Doctor: "Oh Lord! Could he ever gain knowledge?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "How simple Keshab Sen was! One day when he came to the Kali Temple, he saw the guesthouse. He asked – it was four o'clock – 'When are the guests and the poor going to be fed?'

"The more faith you have, the more spiritual knowledge you will gain. A cow which is choosy in

fodder doesn't give much milk. But the cow that gobbles anything you give it – vegetable leaves and skin, straw – yields streams of milk. (*Everybody laughs*.)

"Unless you have the faith of a child, you can't realize God. A mother says, 'He is your elder brother.' The child has such faith that he believes him to be his brother without the least doubt. The mother says, 'There's a bogey man!' The child believes one hundred percent that there is a bogey man in the room. God bestows His mercy on him who has the faith of a child. You cannot attain God with a worldly intellect."

Doctor (*to the devotees*): "It isn't good to drink milk from a cow that eats all sorts of things. We used to feed our cow anything, and later I fell very ill. I wondered what the reason could be. After a great deal of enquiry, I found that it had been eating everything. That created a lot of problems. I had to go to Lucknow [to get cured]. In the end it cost me twelve thousand rupees! (*Roars of laughter*.)

"Well, it's not easy to see the relation between cause and effect. Why misfortune falls, one cannot tell. A seven-month-old girl of a family of the Paikpara gentleman fell ill with whooping cough. I went there to treat her. I couldn't uncover the cause of her illness until I found that she had drunk the milk of an ass that had gotten wet in the rain." (*All laugh*.)

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you mean? It's like saying my cab passed under a tamarind tree and I

suffered from acidity!" (*The doctor and all others laugh*.)

Doctor (*laughing*): "The captain of a ship had a bad headache. After consultation, the doctor had a poultice applied to the side of the ship. (*All laugh*.)

Company of the holy and renunciation of sense enjoyments

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "It is necessary to keep the constant company of holy people. The disease is chronic. One has to act on their advice and not just listen to them. One has to take medicine and control one's diet. The diet prescribed by a doctor is important."

Doctor: "Prescribed food is most important."

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are three kinds of physicians – superior, mediocre, and inferior. The physician who comes, feels the pulse and leaves, saying, 'You must take the medicine,' is an inferior physician. He doesn't bother to know whether or not the patient has taken the medicine. The physician who makes the patient understand in so many ways why he should take the medicine talks to him nicely, saying, 'Brother, how can you get well unless you take the medicine? Dear brother, do take it. I, myself, will put it in your mouth.' He is a mediocre physician. And the physician who puts his knee on the chest of the patient and forces the medicine down his throat when the patient refuses to take it is the superior physician."

Doctor: "And there are medicines for which you don't have to put your knees on the patient's chest. For example, homeopathic medicines."

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is no danger if a superior physician puts his knee on the patient's chest.

"Like physicians, there are also three kinds of religious teachers. Those who don't keep contact with their disciples after giving them instructions are the inferior ones. Those who explain to their disciples over and over again for their own good so that they can assimilate their instructions – those who implore the disciples lovingly – are mediocre ones. And those who even use force when they find that the disciple hasn't listened are known as superior teachers."

Women and sannyasins – hard rules for sanyasins

(*To the doctor*) "A monk has to avoid 'lust and greed.' He should not even look at the picture of a woman. Do you know what women are like? Like tamarind pickles – the moment you think of them, your mouth begins to water. Tamarind pickles should not be brought into view.

"But this is not for you householders – it is for a monk. As far as possible, you should live unattached among women. From time to time you should go into solitude and meditate on God. No one else should be there. When you have gained faith and love for Him, you will be able to live unattached to a large extent. After having one or two children, a husband and wife should live together as brother and sister. And they should pray to God that the mind not go to sense enjoyment – and that there will be no more children."

Girish (*laughing at the doctor*): "You have been here for three or four hours. Aren't you going to treat your patients?"

Doctor: "My practice and my patients are no more for me now! My meeting this paramahamsa has deprived me of everything!" (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look here, there is a river called karmanasha (the destroyer of all activities). A great problem arises when you take a plunge into this river. Once you dive in, your activity is over. You can't work after that." (*The doctor and all others laugh.*)

Doctor (*to M., Girish, and other devotees*): "Look here, I am your very own. It's not that I come here as a doctor. If you accept me as your own, I am your kith and kin."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "There is such a thing as selfless devotion.[1] It is very good if one can attain it. Prahlada had this selfless devotion. Such a devotee says, 'O Lord, I want neither wealth nor name nor bodily pleasures, and so forth. Only grant that I may have pure love for Thy lotus feet.'"

Doctor: "Yes, I have seen people bowing in the Kali Temple. They have nothing but desires within – 'Grant that I may get some employment' or 'Grant that I be cured,' and so on.

(*To Sri Ramakrishna*) "You should not talk with people because of this disease of yours. But when I come, you may talk with me." (*Everybody laughs.*)

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1. Ahetuki bhakti.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please cure me of this disease. I can't repeat His name and sing His glories."

Doctor: "Meditation alone is enough."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you saying? Why should I live such a monotonous life? I eat fish cooked several different ways – sometimes in curry, sometimes spiced, sometimes with tamarind, and at times fried or baked. Sometimes I perform worship, sometimes I chant God's name,[1] sometimes I meditate, and at other times I sing His name and glories. Sometimes I dance, repeating His name."

Doctor: "I'm not monotonous either."

What is the harm in not believing in the incarnation of God?

Sri Ramakrishna: "Your son, Amrita, doesn't believe in the incarnation of God. What is the harm in it? You can realize God by believing in Him without form and you can also realize God by believing in Him with form. What is needed is to have faith in Him and to surrender yourself. Man is ignorant; he can make mistakes. Can you put four seers of milk in a one-seer jug? Therefore, whatever path you choose, call upon God with a longing heart. He is the knower within the heart. He will surely listen to your inner call. You will reach Him alone, whatever path you take, whether you believe in God with form or God without form, as long as you have a longing heart.

1. Japa.

"Whether you eat sugared roti (Indian bread) straight or sidewise, it will taste equally sweet. Your son, Amrita, is a very good boy."

Doctor: "He is your disciple."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to the doctor*): "No fellow is my disciple. Rather, I am everybody's disciple. We are all children of God. We are all His servants. I also am a child of God, and His servant too.

"'Uncle moon is everybody's uncle.'"

Everyone present enjoys this and laughs.

Section XVI

Vijay, Narendra, M., Doctor Sarkar, and Other Devotees in Joyful Conversation with Sri Ramakrishna

Chapter One

M. on his way to Doctor Sarkar to inform him of Thakur's condition

Today is Sunday, 25 October 1885, 10th of Kartik, the second day of the dark fortnight. Sri Ramakrishna is staying in a house in the Shyampukur area of Calcutta while being treated for cancer of the throat. Doctor Sarkar is his doctor now.

M. is sent daily to the doctor to inform him of Sri Ramakrishna's condition. This morning at half past six M. saluted Sri Ramakrishna and asked him, "How are you feeling?"

Sri Ramakrishna said, "Tell the doctor that in the early hours of the morning my mouth is full of fluid and I have to cough. Ask him if I can take a bath."

M. sees the doctor after seven o'clock and tells him all about Thakur. One or two of his friends and an old teacher are with the doctor. The doctor says to the teacher, "Sir, I woke up at three o'clock this morning concerned about the Paramahamsa. I couldn't sleep after that. He's still on my mind." *(All smile.)*

A friend of the doctor says to him, "Sir, I hear that some people call the Paramahamsa an incarnation of God. You see him daily. What do you think?"

Doctor: "As a man, I have the greatest regard for him."

M. (*to the doctor's friend*): "The doctor is very kind to treat him."

Doctor: "Kindness!"

M.: "Not to him, but to us."

Doctor: "No brother, no! You don't know what I actually lose. I miss two or three calls a day. The next day I go to the patients' houses on my own and don't charge them. How can I charge them when I go to them without being called?"

The talk turns to Mahima Chakravarty. On Saturday when the doctor visited Sri Ramakrishna, Chakravarty was present. Seeing the doctor, he said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Sir, it is to feed the doctor's vanity that you have gotten this disease."

M. (*to the doctor*): "Mahima Chakravarty used to visit you. He used to come to your house to hear you lecture on medical science."

Doctor: "Oh, is that so? How much tamas this fellow has! Didn't you notice that I saluted him as 'God's Lower Third?' God has within him all three qualities (sattva, rajas, and tamas). Did you catch his words, 'You have taken up the disease to feed the vanity of the doctor'?"

M.: "Mahima Chakravarty believes that if the Paramahamsa wants, he can cure himself."

Doctor: "Oh, how is that possible? How can he cure himself? We are medical men and know what cancer is, yet we can't cure it! He knows nothing about it! How will he cure it? (*To his friends*) You see, the disease is incurable, but they are all serving him with great devotion."

Chapter Two

Sri Ramakrishna with his attendant

M. requested the doctor to visit Sri Ramakrishna and then returned home. At three o'clock, after lunch, he went to Sri Ramakrishna again and humbly told him everything. He said, "The doctor embarrassed me today."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "What happened?"

M.: "He heard yesterday when he came here that you had come down with this disease to add to the vanity of doctors."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Who said that?"

M.: "Mahima Chakravarty."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Then?"

M.: "He called Mahima Chakravarty 'God's Lower Third.' Now the doctor says that God contains all three qualities (sattva, rajas, and tamas). (*Sri Ramakrishna smiles.*) He also told me that he woke up at three in the morning and has been worrying about you ever since. At eight o'clock

1. The Doctor had told M. that since he has to go to examine Sri Ramakrishna, he misses two or three calls a day. The next day he goes to the patients' houses on his own and doesn't charge them.

he said, 'Even now the Paramahamsa is on my mind.'"

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "He has an English education. I can't tell him to meditate on me. But he is doing it by himself!"

M.: "And then he said, 'As a man I have the greatest regard for him.' It means that he doesn't regard you as an incarnation of God, but he has the greatest reverence for you as a man."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Did you talk about anything else?"

M.: "I asked him what the schedule for treatment was today. The doctor said, 'Schedule, my foot! I'll have to go again today. What else is there to schedule?' (*Sri Ramakrishna laughs*.) And he added, 'You don't know how much money I'm losing every day. Every day I miss two or three visits.'"

Chapter Three

Sri Ramakrishna with Vijay and other devotees

A short while later Vijaykrishna Goswami comes to see the Paramahamsa Deva. A number of Brahmo devotees arrive with him. Vijaykrishna was in Dhaka for a long while and has now returned to Calcutta after a pilgrimage to many places in the west (Punjab and Uttar Pradesh). He prostrates before Sri Ramakrishna. A number of people are there – Narendra, Mahima Chakravarty, Navagopal, Bhupati, Latu, M., the Younger Naren, and others.

Mahima Chakravarty (*to Vijay*): "Sir, you have been on pilgrimage and visited a number of places. Please tell us what you saw."

Vijay: "What can I say? I see that everything is here where I am sitting. It's no use just wandering around. At some places there are one or two annas of him (meaning Sri Ramakrishna), four annas at other places, that's all. Only here do I find the full sixteen annas."

Mahima Chakravarty: "Quite right! And again, it is he who sends us roaming about or makes us stay in one place."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "See what a state of mind Vijay has developed! All his characteristics have changed, as if he has been boiled.[1] I can recognize a paramahamsa by his neck and forehead. I can tell whether someone is a paramahamsa or not."

Mahima Chakravarty: "Sir, are you eating less?"

Vijay: "Yes, it seems so. (*To Sri Ramakrishna*) I heard of your illness, so I came to see you. And in Dhaka…"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What?"

Vijay does not answer. He remains silent for a while.

Vijay: "It is very difficult to understand him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] without his help. Only here are sixteen annas."

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1. Sri Ramakrishna means: all impurities have been boiled away.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Kedar[1] says that at other places he doesn't get enough to eat, but here he is given his fill."

Mahima Chakravarty: "His fill! It overflows!"

Vijay (*to Sri Ramakrishna, with folded hand*s): "I have now recognized who you are! You don't need to tell me."

Sri Ramakrishna (*in ecstasy*): "If so, so be it."

Vijay: "I have understood."

Saying this, he falls at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna and holds his feet to his chest. Sri Ramakrishna sits like a statue, unaware of the outer world.

Seeing this wonderful scene and the flood of divine love, some devotees begin to weep. Others sing hymns of praise. They all gaze at Sri Ramakrishna, each according to his own understanding. Some see him as a great devotee, others as a holy man, and yet some others as God-incarnate, each according to his own feeling.

Mahimacharan begins to sing, his eyes filled with tears: 'Behold, behold the image of Love.' Now and then, as if having a glimpse of Brahman, he chants: "The Transcendental, Beyond the distinction of one and many, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute."

Navagopal is weeping. Bhupati, another devotee, sings:

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1. Kedarnath Chatterji was in Dhaka for many days. His eyes would wet with tears on reading the story of the Lord. He was a great devotee. His house was in the city of Hali.

Victory, victory to Parabrahman! Infinite, incomprehensible are You, higher than the highest, the Essence of all essences.

You are the light of truth, the fount of love, the wellspring of all blessedness.

This creation of Yours, a many-flavored elixir, is filled with splendour.

You are the poet, great and primeval, of whose verses the sun and the moon are born, from which they rise, in which they set.

With the golden sprinkling of stars and letters traced from clouds, You have written songs across the blue expanse.

The six seasons of the year, in tune with the rejoicing earth, proclaim Your glory.

The flowers reveal Your beauty, and the waters Your serenity. In thunder resound your terror and majesty.

So deep is Your mystery – what can a foolish mind know of it, even meditating age after age?

Millions of suns, moons and stars joyfully bow at Your feet.

Men and women, seeing Your creation, shed tears of joy, overwhelmed.

Gods, men, and heavenly beings worship Your all-pervading divinity; You, the wellspring of all blessedness.

Bestow knowledge and love, give us devotion and peace. Grant, do grant, us shelter at Your blessed feet.

Bhupati sings again:

In the musical mode of Jhijhit – community singing

Ecstatic waves rise high on the sea of consciousness and bliss. How enthralling, how sweet is the play of great ecstasy!

So many waves of new feeling rise in the sports of love. So many waves – rising, falling, ever repeating. Repeat, O mind, the name of Hari!

The whole of creation becomes one in the great communion. All difference melts away. Time and place, the very thought of distinction – all those and all else are no more.

All my wishes, now fulfilled – they too have melted away.

Now, my mind, be lifted up in joy and repeat Lord Hari's name!

In the rhythmic pattern of Jhamp Tal

Gone are delusion, fear, and piety, ritual actions and good works. Pride of race and caste has vanished.

Where am I? And where is Hari? Having stolen my heart, he has run away.

Why did I come to this shore of love's ocean?

Filled full with feeling is my heart, not yet with dullness overcome.

Says Premdas, Hear all sadhus and all citizens of the earth! Such is the new way of God!

After a long time Sri Ramakrishna regains outer-consciousness.

Brahmajnana and 'strange arithmetic' – purpose of God-incarnate

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I don't know what happens to me when I'm in ecstasy. Now I feel ashamed, as though I had been possessed by a ghost. 'Me' and 'mine' vanish in that state.

"I can't count when I come down from this state. I count one, seven, eight – something like that."

Narendra: "It's because everything is one, isn't it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, beyond one and two."[1]

Mahimacharan: "Yes sir, beyond duality[2] and non-duality."[3]

Sri Ramakrishna: "There counting is meaningless. He can't be realized through learning. He is beyond the scriptures – Vedas, Puranas, and Tantras. When I see a person even holding a book in his hands, I call him a rajarshi[4] though he is a jnani. No outer sign can be found in a brahmarishi.[5] Do you know the use of scriptures? Somebody wrote a letter asking for five seers of sandesh and a piece of cloth. The recipient read the letter, remembered 'five seers of sandesh and a piece of cloth,' and threw the letter away. Of what use was the letter then?"

Vijay: "'Sandesh' has been sent, I understand."

Sri Ramakrishna: "God incarnates, assuming a human body. He is certainly present in all places, in all things, but man's desire for God is not fulfilled unless God incarnates in a human form. His needs are not met. Do you know how that is? If you touch a cow anywhere on its body, you have touched the cow. Even if you touch its horn, you have touched the cow. But you can take milk only from its udder." (*All laugh*.)

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1. Beyond one and two: beyond distinction of the Absolute from the relative.
2. Dvaita.
3. Advaita.
4. A person filled with rajas.
5. One who has attained Brahman.

Mahima: "If you want milk, how will it help to suck the horn of the cow? You have to suck the udder." (*All laugh*.)

Vijay: "But a calf first licks around here and there."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And maybe, seeing the calf do this, someone directs its mouth to the udder." (*All laugh*.)

Chapter Four

Rejoicing with the devotees

The conversation is going on this way when the doctor comes to see Thakur. Sitting down, he says, "I woke up suddenly last night at three in the morning. I could only think of you. I thought you might catch cold. And I thought of many other possibilities."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I had a cough and a sore throat. Very early in the morning my mouth was full of fluid. I feel like a thorn has been pricking it."

Doctor: "I heard that this morning."

Mahimacharan continues to talk about his visit to different places in India. He says, "On the island of Lanka[1] no one laughs."

Doctor Sarkar says, "There must be one who laughs. I will have to ask about it."

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1. Now the nation of Sri Lanka; known by the British in Sri Ramakrishna's time as Ceylon.

Medical profession and Sri Ramakrishna

Now the topic of conversation turns to the medical profession.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "Many people think very highly of the physician's calling. But the profession would be the highest of the high only if a doctor were to treat his patients without charge, only out of compassion for their suffering. A doctor becomes hard-hearted if he charges fees. It's base to examine faeces and urine just to make money."

Doctor: "If one only does that, it is certainly wrong. But talking about myself to you would be egotistical."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. It's very good if you can practice medicine in a selfless manner to help others – if you can do it.

"Even so, whatever work a man does, he must keep the company of the holy from time to time. If a man is devoted to God, he will seek holy company himself. I usually give this illustration: a hemp smoker keeps the company of other hemp smokers. If he sees someone who doesn't smoke, he leaves, downcast, or hides. But when he sees another hemp smoker, he is filled with joy. (*All laugh*.) Again, a vulture keeps the company of vultures."

Sadhu has compassion for all living beings

Doctor: "And a vulture flies away in fear of a crow. I say, 'Why serve only man? You should serve all living beings.' I often throw little pellets of wheat flour to sparrows, and flocks of them come to the roof."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Good! That's very good. People who feed other living creatures are holy. Holy people feed sugar to ants."

Doctor: "Will there be no singing today?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Please sing a little."

Narendra sings to the accompaniment of the tanpura and other musical instruments.

Sweet is Your name, O refuge of the lowly, raining like nectar on our ears and comforting us, O beloved of our souls!

The treasure of Your name is the abode of immortality. He who chants Your name becomes immortal.

When the nectar of Your name touches our ears, it erases in that instant the deep anguish of our hearts.

The sweet music of Your name fills the heart with sweetness. O Master of our hearts, and Soul of our souls!

Narendra sings another song:

O Mother, make me mad with Your love.

What need have I for knowledge or reason?

With the wine of Your love make me drunk,

You who steal the hearts of Your devotees!

Drown me in the ocean of Your love.

In this world, Your madhouse, some laugh, some weep, some dance for joy.

Jesus, Buddha, Gauranga – all are drunk with the wine of Your love.

When, O Mother, shall I join their blessed company?

In the heavens too is Your fair of madness: like guru, like disciple.

Who can understand this play of love?

O Mother, who are mad with love, who are indeed the glory of the mad,

Make this, your beggar Premdas, rich with the treasure of love.

After the singing, an amazing sight follows. They all appear mad, overcome with divine ecstasy. Shaking off his pride of scholarship, a pundit stands up and quotes: "Mother, make me mad with Your love. What need have I of knowledge or reason?" Vijay is the first to rise to his feet; he stands there, intoxicated with divine emotion. Then Sri Ramakrishna stands up, having forgotten for the moment the serious and incurable pain of his body. The doctor stands in front of him. He is not conscious even of his patient. The Younger Naren is in a state of bhava Samadhi, and so is Latu. Doctor Sarkar, a student of science, stands wonderstruck at this amazing scene. He sees that those who are in ecstasy have no awareness of the outside world. They are all still, motionless. As their intoxication subsides, some cry and some laugh. They seem like a group of drunkards.

Chapter Five

With the devotees – Sri Ramakrishna and controlling anger

After this everyone sits down. It is 8:00 p.m. The conversation resumes.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor)*: "The divine ecstasy you saw just now – what do they call it in your science? Do you think it's all pretence?"

Doctor (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "When so many people are in this state, it seems to be natural, not a pretence. (*To Narendra*) When you were singing, 'O Mother, make me mad with Your love. What need have I of knowledge or reason?' I too could not control myself. I also stood up. How could I help it? It was very difficul to control my emotion. I thought I shouldn't make a display of it."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "You are unshakable and immovable like Mount Sumeru. (*Everybody laughs*.) You are a deep soul. No one recognized the depth of Rupa and Sanatana's emotion. If an elephant goes into a small pond, everything goes topsy-turvy. But if it plunges into a deep lake, there is no disturbance; no one even notices. Radha said to her gopi friend, 'Friend, you are weeping so bitterly because of your separation from Krishna. But see how hard my heart is! There's not a tear in my eye.' Then Vrinda said, 'You have no tears in your eyes, but that has meaning. A fire of separation is always burning in your heart. As soon as there is a tear in your eye, it dries up with the heat of that fire.'"

Doctor: "I can't beat you in argument!" (*Laughter*.)

Gradually they talk of other things. Sri Ramakrishna begins to describe his first ecstasy and how to control lust, anger, and other passions.

Doctor: "I heard that you were once in ecstasy and a wicked fellow came and kicked you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must have heard it from M. The man was Chandra Haldar of Kalighat. He

often visited Mathur Babu. I was lying on the ground, overcome with God-consciousness. It was dark. Chandra Haldar thought I was pretending in order to win Mathur's favour. He came into the room and kicked me black and blue. Everybody said that Mathur Babu should be told, but I forbade it."

Doctor: "This too is due to the will of God. People will learn from it how to overcome anger and be forgiving."

Vijay and Narendra have a glimpse of God's form

In the meantime the devotees have a long talk with Vijay in Thakur's presence.

Vijay: "I feel that somebody is always with me. Even when I'm far away, he tells me what is happening."

Narendra: "Like a guardian angel."

Vijay: "I saw him (the Paramahamsa Deva) in Dhaka. I even touched his body."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "It must have been someone else."

Narendra: "I have also seen him a number of times. (*To Vijay*) So how can I say I don't believe you?"

Section XVII

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at the Shyampukur House

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna with Girish, M., the Younger Naren, Kali, Sarat, Rakhal, Doctor Sarkar, and other devotees

The next day is Monday, 26 October 1885, the 11th of Kartik, the third day of the dark fortnight of Aswin. Sri Ramakrishna is staying in the same house at Shyampukur in Calcutta for treatment.

Doctor Sarkar, his physician, visits almost every day, though devotees go to him regularly to report Thakur's condition.

It is the autumn season. The Saradiya Durga Puja was celebrated a few days ago. Sri Ramakrishna's devotees observed it with mixed joy and sadness, for their gurudeva has been suffering seriously for the last three months with cancer of the throat. Hearing that it is incurable, the unfortunate devotees shed tears in solitude. Some of them are living at the Shyampukur house in order to nurse Sri Ramakrishna, which they are doing with their hearts and souls. Through such service, Narendra and other unmarried young disciples filled with dispassion are learning to climb the steps of the renunciation of 'lust and greed.'

Despite Sri Ramakrishna's severe pain, crowds still come for his darshan. They feel peace and joy when they see him. He is an ocean of motiveless grace, and there is no end to his compassion. He talks to them all, anxious about their welfare. Finally, the doctors – particularly Doctor Sarkar – tell him not to speak at

all. But the doctor himself, who stays there for six or seven hours at a time, says, "You should not talk to anybody else, but you can talk to me."

The doctor is simply enchanted with the nectar of Sri Ramakrishna's words. That is why he stays for such long periods.

M. will go to the doctor at ten o'clock to report Sri Ramakrishna's condition. He speaks to Sri Ramakrishna before going.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I have much less pain. I feel much better. Is it because of the medicine? Should I take that medicine?"

M.: "I'm going to the doctor. I'll tell him everything. He will prescribe what is best."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You know, Purna[1] hasn't been here for two or three days. I'm worried."

M.: "Kali, why don't you go ask Purna to come?"

Kali: "I'll leave immediately."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "The doctor's son is a very good boy. Please ask him to come."

Chapter Two

Conversation between M. and the doctor

Reaching the doctor's house, M. finds him sitting with two or three friends.

Doctor (*to M.*): "I was talking about you just a minute ago. You said you would come at ten o'clock. I've been waiting here for an hour and a half. I was wondering what happened and how he was doing.

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1. Purna Chandra is 14 or 15 years old.

(*To a friend*) "Brother, please sing that song."

The friend sings:

Sing, as long as you live, the name and glories of Him whose splendour illumines the universe,

Whose boundless love streams like nectar, bringing joy to all.

The thought of His compassion brings a thrill, the hair stands on end. What words can express Him, whose grace instantly ends all sorrows!

"On every side – above, below, in water and sky – where is His limit, where is His end?" his seekers forever ask.

He is the abode of consciousness, the great transformer, stainless and pure, the ever-wakeful eye, whose vision leaves not a trace of sorrow.

Doctor (*to M.*): "Isn't it a beautiful song? Particularly the line, "'Where is His limit, where is His end?" his seekers forever ask.'"

M.: "Yes sir, it is indeed very beautiful, a beautiful conception of the Infinite."

Doctor (*affectionately*): "It is quite late. Have you eaten? I finish my meal by ten o'clock and then go out to give consultations. I don't feel well if I go to work without eating. Listen, I have been thinking of inviting you all to a feast."

M.: "That would be fine, sir."

Doctor: "Well, where should it be, here or there? Whatever you prefer."

M.: "Sir, whether it is here or there, everyone will enjoy it."

Now the topic of conversation turns to Mother Kali.

Doctor: "Kali is just a Santhal[1] woman." (*M. laughs loudly*.)

M.: "Sir, where did you get that?"

The doctor: "I heard something like that somewhere." (*M. laughs*.)

The previous day Vijaykrishna and some other devotees had experienced ecstasy. The doctor was present. The conversation turns to it.

Doctor: "I saw it. But is it good to have so much emotion?"

M.: "Paramahamsa Deva says that an excess of ecstasy that comes by meditation on God does not harm you, even if it is very deep. He says, 'The light of a gem soothes the body. It does not burn it.'"

Doctor: "But the lustre of a gem is only reflected light."

M.: "He also says, 'By drowning in the sea of immortality, one does not die. God is the lake of immortality. Diving into it does no harm. In fact, he becomes immortal – provided he has faith in God.'"

Doctor: "Yes, of course."

Doctor Sarkar gets into his carriage. After examining three or four other patients, he will go see the Paramahamsa Deva. On the way, he talks to M. about different things, beginning with [Mahima] Chakravarty's egotism.

M.: "He visits Sri Ramakrishna. Even if he has a little ego, it will fall off in a few days. A person's pride vanishes when he sits near him. It gets

1. Santhal, an aboriginal tribe of India.

crushed. The reason is that he has no egotism. Pride takes flight before a very humble man. Just see what a great person Vidyasagar is. What modesty and humility he showed Thakur. The Paramahamsa Deva went to see him in his Badurbagan house. It was nine in the evening when he said goodbye. Vidyasagar himself carried a light to show the way from the library to the carriage. And he stood there with folded hands till the carriage left."

Doctor: "Well, what does Vidyasagar think of him?"

M.: "He showed him great respect that day. But I think from what he said afterward that he doesn't like what the Vaishnavas call ecstasy. His views are like yours."

Doctor: "I don't like folding hands or touching somebody's feet with my head. There's no difference between the head and the foot, but if you consider feet different, then go ahead and do it."

M.: "You don't like ecstasy or anything like that. The Paramahamsa sometimes calls you a deep soul.[1] Perhaps you remember yesterday he told you that when an elephant goes into a small pond, it makes a big splash, but when it goes into a lake, there's hardly any movement in the water. When the elephant of emotion enters into a deep soul, it can't affect him in any way. He says that you are a deep soul."

1. Gambhir atman.

Doctor: "I don't deserve the compliment. After all, what is ecstasy? It's a feeling. And then there are other feelings too. If love of God and other feelings are deep, some can control them, others cannot."

M.: "Some explain ecstasy this way, others don't. But sir, ecstasy or love of God is unique. I saw Stebbing's book on Darwinism in your library. Stebbing says that whether or not the human mind is the result of evolution or is a special creation of God, it is equally wonderful. He illustrated it with the theory of light. Whether or not you know the wave theory of light, light in either case is wonderful."

Doctor: "Yes. And did you see that Stebbing accepts Darwinism as well as God?"

They again talk of Sri Ramakrishna.

Doctor: "I see that he is a worshiper of Kali."

M.: "What he means by Kali is different. What the Vedas call the Supreme Brahman (Parabrahman), he calls Kali. What the Muslims call Allah or the Christians God, he calls Kali. He doesn't see many gods – he sees only one. What ancient knowers of the Absolute called Brahman, what yogis call Atman, or devotees call Bhagavan, he calls Kali.

"We have heard this from him: A person had a tub of dye. Anybody who wanted his cloth dyed would go to him. The dyer would ask which colour the fellow wanted. If the latter said green, he would dip the cloth in the tub and return it to him, saying, 'Here is your cloth dyed green.' If another asked

him for red, he would dye his cloth in the same tub and say, 'Here is your cloth dyed red.' He would dye the cloth green, blue, yellow – all colours in the same tub. Seeing this amazing spectacle, a person said to him, 'Sir, do you know what colour I want? Please give me the colour of the dye in your tub.' It is the same with Sri Ramakrishna – he has all the attitudes in him. People of all religions find peace and joy in him. Who can comprehend what his feeling is or its depth?"

Doctor: "All things to all men! But this isn't right, even if St. Paul says it."

M.: "Who can fathom his state of mind? We have heard from him that unless you trade in thread, you can't distinguish thread number 40 from thread number 41. Unless you are a painter, you can't appreciate another painter's art. The experience of a saint is very deep. Unless you become like Christ, you can't truly understand Christ. Perhaps the Paramahamsa Deva's state of realization is the same as what Christ meant when he said: 'Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.'"

Doctor: "How have you arranged to look after him in his illness?"

M.: "At present an older devotee is supervising his nursing every day. Some days it is Girish Babu, some days Ram Babu, some days Balaram Babu, some days Suresh Babu, some days Navagopal, and on other days Kali Babu. It is this way."

Chapter Three

With devotees – what can mere learning do?

While they are talking, the doctor's carriage stops before the Shyampukur House where Thakur is staying. It is one o'clock. Thakur is sitting in a room on the first floor, where many devotees, including Girish Ghosh, the Younger Naren, and Sarat sit in front of him. They are all gazing at the great, ever-joyful yogi. They are sitting spellbound like snakes before a charmer, or like the escorts of a bridegroom reveling in a marriage procession. The doctor and M. come in, salute him, and sit down.

Seeing the doctor, Sri Ramakrishna laughs and says, "I'm feeling much better today."

In due course there is conversation on God.

The earlier story – Doctor Ramnarayan – conversation with Bankim

Sri Ramakrishna: "What use is mere learning without discrimination and dispassion? I go into a strange mood when I think of the lotus feet of the Lord. Then the cloth I wear on my body drops. And I feel a strange sensation move up from my feet to my head. Then everything appears to me as mere straw. When I see that a pundit is without discrimination and has no love for God, he appears to me just like a dry piece of straw.

"Doctor Ramnarayan was reasoning with me when I suddenly went into that mood. I said to him, 'What are you saying? What can you understand of Him with your reason? Or what can you understand of His creation? You have the simple mind of a weaver!' Seeing me in that state of mind, he began to cry and stroke my feet."

Doctor: "You see, Doctor Ramnarayan is a Hindu. Besides, he believes in sandal paste and flowers. He is an orthodox Hindu."

M. (*to himself*): The doctor said earlier that he had nothing to do with gongs and conch-shells.[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to doctor*): "Bankim[2] is one of your pundits. I met him once. I asked him, 'What is the duty of man?' He replied, 'Eating, sleeping and procreating.' When I heard him say this, he fell in my estimation. I said, 'What are you saying? How low can you get? Whatever you think day and night, whatever you do all the time, comes out of your mouth. When you eat radish, you belch radish.' Then we had a long conversation about God. There was devotional music, and I danced. Then Bankim said, 'Sir, please visit my house once.' I replied, 'If God wills.' Then he said, 'You will find devotees there too.' I laughed and said, 'My dear, what kind of devotees do you have there? Are they like those who cried, 'Gopal, Gopal?'"

Doctor: "'Gopal, Gopal!' What does that mean?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A goldsmith had a shop. He was a great devotee – a true Vaishnava with beads around his neck, holy marks on his forehead, and a rosary in his hand. Everybody would go to that shop, thinking that he was such a great devotee that he wouldn't cheat them. Seeing a party of

1. Used in ritualistic worship.
2. Bankim Chandra Chatterji is a resident of the Benetola area of Calcutta, a deputy magistrate, and a great devotee. Sri Ramakrishna met him at Adhar Sen's house, and this was their only meeting. Bankim was also the celebrated Bengali author of *Vande Mataram*.

customers, one of his craftsmen would say, 'Keshab, Keshab.' After a while another would recite the name, 'Gopal, Gopal.' After some time, a third would say 'Hari, Hari!' And finally one would utter 'Har-Har.' Hearing so many names of God in the course of work, the customer would naturally say to himself, 'This goldsmith is a man of very high character.' But do you know the truth? The fellow who said, 'Keshab, Keshab,' meant to ask, 'What are they like?' The one who said, 'Gopal, Gopal,' would mean that he had assessed them and found them to be a herd of cows. (*Laughter*.) The one who said, 'Hari, Hari' meant, if they were just a herd of cows, should we rob them? (*Laughter*.) And he who said, 'Har, Har' would mean, 'Yes, yes, do, since they are a herd of cows.' (*Laughter*.)

"I went somewhere with Mathur Babu, and a number of pundits came to argue with me – me, a fool! (*All laugh*.) Seeing me in that strange mood, and after having talked with me, they said, 'Sir, all that we have read, all our knowledge and scholarship, has turned to spittle after talking to you. We now understand that when God's grace is granted, there is no lack of spiritual knowledge. A fool becomes wise, and the dumb begin to speak.' That's why I say that no one becomes learned just by reading books."

Earlier story – first instance of samadhi – manifestation[1] of Saraswati[2] seated in the throat of a fool

"Yes, when you receive His grace, can there be any lack of knowledge? Look, I am a fool, I know nothing. Then who speaks all this? The storehouse of this knowledge is inexhaustible. One day in Kamarpukur I saw them weighing heaps of paddy. As they did, they chanted, 'Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram.' One person was weighing and the other was pushing the heap of paddy toward him as the first heap dwindled. It is the same in my case when I talk. Before I finish, my Divine Mother pushes more from Her inexhaustible store of knowledge.

"During my boyhood God manifested Himself in me. I was eleven and I was going across a field when I saw something above. They say I was completely unconscious, not aware of anything. I have become a different person since then. I began to see another person within me. When I went to worship the deity, my hand, instead of going to the deity, would come to my head and I would offer flowers to it. The young man who was living with me would not come near me. He said, 'I see a strange light in your face. I'm afraid to come near you.'"

1. Avirbhava.
2. Goddess of knowledge.

Chapter Four

Free will or God's will

yantrārūḍhāni māyayā ||

[All beings revolve by His Maya, as though mounted on a machine.]

– Bhagavad Gita 18:61

Sri Ramakrishna: "I am a fool, I know nothing. So who, then, says all this? I say, 'Mother, I am a machine, You are the operator; I am the house, You are the indweller; I am the chariot, You are the charioteer; I do what You make me do; I speak as You make me speak; I move as You make me move. Not I, not I. You, only You.' She is ever victorious. I am merely an instrument. When Radha was carrying a pitcher with a thousand holes and not a drop of water leaked out of it, everybody began to praise her, saying that such a faithful[1] wife is rarely found. Then Radha said, 'Why do you praise me? Instead you should say, "Victory to Krishna, victory to Krishna!" I am merely His maidservant.' In that same mood I once put my foot on Vijay's chest. Though I have such great respect for him, I put my foot on his chest! What would you say to that?"

Doctor: "You should be careful now."

Sri Ramakrishna (*folding his hands*): "How can I help it? When that mood comes over me, I become unaware of everything. I have no idea what I'm doing."

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1. Sati.

Doctor: "You must be careful. It's no use just to fold your hands with humility."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Can I do anything myself in that mood? What do you think of that state? If you think it is pretence, I would say that all your science is less than worthless."

Doctor: "Sir, if I think that, why do I come so often? Look, I neglect my work to come here. I miss visits with many patients while I stay here for six or seven hours!"

I will not fight – the Bhagavad Gita – only God is the doer, Arjuna an instrument

Sri Ramakrishna: "I said to Mathur Babu, 'Don't think that I feel blessed because an important man like you believes me and respects me.' You may respect me or not, but the fact is that a mere man can do nothing. Only God makes one respect another. Before God's power, man is a mere straw."

Doctor: "Do you think I respect you because some fisherman[1] believes you? I have respect and regard for you as a man."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Am I asking you to respect me, brother?"

Girish Ghosh: "Does he ask you to have respect for him?"

Doctor (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Are you saying that it is all God's will?"

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1. Doctor Sarkar is referring here to Mathur Babu (Sejo Babu). He was a fisherman by caste.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What else am I saying? What can a man do before the will of God? Arjuna said in the battle of Kurukshetra, 'I won't fight this battle, I won't kill my relatives.' Sri Krishna said, 'Arjuna, you will have to fight. Your nature will compel you.'[1] Sri Krishna revealed everything to him – that everyone had already been slain.[2] Some Sikhs that came to the temple said that even the leaf of an ashwattha tree trembles by the will of God, that not a single leaf can flutter without His will."

Liberty or necessity – influence of motives

Doctor: "If it is the will of God, why do you chatter? Why do you talk so much to give spiritual knowledge to others?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He makes me talk, so I talk. I am an instrument, He is the operator of the instrument."

Doctor: "You say that you are the instrument. It's all right to say that. Or be quiet knowing that everything is God."

Girish: "Say what you like, brother. But it is He who makes us act. Can anyone take a single step against the Almighty's will?"

Doctor: "But He Himself has given us free will. If I like, I can meditate on God, and if I don't like, I don't have to."

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1. Bhagavad Gita 18:59.

2. mayāivaite nihatāḥ pūrvam eva nimittamātraṁ bhava savyasācin। Bhagavad Gita 11:33. [By Me they have already been destroyed; be you, O skilled archer, a mere instrument!]

Girish: "If you meditate on God or do any other good work, you do it because you like to. It's not you who do these things, but your liking them that makes you do them."

Doctor: "Why? I do them as duties."

Girish: "That's because you like to do your duty."

Doctor: "Suppose a child is being burned. I go to save it out of a sense of duty."

Girish: "You feel happy you are able to save the child. That's why you rush into the fire. It's the positive feeling that makes you go. You take opium in the expectation of enjoying spicy food later." (*All laugh*.)

Knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the knower are the threefold impulse to action[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have to have some kind of faith to take up any work. You think of your objective and take pleasure from that. Only then will you do the work. Suppose there is a metal jar full of gold coins buried in the ground. First you have to know about it, know it's there. When you think of the jar, you feel pleasure. Then you begin to dig into the earth. As you dig, you hear a metallic sound, which makes you happy. Then the side of the jar becomes visible and you are happier still. In this way your happiness gradually increases. Standing on the verandah of the temple, I have seen sadhus preparing to smoke hemp and anticipating the joy."

1. Bhagavad Gita 18:18.

Doctor: "But fire emits both heat and light. You are able to see in the light, but the heat burns your feet. When you do your duty, it's not just that you get pleasure out of it – it also can bring trouble."

M. (*to Girish*): "When your stomach is filled with food, your back can bear the load. There is pleasure even in trouble."

Girish (*to the doctor*): "Duty is dry."

Doctor: "Why so?"

Girish: "Then it must be juicy." (*All laugh.*)

M.: "Very good! Beautiful! You take a bitter pill in the hope of something spicy later on."

Girish (*to the doctor*): "You must feel that duty is pleasant. Why else would you do it?"

Doctor: "Because my mind is inclined that way."

M. (*to Girish*): "Your nature pulls you to it. (*Laughter.*) If it is the inclination of your nature, where does free will come in?"

Doctor: "I don't say that a person is absolutely free. A cow tied to a post is free only as far as the rope allows. The pull of the rope…"

Sri Ramakrishna and free will

Sri Ramakrishna: "Jadu Mallick also gave this illustration. (*To the Younger Naren*) Is it in some English book?

(*To the doctor*) "Look, it is God who does everything. 'He is the operator and I am the instrument.' If you can have this faith, you will

become liberated in this very life.[1] 'You (God) do Your own work, but people say they are doing it.' Do you know how it is? There is a beautiful illustration in the Vedanta. Rice is being cooked in a pot. Potatoes and eggplant have been put in with it. After a while the potatoes and eggplant begin to jump up and down as though they were proud of themselves – 'I am moving, I am jumping up and down!' When young children see it, they think that the potatoes, rice, and eggplant are alive and jumping up and down. But their elders, who know better, explain that the potatoes, eggplant, and rice are not animate; they don't jump up and down by themselves. The moment you remove the burning log from under them, they stop moving. 'I am the doer' – this pride of man is the result of ignorance. People are powerful only by God's power. Everything becomes quiet when you pull that burning log out from under. Marionettes dance beautifully when their strings are in the hands of a puppeteer, but the moment the strings fall from his hands, they can't move.

"As long as you have not seen God, as long as you haven't touched the philosopher's stone, you remain under the delusion that you are the doer – that you are doing right or doing wrong. This awareness persists. The feeling of distinction is God's maya and is necessary to run His world of illusion. But by taking refuge in the maya of knowledge,[2] by taking the road of truth, you can realize Him. He who realizes God, who gets His

1. Jivanmukta.
2. Vidyamaya.

vision, he alone can cross over His maya. 'God alone is the doer; I do nothing': someone who has this faith becomes liberated in this very life. I said that to Keshab Sen."

Girish (*to the doctor*): "Free will, how do you know it exists?"

Doctor: "Not by reason. I feel it."

Girish: "But I and others feel it otherwise." (*All laugh*.)

Doctor: "There are two elements to duty. One, I go to work out of a sense of duty. Two, I find pleasure in it. But initially I don't perform duty in the hope of pleasure. When I was a child, I noticed that the priest was very worried to see ants on the sandesh to be offered. The thought of the sweets gave him no pleasure. (*Smiling*) Instead, he felt worried."

M. (*to himself*): "It is very difficult to say whether one feels pleasure while doing a duty or thinking of it afterward. Where is free will if action is impelled by pleasure?"

Chapter Five

Spontaneous love of God[1] – earlier story of his life: Sri Ramakrishna's attitude of being a servant of God

Sri Ramakrishna: "What he (the doctor) is talking about is called devotion without any selfish motive: I don't want anything from Mahendra Sarkar. I want nothing, but I like to see him. This

1. Ahetuki bhakti.

actually is called selfless love. If I derive a little pleasure out of it, how can I help that?

"Ahalya said, 'Rama, I don't mind even being born a pig, but I wish for pure love and devotion at Your lotus feet. I want nothing else.'

"Narada went to see Sri Ramachandra at Ayodhya to remind him that he was to slay Ravana. Seeing Sita and Rama, he began to chant their praises. Delighted with his devotion, Ramachandra said, 'Narada, I am pleased with your chants; please ask for a boon.' Narada said, 'Rama, if you must grant me a boon, please grant that I may have pure love and devotion for your lotus feet. And may your world-bewitching maya not enchant me.' Rama said, 'Ask for another boon.' Narada replied, 'I want nothing more. I only want pure love for Your lotus feet.'

"It is the same with him (the doctor). He only wants to see God. He doesn't want wealth, honour, and physical comforts. He wants nothing at all. This is called pure love and devotion.

"It does give some pleasure, but it's not the pleasure of the senses. It's the pleasure of devotion to God and ecstatic love. Sambhu Mallick once said when I went to visit him, 'You come here because you feel happy talking to me.' Yes, there is that bit of happiness.

"But there is a state higher than this, when one wanders around aimlessly like a child, perhaps just to catch a grasshopper.

(*To the devotees*) "Do you understand his (the doctor's) attitude? It is a prayer: 'O God, grant me

the right inclination so that I won't be tempted to do wrong.'

"I also felt this state. It is called the attitude of a servant. I used to cry, 'Mother, Mother' so desperately that people would gather around me. When I was in this state, someone brought a prostitute to my room to tempt me and cure me of my madness. She was a beautiful woman with pretty eyes. I ran out of the room crying, 'Mother, Mother.' Shouting for Haladhari, I said, 'Brother, come and see who has entered my room!' I told him and others about the woman. In this state I used to weep, crying, 'Mother, Mother, save me! Mother, purify me so that my mind doesn't go from truth to untruth!' (*To the doctor*) This attitude of yours is good. It is the attitude of a devotee,[1] the attitude of a servant of God."

Doing good to mankind – ordinary people – selfless work and purity of character[2]

"If someone is pure in character, he thinks only of God. He likes nothing else. Some people are born with pure sattva because of their past actions.[3] By striving to act selflessly, one finally attains pure sattva. When sattva is mixed with rajas, the mind is diverted. Then one is possessed by the vanity of doing good to the world – but it's very difficult for an ordinary person to do good to the world. However, there is no harm in working selflessly to do good.[4] It's very good for a person to try to work

1. Bhakti bhava.
2. Sattva.
3. Prarabdha karma.
4 . Nishkama karma

in this way, but it isn't possible for everybody. It's very difficult. Of course everybody has to work; only a few can give up work altogether. Pure sattva is found in only a very few. But when a person works selflessly, the quality of sattva mixed with rajas gradually turns into pure sattva.

"It's only when one has developed pure sattva that he realizes God, through His grace.

"An ordinary person can't understand the state of pure sattva. Hem once said to me, 'Well, my dear priest,[1] isn't the aim of life to earn name and fame in the world? Don't you think so?'"

1. Hem addressed Ramakrishna as Mr. Bhattacharya, a title of respect for priests. His remark is tinged with sarcasm and suggests that even so-called holy people can be attached to name and fame.

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra, Doctor Sarkar, Girish Ghosh, and Other Devotees

Joyful Conversation

Chapter One

The joy of devotional music – in samadhi

The next day at half past five, Tuesday, 27 October 1885. Narendra, Doctor Sarkar, Shyam Bose, Girish, Doctor Dukari, the Younger Naren, Rakhal, M., and others have come. The doctor feels Sri Ramakrishna's pulse and prescribes medicine.

Thakur talks about his pain and takes the medicine. After that the doctor says, "Now talk with Shyam Babu and I will leave."

Sri Ramakrishna and a devotee ask him, "Would you like to hear a song?"

Doctor: "You become so emotional. You have to keep your feelings under control."

The doctor sits down again. Narendra begins to sing in a sweet voice to the accompaniment of the tanpura (a stringed drone) and mridanga (drum). He sings:

> Wonderful and infinite is this world of Yours,
> This universe, a treasury of beauty.

The stars shine like a necklace of thousands of gems;
Innumerable are the moons and suns.

The earth luxuriates with a wealth of grain,
And full indeed is Your storehouse.

O great Lord, countless are the people who ceaselessly sing Your praise!

Then he sings a second song:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Your formless beauty sparkles. And so the yogi meditates in a dark mountain cave.

In the lap of infinite darkness, on the waves of the great silence,[1] eternal peace and joy float without end.

Putting on the form of the Formless One, in darkness draped, O Mother, who are You seated alone in boundless bliss?

At the lotus of Your fear-dispelling feet flashes the lightning of love, while loud and earth-shaking laughter issues from Your dazzling face.

The doctor says to M., "This is dangerous for him, this singing. If he goes into ecstasy, it could be dangerous."

Sri Ramakrishna asks M. what the doctor said. M. replies, "The doctor is afraid a song will excite your feelings and bring on samadhi." Even while he speaks, Sri Ramakrishna goes into an ecstatic mood. Looking at the doctor with folded hands, he says, "No, no. Why should I go into samadhi?" However, even while saying this, he goes into deep samadhi, his body still, his eyes fixed. Speechless and unaware of the outside world, he resembles a wooden statue. His mind, intellect, and ego are all turned inward. He is no longer the same person.

1. Nirvana.

Narendra continues singing the sweet song with his melodious voice:

What wondrous beauty, what an enchanting face I see!

The Lord of my soul has entered my humble hut, and the spring of love wells forth.

O Lord, beloved of my heart, what treasure shall I offer You?

Accept my soul, accept my life; whatever I have, accept all that from me.

And again:

O gracious Lord, what happiness can there be in life if the bee of my soul is not lost forever in the lotus of Your feet?

What can I gain from limitless wealth if I do not seek the gem supreme?

I do not wish to behold a child's tender face
if there I cannot catch a glimpse of Your loving countenance.

Moonlight has no meaning for me: I see darkness everywhere, unless in that moonlight I behold Your loving face.

Even the untainted gold of the chaste wife's love is stained, unless it holds the gem of Your love.

O Lord, doubt bites me endlessly, a deadly serpent whose venom dilutes my love for You.

What more can I say, my Lord? You are the precious jewel of my heart, the abode of my joy.

When the doctor hears the line, "Even the untainted gold of the chaste wife's love," his eyes fill with tears and he exclaims, "Ah! Ah!"

Narendra sings another song:

Oh, when will ecstatic love dawn in my heart? When shall I, wishing for nothing else, chant Hari's name while tears stream from my eyes?

When will my life breath and mind be pure, when shall I, a pilgrim to the Vrindavan of love, shed my worldly bonds?

When will the collyrium of knowledge drive away the darkness from my eyes?

When, by the touch of the philosopher's stone, will this body of iron turn to gold?

When shall I see the universe pervaded by God and be immersed in love divine?

Oh, when shall I be free from rites and work and the pride of family and caste?

When will fear and shame loosen their hold, and I be freed from convention's pride?

My body besmeared with the dust of devotees' feet, the sweet burden of perpetual dispassion on my shoulders, I shall scoop up the Yamuna's water of love divine and drink it from my hands.

Then drunk with love, I shall weep and laugh and swim in the sea of Sachchidananda.

Mad myself, I shall make others mad and dwell always at the feet of the Lord.

Chapter Two

Jnana and vijnana[1] – perception of Brahman

In the meantime Sri Ramakrishna regains outer consciousness. The songs have ended. Now a very interesting talk begins, intriguing to every type of

1. An intimate knowledge of God by which the universe and all living beings are seen as manifestations of the divine.

person – scholar and fool, young and old, man and woman – to all without distinction. All are spellbound, gazing at Thakur's beautiful face. Where is his terrible pain now? His face looks like a lotus in full bloom, shining with divine light. Addressing the doctor, Thakur says, "Give up false modesty. Why be ashamed of repeating the name of God? As the proverb goes, 'Shame, hatred, and fear keep one from attaining God.' You think, I am a great man, so I can't dance and utter the name of the Lord; if other big people hear of it, what will they think of me? It would be a shame for them to say, 'The doctor was dancing and chanting the name of the Lord!' Give up such ideas."

Doctor: "I don't think that way. I don't care what others say."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You are too much that way! (*All laugh*.)

"Listen, go beyond knowledge and ignorance.[1] Only then will you be able to know God. Knowledge of many things is ignorance. Pride of learning is also ignorance. 'God pervades all' – this conviction is knowledge. Knowing Him intimately is called vijnana. Say a thorn has stuck into your foot. You need another thorn to take it out. When you have taken out the thorn that pricked you, you throw them both away. To remove the thorn of ignorance, you first have to acquire the thorn of knowledge. Then both the thorns of knowledge and ignorance have to be thrown away. He is beyond knowledge and ignorance. Lakshmana said to Rama, 'How

1. Jnana and ajnana.

strange! Vasishtha Deva[1] is such a wise man, but even he wept inconsolably at the death of his son.' Rama said, 'Brother, he who has knowledge also has ignorance. He who has knowledge of one kind also has knowledge of other kinds. He who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. Brahman is beyond knowledge and ignorance, beyond virtue and vice, beyond righteousness and unrighteousness, beyond purity and impurity.'"

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna recites a song of Ramprasad:

> Come, O mind, let us go for a walk to Kali, the wish-fulfilling tree and gather there the four fruits of life.
>
> Of your two wives, Worldliness and Dispassion, take only Dispassion along, and ask her eldest son, Discrimination, for the truth about Reality.[2]

Beyond speech and mind – the real nature of Brahman cannot be described

Shyam Bose: "What will remain when both thorns are thrown away?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The eternal, ever-pure Consciousness[3] – the Essence. How can I make it clear to you? If somebody asks you how ghee[4] tastes, how can you explain it? At the most you can say, 'What is ghee like? It's just like ghee.' A girl said to her friend, 'Your husband has arrived. Tell me, what is the joy you feel?' The friend said, 'Sister, you will only know when you have a husband. How can I tell you?' The Purana says that

1. Rama's preceptor and a holy sage.
2. For complete song see: Section II, Chapter VI.
3. Nitya-shuddha-bodha-rupam.
4. Clarified butter.

when Bhagavati, the divine Mother, took birth in the house of Himalaya, She showed Herself to Him in various forms. When Giriraj (the Lord of the mountains, Himalaya) had seen Her in many forms, He said to Her, 'Mother, may I now have the vision of Brahman mentioned in the Vedas?' Bhagavati replied, 'Father, if you want to see Brahman, you must have the company of holy people.'

"What Brahman is cannot be explained in words. Someone said, 'Everything has been made impure by the tongue, but Brahman has never been defiled.' It means that the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and other scriptures may be said to have been defiled because they are recited by the tongues of men. But what Brahman is, nobody has yet been able to express in speech. So Brahman has not yet been defiled. One cannot describe in words the play and communion with Sat-chit-ananda. Only he knows who has experienced it."

Chapter Three

The pride of a pundit – vice and virtue

Addressing the doctor again, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Look, you cannot attain knowledge until you are rid of the ego. There is a saying: 'When shall I be free? When "I" ceases to be.' 'My' and 'mine' are ignorance; 'You' and 'Yours' are knowledge. A devotee says, 'O God, You alone are the doer. You alone do everything. I am only an instrument. I do what You make me do. And all this splendour, this universe, is Yours. This house, this family, is Yours

– nothing is mine. I am Your servant. I have only the right to serve You as You command.'

"Anybody who has read even a little begins at once to put on airs. I had a talk about God with Kalikrishna Tagore. He said, 'I know all that.' I said, 'Does a person who visits Delhi brag about it? Does a babu[1] go around saying he's a gentleman?'"

Shyam Bose: "But Kalikrishna Tagore has great respect for you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What can I say, brother? There was a scavenger woman at the temple garden in Dakshineswar. So puffed up because she had some jewelry! One day when she was walking on the path, a few people passed by her. Angrily she shouted at them, 'Hey, get out of my way!' If she could be so arrogant, what can I say about the pride of others?"

Shyam Bose: "Sir, there is punishment for sins. How can you say that God is doing everything?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have the intellect of a goldsmith."

Narendra: "A 'goldsmith's intellect' means a calculating mind."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I tell you, eat the mangoes! What's the use of calculating how many hundreds of trees there are in the orchard, how many thousands of branches, how many millions of leaves? Why calculate all this? You've come to eat mangoes. Eat them!

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1. A man of a highly respectable family or social position.

(*To Shyam Bose*) "You've been born in this world to worship God. Try to gain love and devotion for His lotus feet! Why bother with other things? What will you gain by philosophizing? Look, you can get drunk with only a little wine. Why do you have to know how many measures of wine there are in the wine shop?"

Doctor: "Besides, God's wine is infinite. It has no measure."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shyam Bose*): "Give your general power of attorney to God. Lay the whole burden on Him. If you give responsibility to an honest fellow, will he deceive you? It's for God alone to know whether or not He will punish you."

Doctor: "Only He knows what is in His mind. How can anyone figure it out? God is above and beyond all human calculation!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shyam Bose*): "You Calcutta people have only this to say: God is partial because He makes one person happy and another miserable. Whatever these rascals see in themselves, they see in God."

Is earning name and fame the aim of life?

"Hem used to visit Dakshineswar. Whenever he saw me, he would say, 'Well, revered priest, isn't earning a name in the world the main thing?' You see, very few people say that the aim of human life is God-realization."

Chapter Four

The gross, the subtle, the causal, and the Great Cause

Shyam Bose: "Can anyone show us the subtle body? Can anyone demonstrate that this very subtle body leaves the gross body?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A true devotee doesn't care a whit to show you all this. What does he care if some fool believes him or not? He doesn't care whether he influences some big fellow or not."

Shyam Bose: "Well, what is the difference between the gross body and the subtle body?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The body that is made of five elements is the gross body. The subtle body is the mind, the intellect, the ego, and the mind-stuff. That by which one enjoys the bliss of God and communion with Him is the causal body. It is called 'Bhagavati tanu'[1] in the Tantra – the Divine Body. Last of all is the Great Cause[2] which cannot be expressed in words."

Need for spiritual disciplines – devotion to God alone matters

"What is the use of just listening to all this? You have to do something.

"What is the use of shouting, 'Hemp, hemp?'[3] Will that make you high?

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1. The Causal body, derived from the Mother of Universe (Bhagavati).
2. Mahakarana, the unconditioned turiya.
3. A play on words: siddhi means both "attainment" and "hemp."

"You can't get high even if you rub hemp-paste on your body. You have to eat some. Which is number 41 grade yarn and which is number 40? You can't tell unless you work in the yarn trade. A person in the trade has no difficulty at all picking out yarn of a particular grade. So I say, practice some spiritual disciplines. Then you will know it all – the gross, the subtle, the causal and the Great Cause. When you pray to God, just pray for love at His lotus feet.

"After Ahalya was freed from the curse, Ramachandra said to her, 'Ask for a boon from me.' Ahalya said, 'Rama, if you wish to grant me a boon, grant that even if I am born a pig, my mind will always dwell at your lotus feet.'

"I asked the Divine Mother only for love and devotion. Offering flowers at Her feet and folding my hands, I said: 'O Mother, here is Your knowledge, here is Your ignorance; please grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your purity, here is Your impurity, just grant me pure devotion. Here are Your virtuous acts, here is vice, just grant me pure love. Here is Your righteousness, here is Your unrighteousness, just grant me pure devotion.

"Righteousness – charitable work and so on. If you accept righteousness, you will also have to accept unrighteousness. If you accept virtue, you will also have to accept vice. If you believe in knowledge, you will have to accept ignorance too. If you accept ritual purity, you will also have to accept ritual impurity. If you are aware of light, you are also aware of darkness. If you have the knowledge of one, you also have the knowledge of

many. The person who has knowledge of good also has knowledge of what is evil.

"If a person has love and devotion for the lotus feet of God, even though he may eat pork, he is blessed. On the other hand, if a person's mind is attached to the world, even if he lives on boiled rice with clarified butter…"

Doctor: "That's not right. Let me tell you something. Buddha ate pork and he suffered from colic. Because of the pain, he took opium. Do you know what nirvana and all that is? Taking opium and remaining sedated. He'd lose all external consciousness. This was his nirvana."

Everybody laughs to hear such an interpretation of Buddha's nirvana. The conversation continues.

Chapter Five

Household and selfless work – Theosophy

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shyam Bose*): "There is no harm in leading a householder life. But you must do your work selflessly, fixing your mind at the lotus feet of God. You see, if a person has a boil on his back, he talks to everybody and attends to his work too, but his mind is always on the boil. It is the same.

"Or live in the world like an unchaste woman. Her mind is drawn to her lover even while she's performing her household duties. (*To the doctor*) Do you understand?"

Doctor: "If I don't have such an attitude, how can I understand?"

Shyam Bose: "You do understand it a little. Don't you?" (*Everybody laughs*.)

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "He has been in this trade for quite some time. Isn't that true?" (*All laugh*.)

Shyam Bose: "Sir, what do you think of Theosophy?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The thing is that people who go around making disciples are of inferior calibre. And those who want occult powers are also of a lower class. For example, the power to walk across the Ganges on foot, or to be able to tell what a person is saying at some distant place – that is an occult power. It is very difficult for such a person to have pure love for God."

Shyam Bose: "But the Theosophists are trying to re-establish Hinduism."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I don't know much about them."

Shyam Bose: "Where the embodied soul[1] goes after death – whether to the region of the moon or some planet and so on – is all explained in Theosophy."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That may be so. But do you know how I feel? Somebody asked Hanuman, 'What day and date is today?' Hanuman said, 'I don't know the day, nor the date, nor the position of the planets – nothing. I only think about Rama.' My attitude is exactly like that."

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1. Jivatman.

Shyam Bose: "They believe in Great Souls.[1] Do you?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you believe in my words, I say yes. Now leave these matters alone. Come when I feel a little better. If you have faith in me, you will find some way to peace. Don't you notice that I don't accept money or gifts of clothes? No offering has to be made here. That is why so many people visit me. (*All laugh*.)

(*To the doctor*) "I want to say this. Please don't take offense. You have done all these things – earned money and name, lectured. Now fix your mind on God for a while. And come here now and then. Talking about God is inspiring."

After some time the doctor rises to leave. At the same time Girish Ghosh arrives and, taking the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet, takes a seat. The doctor is happy to see him and sits down again.

Doctor: "The whole time I was here, he didn't come. Just as I rise to leave, he arrives!" (*All laugh*.)

The doctor and Girish begin to talk about the Science Association.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Will you take me there some time?"

Doctor: "If you go there, you will lose consciousness seeing all the wonderful works of God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Really?"

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1. Mahatmas.

Chapter Six

Adoration of the guru

Doctor (*to Girish*): "Do whatever you like, but please do not worship him as God. By doing so, you are bringing ruin to such a good man."

Girish: "Sir, how can I help it? How else can I feel about him who has taken me across the ocean of the world and the ocean of doubt? Tell me, can I even look on his excrement as excrement?"

Doctor: "It's not a matter of excrement. That doesn't disgust me either. One day a shopkeeper's son came to see me and he defecated. Everybody covered their noses with cloths. I sat beside him for half an hour and didn't bring my handkerchief to my nose. I don't even cover my nose when a scavenger passes by with a bucket on his head. I know that I am the same as he. How can I feel revulsion? Can't I take the dust of his (Sri Ramakrishna's) feet? See, I take it." (*He takes the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet.*)

Girish: "The angels are ringing bells at this moment."

Doctor: "What is strange about taking the dust of a man's feet? I can take dust of anybody's feet. See? Watch me take it! (*He takes the dust of everybody's feet.*)

Narendra (*to the doctor*): "We consider him to be like God. Do you know what it is like? There is a point somewhere between the vegetable and the animal kingdoms where it is very difficult to distinguish whether something is animate or

inanimate. In the same way, there is a point between the man-world and the God-world where it is difficult to tell whether a person is human or God."

Doctor: "Well, dear brother, analogies do not apply to God."

Narendra: "I'm not saying that he is God. I am only saying that he is a godlike man."

Doctor: "One should not give vent to such feelings. It's not good to express them. Nobody understands my own feelings. Even my best friends think of me as hard and cruel. Maybe even you people will turn me out after beating me with your shoes."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "How can you say that? These people have great affection for you. They await your arrival as eagerly as the ladies in a bridal chamber await the coming bride-groom."

Girish: "Everyone has the greatest respect for you."

Doctor: "My son and even my wife think of me as hard-hearted. It is because I don't express my feelings to anybody."

Girish: "In that case, sir, you'd better open the doors of your heart out of pity for your friends so they can understand you."

Doctor: "What can I say? My feelings get worked up even more than yours. (*To Narendra*) I shed tears in solitude."

Godlike men assume mankind's karma – Narendra's attitude

Doctor (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Well, sometimes in ecstasy you place your feet on people. That's not good."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But do you think I know that I'm putting my foot on anybody?"

Doctor: "You don't think it's right, do you?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "How can I tell you what happens to me in the state of samadhi? After I come down from it, I think that maybe I have this disease because of it. The thought of God makes me mad. All this happens in a state of divine madness. How can I help it?"

Doctor: "He agrees with me. He expresses regret for what he does. He knows that such an act is sinful."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "You are very clever. Why don't you answer? Explain it to him."

Girish (*to the doctor*): "Sir, you are mistaken. He is not sorry for that. His body is pure, untouched by sin. He touches people for their good. There is a great possibility of his getting a disease by taking their sins on himself. That is what he thinks sometimes. When you had colic pain, didn't you regret having stayed up late at night and reading? Does that mean it's bad to stay awake and read at night? He may regret that he's ill, but he doesn't think that it's wrong to touch others for their good."

Doctor (*embarrassed, to Girish*): "I stand defeated. Give me the dust of your feet. (*He takes the dust of Girish's feet.*)

(*To Narendra*) "I have to acknowledge his intellectual power."

Narendra (*to the doctor*): "And think of it this way too. You can devote your life to the discovery of scientific truth and not care about physical hardship and comfort. Can he not risk his health for God, the greatest of all sciences?"

Doctor: "All religious reformers – Jesus, Chaitanya, Buddha and Mohammed – were filled with conceit in the end, saying, 'Only what I say is true.' What's this all about!"

Girish (*to the doctor*): "Sir, you are now guilty of the same fault. You have the arrogance of all of them combined. When you point out their egotism, you are guilty of it yourself."

The doctor is silent.

Narendra (*to the doctor*): "We offer him worship bordering on divine worship."

Sri Ramakrishna laughs with delight, like a child.

Appendix I

Baranagore Math

Today is Monday, 9 May 1887, the second day of the dark fortnight of Jaishtha. Narendra and other devotees are in the monastery. Sarat, Baburam, and Kali have gone to Sri Kshetra.[1] Niranjan has gone to see his mother. M. is at the monastery.

The brothers of the Math are resting after the midday meal. The Elder Gopal is copying some songs into a music notebook.

It is afternoon. Rabindra enters like a madman, barefoot and wearing only half a black-bordered dhoti. His eyes are rolling like a madman's. They all ask, "What has happened?" Rabindra says, "Wait. I'll tell you everything in a little while – but I won't go back home. I will stay here with you. She's a traitor. What do you think of this? I had a drinking habit for five years, and I gave it up for her sake. That was eight months ago. Not a drop. She's betrayed my trust!"

The brothers of the monastery say, "Calm down, please. How did you get here?"

Rabindra: "I walked barefoot all the way from Calcutta."

The devotees ask, "Where is the other half of your dhoti?"

Rabindra says, "She tugged at it when I left and it got torn off."

---

1. Jagannath Puri, an ancient place of pilgrimage in Orissa state.

The devotees say, "Please go take a bath in the Ganges and cool off. Then we'll talk."

Rabindra belongs to a respectable Kayastha family of Calcutta. He is between twenty and twenty-two years old. He met Sri Ramakrishna at the Kali temple in Dakshineswar and received his special grace. Once he spent three nights with Thakur. He is a man of very gentle and sweet nature. Thakur showed him great affection but said, "It will take you some time. There is still some desire for sense enjoyments in you. Nothing is possible just now. The police can't do anything the very moment a theft takes place. When it quiets down a little, the police come and arrest the guilty."

Rabindra has become infatuated with a prostitute, but he has all the other virtues – compassion for the poor, contemplation of God, and so on. Learning that the woman was unfaithful to him, he arrives at the monastery in a torn dhoti and resolves not to return to the world.

Rabindra goes to the Paramanik Ghat for a bath in the Ganges. A devotee accompanies him, hopeful that the company of holy men will awaken the young man's spiritual consciousness. After the bath he takes Rabindra to the cremation ground near the ghat and shows him a dead body, saying, "The brothers of the monastery come here alone at night to meditate. It is good for us to meditate here. Here one sees clearly that the world is transitory." Hearing this, Rabindra sits down to meditate, but he cannot meditate for long. His mind is too restless.

Both men return to the monastery and bowed down to Thakur in the shrine. The devotee tells Rabindra that the brothers meditate in this room.

Rabindra sits to meditate for a while but cannot continue for long.

Mani: "How do you feel? Is your mind very restless? Is that why you got up? You probably couldn't concentrate properly."

Rabindra: "I am definitely not going back to the world. Even if my mind isn't settled down."

Mani and Rabindra stand in a quiet spot in the monastery. Mani tells a story from the life of Buddha: Buddha first attained spiritual awareness by listening to a song of some celestial maidens. These days the lives of Buddha and Chaitanya are continually discussed in the monastery. Mani sings:

> We long for peace, but where can it be found?
>
> Where we come from and where we go, we do not know.
>
> Again and again returning, with laughter and tears without end,
>
> We wonder all the while where our paths will lead.

That night Narendra, Tarak, and Harish return from Calcutta, where they had been invited to eat at a devotee's house. When they arrive, they say, "Oh, what a feast we had!"

Narendra, the brothers of the monastery, M., Rabindra, and others are all sitting in "the room of the demons."[1] Narendra hears Rabindra's news.

1. Danas; the monastic brothers were nicknamed "demons."

Grief-stricken man and Narendra's counsel

Narendra sings, as though to instruct Rabindra through the song:

Give up, O man, and cast aside any wrong advice.

You will be freed from your pain when you have known the Lord.

Narendra sings again as if advising Rabindra:

Aspiring soul, imbibe the bliss from Hari's cup of love, become intoxicated!

One's childhood is spent in play, and adulthood infatuated with woman.

In old age one falls prey to bodily ills and lies in bed from morning till dusk.

How can delusion be removed? As the musk deer roams the forest, not knowing

That the sweet-scented musk that draws it ever onward rests in its own navel,

So without the guru one's searches will be in vain.

After some time the brothers of the Math come into Kali Tapasvi's room.[1] Girish has just sent two of his new books to them, *Buddha Charita* and *Chaitanya Charita.* Narendra, Sashi, Rakhal, Prasanna, M., and some other devotees are present. Since coming to the new monastery (Baranagore), Sashi has devoted himself heart and soul to worshiping Thakur. They are all amazed at his devotion. In the same way that he served Thakur day and night during his illness, he now worships him single-mindedly with deep devotion.

1. Kali Tapasvi later became Swami Abhedananda. Tapasvi means ascetic.

One brother of the monastery reads from *Buddha Charita* and *Chaitanya Charita.* He reads *Chaitanya Charita* somewhat sarcastically. Narendra snatches the book away from him and says, "You spoil a good thing doing that!"

Narendra himself reads about Chaitanya Deva's showering of love.

A brother of the Math: "I say that nobody can give love to another."

Narendra: "Paramahamsa gave love to me."

Brother: "Are you sure you got it?"

Narendra: "What can you understand? You belong to the servant class.[1] All of you will serve me and massage my feet – even Sarat, Mitir, and Deso. (*All laugh*.) Don't flatter yourself that you've understood everything. (*Laughter*.) Go and prepare a smoke for me." (*All laugh*.)

Brother: "No… I will… not…"

M. (*to himself*): Sri Ramakrishna has infused mettle in many of the brothers of the monastery, not only in Narendra. Without such mettle is it possible to renounce "lust and greed"?

Spiritual practices of the monastic brothers

The next day is Tuesday, 10 May, the day of the Divine Mother. Narendra and the other brothers are going to offer a special puja to the Mother of the Universe. A triangular yantra (sacred diagram) has been drawn in front of Thakur's shrine. They will

1. God's servant class.

perform a homa,[1] followed by animal sacrifice. According to the Tantra both homa and sacrifice have to be performed. Narendra reads from the Gita.

Mani goes for a dip in the Ganges. Rabindra paces the roof all alone. He hears Narendra chanting melodiously:

Om, I am neither the mind, the intellect, the ego, nor the mind-stuff,

Nor I am the ears, the tongue, the nostrils, the eyes.

I am neither the sky nor earth nor fire nor air.

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

I am neither the life-breath nor the five vital forces;[2]

not the seven metals, not the five sheaths.[3]

Neither speech nor hands nor feet nor genitals nor anus am I.

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

I have neither attachment nor enmity, neither greed nor infatuation.

Neither vanity nor envy have I.

I have neither righteousness, wealth, desire, nor liberation.[4]

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

I know nothing of virtue and vice, nothing of happiness and sorrow.

---

1. Vedic sacrifice in which oblations are offered into fire.
2. The five "breaths": prana, apana, samana, vyana, and udana.
3. The five coverings of the atman: the physical body (annamayakosha), the life-force (pranamayakosha), the mental sheath (manomayakosha), the intelligent will (vijnanamayakosha), and the causal body (anandamayakosha).
4. Dharma, artha, kama, moksha – the four goals of human life.

I am neither mantra, nor place of pilgrimage, nor Veda, nor ritual;

Neither the eater of food, nor eating, nor food.

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

Rabindra returns after his bath in the Ganges. His dhoti is wet.

Narendra (*in a whisper, to Mani*): "He has just taken his bath. It's the right time to initiate him into sannyas. (*Mani and Narendra laugh*.)

Prasanna asks Rabindra to change and gives him a gerua dhoti.

Narendra (*to Mani*): "Now he's going to wear the cloth of renunciation."

Mani: "What kind of renunciation?"

Narendra: "Renunciation of 'lust and greed.'"

Rabindra puts on the ochre cloth and goes into Kali Tapasvi's room to sit there alone. Perhaps he will meditate for a while.

Appendix II

Letter from Aswini Kumar to M.

Sri Ramakrishna with Aswini Kumar and other devotees

Keshab Sen (1881), Devendranath Tagore, Achalananda, Shivanath, Hriday, Narendra, and Girish

Beloved brother M.,

I received the fourth part of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* sent by you on the day of Kojagar Purnima,[1] and finished reading it today, the second day of the lunar month. Blessed you are. You have showered nectar on the whole country.

Some time ago you wanted to know what conversations I had with Thakur. I shall try to tell you about them. But I am not as lucky as M., to be able to write down the day, the date, the position of planets, of my visits with him, and to account for all the words that poured from his holy lips. I write what I remember. It is possible that I mistake the date of one conversation with another. Besides, I don't remember everything.

The first time I met Thakur was probably during the autumn holidays of 1881. Keshab Babu was expected on that day. I went to Dakshineswar by boat. When I reached the ghat, I asked someone where the Paramahamsa was. Pointing to the northern verandah, to a person resting against a bolster, he said, "He's the Paramahamsa." Seeing

1. The full moon day of Lakshmi Puja.

him clad in a black-bordered cloth and resting against a bolster, I said to myself, "What kind of a paramahamsa is that?" But then I saw that he was half leaning against the big pillow with his hands holding his drawn-up knees. I said to myself, He doesn't know how to rest against a pillow like a gentleman. So maybe he is the paramahamsa." I saw a gentleman sitting to his right very near the pillow and was told that he was Rajendra Mitra, who later became the Assistant Secretary of the Bengal Government. There were many others sitting on his right. In a few minutes he said to Rajendra, "See if Keshab is coming." Only a short time before someone had come to tell him that Keshab was not there. Hearing a sound, he again said, "Just go see. Check again." This time too a person came back and said, "No." The Paramahamsa laughed and said, "Leaves rustle in the wind and Radha says, 'Here comes my beloved!' You know, Keshab has been doing this for a long time: he is coming; no, he hasn't come."

After some time, as evening approached, Keshab arrived with his group. He bowed low before Thakur and touched his forehead to the ground. Thakur did the same. When he raised his head, he was in samadhi. He said, "You have brought all the residents of Calcutta, as if I'm going to deliver a lecture. But I won't be able to do that. Do it yourself if you like. I can't do all that."

With a divine smile on his face, in the same state, he said, "I shall eat, I shall drink, I shall stay at your house. I shall eat, sleep, and defecate at your house. But I can't give lectures." Keshab Sen

gazed at him and was filled with emotion. He said again and again, "Ah, ah me."

Seeing this state of Thakur I thought, Is he pretending? I've never seen anything like this before. And you know what faith I have.

After coming down from samadhi, he said to Keshab, "Keshab, one day I went to your place and heard you say: 'Having dived into the river of God's love, we will reach the sea of Sat-chit-ananda.' Then I looked up [to where Keshab's wife and other ladies were sitting] and said to myself: 'Then what will happen to them?' You are householders. How will you fall so suddenly into the sea of Sat-chit-ananda? You are like a mongoose with a brick tied to its tail. Hearing just a little noise, it climbs up into its niche, but how can it stay there? That brick pulls it and it falls down to the ground. You householders can practice a little meditation and so on, but the brick of a wife and children will pull you down to earth again. You may dive into the river of love for a while, but you'll soon come up again. It will continue like this. How can you dive for good?"

Keshab said: "Isn't it possible for a householder? What about Maharshi Devendranath Tagore?"

The Paramahamsa Deva repeated "Devendranath Tagore, Devendra, Devendra" twice or thrice, bowed to him a few times, and said, "You know, there was a person who used to celebrate the worship of Durga and from morning till evening slaughtered goats as sacrifice to Her. Some years later there was not so much activity. Somebody asked the man, 'Sir, why is there no longer great hustle and bustle of sacrifice at your house?' He

replied, 'I've lost my teeth, you see.' Devendra now practices meditation and contemplation. That is natural. But there is no doubt he's a good man.

"Look here, as long as a man is under the spell of maya, he's like a green coconut. A piece of its shell comes off with the meat. But when delusion is gone, the shell and kernel become separated. Then they can easily be separated; the kernel sounds like a dry ball inside. When he is free from delusion, the soul and the body of a man become separate; there is no identification with the body.

"It is the 'I' that is the cause of all trouble. Will this rascal 'I' not go? In a dilapidated house an ashwattha tree sprouts. Even if you cut it down and throw it away, another branch shoots up the next day. It is the same with this 'I.' Wash the bowl an onion has been kept in any number of times. Can you ever get rid of its smell?"

While talking, he said to Keshab Sen, "Well, Keshab, your Calcutta gentlemen say there is no God. One of them is climbing up a staircase. He takes a step and as he takes another, he suddenly exclaims: 'Oh! What happened to my side?' and falls unconscious. His relatives call for a doctor, but before he arrives, the gentleman expires. Yet they say, 'There is no God!'"

After an hour or an hour and a half, devotional singing began. What I saw then I feel I shall never forget, even after many lives. Everyone began to dance, even Keshab. Thakur was in the middle and the others were dancing around him. While dancing, he suddenly became motionless, absorbed

in samadhi. He remained in this state for quite some time. After I saw him and heard his words, I felt, yes, he is truly a paramahamsa.

One day, perhaps in 1883, I took a number of young men from Srerampore to see him. Looking at them Thakur said "What has brought them here?"

I: "To see you."

Thakur: "What is there to see in me? Let them look at the buildings and temples."

I: "They have not come to see the buildings. They have come to see you."

Thakur: "Then they're flints – there is fire in them. You may keep a flint in water for a thousand years, but the moment it is struck, it will generate fire. These young men must be the same. As for me, you may strike hard, but no fire will come out."

We all laughed to hear these last words. I don't exactly remember any other conversation that day. But there was some talk that the shell of "I-ness" does not disappear, and about the renunciation of "lust and greed."

Yet another day that I visited him, after I had saluted him and sat down, he said, "Can you bring me some of that stuff that fizzes when you uncork it – a bit sour, but a little sweet?" I said, "Lemon soda?"

Thakur said, "Do bring some." I remember bringing him a bottle.

As far as I can recall we were alone. I asked him many questions.

I: "Do you believe in the distinction of caste?"

Thakur: "How can I say I do? I ate curry at Keshab Sen's house. But listen to what happened one day. Somebody with a long beard brought me some ice. I didn't feel at all like eating it. But later, when another person brought ice from the same man, I ate it with gusto. You see, the distinction of caste falls off by itself, just like fronds fall from coconut and palm trees when they grow. Caste distinction also falls like this. Don't pull them off; let them fall off by themselves."

I asked: "What do you think of Keshab Babu?"

Thakur: "I say, brother, he is a saintly man."

I: "And Trailokya Babu?"

Thakur: "He is a good man, sings very well."

I: "Shivanath Babu?"

Thakur: "A good man, but he argues."

I: "What is the difference between a Hindu and a Brahmo?"

He said: "There is no particular difference. In a serenade one person continues to play a particular note while another plays various melodies. One of the melodies is, 'My Radha is sulking.' Brahmos play just one note – the Formless. Hindus produce melodies of various kinds.

"Water and ice – one is without form, the other with form. That which is water becomes ice when it is cold. With the heat of knowledge, ice melts into water. In the cold of devotion, water turns into ice.

"The Reality is one and the same. Different people give It different names. It is like this: there are four ghats on the four sides of a pond. Some people take water from one and say they are taking *jal*. Those taking water at another place may say they are taking *pani*. At the third place they call it *water,* and at the fourth, they call it *aqua.* But it is the same water."

When I told him that I had met Achalananda Tirthavadhuta in Barisal, he said, "The same Ramkumar of Kotrang?"

I: "Yes, sir."

Thakur: "Well, what do you think of him?"

I: "I liked him."

Thakur: "Well, do you like him better than you like me?"

I: "How can you be compared with him? He is a pundit, a learned man. Are you a pundit, a jnani?"

Hearing this, he was speechless; he remained silent. After a minute or so, I said, "He may be a pundit, but you are fun, full of joy. There is a lot of fun in your company."

At this he smiled and said, "Well said. You are right."

He asked me, "Have you seen my panchavati?"

I answered, "Yes, sir."

He told me a little about what he used to do there. He told me about the various spiritual disciplines he had practiced, and also about Nangta

(the Naked one, Totapuri). I asked him, "How can I realize God?"

He: "You see, brother, He is pulling us the way a magnet pulls iron. But if mud covers the iron, it can't be pulled. When it is washed clean by weeping (for Him), you will immediately stick to Him."

I was recording Thakur's statements as I listened to him. He said, "Look here, it is not enough just to shout, 'Hemp, hemp!' Get some hemp, grind it in water, and then drink it." Then he said to me, "Since you live a householder's life, live a little inebriated. Let that glow continue even when you're engaged in work. You won't be able to be like Sukadeva who lay naked with intoxication.

"Since you're going to live in the world, you should write out a general power of attorney and give it to God. He will do whatever is necessary. Live like a maidservant in a rich household. How much she loves the children of her master! She bathes them, washes them, and feeds them as if they were her own. But she knows in her heart that they are not hers. As soon as her services come to an end, all contact is lost.

"Just as you rub your hands with oil before cutting open a jackfruit, cover yourself with the oil that will not allow you to become entangled in the world and affected by it."

All this time that we were talking, we were seated on the floor. Now he got up on his cot and lay on his back. He said to me, "Fan me."

I began to fan him. He remained quiet. After some time he said, "It is very hot, brother. Moisten

the fan with water." I said, "Oh, you are fond of good living too, I see!" He smiled and said, "Why not? Why shouldn't I?" I said, "Very well, then have as much as you want." The pleasure I had that day being near him I cannot express.

The last time I visited him – a day you mentioned in the third volume (Section XVI) – I went with the headmaster of my school. It was just after he had passed his B. A. You met him the other day. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw him, he said, "Where have you found him? He's a very fine fellow!"

Then he said: "Brother, you're a lawyer. You are very clever! Can you give me some of your cleverness? Your father came here the other day. He was here for three days."

I asked: "How did you find him?"

He said: "He's a good man, but sometimes he talks nonsense."

I said: "Knock off some of his nonsense the next time you see him."

He smiled a little. I said, "Please give me some special instruction."

He said: "Do you know Hriday (Hriday Mukhopadhyay)?"

I said: "Your nephew? I only know him by name."

Thakur: "Hriday used to say, 'Uncle, don't say everything you have to say all at once. Why should you repeat the same things over and over again?' I said, 'What does it matter to you, you rascal? These

are my words. I may repeat them a million times. What is that to you?'"

I smiled and said: "Quite right, quite right."

After some time he sat down and, repeating, 'Om, Om,' he began to sing:

> Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty….

Singing a couplet or two, and repeating, "Dive, dive," he himself dived deep.

The samadhi over, he began to pace up and down. He was wearing a dhoti. With both hands, he pulled it up to his waist. One end of it trailed on the ground, the other hung loose. My companion and I began to nudge each other and whisper, "He's wearing his dhoti nicely!" But in a little while he said, "Away, away, you rag of a cloth!" He threw it away and began pacing up and down naked. Bringing an umbrella and a walking stick from the northern side of the room, he asked, "Are these yours – this umbrella and the walking stick?" I replied, "No, sir," and he immediately said, "I already knew that. Just by looking at an umbrella and walking stick I can judge a man. Surely these belong to that fellow who swallowed my words without understanding them."

After a while he sat on the northern end of his cot facing west, still naked. He asked me, "Do you consider me uncivilized?"

I said: "No, you're very civilized. Why do you ask?"

Thakur: "Well, Shivanath and others like him think of me as uncivilized. When they come, I have to somehow wrap myself in this dhoti. Do you know Girish Ghosh?"

I: "Which Girish Ghosh? The one who runs a theatre?"

Thakur: "Yes."

I: "I've never seen him, but I know his name."

Thakur: "He is a good man."

I: "I hear he drinks. Does he?"

Thakur: "Let him. Let him. How long will he continue? Do you know Narendra?"

I: "No, sir."

Thakur: "I'd like you to meet him. He's passed his B.A. and hasn't married."

I: "Very well. I shall meet him."

Thakur: "Today there will be a kirtan[1] at Ram Dutta's house. You will meet him there. Please go there this evening."

I: "All right."

Thakur: "Will you go? You must definitely go."

I: "Would I disobey your order? I will certainly go."

He showed us the pictures in his room. Then he asked me, "Is a picture of the Buddha available?"

I: "I hear it's available."

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1. Community singing of hymns.

Thakur: "Bring me one."

I: "All right, I'll bring one the next time I come."

I never saw him after that day. I was not lucky enough to sit at his feet again.

That evening I went to Ram Babu's house where I met Narendra. Thakur was sitting in a room, resting against a bolster, with Narendra on his right. I was in front of them. He asked Narendra to talk to me.

Narendra said, "I have a bad headache today. I don't feel like talking."

I said, "Never mind. We'll talk another day."

That talk we had in Almora in the month of May or June of 1897.

Thakur's wish had to be fulfilled, though it took twelve years. Oh, what a happy time those few days in Almora with Swami Vivekananda were. Sometimes it was in his house, at other times in mine. And one day I was with him alone on a hilltop. I didn't see him again after this meeting. It was to fulfill Thakur's wish that I was able to meet him that time.

Sri Ramakrishna also I saw only four or five times. But even during that short time, I felt we were as close as if we had been classmates. How frankly we talked! The moment I left him, I said to myself, Oh my God, what a man I've been with! Whatever I saw, whatever I got from him during these few days has sweetened my entire life. With enormous care I have treasured that soft smile, that showering of divine words in my heart.

Brother, it is the inexhaustible wealth of a poor person. A grain of bliss flowing from that smile has brought gladness even to distant America. Thinking of this, I am overwhelmed again and again. If it is so with me, how fortunate you are!

M. (Mahendranath Gupta): Short Life of the Author

Mahendranath was born on Friday, 14 July 1854, 31st of Ashadha, 1261 B.Y., on the Naga Panchami day on Shiva Narayana Das Lane of Shimuliya, a neighborhood in Calcutta. Mahendranath's father was Madhusudan Gupta and his mother, Swarnamayi Devi. Madhusudan was a devotee of God; Thakur was aware of his devotion.

Mahendranath was the third child of Madhusudan. It is said that this son was born after his father performed mental worship to Shiva twelve times in succession. For this reason Madhusudan had a special affection for this son and he was particularly careful that the child not come to any harm. The boy Mahendra was extremely good-natured and had great love for his parents. He could recall many incidents from his early childhood – for example, going with his mother to the Car Festival of Mahesh when he was five years old. On the journey home he remembered the boat touching the Dakshineswar ghat. While everybody was busy visiting the deities in the temples, M. somehow became lost and found himself alone in the natmandir in front of the shrine of Bhavatarini Kali. Not able to find his mother, he began to cry. At that moment someone found him crying and consoled him. Mahendranath used to say that this incident always remained vivid in his mind. The brilliant radiance of the newly constructed and dedicated temple was clearly

seen in his mind's eye, and he thought that the person who came to console him was probably Thakur himself.

As a boy Mahendranath studied in the Hare School. He was a very bright student and always held first or second position in his class. The shrine of Mother Shitala of Thanthania was on his way to and from school – the shrine can now be seen in front of the College Street Market – and he never forgot to salute the deity. By virtue of his natural intelligence, together with hard work, he won scholarships and honours in his entrance, F.A., and B.A. examinations. He won second place in his entrance examination, and though he missed one of his mathematics papers, he placed fifth at the F.A. examination. In 1874 he stood third on his B.A. He was a favourite student of Prof. Tawny in the Presidency College.

In 1874, while still in college, he was married to Nikunja Devi, the daughter of Thakur Charan Sen and a cousin of Keshab Sen. Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother had great affection for Nikunja Devi. When she lost her son and became almost insane with grief, Thakur would bring peace to her mind by stroking her body.

Before he became a teacher, Mahendranath served for some time with the government and then in a merchant's office. But he could not stay with those jobs. Thakur had already arranged a different way of life for him. He took up teaching in school and college. In Ripon City and Metropolitan colleges, he taught English, psychology, and economics. When he started going to Thakur in

1882, he was headmaster of the Shyampukur branch of Vidyasagar's school.

Rakhal, Purna, Baburam, Binode, Bankim, Tejchandra, Kshirode, Narayan, and some other intimate devotees of Thakur were all students of M.'s school. That is why they all called him Master Mahashay (revered teacher). That is why he became famous in Sri Ramakrishna's group of devotees as "Master," or "Master Mahashay." Thakur also called him "Master" or "Mahendra Master."

Mahendranath was inclined toward religion from his boyhood. When Keshab Sen came into the public eye as a famous preacher and the founder of the Navavidhan [New Dispensation] Brahmo Samaj, Mahendranath became acquainted with him and would take part in the worship at the Navavidhan temple or at Keshab's home. At this time Keshab was his ideal. Later he would say that sometimes during worship Keshab would pray with such moving words that he looked godlike. Later, when he met Thakur and heard him speak, he realized that Keshab had derived his heart-warming charm from Thakur himself.

Mahendranath met Thakur at the Dakshineswar Kali temple on 26 February 1882. As soon as Thakur saw him, he recognized M. as a person eligible for divine knowledge. At the end of the first meeting, when M. was leaving, Thakur said to him, "Come again." But he expressed regret when he came to know that M. was married and had children. However, he also told him that there were very good signs on his forehead and eyes (fit

for a yogi). At the time Mahendranath liked to meditate on the formless Brahman. He did not like the worship of a deity in clay images.

M. was very well read in Western philosophy, literature, history, science, economics, and other subjects. He also was very well read in the Sanskrit Puranas and dramatic literature. He knew by heart verses from *Kumarasambhava, Shakuntala, Bhattikavya, Uttar Ramacharita,* and other dramatic works. He had studied Buddhist and Jain philosophies, as well as the Bible, particularly the New Testament. As a result, he considered himself a scholar.

But this pride received a blow on his first meeting with Thakur. Sri Ramakrishna showed him immediately the insignificance of the knowledge he had acquired and made him realize that real knowledge is to know God and that everything else is ignorance. Only a couple of blows from Thakur's words silenced Mahendranath. As Thakur would say, "A bullfrog is silenced forever after a croak or two when it falls a prey to a king cobra." So it happened with M.

During his very first meeting Thakur taught M. how to take care of both sides of life – the worldly and the spiritual – during one's life's journey. This is called "sannyasa in the household" or renunciation as a householder. The essence of it can be summed up: Do all your work but keep your mind in God; live with your wife, son, father, mother, and others; serve them, accepting them as your very own, but know in your heart that none of them is yours.

Just as an oyster floating on water receives a drop of rain when the Svati conjunction of stars is in the ascendant and then dives deep into the sea to make a pearl, M. followed this instruction of Thakur. He began to practice interior spiritual disciplines in solitude. He understood that the aim of human life is God-realization. He began his spiritual practices in solitude, and whenever he found time, he would go and sit at Thakur's feet. Lest he fall into the whirlpool of the world later, Thakur tested him from time to time and would ask him the reason if he did not come to see him.

Thakur knew from the very beginning that M. would narrate his story and teachings to people. If he became lost in the world and were to fall into the whirlpool of ignorance, he would not be able to tell it. He kept a keen eye on M. to see if some knot were forming within. When he made sure that M. had become careful, Thakur said to him, in January of 1884, "Now go and live at home. Let them know that you are their own, but be sure that you know in your mind that you are not theirs, nor are they yours." Throughout his life Mahendranath practiced this mantra of the renunciation of a householder. Thakur would often say, "Be in the world, but not of the world." He said to M., "Your eyes and forehead look like a yogi's come fresh from practicing spiritual austerity. You are an intimate companion of Chaitanya Deva. I recognized you from your reading of *Chaitanya Bhagavata*.

"You belong to the class of the perfect by nature. Do you know what you are? When Narada began to bestow the knowledge of Brahman on all (to Sanaka, Sanatana, and others), Brahma bound him

in maya with a curse. You will be able to recognize all people.

"You are my intimate companion. Were it not so, how could your mind be so interested in spiritual things when it lacked nothing worldly?

"Mother, do reveal Yourself to him again and again. Otherwise, how will he continue to attend to both sides? Let him do both: life in the world and renunciation. What is the need for him to renounce everything all at once? Yet may Your wish prevail. You may make him renounce all if that is Your will.

"Mother, awaken him. Otherwise, how can he awaken others? Why have you put him in worldly life? What would have been lost…? Narendra and Rakhal would stay away from women. You also will. You also will not be able to associate with women.... He is a deep soul, like the Phalgu river. He has real spirituality within.

"Your attitude is like Prahlada's – 'I am That' and 'I am God's servant.'

"The Master (M.) is very pure. He has no pride.

"You are my own, of the same substance, like father and son.

"You are the inner as well as the outer pillars of the natmandir."

A struggle continued to rage in Mahendranath's mind during his days with Thakur: Why have I not embraced sannyas? If he had become a monk, his mind could have soared like a free bird in the

firmament of divine consciousness.[1] Thakur would assure him from time to time by saying, "He who has renounced in the mind is a person of renunciation. Nobody who comes here is a householder. The householder devotees of Chaitanya Deva also lived with their family with detachment. The work you do does not involve that much worldliness."

Just as a weak child holds to his mother with all its strength when overwhelmed with fear, knowing that she is the main and a sure haven, Mahendranath held to Thakur in fear of the weaknesses born of family life – so much so that he absorbed himself in that feeling throughout his life. He talked of nothing but Thakur. He thought of Thakur as his only refuge, the most desirable goal, and the one aim in life. He had become one with Thakur. Thakur was his supreme attainment:

> yaṁ labdhvā cāparaṁ lābhaṁ manyate nādhikaṁ tataḥ |
> yasmin sthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate ||
>
> [And having gained that, he can think of no greater gain; established in that, he is not shaken by even the heaviest sorrow.]
>
> – Bhagavad Gita 6:22

Day and night M. taught the means to save oneself in the Kaliyuga: "Keep the company of the holy, practice spiritual disciplines in solitude at times, and have faith in the words of the guru."

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1. Chidakasha.

Those who saw him in his old age felt that here was a yogi, or a rishi, living as a householder for the purpose of showering the love of Sri Ramakrishna on them. Morning, afternoon, or evening – whenever one went to see him – one would find him in the company of devotees, talking about the love of God. Talk of God flowed continuously, from the Vedas, the Puranas, the Bible, the Koran, the holy books of the Buddhists, the Gita, the Bhagavata, the Adhyatma Ramayana. No weariness, no pause – unceasing talk about Thakur, the embodiment of all faiths and spiritual practices. What an extraordinary way of serving Thakur! He had dedicated his body, mind, and wealth, his all, to the work. Is this what is called the 'servant I' of Hanuman"?

Who would not like to be fortunate enough to be the servant of Sri Ramakrishna? His intimate disciples were, of course, his servants. M. also was markedly a servant of Sri Ramakrishna. "You are my own, of the same substance, like father and son" – these holy words of Thakur indicate this. Thakur himself had said that Narendranath would carry out his mission. He had often hinted that Mahendranath would also do his work. We find it in the Kathamrita at several places: "Mother, I can say no more. Please grant power to Ram, Mahendra, Vijay, and others, that they may carry out Your work from now on.

"Mother, why have You given him (M.) only one-sixteenth of Your power?[1] Oh, I understand, it will be enough for Your work." One day Sri

1. Kala Shakti.

Ramakrishna told him, "The Mother has kept the Bhagavata pundit (the preacher of the divine word) in the world, tying him with one bond. Otherwise, who would explain the Bhagavata?" Thus we see that, just as Narendranath had come for Thakur's work and Thakur gave him the badge of authority, Mahendranath also was not deprived of inheritance – he too got power and love from Thakur.

To make him competent to work for the welfare of mankind, Sri Ramakrishna made him undergo spiritual austerities from time to time. For more than a month, from 14 December 1883 to almost the middle of January 1884, he practiced continuous spiritual disciplines in Dakshineswar under the care of Thakur. While he lived with Thakur, not only did M.'s heart open out, but his pride was vanquished. Thakur used to say, "His pride has gone." Had he retained it, M. could not have accomplished the task assigned him by Thakur. This task was to disperse Thakur's words to others. Having kept himself hidden in the five volumes of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, M. has expressed Sri Ramakrishna fully. He gave himself a number of pseudonyms – Mani, Mohini, Mohan, a particular devotee, M., Englishman, and so on. The writer's own personality manifests nowhere at all. Only at some places does one come across his reflections. But even they are based on what Thakur had said and are merely an effort to explain Thakur's greatness. These thoughts and reflections are nothing but the image of Sri Ramakrishna in the pure heart of a disciple. This is how M. hid himself and why, after reading the Gospel in 1897, Swami Vivekananda wrote, "I now

understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work. Socratic dialogues are Plato all over. You are entirely hidden." Sri Keshab Gupta wrote, "Renouncing the temptation of being a literary figure is the hallmark of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita. Like the spreading perfume of hidden tuberoses is the great beauty of this spiritual book."

That Thakur subjected M. to tests has been mentioned in the Kathamrita – 9 November 1884 – where it is obvious that this work of recording the Kathamrita had been reserved for him. Mahendranath had recorded his immortal words in his diary, while living in Thakur's company, with year, date, day of the week, and the lunar date. Taking these notes as a foundation, the Gospel and the five volumes of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* were written. Such work is unique in history – the life of a divine personality, an avatar, recorded in this way. It is unique. N. Ghosh correctly said about the words of *Sri Sri Kathamrita* in the *Indian Nation*: "They take us straight to the truth and not through a metaphysical maze. The style is Biblical in simplicity. What a treasure would it have been to the world, if all the sayings of Sri Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Nanak, Chaitanya could have been preserved thus."

Can anybody and everybody accomplish such a work? Even if they do, it cannot be with such pure fervour. It was possible only by the grace and desire of Thakur. That is why Thakur first rid the writer of his pride. Which is why Mahendranath hid

himself by taking up a number of pseudonyms found in the *Kathamrita*.

It is obvious from Mahendranath's words and attitude that he always felt himself to be a servant in Thakur's company. And he made of himself a sannyasin. He would often say, "We ought to have only one aim – to be as perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect."[1]

After Thakur's passing away, M. used to visit the Baranagore monastery now and then to live with his brother disciples, to firmly root in himself the ideal of service and spiritual discipline, renunciation, and austere life that they all aspired to. With the aim of cultivating a spirit of complete dependence on God, he would sometimes spend nights in front of the University of Calcutta Senate Hall, just like an indigent. Other times he would go to Uttar Pradesh to live in a hut[2] and practice austerities like a sadhu.

Now and then M. would go to the Howrah Station to watch people return from pilgrimage and he would salute them. He would ask for prasad from them and share it with his companions, saying 'Prasad brings one in contact with God."

Whenever he found time or the opportunity, Mahendranath would seek the company of Thakur in Dakshineswar or in the house of a devotee. Even during school recess, whenever Thakur went to a

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1. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" – Matthew 5:48.
2. The hut where he practised austerities still stands in Swarga Ashrama at Hrishikesh. He lived there for several months in 1912.

devotee's house, M. would go there to be with him. Once the results of the Shyampukur school were rather low because of his frequent visits to Sri Ramakrishna. Vidyasagar said cuttingly about him, "Master (M.) is busy with the Paramahamsa; he has no time to think of the school's affairs." As the remark involved his guru's name, M. immediately resigned his job. When Thakur came to know about it, he said, "You have done the right thing. The Divine Mother will take care of you."

Whenever Thakur was in need of anything, he would tell Mahendranath, adding at the same time, "I cannot accept from just anybody."

Mahendranath was very popular with Sri Ramakrishna's group of devotees for his goodness and simplicity of heart. When Narendranath was in straightened circumstances after the death of his father and was very anxious to carry out spiritual practices, Mahendranath arranged for his family's expenses for three months, thus enabling him to attend to his spiritual pursuit with a free mind, as directed by Thakur. At times Mahendranath would also go secretly to Narendranath's mother to render some help.

After Sri Thakur's mahasamadhi, his devotees established a monastery at Baranagore. In the beginning Suresh Mitra, Balaram Bose, and M. helped it financially. At the time Mahendranath was teaching in two schools. He donated his income from one school to the monastery.

Narendranath lived the life of a wandering monk from 1890 to 1893. Inspired by his example, some of his brother disciples went to the Himalayas

or to Uttarkhanda to carry out spiritual practices. During this time Mahendranath remained absorbed in his diaries day and night, and meditated on Thakur, taking refuge at the feet of the Holy Mother. Whenever a conflict arose in his mind, he would give himself up completely to the Holy Mother. He would also bring her to his house and serve her there. She would stay at Mahendranath's house for more than a fortnight, sometimes for more than a month. As directed by Thakur in her dream, the Holy Mother went to the house of Mahendranath to install the holy water vessel with her own hands and to arrange for its worship. Holy Mother performed much worship, repetition of the name, and meditation in this shrine.

Since 1889 and on a regular basis M. provided money for the service of the Holy Mother. Whenever she was in need of anything, she informed Mahendranath. When a piece of land was to be bought for worship of the Mother of the Universe (Jagaddhatri), she asked Mahendranath to send money. Upon receipt of the letter, he sent Rs. 320/-. Once, when water became scarce in her village and he was asked to send money to dig a well, Mahendranath sent Rs. 100/-. M. also used to send money to the monks of the monastery when they wanted to go on pilgrimage or to the hills for spiritual practise.

M. received a number of requests to publish this book. When more and more requests poured in and at Holy Mother's request, M. one day read it to her. She was extremely pleased to hear it. Blessing M.

she said, "Hearing it from your lips, I felt as if Thakur himself was talking." And she directed M. to publish the book.

In 1897 Mahendranath published the first edition of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (According to M., a son of the Lord and Disciple).* Thus the Gospel became known in English. Sri Ramchandra Dutta wrote in the *Tattva Manjari* published from Yogodyan, in the month of Agrahayana, 1304 B.Y. (November-December, 1897):

"Revered Mahendranath Gupta … who has so much faith in the Lord that he is making as much effort as is humanly possible to spread Sri Ramakrishna's words in a book for the good of the common man…. Our request to Gupta Mahashay is that, instead of bringing these teachings in separate editions, he publish them in one big volume. It would be of greater service to mankind.

"Our second request is that he not give up writing in the Bengali language, because the essence of the words is somewhat changed in several places by translation into English. Master Mahashay knows this very well. The ordinary man of this country will find it difficult to understand if it is in English."

And that is how it happened later. Bearing the name of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by Sri M., it began to appear in *Tattva Manjari, Banga Darshan, Udbodhan, Hindu Patrika*, and some other monthly magazines of the time. They were collected and published as Volume I through the Udbodhan Press by Swami Trigunatitananda. The

second volume appeared in 1904, the third in 1908, the fourth in 1910, and the fifth in 1932. The work has been translated into many languages, both Indian and foreign. Everybody began to say, "An invaluable gem is being added to Bengali literature." The *Nava Bharat* wrote: "Except for M., nobody possesses this gem." The *Sanjivani* wrote: "*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* is truly a treasure of nectar." Romain Rolland, the savant, wrote: "The exactitude is almost stenographic."

With the publication of the *Kathamrita*, new and more devotees began to visit the monastery and Holy Mother's house. New and more sannyasins began to read the *Kathamrita*. The Ganges of peace began to flow in the world of trial and tribulation.

Swami Premananda wrote: "Thousands of people are finding new life from the *Kathamrita*, thousands are receiving bliss from it. Bent under the weight of the trials and sufferings of worldly life, many thousands of people are gaining peace in their family life of sorrow and attachment."

All recognized that Sri Ramakrishna, the incarnation of the age, had incarnated for the good of humanity and that man will attain peace and gain fearlessness by taking shelter at his feet.

Presiding at M.'s birth anniversary in 1955, Hemendra Prasad Ghosh said: "M. has presented Sri Ramakrishna to the world through his *Kathamrita* in a very short time. Had he not written the *Kathamrita*, it would have taken much longer for the world to know Sri Ramakrishna.

That God can be realized even while living in the household – the truth taught by Sri Ramakrishna – is clearly manifest in M."

Many western devotees also used to meet M. at his house. M. would talk only of his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, day after day, month after month, and year after year continuously. He would say, "I am an insignificant person, but I live by the side of an ocean, and I keep with me a few pitchers of sea water. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak of but his words?"

He would speak in such a touching and affectionate manner that it appeared to the visitors that they were hearing these words sitting close to Thakur himself. It was as if a bridge had been built between the spot where he sat and talked about Thakur and the scenes of Thakur's life itself. His narratives seemed real. Paul Brunton narrated his meeting with Mahendranath in his book *Search in Secret India.* Describing his first meeting with M., he writes, "A venerable patriarch has stepped out from the pages of the Bible and a figure from Mosaic times has turned to flesh."

Swami Yogananda, in his book *Autobiography of a Yogi,* recorded how he was inspired by Mahendranath in the early years of his spiritual life: "Mahendranath was a sannyasin-in-the-household. His life is a shining illustration of renunciation. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by M. is not only an excellent piece of literature, but also the immortal words of a divine life."

Many young men embraced monastic life by coming in contact with Mahendranath, and from

him they found new inspiration in religious life. Even those who saw him only once never forgot his yogi-like figure, his humility, and his simplicity.

When the translation of some chapters of the *Kathamrita* appeared as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Volume II – and was also published in the *Morning Star* without M.'s permission and consultation – how hurt M. felt. This is evident from his letter: "Dear Ayukta Babaji, My love and salutations to you all. The translation of the *Gospel* in the *Morning Star* is, I regret to say, not satisfying to me. Being an eyewitness, I naturally want the spirit to be kept in the translation. Moreover, the report of a meeting should not appear in a mutilated form. The translation should be done by myself. You may do the work after my passing away, which is by no means a distant contingency. I am 76 and my health is not at all good. It is painful to see the Gospel presented in this way. I do not approve the translation which has appeared as Volume II from Madras…."

Mahendranath never made disciples; he never initiated anyone. He tried to follow each and every word of Thakur literally. He was not a fanatic – in all religions he saw the "harmonizing image" of Sri Ramakrishna. He spent his whole life, as though a life-long vow, in spreading the divine words of Thakur.

Mahendranath Dutta[1] in his book *Master Moshayer Anudhyan* wrote:

1. Brother of Swami Vivekananda.

"He (M.) believed that the guru and the spiritual ideal[1] are one – the guru is the ideal and the ideal is the guru. They are one and the same. By discussing and meditating on Sri Ramakrishna, thinking of him, constantly remembering him and talking about him, M. was filled inwardly with Ramakrishna, though outwardly he was Mahendranath Gupta. He tried to be one with Sri Ramakrishna by giving up his own individuality and independent thinking. He retained no other thought, no ideas of his own. That which is called a fiery independent spirit or self-assertion in English, he gave up entirely. Within he was all Ramakrishna. His main objective in life seems to have been to live as a reflection of Sri Ramakrishna. So I say that having given up his independent thinking, his own individuality and personal views, he became one with his guru. The instructions of the guru, his words, were the only subjects of his thought. Of course, while attending to his worldly duties or teaching at the school – that is to say, work of a lower plane – he did retain his individuality and independent thinking. But even in such work, the impact of Sri Ramakrishna and his views were quite evident. So I say that Master Mahashay was Sri Ramakrishna within and Mahendranath Gupta without."

During the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna, Mahendranath was first among the devotees to visit the native village of his guru. For him it became the holiest place of pilgrimage. Taking every spot there as holy, he lay prostrate on the

1. Ishtam.

ground. And he brought back some earth from this place as a sacred reminder. Hearing this, Thakur said, "Nobody asked you to do this, you did it of your own accord." Shedding tears of joy and touching his head and body, he blessed M. and said, "Collecting earth shows love and devotion."

Mahendranath felt unspeakable joy in touching the image of Jagannath in Puri and Tarakanath in Tarkeshwar as Thakur wished him to do. Hearing of it, Sri Ramakrishna touched Mahendranath's hand and said, "You are pure."

Whenever M. began writing *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* for the purpose of publishing it, he would observe acts of purity and take only one meal a day – boiled rice with clarified butter.[1] Until the very day of the publication of the book, he followed these practices. At the time of publication of the fifth volume, M. left his mortal frame.

Thakur used to say, "Bhagavata-bhakta-Bhagavan[2] are one and the same." That is why, whenever the character of Mahendranath, the devotee, is discussed, it is mostly related to *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. The recorder of word lives forever along with the word. Thus has Mahendranath also attained immortality. As long as the name of Sri Ramakrishna remains alive in this world, his Bhagavata, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, will also live, and with it will live M.

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1. Havishya.
2. Scripture-devotee-Lord.

It was during the night of 4 June 1932, the 20th Jaishtha that Mahendranath fell ill after completing the writing of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, Volume V. The following morning, a Saturday, at six o'clock, repeating the names of Sri Thakur and Holy Mother, and with this last prayer on his lips, "O Gurudeva, Mother, take me in your lap," this highest of yogis left his body. He was seventy-eight. It was like the departure of a great yogi, as if he had just fallen asleep.

The last rites on the holy body of Sri M. were performed in the cremation ground at Cossipore, to the right of the spot where Sri Thakur's body was cremated. Ever a servant of Thakur, and at the end Mahendranath found a place close to him. Many intimate devotees of Sri Ramakrishna had left this world of maya before the demise of Mahendranath, but this precious piece of land seemed to have been reserved by Thakur for this beloved servant-disciple.

At that time there was a platform of white marble where Thakur's body had been cremated. M.'s two worthy sons – Prabhas Chandra Gupta and Charu Chandra Gupta – bore almost all the expenses for building a common canopy over both Sri Thakur and Master Mahashay.

Bengali Publisher

Section I

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra and other Intimate Disciples in Dakshineswar

Chapter I

The story of Thakur's earlier life – Sri Ramakrishna in his first ecstasy of love in 1858

The devotee Krishnakishore, a sadhu from Ariadaha, Jatindra, Jaya Mukherji and Rani Rasmani

Sri Ramakrishna is in a happy state of mind today. Narendra has come to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. Other intimate disciples are there as well. Narendra takes his bath and receives prasad[1].

It is Monday, 16 October, 1882, the fourth day of the bright fortnight of Aswin. The Durga Puja falls on Thursday next, the seventh day of the lunar month.

Rakhal, Ramlal and Hazra are with Sri Ramakrishna. Narendra is accompanied by one or two Brahmo youths. M. is also present.

Narendra has taken his meal with Sri Ramakrishna. After the meal, Sri Ramakrishna asks for bedding to be spread on the floor of his room. The devotees, particularly Narendra, will rest there. A mat of superior quality is spread out with a quilt and a pillow over it. Like a child, Sri Ramakrishna sits near Narendra on the bedspread. Turning toward him joyfully, he talks with the devotees, particularly Narendra. A radiant smile plays on his face. During

[1] Sacramental food which has been offered to the deity

the conversation, he tells them of incidents in his life and his spiritual state.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and others) — After this spiritual state of mine, I only longed to hear about the Lord. I used to wander about trying to find out where the *Bhagavata*, the *Adhyatma (Ramayana)* or the *Mahabharata* was being read. I used to go to Krishnakishore of Ariadaha to listen to the recitation of the *Adhyatma*.

"What faith Krishnakishore had! Once when he was in Vrindavan, he felt thirsty and went to a well. He found a man standing near it. When asked to draw some water for him, the man said, 'I belong to a low caste and you are a brahmin. How can I draw water for you?' Krishnakishore said to him, 'Just say Shiva twice. The moment you say Shiva, you will be purified.' The man uttered, 'Shiva, Shiva,' and drew some water. Such an orthodox brahmin and he took that water! What faith!

"A sadhu came to the bathing ghat at Ariadaha. I thought I would go to see him one day. I told Haladhari in the Kali Temple that I would go to meet the sadhu with Krishnakishore. I asked him if he would like to see him. Haladhari said, 'What use is it to see a cage of clay?' You see, Haladhari reads the *Gita* and the Vedanta philosophy. That is why he called the sadhu a 'cage of clay'. I told Krishnakishore about it. He was quite angry and said, 'What! Did Haladhari say that? One who meditates on the Lord, thinks of Rama, and has given up everything for His sake, to call the body of such a man a cage of clay! He doesn't know that the body of such a devotee is made up of Spirit.' He was so angry that when he would come to the Kali Temple to pick flowers, he would turn away when he saw Haladhari and did not talk to him.

"He said to me, 'Why did you cast off your sacred thread?' When I was in that state, everything blew away from me as if by the cyclone of Aswin. No indication of my previous life remained! I lost external awareness! Even my *dhoti*[1] fell off, so how could I care for the sacred thread? I said to him, 'If you once experience that madness for the Lord, you will understand.'

"And this is what happened. He, himself, went into God-intoxication. He just uttered, 'Om, Om,' shutting himself in a room without another word. Thinking that it was a disease of the brain, a Kaviraj[2] of Natagore was sent for. Krishnakishore said to him, 'My good brother! Do please cure me of my disease, but not of my Om[3]!'

"One day when I went to see him, he was in a pensive mood. 'What is the matter?' I asked him. He said, 'The Tax man came and I am thinking about what he said – that if I do not pay with cash immediately, he will sell my utensils.' I said, 'What is the use of thinking about it? All he can do is to take away your utensils. Even if he carries them away tied together, he cannot carry you with him. You are *kha* (ether)!' (Narendra and others laugh.) Krishnakishore says that he is like ether. You see, he studies the *Adhyatma* (*Ramayana*). I used to joke with him, sometimes calling him *kha*. I laughed and said, 'You are *kha*. The Tax man will not be able to carry you away.'

"During ecstasy, I would tell the truth to everybody. I did not care about one's position and was not afraid of men of power.

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[1] Long cloth for covering the body
[2] An Ayurvedic physician
[3] Omkar, the Vedic symbol for the Supreme Being

"One day Jatindra came to Jadu Mallick's garden. I was there. I asked him, 'What is man's duty? Isn't it to meditate on God?' Jatindra said, 'We are worldly people. Is there salvation for us too? Even King Yudhisthira had to visit hell.' I felt very angry. I said, 'What kind of man are you! You only remember Yudhisthira's visit to hell and you forget his truthfulness, his readiness to pardon, his forbearance, discrimination, dispassion and love for the Lord.' I was going to say much more when Hriday stopped me. He put his hand on my mouth. A short time later Jatindra left, saying that he had some business to attend to.

"Many days later I went with Captain[1] to Sourindra Tagore's house. Seeing him, I said, 'I cannot call you a raja or anything like that because it would be a lie.' He talked with me for awhile, then Western visitors began to arrive. He is a man of rajasic nature. He keeps himself busy with so many things. Word of my visit was sent to Jatindra, but he sent a message that he had a sore throat.

"In the same state of God-intoxication, I saw Jaya Mukherji one day at the Baranagore *ghat*[2]. He was performing *japa*[3] but his mind was elsewhere. I approached him and gave him two slaps.

"One day Rasmani came to the Kali Temple. She used to come for worship and would ask me to sing a song or two. This particular day I was singing, when I noticed that she was sorting flowers but her mind was elsewhere. I at once slapped her twice. Then she sat there anxiously and confused, with her hands folded.

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[1] Colonel Viswanath Upadhyaya, a resident of Nepal. The advocate and emissary of the king of Nepal and his representative in Calcutta. A very orthodox brahmin and a great devotee.

[2] A brick landing stair on the bank of a river, a pond, or a reservoir

[3] Repetition of the Name

" 'Brother, what kind of temperament have you developed?' Haladhari asked. What was I to do? I prayed and prayed to the Mother and freed myself from the tendency to correct people."

With Mathur on pilgrimage in 1868 – Sri Ramakrishna weeps on hearing worldly talk in Kashi

"When I was in that state, I liked to hear nothing but talk of the Lord. If I heard worldly talk, I would sit silently and weep. Mathur Babu had taken me with him on pilgrimage. We stayed for many days in Raja Babu's house in Kashi. One day I was sitting with Mathur Babu in the drawing room. Raja Babu was also there with his men. I noticed that they were talking about worldly things: so much money was lost, and so on. I began to weep, 'Mother, where have you brought me? I was so well off in Rani Rasmani's temple. That I should hear of 'lust and greed' even in holy places!' There [in Dakshineswar] I did not have to listen to such worldly talk.'

Sri Ramakrishna asks the devotees, particularly Narendra, to rest awhile. He himself lies down on the smaller cot.

Chapter II

Enjoys the kirtan with Narendra and others – full of love, he embraces Narendra

It is afternoon. Narendra is singing. Rakhal, M., Narendra's Brahmo friend, Priya, and Hazra are there.

Narendra sings a devotional song to the accompaniment of *mridanga* (drum).

Meditate upon Hari, O my mind! He is the essence of consciousness. He is free from all impurity!

Without equal is His glory, beautiful is His shape, how very beloved is He in the hearts of His devotees!

Behold, His beauty is enhanced by fresh manifestations of love! It casts into shadow the effulgence of a million moons!

Verily, lightning flashes out of His glorious beauty! His blessed vision causes the hair to stand on end.

Worship His holy feet in the lotus of your heart. Gaze upon the matchless beauty of that beloved form.

Now that the mind enjoys peace and the eyes are filled with love, be immersed in divine love. Inspired with your devotion, remain merged in the joy of love.

Narendra sings again –

Satyam Shivam Sundaram[1] manifests Itself in the temple of the heart.

When shall my mind remain immersed night and day in the sea of this Beauty? (When shall that day come, O Lord, dispenser of the destiny of the lowly?)

When, O Lord, will knowledge divine grow in my heart, and this restless mind become dumbfounded and take shelter at Your feet?

Just as the *chakora*[2], on seeing the moon, begins to frolic with joy,

In the same manner, bliss-like embodied nectar will rise in the firmament of my heart and I, too, O Lord, will become intoxicated in Your light.

When, O friend of my soul, will this mind rest at the holy feet of the King of kings?

At Thy matchless feet of peace and Absolute good, the end of my life will be realized!

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[1] Absolute Truth, Absolute Good and Absolute Beauty are one

[2] A red-legged partridge which enjoys moonbeams

And when shall I be worthy of the delight of paradise in this very body, in this very life?

O Lord, seeing Your pure and sinless form, seeing Your radiance, the darkness of sin is dispelled like darkness by light.

O the friend of the lowly, pray light in my heart a burning faith like the polestar and fulfill my desire.

When shall that day come when, constantly looking on Him, my mind shall dive deep in the sea of that Divine Beauty?

Having attained You, I will remain merged night and day in the joy of love and forget myself.

But when will such a day dawn?

Song –

Repeat the sweet name of the Lord with joy and gladness!

Waves will rise on the sea of the nectar of His name. Drink it ceaselessly and give it to others.

When your mind goes dry, falling into illusory things of the world, sing His name and glory and fill it with the nectar of love.

Take care lest you forget that great mantra. Call upon the all-compassionate Father in adversity.

Come, shouting, 'Victory to Brahman, victory to Brahman,' and break the bonds of sin.

Becoming a practitioner of the yoga of love, become intoxicated with the joy of Brahman and attain your goal.

The kirtan continues with the accompaniment of the *mridanga*[1] and cymbals. Narendra and other devotees sing the kirtan, forming a circle around Sri Ramakrishna. Now they sing – 'Get absorbed in the

[1] Drum

nectar of divine love.' Occasionally they sing – 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram manifests Itself in the temple of the heart.'

At last, Narendra himself takes the *khol* (drum) and, full of emotion, sings along with Thakur: 'Repeat the sweet name of the Lord with joy and gladness.'

When the song ends, Sri Ramakrishna embraces Narendra a long time, saying, "Oh, what joy you have given me today!"

Today a fountain of love is welling up in Thakur's heart. It is about eight in the evening. He is pacing the verandah alone, intoxicated with divine love. Coming to the long northern verandah, he paces it from one end to the other. At times, he talks with the Divine Mother. Then he exclaims like one mad, "What [harm] can you do to me?"

Maya can do no harm to him who has the Divine Mother to protect him. Is this what he is saying?

Narendra, M. and Priya are going to spend the night. Sri Ramakrishna is beside himself with joy that Narendra will stay with him. Supper is ready. The Holy Mother is in the Nahabat[1]. Having prepared the supper with *chapattis* (Indian bread), gram lentils etc., she has sent for the disciples to come and eat their supper. The disciples stay here off and on. Surendra bears the expenses every month. The verandah to the southeast of Sri Ramakrishna's room is being made ready for eating.

Narendra and others are forbidden to talk of the school or any such matter

Narendra and others talk as they stand at the eastern door of the room.

[1] Music tower

Narendra — Don't you see what the boys of today have become?

M. — They are not bad, but no religious instruction is given to them.

Narendra — My observation is that their behavior is going downhill. They are flippant and vulgar, they show off and play truant. I have even seen them visiting places of ill repute.

M. — When I was a student, I never heard or saw such things.

Narendra — You apparently didn't keep company with such boys. I have seen them call other people vulgar names. Who knows what people they might be meeting!

M. — It is strange!

Narendra — I know many whose character has been lost. I wish the school authorities and their guardians had kept an eye on them.

Talk on God is the real talk – *atmanam va vijantha anya vachan vimumchatha*[1]

As they converse, Sri Ramakrishna comes from the room and says laughingly, "I say, what are you people talking about?" Narendra replies, "We are talking about the school. Boys today are losing their character." Sri Ramakrishna listens for awhile and then says to M. gravely, "It is not good to talk about these things. No talk is right except talk about the Lord. You are older than he, and you are intelligent.

[1] Know that Self alone and discard all other talks. Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.5

You should not have allowed him to raise such topics." (Narendra is around 19 or 20, M. is about 27 or 28.)

M. is embarrassed. Narendra and the other devotees keep quiet.

Sri Ramakrishna smiles as he stands and feeds Narendra and the others. He is very happy today.

Having taken their meal, Narendra and the other devotees go to Thakur's room. Sitting on the floor, they rest and talk with him. It is a mart of joy. During the conversation, Thakur says to Narendra, "Do please sing that song: 'The full moon of divine love rises on the firmament of divine wisdom.' "

Narendra begins to sing. Soon the other devotees begin to play on the drum and cymbals in accompaniment.

Song –

The full moon of divine love rises on the firmament of divine wisdom.

The ocean of love overflows: O how full of joy is the Lord!

(Victory unto Thee, merciful Lord! Victory! Victory!)

In all the four directions the planets of devotees twinkle.

The Lord, the friend of the devotees, is joyfully enacting His *lila*[1] with them.

(Victory unto Thee, merciful Lord! Victory! Victory!)

Behold, the gate of heaven is wide open and the vernal, joyful breeze of new dispensation arises,

Carrying the fragrance of divine love all around. It makes yogis drunk with the joy of communion.

(Victory unto Thee, merciful Lord! Victory! Victory!)

[1] Divine sport

On the sea of the universe is the lotus of the new dispensation, upon which is seated in Her majesty the Divine Mother, the embodiment of all joy!

The devotees, like a swarm of bees, drink its nectar with great fervour!

Behold the gracious countenance of the Mother! Behold, it delights the heart, it fascinates the universe!

Falling at Her feet are bands of holy men, singing and dancing, drunk with joy.

What beauty unparalleled! The blessed vision restores life to the dying soul.

Premdas, holding the feet of all devotees, says, "Sing, O brothers. Sing, 'Victory to the Mother.' "

Thakur dances as he sings, surrounded by devotees who also begin to dance.

After the kirtan Sri Ramakrishna begins to pace up and down the northeastern verandah. Hazra Mahashay is sitting on the northern part of the verandah talking to M. Thakur goes there and sits down. He asks a particular devotee, "Do you sometimes dream?"

The Devotee — I did have a very strange dream: of water, water everywhere in the universe. What an immense, limitless sheet of water it was! A number of boats were sailing on it. Suddenly, they sank into the rising waves. I, and a number of other people, got into a ship. And lo! I saw a brahmin walking over that shoreless sea. I asked him, 'How can you walk on deep water?' The brahmin smiled and said, 'It is not difficult. There is an unbroken bridge underneath me.' 'Where are you going?' I asked. 'To Bhawanipur,' he answered. I said, 'Stop for awhile. Let me accompany you.'

Sri Ramakrishna — My hair stands on end to hear this.

The Devotee — The brahmin said, 'I am in a hurry. It is not yet time for you to disembark! Let me go. Mark this path. You may tread it later on and follow me.'

Sri Ramakrishna — My hair stands on end hearing it. You should get initiated soon.

It is 11:00 p.m. Narendra and other devotees will sleep in Thakur's room on bedding spread over the floor.

On waking up in the morning, the devotees see Sri Ramakrishna, naked like a child, pacing up and down, chanting the names of the various gods. Sometimes he gazes at the Ganges, sometimes he goes to the pictures of the gods hanging on the wall and offers his obeisance, and sometimes he sings hymns in a very sweet voice. At times he says, "Thou art the *Veda*, the *Purana*, the *Tantra*, the *Gita*, the Gayatri, the *Bhagavata*, the bhakta and Bhagavan." Referring to the *Gita*, he says again and again, "*Tagi*[1], *tagi*, *tagi*, *tagi*." And sometimes he says, "Thou art Brahman, Thou art Shakti (Divine Power); Thou art Purusha[2]; Thou art Prakriti[3]; Thou art *virat*[4]; Thou art *svarata*[5]; Thou art *Nitya* (the Absolute); Thine is the whole *lila*; Thou art the twenty-four cosmic principles."

In the meanwhile, early morning *arati*[6] has started in the temples of Kali and Radhakanta. Conch shells sound and bells are ringing. The disciples wake up to see that flowers are being

[1] Tagi means a renouncer. It is formed by reversing the word "Gita".
[2] The Self, the Absolute, Spirit. Pure Consciousness, the witness of the changes of Prakriti
[3] Primordial Nature, composed of the gunas, the material of the universe of mind and matter
[4] Personified vastness
[5] One who is self-illumined and illumines others
[6] Singing of devotional songs along with waving of lights before the sacred images

collected from the Kali Temple flower garden for worship of the gods. The morning sacred music from the Nahabat floats over the area.

Narendra and the other devotees finish their morning ablutions and meet Sri Ramakrishna. He stands next to his room on the western corner of the northeastern verandah, his face beaming with a smile.

Narendra — I have noticed a number of sadhus belonging to the sect of Nanak seated in the Panchavati.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, they arrived yesterday. (To Narendra) I would like to see you all seated together on the mat.

All the devotees sit down on the mat. Sri Ramakrishna looks at them with delight and talks to them. Narendra raises the topic of sadhana (spiritual disciplines).

Practicing spiritual disciplines in the company of women prohibited for Narendra and others – sadhana done in the attitude of a son is extremely pure

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and others) — Bhakti, or love of God, is the essence. When you develop love for Him, discrimination and dispassion come by themselves.

Narendra — Well, the *Tantra* talks of sadhana in the company of women.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not a good path. It is very difficult and often brings about the downfall of the aspirant. Spiritual disciplines can be practiced with the attitude of a hero, a maidservant, or even the attitude of a mother to a child. I have the attitude of a child to his

mother. The attitude of a maidservant is also good. The path of sadhana with the attitude of a hero is very difficult. The attitude of a child is very pure.

The sadhus belonging to the sect of Nanak salute Thakur saying, "Namo Narayana[1]!" Thakur asks them to take their seats.

Everything is possible with God – miracles

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Nothing is impossible for God. Nobody can describe His real nature. All is possible for Him. There were two yogis practicing sadhana. The sage Narada passed by. Knowing him to be Narada, one of them asked, 'Are you coming from Narayana? What is He doing?' Narada said, 'I saw that He was passing camels and elephants back and forth through the eye of a needle.' One of the yogis said, 'What is there to marvel at? Everything is possible for Him.' The other yogi replied, 'Oh, no. That is impossible. You have never been there.' "

It is about nine in the morning. Thakur is seated in his room when Manomohan from Konnagar arrives with his family. He bows to Sri Ramakrishna. "I am taking my family to Calcutta," he says. Thakur makes kind enquiries and then says, "Today is the first *Agastaya*[2] and you are going to Calcutta. What can I say, brother?" Saying this, he smiles a little and resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna instructs Narendra to become absorbed in meditation

Narendra and his friends return after bathing in the Ganges. Sri Ramakrishna says to Narendra with

[1] Salutations to the Lord

[2] The first day of the month of Bhadra. It is considered an inauspicious day for making a journey because Agastaya Muni set out for his journey to the south from Vindyachal on this day of Bhadra never to return.

great eagerness, "Go to the banyan tree and meditate on the Lord. Shall I give you an *asana* (mat)?"

Narendra and his Brahmo friends sit at the foot of the banyan tree in the Panchavati. It is around half past ten in the morning. Soon Sri Ramakrishna and M. arrive. Thakur begins to talk to the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Brahmo devotees) — At the time of meditation, you must become absorbed in Him. Can you reach the precious stones at the bottom of the sea by floating on the surface?

Saying so, Thakur begins to sing in his sweet voice.

Song –

O my mind, dive deep, taking the name of Kali on your lips – dive into the deep waters of the heart, where the precious stones lie.

If you do not reach the treasure by diving three or four times, it does not mean that the sea of the heart has no treasures within.

Dive with all your might but once, O mind. In the sea of jnana, of *Kulkundalini*[1], lie pearls of peace.

By your bhakti and wishing for Shivayukti (union with Shiva), you will reach them.

In this sea, there are six alligators – of lust and the rest – always moving about looking for food.

Smear your body with the turmeric of discrimination. The smell of turmeric will keep them away from you.

Many are the precious gems that lie scattered at the bottom of the sea.

Says Ramprasad, "Jump into the sea and you shall get them."

[1] Kundalini; the serpent power

The Brahmo Samaj – lectures and social reforms – first attain the Lord and then preach

Narendra and his friends come down from the terraced platform and stand close to Thakur, who talks to them as they proceed south to his room.

"Alligators can catch you when you dive," Sri Ramakrishna says. "But when your body is smeared with turmeric, they won't touch you. In the sea of the heart there are six alligators, those of lust and the other passions. But when you rub your body with the turmeric of discrimination and dispassion, they cannot touch you."

"What will learning and lecturing avail one if he does not have discrimination (*viveka*) and dispassion (*vairagya*)? The Lord is the only Reality and all else is transitory; only He is real, all else is unreal – this is called discrimination.

"First install Him in the temple of your heart. Speeches and lectures can be delivered later if you like. What use is it to cry 'Brahman, Brahman,' unless you have discrimination and dispassion? It is just like blowing a conch shell.

"There was once a young man named Padmalochan. His fellow villagers called him by the pet name of Podo. In the village was a dilapidated temple, which contained no image of the deity. All around it, plants of Ashwattha and other bushes had grown up. Inside, bats made their nests. The floor was littered with their droppings and covered with dust. Nobody visited this temple.

"One day after dusk the villagers heard the sound of a conch shell. It came from the side of the temple. The villagers thought that somebody had perhaps installed the image of God in it and that evening worship with lamps was being performed. Boys, old

men, men and women ran to the temple to worship God and witness His arati. But they saw that Padmalochan was standing there blowing a conch. There was no image of God, the dirt of the temple had not been removed, and the bat droppings were still there. They exclaimed, 'Madhava (God) has not been installed in the temple of your heart!' "

Song –

O Podo, Lord Madhava has not been installed in the temple of your heart.

You have brought confusion unnecessarily by blowing the conch.

Eleven bats are camping there night and day.

"What will the blowing of a conch shell avail you, if you want to install Madhava (God) in the temple of your heart and wish to attain Him? Purify your mind first. When your mind is purified, God will take His seat on that pure *asana*. When there are bat droppings, Madhava cannot be installed. There are eleven bats, the eleven organs: Five organs of perception, five of karma [of work like hands, feet, etc.], and the mind. First install Madhava; then if you like, deliver sermons and lectures. Take a plunge first. Dive and pull out the gems. Then take to any other work.

"But nobody wants to dive. One practices no *sadhana*[1] and no *bhajan*[2]; one does not have discrimination and dispassion. However, one learns a couple of things and begins to lecture!

"It is the most difficult task to teach humanity. Only he who receives Bhagavan's commandment after realizing Him may teach mankind."

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[1] Practice of spiritual disciplines
[2] Singing of devotional hymns

The [worldly] wife – all come under the control of one who has sincere bhakti

Thakur comes to the western part of the northern verandah of his room while talking and stands there. Mani is beside him. Thakur says again and again, "You can not reach Bhagavan without developing discrimination and dispassion." Mani is married. He says to himself earnestly, "What will happen to me!" He is twenty-eight years old and has received an English college education. He asks himself, "Do discrimination and dispassion mean renunciation of 'lust and greed?' "

Mani (to Sri Ramakrishna) — What should one do if one's wife says, 'You are neglecting me. I shall commit suicide.'

Sri Ramakrishna (in a grave tone) — She who is an obstacle in the way to the Lord, let her commit suicide or anything she likes! Such a wife should be shunned.

"**She who is a hurdle in the way of the Lord is an *avidya* (worldly) wife.**"

Absorbed in deep thought, Mani leans back against the wall worried. Narendra and the other devotees stand there without speaking a word.

Thakur continues talking for some time. He suddenly comes and stands near Mani. Alone with him, he softly says to Mani, "But if one has sincere love of God, all come under his control – whether it is the king, wicked people, or a wife. If you have sincere bhakti for the Lord, the wife also comes gradually to this path. If you are good, God willing, she can also become good."

These words extinguish the fire in Mani's heart. He had been thinking that if his wife committed suicide, it could not be helped.

Mani (to Sri Ramakrishna) — How dangerous it is to be a householder!

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani and Narendra) — That is why Chaitanya Deva said, 'Listen, brother Nityananda. There is no salvation for a man of the world.'

(Alone to Mani) "There is no salvation for him who doesn't have pure love for the Lord. He who lives a family life after God-realization need have no fear. If one practices spiritual disciplines at times in a solitary place and thus develops pure love for God, there is no danger in family life for him. Chaitanya Deva also had family men as his devotees. But they lived as householders only in name – for they lived without attachment."

The worship of gods with food offerings and waving of lights is over. Now music begins to sound in the Nahabat. It is time for the deities to rest. Sri Ramakrishna sits down to take his meal. Narendra and other devotees are also going to have their meal with him.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary Celebrated in Dakshineswar

Chapter I

With devotees at daybreak

Today the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna will be celebrated at the Kali Temple. It is Sunday, 11 March, 1883, the second day of Falgun. The intimate disciples of Thakur will celebrate his birthday with him.

This morning devotees have been coming one by one to the temple garden. The shrine of Mother Bhavatarini[1] faces the entrance to the temple garden. The *sanai*[2] is being played beautifully in the natmandir, in *prabhati*[3] raga (type of melody), just after the early morning arati. It is spring and all the creepers and trees have clad themselves in new leaves. The hearts of the devotees dance with joy in anticipation of Thakur's birthday celebration. The very atmosphere seems filled with waves of heavenly joy. When he arrives, M. sees that Bhavanath, Rakhal and Bhavanath's friend, Kalikrishna, are already there. It is very early in the morning. Thakur is talking with them happily, seated on the eastern verandah. M. goes to them and prostrates before Thakur to salute him.

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[1] The Divine Mother, saviour of mankind from the bonds of the world
[2] A wooden wind instrument
[3] Matin; morning song

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Oh, you have come! (To the devotees) One does not succeed if one has the feeling of shame, hatred and fear. How much joy you will have today! But the rascals who do not sing and dance, intoxicated with the name of the Lord, will never attain Him. Why feel ashamed of talking about God, why fear what others think? Come, sing together.

Bhavanath and Kalikrishna sing.

Song –

Blessed is this day so full of joy,

We are together spreading Your true religion in Bharat (India).

Every heart is Your abode, everywhere Your holy name is taken.

The community of devotees is singing Your glories,

Lord, we want neither wealth, nor friends, nor fame. We desire nothing.

Men and women pray to You with a longing heart.

O Lord, we have taken refuge at Your feet. Why fear? Why fear death?

Shouting, 'Victory, victory to You,' we have attained the mine of immortality.

Sri Ramakrishna listens to the song with full attention and his hands folded. While listening, he suddenly goes into ecstasy. In fact, Thakur's mind is like a dry matchstick – strike it but once and it lights. The mind of an ordinary man is like a wet matchstick – howsoever much you may strike it, it doesn't ignite. The reason is that it is attached to the objects of sense enjoyment. Sri Ramakrishna remains absorbed in meditation. After a long time, Kalikrishna whispers something in Bhavanath's ear.

What should be first? Name of the Lord or instruction to the working classes

Kalikrishna salutes Thakur and rises. Thakur is surprised and asks him where he is going.

Bhavanath — Sir, he has some work to do, so he must go.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why does he need to go?

Bhavanath — Sir, he is going to the Baranagore Working Men's Institute.

Kalikrishna leaves.

Sri Ramakrishna — He is unlucky. You see, the name of the Lord today will give such great joy! His fate does not allow him to enjoy it.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees during his birthday celebrations – rules of conduct very difficult for monk

It is between 8:30 and 9:00 in the morning. Not feeling well, Thakur did not take a dip in the Ganges today. Instead, a pitcher of water for his bath is brought to him on the eastern verandah. Thakur takes his bath and the devotees help him. As he bathes, Thakur says, "Keep a jug of water aside." He pours that water on his head last of all. Sri Ramakrishna is taking great care today – he doesn't pour more than a jug full of water over his head.

After his bath, he chants the name of Bhagavan in a very sweet voice. Putting on freshly laundered clothes, he goes south through the brick courtyard to Kali's shrine. A devotee or two

accompany him. He constantly repeats the Name. His eyes, half closed, look like the eye of a bird hatching eggs.

Reaching Mother Kali's shrine, he offers his obeisance and performs worship. It is not the time for formal worship, but he offers flowers and sandal paste at the feet of the Mother, and then brings them to touch his own forehead. Lastly, he brings the Mother's flowers and leaves to his forehead. Then he says to Bhavanath, "Take the green coconut which has been offered to Mother Kali."

Thakur then goes toward his room through the brick courtyard. He is accompanied by M. and Bhavanath, who holds the green coconut. On the right is the Radhakanta (Radha and Krishna) temple. Thakur says, "This is the home of Vishnu." He offers them obeisance by lying prostrate on the ground, after having the darshan[1] of the dual images of Radha and Krishna. To his left are the twelve Shiva temples. He offers obeisance, thinking of Sadashiva[2].

Thakur now reaches his room. He sees that devotees are already assembled there – Rama, Nityagopal, Kedar Mukherji and many others. All of them lie prostrate to salute him. Thakur enquires about their well-being.

Seeing Nityagopal, he says, "Do you want something to eat?" Nityagopal has the attitude of a child. He is not married; he is twenty-three or twenty-four years old. He is generally surcharged with ecstasy. He sometimes visits alone, and at other times in the company of Ram. Sri Ramakrishna loves him because of his ecstatic state. Thakur mentions occasionally that he is in the state of a

[1] Seeing, experiencing; paying respect to a holy place or person by a ceremonial visit; also the blessing or purification felt in the presence of holiness.

[2] An appellation of Lord Shiva

paramahamsa[1]. Just now, he is looking at him as Gopal (child Krishna).

Nityagopal says, "I would like to have something to eat." His whole conduct is childlike.

Instruction to Nityagopal: Complete prohibition of the company of women for the *tyagi* (man of renunciation)

After eating, Thakur takes him to the semi-circular verandah in the western corner of the room near the Ganges. He talks to him.

A great woman devotee, thirty or thirty-two years old, occasionally visits Sri Ramakrishna. She has great devotion to him. She also has great motherly affection for Nityagopal because of his wonderful states of mind. She often takes him to her house.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Nityagopal) — Do you visit her?

Nityagopal (childlike) — Yes, I do go. She takes me home with her.

Sri Ramakrishna — Beware, holy man! Go to her once or twice. Not very often, or you will fall! 'Lust and greed' constitute maya. **A holy man must remain very far away from women.** Everybody has a fall in their company – even Brahma and Vishnu struggle for life in their company.

The devotee listens to all this.

M. (to himself) — How strange! Thakur sometimes says that this devotee is in the state of a *paramahamsa*. Even in this high state there is risk! Thakur has made

[1] Highest class among saints who have attained final knowledge and sanctity

such difficult rules of conduct for a sadhu. He runs the risk of downfall if he associates himself with women. If one does not have such a high ideal, how can one be liberated? That woman is unique in devotion. Even then, there is risk! Now I understand why Sri Chaitanya awarded such hard punishment to the Younger Haridas. Even though Mahaprabhu (Sri Chaitanya) forbade him, the younger Haridas talked with a young widow. Haridas was a sannyasi (monk), of course. So Mahaprabhu left him. What punishment! How hard the rule for a sannyasi! And what love Sri Ramakrishna has for this devotee! Lest some misfortune should befall him later on, he promptly cautions him in advance. The devotees are struck dumb! 'Beware, holy man.' This grave warning is heard by them all.

Chapter III

God with form and God without form – Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi at the name of Rama

Now Sri Ramakrishna has come with the devotees to the northeastern verandah of the room. A householder, a resident of Dakshineswar, is also seated with the devotees. He talks Vedanta at home. In the presence of Thakur he is now talking with Kedar Chatterji on the topic of Shabda Brahman[1].

Sri Ramakrishna and avatarhood – Sri Ramakrishna and harmony of religions

The Resident of Dakshineswar — Is the *Anahata Shabda*[2] always sounding within and without?

[1] The sound of Om
[2] Unstruck sound of Om

Sri Ramakrishna — This sound alone is not enough. There is something indicated by the sound. Can I derive pleasure just from your name? Unless I see you, I cannot be a hundred percent happy.

The Resident of Dakshineswar — That *Shabda* is Brahman, the *Anahata* sound.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Kedar) — Oh, I see. His belief is like that of the rishis. The rishis said to Ramachandra, 'Rama, we know you are the son of Dasharatha. Bharadvaja and other rishis may take you as an avatar and worship you. But we only want Akhanda Sachchidananda (Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute).' Hearing this, Rama laughed and left.

Kedar — The rishis did not accept Rama as an avatar. They were fools.

Sri Ramakrishna (gravely) — Please don't say such things. We all have our own inclinations. Besides, what one understands is what one can digest. The mother cooks fish for her children in different ways. To some she serves *pulao* (fish with fried rice). But every stomach cannot digest *pulao*. To them she gives fish soup – whatever one can digest. And then some people prefer fried fish, and some, fish with sour sauce. (All laugh.) We all have different dispositions.

"The rishis were jnanis (men of knowledge), so they sought Akhanda Sachchidananda (Indivisible Existence Knowledge Bliss Absolute). On the other hand, devotees seek the avatar – to enjoy his love. Seeing Him, the darkness of the mind is dispelled. The *Purana* says, 'When Ramachandra entered the Council Hall, it was as if a hundred suns were shining.' Then why were the councilors not burnt? The answer to this

is that His light is not physical light. The lotus of the heart of all the councilors opened their petals. You see, when the sun rises, the lotus opens its petals."

Sri Ramakrishna is talking to the devotees as he stands there. Suddenly his mind is withdrawn from the external world and plunges within. "The lotus of the heart has opened up," he says. He now goes into deep samadhi.

The lotus of Sri Ramakrishna's heart has opened in samadhi, having the vision of Bhagavan. He stands as before, but like an inanimate object. His holy face is radiant and smiling. Some of the devotees are seated, while others are standing. None utters a word. The devotees watch him intently. They have never before seen this unique image of love, or enjoyed the sight of samadhi. After a long time, his samadhi breaks.

Taking a long breath, Sri Ramakrishna repeats the name of Rama again and again, as though nectar flows from every letter of the word. Now he sits down. The devotees sit around him and gaze at him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — When an avatar comes, an ordinary man cannot recognize him – he comes as if in secret. Three or four of his intimate devotees recognize him. Rama was a full manifestation of Brahman, he was a perfect avatar – but only twelve rishis knew this. The other rishis said, 'Rama, we only consider you as a son of Dasharatha.'

"The Akhanda Sachchidananda[1] cannot be known by all, but he who attains Nitya (the Absolute) and yet lives in His lila (sport) to enjoy himself with Him has ripe bhakti. Only after you have seen the queen in the foreign land (England), can you describe her, her work, and anything else about her. Bharadvaja and other

[1] Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute

rishis prayed to Rama in these words: 'Rama, you are that very Akhanda Sachchidananda. You have manifested Yourself before us in the form of Rama. In fact, it is with the help of Your maya that You have appeared as a human being.' Bharadvaja and other rishis were great devotees of Rama. They had ripe bhakti."

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna in the joy of kirtan and samadhi

The devotees sit wonderstruck listening to this doctrine of the avatar. Some of them say, "What a wonder! He who is called Akhanda Sachchidananda in the *Vedas*, beyond mind and speech, that Being has manifested Himself before us as a man three and a half cubits[1]." Since Sri Ramakrishna himself is saying this, it must be true. Were it not, this great man would not have gone into samadhi just by repeating, "Rama, Rama." Undoubtedly, he has been seeing Rama's form in the lotus of his heart.

Soon the devotees of Konnagar arrive, singing kirtan to the accompaniment of *khol* (Indian drum) and cymbals. Manomohan, Nabai and many others, singing the kirtan of the Name, reach Sri Ramakrishna in the northeastern verandah. Sri Ramakrishna, intoxicated with divine love, sings devotional songs with them.

At times during the kirtan, while dancing, he goes into samadhi. Then he stands like a statue. In this state, the devotees adorn him with big interwoven garlands of flowers. The devotees look on him as Gauranga himself standing before them. Sometimes, Thakur is in the inmost state of samadhi (divine consciousness) when he loses all external

[1] Unit of length based on the length of the forearm from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger and usually equal to about 18 inches

consciousness and appears like an inanimate statue. At other times, overcome with divine love, he dances in a semi-conscious state. When in full consciousness, like Gauranga, he joins the devotees in singing hymns.

Sri Ramakrishna stands in samadhi. He has garlands around his neck. A devotee holds him for fear he might fall. Other devotees stand around him and sing kirtan to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. His sight is fixed, he faces westward; his beautiful moon-like face beams with divine love.

The devotees gaze at this image of joy for a long time. His samadhi ends. It is mealtime. After awhile the kirtan also ends. The devotees busy themselves in serving Sri Ramakrishna his meal.

After resting for some time, Sri Ramakrishna puts on a new yellow cloth and sits down on the smaller cot. The devotees watch him. The unique figure of this joyous saint clad in yellow cloth and wearing a radiant smile on his face attracts them wholeheartedly. Their eyes are never satiated by watching this divinely rare, holy and loving person. M. says to himself, "I continue to want to watch him and to merge myself in that sea of beauty!"

Thakur sits down to take his meal. The devotees, too, happily partake of the prasad.

Chapter V

Talk on harmony of religions with the goswami

After the meal, Sri Ramakrishna rests on the smaller cot. The room, even the outer verandah, is full of people. The devotees sit on the floor in the room, gazing at Thakur all the while. Kedar, Suresh, Ram, Manomohan, Girindra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, M. and a number of other devotees are inside the room. Rakhal's father is also in the room.

Thakur addresses a Vaishnava goswami[1] seated there. Whenever he sees a goswami, Thakur bows his head in salutation. Sometimes he even prostrates himself.

The great importance of name or love of God – Ajamila

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, what do you say is the way?

Goswami — Sir, *Nama* (repetition of the holy Name) indeed takes one to Him. In the age of Kali, Name is of the greatest importance.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, undoubtedly. Name is of great importance. Yet if there is no love, how can it help? Deep yearning for the Lord is essential. What will it avail me if I repeat the Name but my mind remains tied to 'lust and greed'?

"The scorpion or spider sting is not cured just like that. One has to treat it with the smoke of cow dung cakes."

Goswami — But what about Ajamila? Ajamila was a great sinner; there was no sin he did not commit. But he attained liberation by calling his son by his name, Narayana, at the time of his death.

Sri Ramakrishna — Perhaps Ajamila had performed many meritorious deeds in an earlier birth. And it is a fact that he practiced austerities later in his life.

"And one can say this too, that it was his last birth. What use is it to wash an elephant if it again smears its body with mud? It becomes its original self. But before it enters its stable, if someone wipes the dust off and gives it a bath, it remains clean.

[1] A Vaishnava guru or preceptor

"Even if a person is purified by repeating the Name, it is possible that he may be defiled later on by committing a number of sins. Such a person has no will power. He does not promise to himself that he will not commit another sin. A bath in the Ganges makes one's sins disappear. But then, what does it avail one if sins disappear? They say that these sins live on the trees. As soon as a person returns from his bath in the Ganges, all his old sins jump onto his shoulders from the trees. (All laugh.) The same old sins sit again on the shoulders! One takes a step or two after the bath and lo! they are there again on one's shoulders!

"So, repeat the Name and also pray at the same time that you may develop love for the Lord. And that all transitory things, such as money, name and fame, and pleasures of the body, may have less and less attraction for you. You must pray thus."

Vaishnavism and sectarianism – harmony of religions

Sri Ramakrishna (to the goswami) — When one develops sincere devotion to Him, one can realize the Lord by any religion. The Vaishnavas will attain Him, so will the devotees, the Vedantists and also the Brahmajnanis. And the Muslims and the Christians shall also attain Him. Everybody will attain God if they develop sincere devotion to Him. But some people pick a quarrel. They say, 'Unless you repeat the name of Lord Krishna, you will not succeed.' Others say, 'If you don't repeat the name of Mother Kali, you will achieve nothing.' Yet others say, 'Except through Christianity, you will reach nowhere.'

"Such intelligence is known as 'dogmatic intellect'. Thinking that only my religion is true and all others are false is not right. You can attain the Lord by many paths.

"Besides, some say that the Lord has a form, that He is not formless, and they quarrel with the others. The Vaishnavas quarrel with the Vedantists. Unless you see the Lord face to face, you cannot talk of Him correctly. He who has seen Him, knows that the Lord has forms and He is also formless. What else He is cannot be talked about.

"A number of blind men came to an elephant. Somebody told them that it was an elephant. The blind men asked, 'What is the elephant like?' and they began to touch its body. One of them said, 'It is like a pillar.' This blind man had only touched its leg. Another man said, 'The elephant is like a husking basket.' This person had only touched its ears. Similarly, he who touched its trunk or its belly talked of it differently. In the same way, he who has seen the Lord in a particular way limits the Lord to that alone and thinks that He is nothing else.

"A person, having defecated in a jungle, said when he returned, 'I have seen a beautiful red chameleon under a tree.' Another person said, 'I went before you under that tree. Why, it is not red, it is green. I saw it with my own eyes.' And another person said, 'I know it well. I went earlier than both of you. I have also seen that chameleon. It is blue.' Two other people reported that it was yellow or brown, as well as of various colours. This led to a big quarrel. Everybody thought that what he had seen is true. Finding them quarreling, a person said, 'What is the matter, brothers?' When he heard their accounts, he said, 'I live under this very tree. I know very well what this animal is like. Each one of you is right in describing it. It is a chameleon – sometimes green, at other times blue, then again other colours. And at times I find it has no colour at all – it is attributeless.' "

God with form and without form

(To the goswami) "It is no use just saying that the Lord has a form. It is right that He assumes a human body, as in the case of, say, Sri Krishna. He appears before the devotees in different forms. This is true. But it is also true that He is the formless Akhanda Sachchidananda[1]. The *Vedas* say that He is both with form[2] and formless[3], with attributes[4] as well as attributeless[5].

"Do you know how it is? Sachchidananda is like an infinite ocean. When it becomes cold, ocean water freezes into ice, which floats on the surface in different shapes. In the same way, when the cold of bhakti affects the ocean of Sachchidananda, one sees God with form. For the devotee He is with form. But when the sun of jnana rises, the ice melts; it becomes water as before – water above, water below, water everywhere. That is why they pray in the *Srimad Bhagavata*, 'Lord, You are with form, and You are also formless. We see you wandering around like a human being, though the *Vedas* say that You are beyond mind and speech.'

"So one can say that for some devotees He assumes eternal forms. There are places where the ice never melts – it assumes the form of crystal."

Kedar — Sir, in the Srimad Bhagavata Vyasa Deva prayed for God's forgiveness for three misgivings. At one place he says, 'Oh Bhagavan, You are beyond mind and speech. But I am narrating Your lila (worldly play) – that is only Your aspect with form. Pray pardon me.'

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[1] Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute
[2] *Sakara*
[3] *Nirakara*
[4] *Saguna*
[5] *Nirguna*

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, God is with form and He is also formless. Furthermore, He is even beyond form and formlessness. There is no limit to Him.

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna – ever-perfect and dispassion[1] of youth

Rakhal's father is seated in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Rakhal is living with Thakur these days. Rakhal's father has married again after the passing away of his mother. He comes here sometimes to see Rakhal. He has no great objection to Rakhal's staying here. He is a rich worldly man, always busy with litigation and other such matters. A number of lawyers, Deputy Magistrates and the like, often come to visit Thakur. Rakhal's father comes to talk with them at times. He consults them on many worldly matters.

Sri Ramakrishna looks at Rakhal's father every now and then. He wants Rakhal to stay with him at Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Rakhal's father and the devotees) — Oh, what a mood Rakhal is in these days! Watch him and you will see his lips move every now and then. You see, he mentally repeats the Lord's name, so his lips move.

"All these boys are of the class of the ever-perfect. They are born with the knowledge of the Lord within. They will know when they are a little older that much contact with the world brings a sure fall. In the *Vedas* there is mention of a bird called Homa which lives high in the sky. It never comes down to earth. It lays its egg in the sky and the egg begins to fall. After some days a young chick breaks out of its shell and continues the

[1] Vairagya; nonattachment

fall. It is so high that it grows wings and opens its eyes during the fall. Still falling, it sees that it is going to hit the earth. Falling on the ground means sure death. Seeing the earth fast approaching, the young bird suddenly swoops upward toward its mother. It has but one aim: to reach its mother.

"All these youngsters are like this bird. They are afraid of the world from their early years. They have only one care, 'How to reach the Mother, how to attain the Lord.'

"You might ask, 'How can they have such jnana and bhakti living among worldly people and born out of the semen of worldly parents?' There is a deep meaning to this. If a gram falls on a mound of dung, it still germinates into a gram plant. How useful such a gram is! It has indeed fallen on a heap of dung. But does it mean that it will become a plant of some other type?

"Oh, what a mood Rakhal is developing these days! But how could it be otherwise? If arum is of a good quality, its shoots are also good. (All laugh.) Like father, like son."

M. (aside to Girindra) — He has explained God with form and God without form so well. Do the Vaishnavas believe only in God with form?

Girindra — Perhaps they do. They are one-sided.

M. — Have you been able to understand the 'eternal form' of God? What about the 'crystal'? I am not able to understand it well.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Well brother, what are you talking about?

M. and Girindra smile but do not reply.

Brinde, the maidservant (to Ramlal) — I say, Ramlal, please give this man his meal. You may give me my meal later on.

Sri Ramakrishna — What! You have not given Brinde her meal?

Chapter VII

In joy of devotional songs at Panchavati

The devotees sing the kirtan in the Panchavati in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna joins them. Repeating the name of the Divine Mother with the devotees, he is filled with joy.

Song –

The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.

The rough wind of 'misdeeds' made it fall, circling to the ground.

Maya's pull made it heavy and I could not raise it again.

It got entangled with the string of love for wife and children.

Alas! Its crest of jnana is rent. One may pull at it but it falls down.

It has lost its crest, so how can it fly? The six passions have overpowered it.

It was tied to the string of bhakti. While playing, it fell into illusion.

Oh Nareschandra! Rather than weep or laugh, it was better not to have come to play.

They sing another song with the accompaniment of drum and cymbals. Thakur dances with the devotees.

Song –

The bee of my mind drinks deep at the blue lotus-like feet of Mother Shyama.

At the blue lotus-like feet of Shyama, at the blue lotus-like feet of Mother Kali.

The honey of all worldly things – the flowers of lust and so on – have lost all charm.

The feet of the Mother are black-hued, so is the bee; black has mixed with black.

The five elements, turbulent and fascinating, have broken away on seeing this play.

It is only now that Kamalakanta has seen the fulfillment of his hopes.

Joys or sorrows are the same to him; the ocean of joy rolls on.

The kirtan continues. The devotees sing.

Song –

What a machine Ma Shyama has built!

(What a machine Ma Kali has made!)

In this machine three and a half cubits high, what pranks She is playing!

Mother, You Yourself are working this machine, holding its cord.

But the machine says: I am working by myself. It does not know who is working it.

Whoever finds the Mother remains a machine no more.

Yet some machines have even bound the Mother Herself with the cord of love.

Song –

One comes to this world to throw dice. Coming here, I had entertained so many hopes.

To hope for hope is a low state of mind. First I got a 'five' [of the dice].

Then a 'twelve'! And 'eighteen' and 'sixteen'. The way they come again and again, I, too, came to the world.

O Mother! When I got the 'next twelve,' I got entangled with the five[1] and the six[2].

The devotees enjoy themselves. When they stop for awhile, Thakur rises. A number of devotees have arrived in and around Thakur's room.

Sri Ramakrishna is going south toward his room from the Panchavati. M. is with him. They meet Trailokya as they reach Bakultala. Trailokya offers his obeisance to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya) — They are singing in the Panchavati. Why don't you go there?

Trailokya — What shall I do there?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why, it is very nice. Do see it once.

Trailokya — I have already been there once.

Sri Ramakrishna — Good, very good. Very nice.

Chapter VIII

Sri Ramakrishna and right conduct in household

[1] Five elements collectively, namely: earth, water, fire, air and space
[2] Six passions

It is about half past five or six. Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees on the southeastern verandah. He is looking at the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Kedar and other devotees) — The sadhu who has renounced the world only repeats the name of Hari. He has no other work to do. If he meditates on the Lord, there is nothing to wonder at. If he doesn't contemplate the Lord and doesn't repeat the name of Hari, everybody will speak ill of him.

"But if a family man repeats the name of Hari, it is heroic. Just see: King Janaka was a great hero. He wielded a double-edged sword – one of jnana and the other of karma. On the one hand he was a perfect knower of Brahman; on the other, he engaged himself in worldly work. An unchaste wife attends to her household work with great care. But she is constantly thinking of her lover.

"The company of holy men is always essential. Holy men bring you in contact with the Lord."

Kedar — That is true, sir! Saints come for the good of mankind. They are like the railway engine which has many compartments attached to it. It pulls them all. Or they are like a river or reservoir: they quench the thirst of many people.

The devotees gradually prepare to go home. One by one they prostrate themselves before Sri Ramakrishna and take the dust of his feet. Addressing Bhavanath, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Don't go home today. I am greatly inspired when I see you people."

Bhavanath has not yet entered family life. He is about nineteen or twenty, fair complexioned, and has a beautiful body. He begins to shed tears at the

very mention of the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna looks on him as Narayana (the very manifestation of God).

Section III

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple with Devotees – Second Visit of Adhar

Chapter I

Manilal and visit to Kashi

Come! Let's go once again to the Dakshineswar temple to see Sri Ramakrishna. Let us observe how he enjoys himself in the company of devotees, how he is ever absorbed in samadhi thinking of the Lord. Let us see him now in samadhi, now intoxicated with the joy of devotional songs, and now talking to the devotees. He always has the name of the Lord on his holy lips. His mind is ever indrawn, his conduct is like a five-year-old child. He utters the name of the Divine Mother with every breath. His conduct is absolutely like that of an ego-less five-year-old child. A child of five is unattached to sense objects; he is always happy, guileless and magnanimous. Sri Ramakrishna's one word is that God is the reality and all else is unreal, a matter of two days. Let us go and see that child intoxicated with divine love. The great yogi that he is! He roams all alone on the shore of the infinite ocean. One can't tell what he sees in this infinite ocean of Sachchidananda. Lo! Having witnessed it, he is roaming about mad with love.

It is Sunday, the first day of the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra. Yesterday, Saturday, was the new moon when Sri Ramakrishna went to Balaram's house. In the deep dark night of the new moon, Mahakali plays alone with Mahakala[1].

[1] Shiva, the Absolute

For this reason Thakur does not remain still long on the new moon. And it is why he is in the state of a child who is with his mother night and day and who cannot live without her.

It is Sunday morning, 8 April, 1883, twenty-sixth day of Chaitra. Thakur is seated like a child. Rakhal, a young devotee, is seated close by.

M. comes and prostrates himself before Thakur. Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, Ramlal, Kishori and many other devotees are gathered here. The elderly Brahmo devotee, Manilal Mallick, enters and offers his salutations to Sri Ramakrishna.

Mani Mallick has been on pilgrimage to Kashi. He is a trader and has an office in Kashi.

Sri Ramakrishna — So you have been to Kashi. Did you meet any sadhus there?

Manilal — Yes sir, I went to see Trailanga Swami, Bhaskarananda, and some others.

Sri Ramakrishna — Please tell me how you found them.

Manilal — Trailanga Swami is still in the same temple on Manikarnika Ghat with Benimadhav. People say that he was in a high spiritual state before. He could work any number of miracles. Now they are far fewer.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is fault finding by worldly people.

Manilal — Bhaskarananda meets everybody. He is not like Trailanga Swami who doesn't say a word.

The spiritually perfect believe that 'God is the doer' – others believe in vice and virtue, in 'free will'

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you have any conversation with Bhaskarananda?

Manilal — Yes sir, we talked for a long time. Among other things we discussed vice and virtue. He said: Don't tread the path of sin. Don't even think of evil. This is what the Lord requires of you. Perform only actions which bring you merit.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, that is true as far as worldly people are concerned. But it is different for those who are illumined, who have realized that the Lord is the only reality and all else is unreal and ephemeral. They know that the Lord alone does everything and that we are all non-doers. They who are illumined never take a wrong step, they don't have to calculate before eschewing sin. They have so much love for the Lord that all their actions are exemplary. But they know that they are not the doers of their actions, they know that they are only the servants of the Lord – that they are only the machines while the Lord is the operator of the machine. They know that what they are doing is by His will, that what they speak is what He makes them speak, that they move the way He makes them move.

"They who are illumined have gone beyond vice and virtue. They see that the Lord is indeed doing everything. There was a monastery whose sadhus used to go out every day to beg holy food. One day one of the sadhus saw that a landlord was badly thrashing a man. The sadhu was very compassionate. He intervened to stop the landlord from beating the man. The landlord was in a rage. All his anger fell on the body of the sadhu – he thrashed him so badly that the sadhu fell unconscious. Somebody went to the monastery to say

that one of their sadhus had been harshly beaten by the landlord. The sadhus of the monastery came and saw him lying unconscious. All five of them lifted him, carried him to the monastery and laid him down. They sat around the unconscious sadhu downcast. Some of them fanned him. One of them said, 'Pour a little milk in his mouth.' As they did so, the sadhu regained consciousness and opened his eyes. A brother of the monastery said, 'Let me see whether he has regained consciousness, whether he can recognize us.' He spoke loudly to the sadhu, asking him, 'Maharaj! Who is making you drink the milk?' The sadhu said slowly, 'Brother, he who beat me is indeed giving me milk to drink.'

"Till one has realized the Lord, one cannot attain such a state."

Manilal — Sir, what you are saying is a lofty idea. I had such conversations with Bhaskarananda – on various topics.

Sri Ramakrishna — In whose house is he staying?

Manilal — In some householder's residence.

Sri Ramakrishna — How old is he?

Manilal — He should be 55.

Sri Ramakrishna — And did you talk of anything else?

Manilal — I asked him how one could cultivate devotion and love for God[1]. He said, 'Repeat the Name. Say Rama, Rama.'

[1] Bhakti

Sri Ramakrishna — That is very good.

Chapter II

Family life and renunciation of work

The worship of the Mother of the Universe, Radhakanta, and the twelve Shivas in the temples has ended. The sounds of music and bell-ringing related to the arati and food offering is heard. It is the month of Chaitra. It is midday. The sun is shinning brightly. Only a short while ago, flood tide started and the wind began to blow from the south. The holy Bhagirathi (the Ganges) began to flow northward a short time ago. Thakur is resting in his room after eating.

Rakhal's native village is near Basirhat. In summer there is a great scarcity of water in his region.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani Mallick) — Look, Rakhal was telling me that there is a great scarcity of water in his region. Why don't you get a reservoir dug there? It will benefit so many. (Smiling) You have so much money. What will you do with it? It is said that dealers of oil are very calculating. (Thakur and the devotees laugh.)

Manilal Mallick's home is in the Sinduriapatti region of Calcutta. The Sinduriapatti Brahmo Samaj holds its sessions there. He invites numerous people during the annual festival of the Brahmo Samaj. He invites Sri Ramakrishna with them. Manilal also has a garden house in Baranagore. He often stays there alone and occasionally goes to see Thakur. Manilal is certainly a man of calculation! He seldom hires a carriage to go to Baranagore directly. Instead, he first goes to Sobhabazar by tram. From there, he hires a seat in the carriage for Baranagore. And yet he has no shortage of money. Many years later, after this, he

donated twenty-five thousand rupees to support poor students.

Manilal keeps quiet, but after some time, having talked about various other matters, he refers to the prior conversation: "Sir, you were talking about a reservoir. That is all right. But why talk about dealers of oil?"

Some of the devotees try to suppress their laughter. Thakur also smiles.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and Brahmo devotees in Dakshineswar – the essence of *prema* (ecstatic love)

In a little while a number of elderly Brahmo devotees arrive from Calcutta. One of them is Thakurdas Sen. There is a big gathering of devotees in the room. Thakur is seated on the smaller cot. Facing north, with a smile on his face, he sits like a child, conversing happily with the Brahmo devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Brahmo devotees and others) — You people talk so much of *prema*. But is it such an ordinary thing? Chaitanya Deva was in the state of ecstatic love. There are two characteristics of ecstatic love. One is to forget the world, to become unaware of everything external in the love of God. Chaitanya Deva would think that it was Vrindavan when he was in any forest and it was the Jamuna river at the sight of the sea.

"The second characteristic is to have no attachment to the body one holds so dear. The conviction of the body as the self fully disappears.

"You cannot have *prema* till you have seen the Lord.

"There are some marks of God-realization. When the splendour of love manifests within, God-realization is not far away.

"What does the splendour of love mean? Discrimination, dispassion, compassion, service to the holy, company of the holy, chanting the name and glories of the Lord, truthfulness – all these.

"When one comes across these signs of love, one can know that the vision of God is not far away. By looking at the condition of the servant's house, one can easily determine if a rich man has decided to visit it. First of all, all weeds are cleared, cobwebs are removed, and the floor of the house is cleaned. The rich man himself sends a cotton carpet, a hubble-bubble and other such things. Seeing all these things being carried to the house, everyone surmises that the visit of a gentleman is not far away."

A Devotee — Sir, does one have to reason before being able to control the senses?

Sri Ramakrishna — That is a path – the path of discrimination. If you take to the path of devotion[1], the inner senses get controlled automatically. And it is easier. The more you develop love for the Lord, the less you care for the pleasures of the senses.

"When they lose their child, can the grief-stricken parents think of their bodily pleasures?

A Devotee — I cannot imagine loving God.

Great importance of God's name – the way – the Divine Mother's name

[1] Bhakti

Sri Ramakrishna — By repeating His name you rid yourself of all your sins. Lust, anger, desire for creature comforts and the rest all disappear.

A Devotee — But who likes to repeat His name?

Sri Ramakrishna — Pray to God with a longing heart that you may develop a taste for His name. He always fulfills one's wishes ...

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing in a sweet voice. Overwhelmed by the sorrows of man, he expresses to the Divine Mother the pangs he feels in his heart. Bringing upon himself the state of an ordinary human being, he talks to the Divine Mother of suffering of humanity.

Song –

O Mother Shyama, it is not anybody's fault. I myself am drowning in the well I have dug.

The six passions – lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and envy – are the spade by which I have dug a well in sacred land.

This well is now full of the waters of Kala (Death).

O the heartthrob of Death! O the Beloved of Death!

O my Redeemer! How can I save myself?

O the embodiment of the three gunas, You can rid me of these modes through Your powers.

How can I save myself from these waters of Death? Thinking of it, I shed an unceasing flow of tears.

Before, the level of the water of Death was not so high, but now it rises to my chest. How can I save myself?

O my Mother! You are my only refuge. Mother, liberate me. You can take me across by a single glance of Yours.

And then he sings of the delirious fever of mankind, which can be cured only by one's love for Her name.

Song –

O Mother Shankari[1], O great physician, what delirious fever I suffer, in spite of the grace of Thy feet.

This perishable transitory pride of mine is consuming me in its flames. What depraved attachment I have developed for 'me and mine'!

How can I sustain my life – my desire for wealth and friends is ceaseless?

O the bestower of all goodness! I continue to indulge in things illusory, in wrong doings, in committing sinful acts and so on.

Says Dasharathi: My eyes are full of the deep sleep of maya,

And my stomach filled with the worm of violence. I am revolving as in a whirlpool of illusory action.

I am developing night and day distaste for Your name. Alas! will I be cured of this malady?

Sri Ramakrishna — 'Developing distaste for Your name.' If in disease you develop distaste, you have no possibility of being saved. If you retain a bit of taste, there is good hope for cure. Therefore, they talk of taste for the Name. The Lord's name must be repeated. Call the Lord by any name: Durga, Krishna, Shiva or any other. If, while repeating the Name, your love increases day by day, if you feel joy, then there is no danger. You are sure to be cured. His grace is sure to fall on you.

Sincere bhakti versus artificial bhakti – God cares only for the mind

[1] An appellation of Goddess Durga

"As the state of your mind, so is your gain. Two friends walking together saw the Bhagavata being recited at a place on the way. One of them said, 'Come, friend, let's go and listen to the recitation of the Bhagavata.' His friend looked in, but shortly left for the red light area. He soon felt disgusted with himself and thought, 'Shame on me! While my friend is listening to the story of Lord Hari, look where I have brought myself!' On the other hand, the fellow who was listening to the Bhagavata was also feeling regret. He said to himself, 'What a fool I am! This fellow is talking nonsense and I sit here listening to it! How my friend must be enjoying himself!' Now, when both these men died, he who was listening to the Bhagavata was taken away by a messenger of death and he who had gone to a prostitute was taken to Vaikuntha (Vishnu's abode, heaven) by a messenger of Vishnu.

"Bhagavan sees the mind. He doesn't care who is doing what or where one is. 'Janardhana[1] knows the innermost thought.'

"While initiating a disciple in the Kartabhaja sect, they tell him, 'Now it is your mind.' That is to say, now it all depends on your mind.

"They say that he who has the right kind of mind acts correctly and achieves the right end.

"Because of the powers of his mind, Hanuman could cross the ocean. 'I am a servant of Rama, I repeat His name, what is impossible for me?' He had this faith."

Why can't one see the Lord? Because of one's egoism

[1] An appellation of Lord Vishnu, the vanquisher of demon Jana

"As long as one retains one's I-ness, one is ignorant. As long as egoism persists, there is no liberation.

"Cows bellow, '*Hamba*, *hamba*' and goats bleat, '*Mein*, *mein*.' For this reason, they have to suffer a lot. The butcher slaughters them and makes shoes, drums and hides out of their skin. There is no end to their suffering. In the Hindi language, *hum* and *mein* both mean 'I'. The uttering of *mein, mein* (I, I) leads to more and more suffering. At last, the butcher makes strings with the guts of these animals. When the carder uses the string in his bow, it produces the sound of *tuhun, tuhun*. That is to say, 'You, you.' It is only when one says, 'You, You,' that one is saved and there is no more suffering.

"Oh Lord, you are the Doer and I, a non-doer. This is what constitutes jnana (spiritual wisdom).

"It is only when you become lowly that you can rise. The chatak bird has its nest near the ground, but it can soar at high altitudes. Farming is not possible at high elevations. You need low land to farm. Water only collects on low land; only there is cultivation possible."

Company of sadhus essential for the householders – who is truly poor?

"One should take a little trouble to seek the company of the holy. At home one only talks of worldly matters. There is always one ailment or the other. The parrot says, 'Rama, Rama,' only when it settles on a perch. While flying through the jungle, it only squawks.

"Money does not make a man great. A sign of a wealthy man is light in every room. The poor do not have money to spend on oil, so they can't have that many lights. You see, one must not keep this temple of

the body in darkness: one must light the lamp of jnana (knowledge) within.

"Light the lamp of jnana in the house and see the face of the Mother Brahmamayi[1]."

Real meaning of prayer – marks of spiritual awakening

"Everyone can attain jnana. There is the individual self and the Supreme Being. One must pray to God. Everyone can be united with the Supreme Self. Every house is fitted with gas pipes, but one must apply to the gas company to receive the gas. When you file an application, the company will arrange for the gas and your house will be lit. The company has its office in Sealdah. (All laugh.)

"Some people may become illumined. They have a special mark: they don't like to hear anything but words about the Lord. They don't like to talk of anything but of the Lord. Take, for example, the seven seas, the rivers of the Ganges and the Jamuna – they are all full of water. But the chatak bird wants only the raindrop. It is dying of thirst, but it does not drink any other water."

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna and others sing – Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi

[1] All Blissful Mother of the Universe

Sri Ramakrishna asks somebody to sing. Ramlal and a brahmin brahmachari[1] of the Kali Temple sing in accompaniment with a *banya*[2].

Song –

O Kamalapati[3], the lover of bhakti, if you dwell in the Vrindavan of my heart, my devotion to you will be like that of chaste Radha.

My wish for liberation will be like the milkmaids, and my body will be like the village of Nanda; my love will be like that of mother Yashoda.

Hold me, hold me, O Janardhana[4]. Lift the mount Govardhan of the weight of my sins[5]. Kill quickly the six messengers of Kamsa, lust and so on.

Play on your flute of grace and tame the cows of my mind. I pray that You remain in this pasture of my heart and that I may have the glimpse of my ideal.

Dwell now and evermore with your heart full of affection for your servant under the Vanshivatta[6] of hope.

If you say that you are a prisoner of the love of the cowherds of Braja, then this Dasharathi, bereft of all spiritual knowledge, will become a cowherd and your slave.

Song –

What value has the new cloud in comparison to the moon-like face of beloved Shyam (Krishna)?

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[1] An unmarried and celibate student practicing spiritual discipline
[2] A semi-circular instrument played along with the tabla (drum)
[3] The husband of Kamala (Goddess Lakshmi).
[4] An appellation of Lord Vishnu; the vanquisher of demon Jana.
[5] Krishna had lifted the mount Govardhan on his finger. So lifting the weight of sins means to mitigate the effects of sins.
[6] A banyan tree at Vrindavan under which Krishna played his flute.

With a flute in His hands and a smile on His lips, He lights the world with His loveliness.

Clad in yellow robes, He outshines lightning. A wreath of wild flowers swings from His lotus-like breast to His feet.

In the company of youthful maidens, He lights up the bank of the Jamuna. Outshining numberless moons is this moon of the lineage of Nanda.

O friend! With the music of his flute, He, the epitome of all excellence, has stolen my heart, my mind and my wisdom.

Says Ganga Narayana, 'To whom shall I tell my sorrow? O friend, if you were to fetch water from the bank of the Jamuna, you would know it.'

Song –

The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.

The rough wind of 'misdeeds' made it fall, circling to the ground.[1]

Way to God-realization – love, gopi-like love – 'tiger of love'

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Just as the tiger devours other animals, similarly, the 'tiger of love' swallows lust, anger and such other enemies. Once you develop love of the Lord, lust, anger and the rest disappear. The gopis (milkmaids) had developed such love for Krishna.

"Moreover, there is the 'collyrium of love'. Radha says, 'Friend, I see Krishna filling all the four directions.' Her friend says, 'Dear one, you have applied the 'collyrium of love' to your eyes. That is why you see

[1] This song was sung earlier too. See Section II, Chapter VII of this volume.

it so.' It is said that if you use a collyrium made with the burnt head of a frog, you see snakes everywhere.

"They who live only with 'lust and greed' – who don't think of God even once – are bound souls. What great work can they perform? They are like mangoes pecked by crows. Such mangoes cannot be offered to the gods. Eating them yourself is also risky.

"Bound souls, worldly people, are like silkworms. They could come out of their cocoons if they wished, but they have built their own homes and maya does not allow them to escape. And it all ends with death.

"Liberated souls are not under the control of 'lust and greed'. Some clever silkworms cut their cocoons and come out. But they are very few.

"Because of maya (attachment), one remains forgetful. Few attain spiritual awakening, few are not deluded by the magic of maya, are not subject to the control of 'lust and greed.' When the pot[1] containing ashes from the maternity room falls on one's feet, the 'damn, damn' word of the magician can do no harm. One can see exactly what the magician is doing.

"There are two classes of perfect souls: one is *sadhanasiddha* (perfected by spiritual disciplines) and the other *kripasiddha* (perfected by the grace of God). Some people go to great trouble to bring water to their fields for a good harvest. Others don't have to struggle at all; rainwater fills their fields. One has to practice sadhana rigorously to save oneself from maya. He who is a *kripasiddha* doesn't have to struggle. But there are only one or two such people.

"And then there are the *nityasiddhas* (ever-perfect ones). They are already spiritually awakened in every

[1] In India, normally a pot containing ashes of cow dung and other substances are kept in maternity room to ward off evil spirits

life. Take the example of a plugged fountain. The plumber, while doing something else, accidentally removes the obstruction and lo! water gushes forth from the fountain. When they see the love for God in an ever-perfect person express itself for the first time, people are amazed. They wonder where such bhakti, such nonattachment[1] and such intense love came from."

Thakur is talking of the love for God – the love of the gopis for Krishna. In the meanwhile, some music begins to play. Ramlal sings.

Song –

O Lord, Thou art my all, the support of my life, the Essence of essences.

I have none but Thee as my own in the three worlds.

Thou art my joy, peace, support, refuge, treasure, wealth, knowledge, intelligence and strength.

Thou art my home, my rest, my relaxation, friend and family.

Thou art my present, my salvation, my future and my heaven.

Thou art my scripture and injunctions too, Thou my wish-yielding guru, the fountainhead of my never-ending bliss.

Thou art the means, the end. Thou art the creator, the sustainer and the adorable one.

Thou art the chastising father, the tender-hearted mother, the pilot who steers me across the sea of life.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Oh, what a beautiful song! 'Thou art my all in all.' The milkmaids said to Radha when Akrur came [to fetch Sri Krishna],

[1] Vairagya

'Oh Radha, He has come to steal your entire wealth!' Such love! Such longing they had for Bhagavan!

And then another song –

Does the chariot of Him who wields the *sudershan chakra*[1] and who moves the world around and around with His wheel of Power need any wheels? O milkmaids! Don't hold the wheels of the chariot back.

(These lines refer to an incident when the milkmaids held back the wheels of Sri Krishna's chariot from moving when he was to go to Mathura with Akrur from Vrindavan).

Song –

O dear *sakhi*[2], for whom are you now making this garland with so much care and love?

While listening to the song, Sri Ramakrishna dives deep in the sea of samadhi. The devotees gaze upon him amazed. It is quiet. No movement is made. Thakur is merged in samadhi. He sits there with folded hands, as he is seen in the photograph. Tears of joy trickle down the outer corners of his eyes.

Conversation with the Lord – Sri Ramakrishna's vision – Krishna pervading everywhere

Thakur returns to the normal state of consciousness after quite some time. But what was he talking about with Him whom he has seen in samadhi? Some words reach the ears of the devotees. Thakur speaks indistinctly to himself, "You are I, I am You. You eat, I eat You... Beautiful indeed: You do it all."

"Are my eyes jaundiced? I see You everywhere.

[1] A wheel shaped weapon of Lord Vishnu
[2] Milkmaid friend of Radha

"O Krishna! Friend of the lowly and beloved of my soul. Govinda!"

Saying, "Beloved of my soul," and "Govinda," he again enters samadhi. Absolutely still and unable to take their eyes off him, the devotees see Sri Ramakrishna in a deep ecstatic state.

Chapter V

Sri Ramakrishna filled with God-consciousness – word of God issuing from his lips

Second visit of Adhar Sen – Sri Ramakrishna instructs a householder

Sri Ramakrishna is in samadhi and is seated on the smaller cot. The devotees sit around him. Adhar Sen has arrived, accompanied by several friends. He is a Deputy Magistrate. It is his second visit to Thakur. Adhar is twenty-nine or thirty years old. Saradacharan, a friend of Adhar, is grieving the loss of his son. Saradacharan was a Deputy Inspector of Schools. He is now retired and receives a pension. He had been practicing meditation and prayer even before his retirement. Nothing consoles him after the death of his elder son. That is why Adhar, having mentioned Thakur's name to him, has brought him here. Adhar had also been wanting to see Thakur again.

Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi ends. He sees the roomful of devotees looking at him and then mumbles something to himself.

Is the Lord talking and instructing from his lips?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is seldom that worldly people show spiritual wisdom – only occasionally, like the flame of a lamp. No, no, it is like the ray of the sun

when it peeps through a chink in the wall. It is only possible for worldly people to repeat the Lord's name – not to feel His love. It is like a child saying, 'I swear by God.' He has learnt these words from his quarreling aunts.

"Worldly people have no grit. It does not matter to them whether they succeed or not. If they dig a well for water but strike a rock, they stop digging and look for another spot. If they find sand in the next spot, they give that spot up too. If they had continued to dig at the original spot, they would have found water there.

"A human being reaps what he sows; as the song goes."

Song –

Nobody is to be blamed, Mother. I am drowning in the water of the well I have dug.

" 'I' and 'mine' constitute ignorance. If you think about it deeply, you will find that what you call 'I' is none other than the Atman. Think about it. Are you the body? Are you bones, or flesh, or something else? You will conclude that you are none of these. You don't have a distinguishing individuality. Moreover, you do nothing. You have neither good qualities nor defects, neither merit nor sin.'

"To say that this is gold and that is brass is ignorance. That all is gold is jnana."

Signs of God-realization – is Sri Ramakrishna an Incarnation of God?

"All reasoning stops after God-realization. Yet, some people do reason even after they have realized God. And some people chant God's name and glories out of love for Him.

"How long does a child cry? Till he is put to the mother's breast. Thereafter, he stops crying and he is full of joy. He takes his mother's milk so joyfully! Yet, he may also play and smile while he sucks.

"God has become all the forms there are. Even so, He manifests most in the human being. He is especially present in the person who has the nature of a purely *sattvic*[1] child – who laughs, cries, dances and sings innocently."

Loss of a son – 'O *jiva*, get ready for the battle'

Thakur inquires about Adhar's well being. Adhar tells him that his friend has lost his son. Thakur begins to sing a song.

O jiva! Get ready for the battle!

Death has entered your house in battle array.

Mounting the chariot of bhakti, bearing the quiver of jnana,

Bending the bow of your tongue with the bowstring of love,

Aim the Brahmastra[2] that is the name of the Mother of Universe.

Here is a strategy for the battle: you need no chariot or charioteer.

Fight your foe from the bank of the Ganges; he will easily be slain.

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[1] Possessing the quality of sattva

[2] Weapon of Brahma (Lord the Creator)

"What to do? Be ready for death. Death has entered your house. You have to battle it with the weapon of God's name. He is the Doer. I say, 'Mother, I act as You make me act; I speak what You make me speak. I am an instrument, You are the Being who uses the instrument. I am the dwelling, You are the indweller; I am the carriage, You the driver.'

"Give Him the general power of attorney. If you give the responsibility to a good man, you never suffer any harm. Let His will be done.

"I say, brother, shouldn't you be sorrow-stricken? He was your son! When Ravana was killed in battle, Lakshmana ran to him and saw that there was no spot among his bones where there was not a hole. Then he said to Rama, 'Rama, how powerful are your arrows! There is no spot on Ravana's body without a hole.' Rama replied, 'Brother, the holes that you see in his bones are not made by arrows. It is due to grief for his sons. That grief has pierced all his bones. All the holes are marks of it – his grief has done this to him.'

"You see, all this is transitory – home, family and children are all for two days. Only the palm tree is real. One or two fruits have dropped from the tree. Why sorrow for them?

"God does three things: He creates, He preserves, and He dissolves. Death is inevitable. At the time of universal dissolution, everything will be destroyed, nothing will survive. But the Divine Mother will preserve some seeds of creation. She will take them out again at the time of the new creation. It is just like the mistress of the house with her hotchpotch pot. (All laugh.) In it She preserves cucumber seeds, sea-foam and indigo pills in small bags."

Chapter VI

Instruction to Adhar – death stands facing you

Thakur talks to Adhar while standing on the verandah to the north of his room.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Adhar) — You are a Deputy [Magistrate]. You have this position by the Lord's grace. Don't forget Him. But know that everybody has to tread the same path. You are here only for a few days[1].

"The world is your place of work. You have come here to work. It is just as one comes from one's country home and works in Calcutta.

"Some work is necessary – you must practice some spiritual disciplines. You must finish your work quickly. The goldsmith, while melting gold, uses bellows, blow pipes and a fan to blow air so that fire may give more heat and the gold may melt. When the gold melts, he asks for a smoke. He has worked hard for a long time; he will now smoke his pipe. You have to have grit, a firm resolve. Only then can you practice spiritual disciplines.

"The mystic seed of His name is very powerful. It dispels ignorance. A seed is so soft, and so is its sprout. Yet it breaks the earth and germinates.

"When you live amid 'lust and gold,' your mind is forcefully pulled to them. So you must be cautious. But he who has renounced the world need not fear much. The genuine renouncer keeps a proper distance from

[1] Adhar Sen passed away after a year and a half. Getting the news, Thakur cried for a long time before the Divine Mother. Adhar was a great devotee. Thakur had said to him, "You are my own." Adhar's house was in Benetola, Sobhabazar, Calcutta. Several of his daughters are still alive. His brothers, Shyam Lal and Hira Lal, and other members of his family still live there in his Calcutta house. The drawing room of the house and the worship hall have become places of pilgrimage.

'lust and gold'. That is how he can fix his mind on the Lord while practicing spiritual disciplines.

"Who is a real renouncer? He who can keep his mind fixed on the Lord. Like the bee which only takes honey from flowers. But he who is in the household, living amid 'lust and gold,' can sometimes fix his mind on the Lord, and at other times it goes to 'lust and gold'. He is like the ordinary housefly who sits on sweets one moment and on a sore or excreta another.

"You must always fix the mind on the Lord. Initially, you have to make some effort. Later you enjoy a pension."

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna in Worship Hall of Surendra's House

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna celebrates worship of Mother Annapurna with the devotees at Surendra's house

It is 6.00 p.m. Sri Ramakrishna has graced the assembly of the devotees with his presence in the courtyard of Surendra's house.

One climbs east from the courtyard to reach the worship hall. There a beautiful image of the Mother has been installed. Around Her neck is a garland of flowers, and hibiscus and vilwa leaves have been offered at Her feet. The Mother's image illumines the worship hall.

Today the worship of Mother Annapurna[1] is to be celebrated. It is Sunday, 15 April, 1883, the eighth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Chaitra (the third of Vaishakh 1290 B.Y.) Surendra has invoked the Mother, so he has invited Sri Ramakrishna. Accompanied by devotees, he arrives at the worship hall and pays his respect to the deity. He stands there, gazing at the Mother, telling the *mula mantra*[2] on his fingers. The devotees also pay their obeisance and have darshan of the deity. They stand close to the Lord (Sri Ramakrishna).

Thakur now comes down to the courtyard with the devotees. It is covered with cotton carpets, over which are laid white linen sheets and bolsters. On

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[1] Divine Mother, the giver of food

[2] An esoteric word or words uttered inwardly at prayer

one side a number of Vaishnava devotees are seated with their drums and cymbals, prepared to sing devotional songs. The devotees sit around Thakur.

Thakur is invited to lean against a bolster, but he does not do so. Instead, he pushes the bolster a little away before sitting down.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — To lean against a bolster! Do you know how difficult it is to give up vanity? You may think you are not prey to vanity, but it enters in no time from somewhere.

"Even when the goat's head is severed, its limbs continue to shake. Suppose you have a fearful dream. After you wake up, even quite wide-awake, you still have palpitations of the heart. Vanity is just like this. Even if you forcibly push it away, it returns. Guests often put on long faces and complain, 'Oh, we have not been treated hospitably.' "

Kedar — 'Be humbler than a blade of grass, be patient and forbearing like a tree.'

Sri Ramakrishna — I am the dust of the dust of the feet of the devotees.

Vaidyanath arrives. He is well educated and an advocate in the High Court of Calcutta. He salutes Thakur, folding his hands, and takes a seat on one side.

Surendra (to Sri Ramakrishna) — He is related to me.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, I see. He has a very agreeable nature.

Surendra — He has come to ask you something.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vaidyanath) — Whatever you see is all His power. Without His power, nobody can do anything. Yet God's power is not equally manifest everywhere. Vidyasagar asked me, 'Has God given more power to some?' I replied, 'If there was not unequal power, why should we have come to see you? Have you grown two horns?' Yet this is certain: God is present in all as the all-pervading power[1] – but there is a special manifestation of His power in some.

Free will or God's will

Vaidyanath — Sir, I have a doubt about what they call free will. Sometimes I wonder if it is true that I can do a good act as well as a bad one. Do we really have free will?

Sri Ramakrishna — Everything is under the Lord's control – it is all His *lila* (divine sport). He has created a variety of things: small, big, powerful, weak, good and bad. Whether a man is good or bad is all His maya, His sport. Don't you see that all the trees in the garden are not alike?

"Till one has realized God, one entertains the feeling that one is free to act. This illusion is also created by Him. If man did not feel that he had free will, there would be much more sin. If sin entailed no punishment, one would have no fear of it.

"Do you know how one feels when one has realized the Lord? It is like this: I am a machine, You are the operator; I am the home, You are the mistress of the home. I am a chariot and You are the charioteer. I move the way You make me move. I speak the way You make me speak."

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[1] Vibhu

Is it possible to realize the Lord in a day? Company of the holy is essential

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vaidyanath) — It is not right to argue. What do you think?

Vaidyanath — Yes sir, the inclination to argue disappears only when one attains jnana.

Sri Ramakrishna — Thank you! (Since Thakur says it in English, they all laugh.) You will succeed. When a person talks of the Lord, people don't believe him. If some spiritually advanced person says that he has seen the Lord, even then ordinary people don't believe him. They say, 'If he has seen the Lord, he should show us too.' But can one learn the science of examining the pulse in one day? One must accompany an Ayurvedic physician for a long time. Only then can he distinguish between the various humors of *kapha*, *vayu* and *pitta*[1]. One must keep the company of him who practices the art of examining the pulse. (All laugh.)

"Can everybody tell the grade of yarn – what particular grade it is? You have to be a dealer in yarn. Or you have to work for some days with a dealer of yarn before you can tell whether the grade of the yarn is forty or forty-one."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna enjoys kirtan with devotees – he passes into samadhi

They are now going to start the kirtan. Drums are playing, Goshtha being one of the drummers. Singing has not yet begun, but the soft sound of the drum

[1] Phlegm, wind and bile

brings to mind Gauranga's group of devotees singing the name of the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna is becoming absorbed in ecstasy. Every now and then he glances at the drummer and exclaims, "Ah! Ah! What joy! My hair stands on end!"

The singers ask which song should they sing. Sri Ramakrishna asks humbly, "Please sing something about Gauranga."

The kirtan begins. First they sing about the celestial beauty of Gauranga. It is followed by another song.

Song –

The beauty of Gauranga's face, filled with divine love, is brighter than the brightest gold.

His smile, which illumines the whole world, surpasses even the charm of a million moons shining in the autumn sky.

The kirtan sings of the beauty of Gauranga. The musicians add lines –

Friend, did you see the full moon?

It does not wane, it does not stain.

It illumines the devotee's heart.

The musician then sings: "His face is bathed in the nectar of a million moons." Hearing this line Thakur passes into samadhi.

The song goes on. After awhile Thakur regains outer consciousness. He suddenly stands up. Full of emotion and intoxicated with divine love like the *gopis* (milkmaids) of Vrindavan, he describes Krishna's beauty and joins the musician:

Friend, is it his beauty or because of some fault of my own?

In the three worlds, I see nothing but Krishna!

Thakur sings as he dances. The devotees watch him in amazement. The singer then sings: The *gopi* is speaking –

O flute, please stop. Can't you go to sleep?

He sings further –

How can it sleep?

It is lying on such a delicate and beautiful twig.

It is drinking the nectar from the Lord's lips and is being played with His fingers.

Sri Ramakrishna now takes his seat. The musician sings: Radha says, "Eyes gone, ears gone, nose gone; all my senses have departed! Oh, why have I been left alone?"

The last song is about the meeting of Radha and Krishna.

Radha is making a garland of flowers to place around the neck of Shyam.

While she is doing so, she sees Shyam, the treasure of all good qualities.

Song – Radha meets Sri Krishna

The lovelorn Radha lies in the Nidhu grove of Vrindavan absorbed in the thoughts of Krishna.

No simile can describe the beauty of these two lovers, nor is there any limit to their love.

The one half shines like bright gold, the other half like blue sapphire.

A garland of wildflowers dangles from one side of the neck and from the other swing precious pearls.

A *makar kundal* (an ornamented earring) adorns half the ear; on the other half is a *rattan chabhi* (an ornament).

On one half of the forehead is the glow of the moon and on the other half that of the sun.

On half of the forehead waves the peacock feather and on the other half a braid.

And gleams there the golden lotus, too, and the serpent ready to disgorge a jewel.

The kirtan ends. Thakur utters the mantra, "Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan (the Lord, the devotee and His Word are one)." He prostrates himself again and again. He bows to the devotees all around him. Next he takes the dust of the ground where the kirtan was sung.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and God with form and without form

It is about 9:30 in the evening. Mother Annapurna's presence has illuminated the worship hall. Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees stand in front of Her. Surendra, Rakhal, Kedar, M., Ram, Manomohan and other devotees are present. They have all taken prasad with Thakur. Surendra fed them to their heart's content. Now Sri Ramakrishna is to return to Dakshineswar. The devotees also must go home. They have all gathered in the worship hall.

Surendra (to Sri Ramakrishna) — Today we have not repeated the Mother's name even once.

Sri Ramakrishna (pointing at the deity) — Ah, how beautiful the hall looks, as if the Mother Herself has illumined it! How much joy is there in having Her darshan in this manner! All sensuous desires, all sorrows, flee. Can one have the vision of the Formless God as well? Surely one can. But it is not possible if you have the least worldliness. The rishis meditated on the

Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute after giving up everything worldly.

"The Brahmajnanis[1] sing about Him as the unchanging and unmoving entity. I don't like it. One who sings like this apparently does not enjoy God's sweetness. When you are deluded by treacle, you don't think of syrup made with sugar candy.

"Just see, how you people are having visions with your physical eyes and enjoying the sight. They who talk of the Formless One get nothing – neither within nor without."

Sri Ramakrishna now sings the Mother's name.

Song –

O Mother, ever blissful as You are,

Do not deprive me of bliss.

My mind knows nothing but Your lotus feet.

The king of Death scolds me.

Tell me, Mother, what I shall say to him?

My only desire was to cross the sea of the world with the name of 'Bhavani' on my lips.

I did not even dream, O Mother,

That You would drown me in this shoreless, fathomless sea!

I swim night and day in the name of Durga.

Even so, there is no end to my sorrow.

If I die this time, O the Beloved of Shiva!

Nobody will ever repeat Your name, O Durga.

And then he sings.

[1] Referring to the members of Brahmo Samaj

Song –

Let us utter, utter the name of Durga.

He who treads his path saying, 'Durga, Durga, Durga,' is protected by Her with the trident in Her hand.

You are the day, You are the evening, You are the night.

At one time, You art Purusha[1] and at another the Eternal Female.

You ask me to leave You, but that I shall never do;

I shall be the ankle-bells ringing on Your feet;

I shall be the fish in water and You will catch me in Your claws,

When You soar high in the sky like a kite,

O Mother Brahmamayi[2],

My life shall be rent asunder at one cruel scratch of Your claw.

Do, then, give me Your two red feet as refuge.

Sri Ramakrishna pays his obeisance again to the image of the deity. As he goes downstairs, he calls out, "Rakhal, are my shoes there?"

Sri Ramakrishna enters the carriage. Surendra salutes him. The other devotees also salute him. The street is still lighted by the moon. Thakur's carriage moves toward Dakshineswar.

[1] The Self, the Absolute, Spirit. Pure Consciousness, the witness of the changes of Prakriti

[2] The All Blissful Mother

Section V

Sri Ramakrishna at a Devotee's House in Calcutta

Chapter I

Ramchandra Dutta's house – Sri Ramakrishna enjoys the kirtan

It is Saturday, 2 June, 1883, the dark fortnight of the month of Vaishakh. It is an auspicious day when Thakur comes to visit Calcutta. From Balaram's home he goes to Adhar's. Having heard the *kalahantrita*[1] kirtan he comes to Ram's house in Madhurai Street at Shimulia.

Ramchandra, who had qualified in medicine, was first an assistant chemical examiner in the Medical College. Later, he became a professor of chemistry in Science Association. He built his house with his own money. Thakur has visited his house on several auspicious occasions; consequently, it has become a very holy spot of pilgrimage for the devotees. By the grace of the Guru, Ramchandra is trying to lead the spiritual life of a householder. Sri Ramakrishna profusely praises Ram. He says, "Ram invites devotees to his house and serves them very well!" His house has become a special meeting place of the devotees. Nityagopal, Latu and Tarak [later Swami Shivananda] have become like members of Ramchandra's own family. They have lived with him for several days. Besides, Narayana[2] is worshipped there daily.

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[1] Expressing regret at separation as a result of insult hurled by a lover. Here it indicates pangs of separation of Radha from Krishna.

[2] Lord Vishnu

Ram first invited Sri Ramakrishna to his home on the Phuldolan[1] day – it was the full moon day of Vaishakh. On this day nearly every year he invites Sri Ramakrishna with his devotees to celebrate the festival. Many of Ramchandra's disciples, who are like his own children, continue to celebrate it.

Today the festival will be at Ram's residence, which the Lord [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] is to visit. So Ram has arranged a reading of the Srimad Bhagavata. Though the courtyard is small, a great deal has been arranged in it. There is a canopied dais for the pundit to sit while reading the story of Raja Harischandra from the Srimad Bhagavata. When Thakur arrives from his visits to Balaram and Adhar, Ramchandra goes to him to take the dust of his feet. He then accompanies Thakur to a prearranged seat in front of the dais. He is surrounded by devotees. M. is seated close to him.

Sri Ramakrishna and the story of Raja Harischandra

The story of Raja Harischandra continues. Vishwamitra said, "Maharaj, you have given me the whole earth along with the oceans! Thus you do not have the right to stay at any one place. Even so, you may go to live in the holy city of Kashi *dham*[2]. It is the city of Mahadeva (Shiva). Come, let me take you and your wife, Shaibya, and your son. There, you may collect the offering for me." Saying so, Bhagavan Vishwamitra accompanied the king to Kashi, where they visited the temple of Vishveshvara (Lord Shiva).

As soon as the visit to Vishveshvara Shiva is mentioned, Thakur becomes absorbed in ecstasy. He indistinctly utters, "Shiva, Shiva."

King Harischandra could not make the promised offering, so he sold Shaibya. His son,

[1] A festival held in honour of Sri Krishna on the full moon day of Vaishakh. A swing of flowers is decorated for Sri Krishna on this day.
[2] Place of pilgrimage

Rohitashava, went with Shaibya. The pundit also narrates the story of Rohitashava picking flowers at his brahmin master's house. A snake bit him in the garden and he died in the deep darkness of night. There was no one to cremate him. The old brahmin did not leave his bed. Shaibya, all alone, picked up the body of her son in her lap and started for the cremation ground. Every now and then thunder and lightning flashed among the clouds. It was as if lightning was playing again and again in order to pierce the darkness. Shaibya cried as she went, sorrow-stricken and full of fear.

Because he was unable to collect the entire money for the offering, Harischandra sold himself to a *chandala* (pariah). Having then turned into a chandala himself, he earned a small fee from cremating dead bodies. Many dead bodies burned, while others had already been reduced to ashes. How terrible the cremation ground was in the dark night. Shaibya reached it, weeping bitterly. The sound of her cries would rend any heart. What human being does not feel his heart melt to hear this story? All the listeners begin to cry loudly.

What is Thakur doing while listening to the story? He is sitting absolutely still, silent. Once a tear falls from the corner of his eye and he wipes it away. Why does he not cry out restlessly like the others?

The story continues. At last Vishwamitra came and revived Rohitashava. Everyone visited the temple of Vishveshvara Shiva. The pundit ends his reading by narrting that Harischandra's throne was restored to him. Thakur has sat in front of the dais listening to the holy story for a long time. When the story ends, he goes to the outer room and sits down. The devotees and the pundit narrator follow him and sit around him. Thakur requests the pundit to narrate the story of Uddhava.

Liberation and bhakti – the love of gopis – gopis don't want liberation

The narrator says – When Uddhava came to Vrindavan, the cowherd boys and the milkmaids of Braja ran eagerly to meet him. They asked him, "How is Sri Krishna? Has he forgotten us? Does he remember us?" Some of them began to cry, others took him to different parts of Vrindavan, saying, "At this spot Sri Krishna lifted Mount Govardhan on his finger. Here he slayed Dhenukasur. Here he slayed Shaktasur[1]. He grazed his cows in this pasture. He wandered here on the bank of the Jamuna and played here with the cowherd boys. He talked with the gopis in this grove." Uddhava said, "Why are you so anxious about Sri Krishna? He is omnipresent. He is God Himself. There is nothing besides him." The gopis said, "All this is beyond our comprehension. We are not educated. We only know our Krishna of Vrindavan who played with us here."

Uddhava said, "He is the very presence of Bhagavan. If you meditate on him, you do not have to come to this world. Meditation on him liberates the *jiva* (embodied soul)." The gopis said, "We don't understand all this talk about liberation and such. We only want to see our Krishna, the beloved of our soul."

Sri Ramakrishna listens to all the conversation with full attention and goes into bhava. He says, "The gopis are right." Then he begins to sing in the same sweet voice –

I am not hesitant to grant *mukti* (liberation). I hesitate to grant pure bhakti.

Who wins pure love surpasses all. He is served by all.

He triumphs over the three worlds.

Listen, O Chandravali[2], I will tell you of love.

One may gain liberation but rare indeed is bhakti.

---

[1] Dhenukasur and Shaktasur were demons sent by Kamsa to kill Sri Krishna

[2] One of the gopis at Vrindavan

> Because of bhakti I became King Bali's doorkeeper in the nether world.
>
> Only in Vrindavan can one find pure love.
>
> But for cowherd boys and milkmaids none knows its secret.
>
> Because of bhakti in Nanda's house, taking him as my father, I carried his burden on my head.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the narrator) — The bhakti of the gopis is *prema* bhakti[1]. It is *avyabhicharini*[2] and single-minded bhakti. Do you know what *vyabhicharini*[3] bhakti is? It is bhakti mixed with jnana. In it one believes that Krishna has become all – he is the Supreme Brahman, he is Rama, he is Shiva and he is Shakti. But prema bhakti is not mixed with jnana. Hanuman came to Dwaraka and said, 'I want to see Sita and Rama.' Bhagavan [Sri Krishna] said to Rukmini, 'Please assume the form of Sita. Otherwise, there will be no escape from Hanuman.' When the Pandavas were performing Rajasuya Yajna, many kings were present. They all made Yudhisthira sit on his throne and paid obeisance to him. Bibhishana said, 'I shall only pay obeisance to Narayana (Vishnu) and to none else.' Then Sri Krishna himself lay prostrate before Yudhisthira to pay his obeisance. Thereafter, Bibhishana did the same, with his crown on his head.

"Do you know what it is like? It is like a bride in the family. She serves her husband's younger and elder brothers, his father and also her own husband. She gives them water to wash their feet and a towel. She provides a low wooden seat for them all. But she has quite another type of relationship with her husband.

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[1] Ecstatic love for the Lord
[2] Unalloyed; non straying
[3] Disloyal to one's ideal; unchaste

"Prema bhakti is comprised of the two feelings, 'I' and 'mine'. Yashoda thinks, 'Who will look after Gopal (Krishna) if *I* don't do so? He may fall ill if *I* don't.' Yashoda does not know that Krishna is Bhagavan Himself. On the other hand, she feels, 'He is *mine*.' She knew: Krishna is *mine*, that Gopal is *my* own. Uddhava said, 'Your Krishna is Bhagavan Himself. He is the Lord of the Universe. He is no ordinary being.' Yashoda replied, 'I am not asking you about your Lord. I am asking you about my Gopal – my Gopal, not the Lord.'

"What single-minded devotion the gopis had! Only after many, many entreaties to enter the royal court did the doorkeeper take them to Krishna. But when they saw a person with a turban, they stood with bowed heads. 'Who is this person with a turban?' they asked among themselves. 'Shall we lose our chastity by talking to this man? Where is the beloved of our souls who wears yellow robes and a crest of peacock feathers?'

"See, what single-minded devotion they had for Him! A unique kind of mood persists in Vrindavan. People around Dwaraka worship Krishna, Arjuna's friend. They have little regard for Radha."

Firm faith of gopis – jnana bhakti and prema bhakti

A Devotee — Which is better: bhakti mixed with jnana or prema bhakti?

Sri Ramakrishna — Unless one has intense love for the Lord, one cannot attain prema bhakti (ecstatic love) and does not consider Him as one's very own. Three friends were going through a forest when they saw a tiger. One of them said, 'Brother, we are done for.' The second said, 'Why should we die? Let's call on the Lord.' And the third one said, 'No, why trouble Him? Come, let's climb a tree!'

"The person who said, 'We are done for,' did not know that the Lord is the savior. He who said, 'Let's call on the Lord,' was a jnani. He knew that the Lord creates, preserves and dissolves. And he who said, 'Why should we trouble Him? Come, let's climb a tree,' had prema (intense love) in his heart; he had deep love for God. Such a love has this characteristic: the one who has it considers himself more powerful than the beloved. He does not want his beloved troubled. He wants to save his beloved from even the prick of a thorn."

Ram takes Thakur and the devotees upstairs and serves them several kinds of sweets. The devotees take the prasad full of joy.

Section VI

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Kali Temple in Dakshineswar

Chapter I

With devotees in Dakshineswar – on the Phalaharini puja day

Manilal, Trailokya, Biswas, Ram Chatterji, Balaram, Narendra and Rakhal

The fourteenth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Jaishtha. People are fasting on this fourteenth day of savitri[1]. The Phalaharini puja[2] will be celebrated at night on the last day of the dark fortnight. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the shrine of the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. The devotees are coming to see him. It is Monday, 4 June, 1883.

M. had visited Sri Ramakrishna last Sunday. The Katyayani puja[3] was held last night. Thakur, full of emotion, stands in front of the Mother in the natmandir. He says –

Mother, You are the Katyayani of Braja. You are heaven, You are the earth. And You are the nether world.

Hari, Brahma, the twelve Gopals, ten great sciences and ten avatars have all originated out of You.

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[1] On this day a fast is kept by Hindu married women

[2] On this day the Divine Mother is worshipped as the consumer of the karmas of the devotee

[3] Worship of Goddess Durga

This time You shall have to take me across by any means.

Thakur sings and talks to the Mother. He is fully intoxicated with divine love. Now he goes to his room and sits down on his cot.

The Mother was worshipped until midnight.

The following morning, a Monday, Balaram and some other devotees have arrived. Trailokya and other proprietors of the garden have come with their families for the Phalaharini puja.

It is nine o'clock. Thakur sits on the round verandah overlooking the Ganges with a smile on his face. Playfully he places Rakhal's head on his lap – Rakhal is lying down. For some days, Thakur has regarded Rakhal as Gopala (baby Krishna).

Trailokya is going to the temple for Mother Kali's darshan. On his way he passes Thakur's room. Attendants holding an umbrella accompany him. Sri Ramakrishna exclaims, "Rakhal, get up."

Sri Ramakrishna sits up and Trailokya bows down to him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Brother, was there no *yatra* (musical performance) yesterday?

Trailokya — No, it could not be arranged.

Ramakrishna — Well, let it pass this time, but you must see to it that it is not forgotten in the future. One must continue to observe the injunctions.

Trailokya, assenting, leaves. Shortly after, Ram Chatterji, the priest of the Vishnu temple, arrives.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ram, I said to Trailokya, 'The yatra was not performed. You must see to it that it is not forgotten in future.' Should I have said that?

Ram Chatterji — Sir, what is wrong with it? You were right. One must follow the traditions.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Balaram) — Please eat here today.

Before the meal, Thakur tells the devotees a number of things about his spiritual state. Rakhal, Balaram, M., Ramlal and one or two other devotees are present.

Sri Ramakrishna is angry with Hazra – seeing God in man

Sri Ramakrishna — Hazra used to instruct me, saying, 'Why do you think so much about the young men?' One day in a carriage on the way to Balaram's house, I was very worried about it. I said to the Mother, 'Mother, Hazra asks why I think so much of Narendra and the other young men. He asks why I spend so much time worrying about them, instead of meditating.' While I was saying this, She immediately showed me that She had indeed become a human being. One can clearly see Her in a very pure mind. Having seen Her form, when I came down a little from samadhi, I was very angry with Hazra. I said to myself, 'That rascal has defiled my mind!' Then I said, 'Well, after all, he was not to be blamed. How could he know?'

Sri Ramakrishna's first meeting with Narendra

"I see the young men as the very manifestations of Narayana. When I met Narendra for the first time, I noticed that he did not have body consciousness. I just touched his chest with my hand and he lost all external

consciousness. When he returned to his normal state, he exclaimed, 'I say, what did you do to me? I have my father and mother!' This happened in Jadu Mallick's house. Gradually, I felt more and more longing to see him. I became restless for him. Then I asked Bholanath[1], 'I say, brother, what is the matter with me? There is a boy, kayastha by caste, named Narendra. Why do I feel such attraction for him?' Bholanath told me, 'The *Mahabharata* explains it. When the mind of a person who goes into samadhi comes down, he wants to live and associate with sattvic people. He feels contented only when he meets such people.' When I heard this that I was at peace with myself. At times I sat down and wept to see Narendra."

Chapter II

His Earlier Story: Sri Ramakrishna intoxicated in divine mood and his vision of God's form

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, what a state I was in! When I had this state, I didn't know how days and nights passed by. Everybody said that I had gone mad. So they married me off. I was in a state of divine madness. First I was worried for my wife. Then I thought, 'Well, she can live, eat and drink normally, as I do.' I went to my father-in-law's house where a big kirtan was being performed. Nafar, Digambar Bannerji's father, and others attended it. There was a lot of devotional music. At times I felt worried about the future. Then I said to the Mother, 'Mother, if the *zemindar* (landlord) of the village talks to me and shows me his respect, I will know that all my spiritual realizations are true.' And he did come on his own to talk to me nicely.

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[1] Bholanath was a clerk in the Kali Temple. Later he became the treasurer.

His Earlier Story: Worship of sundari[1] and kumari[2] – witnesses Ramlila and balloon in the Maidan – feeding of cowherd boys in Sihore – with Mathur in his Janbazar house

"What a state I passed through! A very ordinary thing would at once fill me with inspiration. I worshipped *sundari*. She was a fourteen-year old girl. I saw her as the manifestation of Mother Herself. I offered her a rupee and bowed down to her.

"I went to see Ramlila[3]. I saw the real Sita, Rama, Lakshmana, and Bibhishana before me. So I worshipped all the actors who were playing these parts.

"I invited *kumaris* and worshipped them. I saw them as the Mother Herself.

"One day I saw a girl in blue robes standing under a bakul tree. She was a prostitute, but my mind at once became filled with Sita. Instead of the girl, I saw Sita herself coming to Rama after being freed from Lanka. For a long time I was unconscious, in the state of samadhi.

"Another day I went for a walk in the Fort Maidan. A big crowd had gathered to watch a balloon being released. My eyes fell on a European boy leaning against a tree with his body bent in three places. My mind was at once filled with the consciousness of Sri Krishna, and I passed into samadhi.

"In Sihore I served snacks and drinks to cowherd boys, as though they were real cowherds of Braja. Then I ate them too.

---

[1] A beautiful girl
[2] An unmarried young girl
[3] Play of Lord Rama

"I often lost consciousness, so Mathur Babu kept me with him in his Janbazar house for a number of days. I felt as though I had truly become a maid of the Mother of the Universe. The women of the household were as comfortable and free with me as with a small boy or a girl. With the maidservant, I used to escort Mathur's daughter to her husband's room to sleep.

"Even now my mind is transported at the thought of the slightest thing. Before, I could not keep myself still when I saw Rakhal mumble while performing japa. I would immediately be transported by the thought of the Lord."

Sri Ramakrishna narrates many other things about his *prakriti* bhava (feminine state). He says, "I told a male musician about the tips of female musicians. He said, 'How well you do it! Where did you learn it?' " Thakur then begins to mimic a female musician, giving tips on how she sings. None of the devotees could keep from laughing.

Chapter III

Thakur with Manilal – an ocean of motiveless grace

Sri Ramakrishna is resting awhile after eating. He is not sleeping, but is a bit drowsy. Manilal Mallick, an old Brahmo devotee, enters and bows down to Thakur. He takes a seat. Thakur remains lying on his bed. Manilal talks to him casually. Thakur is half-asleep, half-awake. He responds to Manilal.

Manilal — Shivanath is all praise for Nityagopal. He says that Nityagopal is in a very nice spiritual state.

Thakur is still lying on his bed, his eyes a bit drowsy. He asks, "What does he say about Hazra?" Thakur

now sits up and talks to Manilal about Bhavanath's bhakti.

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, what a nice spiritual state he is in! His eyes fill with tears when he sings. At the sight of Harish he goes into ecstasy. He says that Harish is truly a very good man. You see, Harish leaves his own house and stays here [at Dakshineswar] at times.

Sri Ramakrishna asks M., "Well, why does he have so much bhakti? Why do Bhavanath and others get inspired with God?"

M. remains silent.

Sri Ramakrishna — You know how it is? All men look alike on the outside, but some of them have 'sweetened milk' within. The *puli*[1] may have lentils for its filling, or sweetened milk. In both cases it looks alike. A filling of 'sweetened milk' is the desire to know the Lord and to have ecstatic love for Him.

Salvation and vision of one's own real Self by Guru's grace –Thakur grants fearlessness

Now Thakur grants fearlessness to the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Some think that they will never gain jnana and bhakti, that they are bound souls. But when the Guru's grace descends on someone, he need not fear. A tigress came into a flock of goats. When it sprang on its prey, it gave birth to a cub. The tigress died, but the cub grew up in the flock of goats. The goats ate grass and so did the cub. They bleated, so the cub also began to bleat. The cub grew to become a big tiger. One day another tiger happened to come into the flock of goats. It was amazed to see a tiger eating grass. It

[1] A ring shaped sweetmeat with some filling in it

ran toward it and grabbed it in its paws. The latter began to bleat. The wild tiger dragged it to a pond and said, 'Look at your face in this water. You are exactly like me. Here is some meat, eat it.' Saying so, it forced the meat into the mouth of the grass-eating tiger. It at first refused to take it and began to bleat, but having tasted blood, it began to eat the meat. The wild tiger said, 'Have you understood now? You are just like me. Now accompany me to the forest.'

"If the grace of the Guru dawns, there is no fear. The Guru makes you understand who you are, what your real nature is.

"If you practice a little spiritual disciplines, the Guru tells you everything: Do this now and that later. In time, one begins to understand what is real and what is unreal. The Lord is the Reality and the world illusory."

Even pretense of spiritual practice is useful – a *jivanmukta*[1] may live in household

"One night a fisherman was casting his net in a garden pond and stealing fish. When the owner of the garden came to know of it, he surrounded the fisherman with his men. They started searching for him with torches etc. In the meantime the fisherman had smeared his body with some ash and sat under a tree like a sadhu. The men looked for the fisherman everywhere, but could not find him. They only saw a sadhu with ash smeared on his body sitting under a tree meditating. The next day the whole neighbourhood was agog with the news that a sadhu of high spiritual attainment had arrived in the garden. Many people went to the sadhu and offered him flowers, fruits, sandesh and sweetmeats to show their respect. They also offered him

[1] One liberated in this very life

a lot of money. The fisherman said to himself, 'What a wonder! I am not a real sadhu. Yet people have so much devotion for me. Should I become a genuine sadhu, I would assuredly realize the Lord. There is no doubt about it.'

"Even the pretense of spiritual practice brought awakening. Had it been true *sadhana*, how much more awakening would one acquire? One would know what is real and what is illusory. The Lord, indeed, is the Reality and the world transitory."

A devotee is thinking, "Is the world transitory? The fisherman renounced the world. But what about those who continue to live in the world? Must they also renounce it?" Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of motiveless grace, immediately says to M., "If a clerk is sent to jail, he has to finish his term there. But when he is released, does he begin to dance joyfully in the street to the beat of the drum? He again finds the job of a clerk and takes up his old profession. By the grace of the Guru, having acquired jnana, one continues to live in the household as a *jivanmukta*."

Saying so, Sri Ramakrishna grants fearlessness to the householders.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna with Manilal and others – God without-form

Manilal (to Sri Ramakrishna) — At what place should I meditate during my daily worship?

Sri Ramakrishna — The heart is a well-known place, meditate on God there.

Faith is all-important – Haladhari believes in the formless God – Sambhu's belief

> Manilal, a Brahmo devotee, believes in the formless God. Addressing him, Thakur says, "Kabir used to say that God with form was his mother and the formless God his father. And he added, 'Whom to slight and whom to worship? Both sides of the scales are even.' "

"Haladhari used to live with God with form during the day and the formless God at night. That is why, whichever bhava you adopt, you can succeed if you have the right kind of faith. Whether you believe in God with form, or in the formless God, you must have sincere faith."

His earlier story: The first ecstasy – is the Lord the doer or is it coincidence?

"Sambhu Mallick used to come to his garden on foot from Baghbazar. Somebody said to him, 'It is so far away, why don't you take a cab? Some misfortune could occur on the way.' Sambhu blushed with anger and said, 'What! I set out on my journey after repeating God's name. How can there be any unfortunate incident?' By having faith in Him, you can do anything! I used to say that I would believe only if I saw such and such person – if such and such accountant talked to me. At that time, whatever used to come to my mind would come to pass."

> M. had studied logic. He had read that it is just coincidence that morning dreams tally with actual events; that, in fact, it was just superstition. He had read this from a chapter on fallacies. So he asks Sri Ramakrishna –

M. — Well, did it ever happen that the actual event did not tally with what you thought?

Sri Ramakrishna — It always tallied. I would repeat His name and whatever I believed would come to pass. (To Manilal) But do you know the fact? Unless you are guileless and generous, you cannot have sincere faith.

"People with such physical traits as a neck bone that is too prominent, and hollow or squint eyes, do not easily acquire faith. 'It is a misfortune to meet bad omens such as a banana tree in the south, the *pui*[1] creeper in the north and a black tomcat passing in front of you!' "(All laugh.)

Thakur's compassion for Bhagavati, the maidservant – Sri Ramakrishna and a wife's chastity and faithfulness toward her husband

It is dusk. The maidservant comes and burns incense in the room. Manilal has left but there are still one or two people in the room. It is still and fragrant. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot. Rakhal is also there.

After some time Bhagavati, the maidservant of the temple proprietor, salutes Sri Ramakrishna from a distance. Thakur asks her to sit down. Bhagavati has been serving for a very long time. She has been with the proprietor for several years. Thakur has known her for many years. Since childhood she has been temperamental, but Thakur is an ocean of compassion, a savior of the fallen. He talks to her about things in the past.

Sri Ramakrishna — You are getting old. Do you feed sadhus and Vaishnavas[2] with the money you earn?

Bhagavati (smiling) — How can I say that[3]?

[1] A creeper used as a pot herb

[2] Followers of Sri Chaitanya; worshippers of Lord Vishnu

[3] She means yes. In India people usually do not mention about their pious deeds.

Sri Ramakrishna — Have you been to Kashi, Vrindavan and so forth?

Bhagavati (a bit hesitant) — How can I say it myself? I have paid for building a ghat paved with stones and my name is engraved on one of the slabs.

Sri Ramakrishna — What are you saying?

Bhagavati —Yes, my name is engraved there as Srimati Bhagavati Devi.

Sri Ramakrishna — Nice, very nice indeed.

Now taking courage, Bhagavati takes the dust of Thakur's feet.

Sri Ramakrishna stands up stunned, uttering, "Govinda, Govinda," just like a person bitten by a scorpion is startled and stands up suddenly. There was the Ganges water in a pitcher in a corner of the room – it is still there. He reaches the pitcher out of breath, as if frightened, and starts washing the spot she had touched with the Ganges water.

One or two devotees present in the room watch this affair in silent amazement. The maid is seated there as if dead. Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of compassion, the savior of the fallen, addresses the maid and says in a touching voice, "You may salute me from a distance." Saying this, he goes back to his seat and tries to make her forget the incident. He says, "Now listen to some songs." And he begins to sing.

Song –

The bee of my mind drinks deeply at the blue lotus-like feet of Mother Shyama.

At the blue lotus-like feet of Shyama, at the blue lotus-like feet of Mother Kali.

The honey of all worldly things – the flowers of lust and so on – has lost all charm for it.

The feet of the Mother are black-hued, so is the bee; black has mixed with black.

The five elements, turbulent and fascinating, have broken away on seeing this play.

It is only now that Kamalakanta has seen the fulfillment of his hopes.

Joys or sorrows are the same to him; the ocean of joy rolls on.

Song –

The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.

The rough wind of 'faults' made it fall circling to the ground.

Maya's pull made it heavy and I could not raise it again.

It got entangled with the string of the love for wife and children.

Alas! The crest of jnana [of the kite] is rent. One may pull at it but it falls down.

It has lost its crest, so how can it fly? The six passions have overpowered it.

It was tied to the string of bhakti. While playing, it fell into illusion.

O Nareschandra! Rather then weep or laugh, it was better not to have come to play.

Song –

O my mind, live by yourself,

Don't go to any other's house.

Search within yourself,

You will find there all you are looking for.

I say, brother, He Himself is the philosopher's stone, the supreme wealth,

He can give you all you want.

At the door of *Chintamani* (wish-fulfilling gem; God) there are heaps and heaps of gems.

Section VII

Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna's first intoxication of divine love

His earlier story – Devendra Tagore, Dinaकान Mukherji and Kumar Singh

It is the last day of the dark fortnight, 5 June, 1883. Sri Ramakrishna is at the Kali Temple garden. Since it is Tuesday, not many visitors have come. It is on Sundays that there is a greater gathering of the devotees.

Rakhal and Hazra are with Sri Ramakrishna. Seating arrangements have been made on the verandah in front of Thakur's room. M. has been staying here since the previous Sunday.

The musical drama 'Krishna Yatra' was staged on Monday night in the natmandir of Mother Kali's temple. Thakur attended it for some time. This musical play was to have been staged on Sunday night, but was postponed until Monday.

After the midday meal, Thakur again narrates his state of divine ecstasy.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — What states of consciousness have I passed through! I did not eat here; I would go to the house of a brahmin, either in Baranagore or Dakshineswar or Ariadaha. And I would go there at the wrong time. I would go and just sit there without saying a word. If I was asked anything, I would only say that I wanted to eat there. I said nothing else. I

would go to Ram Chatterji's house in Alambazar. Sometimes, I went to the house of Savaran Choudhury of Dakshineswar. I did eat there, but I didn't like it. I found a distinctive smell of fish and meat.

"One day I decided to go to Devendra Tagore's [Ravindra Nath Tagore's father's] house. I said to Mathur Babu, 'Devendra repeats the Lord's name. I want to see him. Will you please take me to him?' Mathur Babu was a very arrogant person. He would not go to other people's houses easily. He tried to dissuade me but later said, 'Devendra and I were class fellows. I will take you to his house, baba (father).'

"Another day I heard that a fine person and devotee, Dina Mukherji, was living near the Baghbazar bridge. I approached Mathur Babu saying that I wanted to go to Dina Mukherji's house. Mathur Babu was helpless; he took me in his carriage. It was a modest house, and here was a great man in a big carriage. They, as well as we, felt embarrassed. He was celebrating his son's sacred thread ceremony. Where could he seat us? We were going to enter a nearby room when he said, 'There are women in that room, you may not go in.' Great embarrassment! When we left, Mathur Babu said to me, 'Baba, I shall no longer listen to you.' I laughed.

"What states have I passed through! Kumar Singh was giving a feast to the sadhus to which I was invited. When I got there, I found a number of sadhus present. I sat down and some of them asked who I was. As soon as they asked, I got up and sat down separately. I said to myself, 'What does it matter?' Later, when everyone was made to sit with leaf plates on the floor, I began to eat before anybody asked me to. I heard some sadhus saying, 'Look what he is doing!' "

Chapter II

Conversation with Hazra – dialogue between Guru and disciple

It is five o'clock. Thakur is sitting on a step close to the verandah. Rakhal, Hazra and M. are seated close to him. Hazra has the attitude of 'Soham[1]'.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hazra) — To your way of thinking, all difficulties are over. It is He who is a believer and it is He who is an atheist; it is He who is good or bad. Besides, He is real and also unreal; that is, all the states of sleep etc. are also His. And then He is also beyond all states.

"A son was born to a peasant late in life. He raised the boy with great care. The boy grew up in time. One day the peasant was working in the field when somebody came to him and said, 'Your boy is seriously ill. He might not survive.' When the man reached home, his boy was dead. His wife was weeping bitterly but the eyes of the peasant remained dry. She complained to a neighbour sadly, 'He has lost such a nice son, but there is not a tear in his eye!' After a long time, the peasant said to his wife, 'You know why I am not crying? I had a dream last night. I saw that I had become a king and the father of seven sons. I also saw in the dream that the boys were people of great quality. As they grew, they acquired knowledge and religion. Then the dream ended. I say to myself: Should I cry for your one son – or those seven sons?' Jnanis believe that the state of dream is as true as the wakeful state.

"The Lord indeed is the doer. Everything happens according to His will."

Hazra — But it is very difficult to understand this. A sadhu of Bhukailas was tortured so terribly that he

[1] I am That

almost died. The sadhu was in samadhi. First they buried him, then they immersed him in water, and then they branded him with a hot iron. That is how he was brought back to consciousness. Because of such torture, he died. People tortured him, but he died by the Lord's will.

Problem of evil and immortality of soul

Sri Ramakrishna — One reaps the consequences of one's actions. By the Lord's will the sadhu who was in samadhi died. The Kaviraj makes *makaradhvaja* in bottles. They smear the bottles all around with mud and put them in a furnace. The gold in the bottles melts, gets mixed with other ingredients, and becomes *makaradhvaja*. The physician then carefully breaks the bottle and takes the *makaradhvaja* out. Obviously, the bottle is of use no longer – it makes no difference if it is or is not there. Similarly, though people killed the sadhu in ecstasy, perhaps he had already attained the goal. After attaining Bhagavan, what does it matter whether the body survives or dies?

Distinction between sadhu and avatar

"The sadhu from Bhukailas was in samadhi. Samadhi is of various kinds. My state tallied with what the sadhu of Rishikesh said. Sometimes I would find the spiritual current creeping up like an ant in my body, and sometimes it would hop up, just as a monkey jumps from one branch of the tree to another. Sometimes it moved like a fish. Only he who has experienced it can understand. He forgets the world. When his mind goes down a little, he prays, 'Mother! Please cure me. I would like to talk.'

"Unless one belongs to the class of *Ishvarakotis*[1], one cannot return to life after samadhi. Some people go into samadhi as a result of their sadhana, but they don't return. But when God Himself comes as a man, as an avatar, He has the key to the liberation of human beings in his hand. Then he returns from samadhi for the good of humanity."

M. (to himself) — Does Thakur hold the key to the liberation of human beings in his hand?

Hazra — One can succeed just by pleasing the Lord – even without the avatar.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Yes, yes. There is a big registration office in Vishnupur. If you get the deed registered there, you don't have to bother about the Goghat office!

Dialogue between Guru and disciple – life of Thakur narrated by himself

It is Tuesday, the day of new moon. It is dusk. Arati is being performed in the temple. Conch shells, bells and some instruments are being sounded in the twelve Shiva Temples, in Radhakanta's Temple and that of Mother Bhavatarini. After the arati is over, Sri Ramakrishna passes through his own room to the southern verandah. It is pitch dark, but lamps are lit at various places in the temple. The Bhagirathi (Ganges) reflects the dark sky on its bosom. It is the day of the new moon, and so Sri Ramakrishna has slipped easily into bhava. Today his bhava is becoming intense. From time to time he utters "Om"

1 Eternally free and perfect souls, born on earth for the good of mankind, with at least some of the characteristics of an avatar

and the Mother's name. It is hot weather. The room is very hot, so he has come to the verandah. A devotee's offering of a thinly woven mat is now spread on the verandah. These days Thakur thinks about the Divine Mother all the twenty-four hours. He talks in a whisper with Mani as he lies on the mat.

Sri Ramakrishna — Look, the Lord can be seen! So and so has seen Him. But please don't talk of it to others. Well, which one do you like better? God with form, or God without form?

Mani — At present I have greater liking for God without form. Even so, I am realizing gradually that He has taken all the different forms.

Sri Ramakrishna — Look, can you take me by carriage to the Mati Seal lake in Belgharia? If you throw a little puffed rice in the lake, all the fish gather to eat it. Oh, how the fish swim playfully! It is such a joyful sight! You will feel inspired, as if the fish of the Atman is sporting in the sea of Sachchidananda. In the same way if you stand in a big open field, you are inspired by the Lord – you feel as though you were a fish from an earthen pot which has jumped into the lake.

"You have to perform sadhana if you wish to see Him. I myself have undergone very hard austerities. How many kinds of spiritual disciplines have I practiced under the Bel tree! I would lie under the tree, crying, 'Mother, please reveal Yourself to me.' My body would become drenched with tears."

Mani — You have undergone so many spiritual disciplines. How can people succeed in a moment? Can one construct a wall just by moving a finger all around the room?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Amrita says, 'A man lights a fire and ten men take its heat sitting around it.' And then, this is very true: it is good to remain in the lila (divine play) after having attained the Nitya (Absolute).

Mani — You said that lila is for enjoyment.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, even the lila is real. Look, bring some little offering when you come to me. Perhaps I shouldn't say it myself, it may look egoistic, but I also say to Adhar, 'Please bring something worth one paisa.' To Bhavanath, I say, 'Buy me betel leaves for a paisa.' Have you noticed what bhakti Bhavanath has! Narendra and Bhavanath are like male and female. Bhavanath is Narendra's faithful follower. You must bring Narendra here in a carriage. Bring something to eat for him too. It will do you a great deal of good.

Philosophy and skepticism

"Jnana and bhakti are both paths to God-realization. In the path of bhakti, one has to observe more religious rules and rites. In the path of jnana, if somebody commits an unscriptural deed, it gets destroyed and does no harm. It is like a banana tree thrown into a roaring fire and is burnt.

"The path of jnana is the path of reasoning, which sometimes makes one become skeptical. In the case of a devotee who sincerely seeks Him, even if he becomes skeptical, he does not give up meditation on the Lord. If the ancestors of a person have been farmers, he does not give up farming, even if he has no crop for want of rain, or because of heavy rain in that year."

Lying down, Thakur rests his head on a big pillow and continues talking. He says to Mani, "My feet are aching. Please stroke them a little."

While rendering service to Thakur, the ocean of motiveless grace, Mani listens to the words of the *Vedas* issue from his holy lips.

Section VIII

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar Temple with Devotees

Chapter I

Conversation about householder life on Dasahara day in Dakshineswar

Rakhal, Adhar, M., Rakhal's father and his father's father-in-law are there

It is Friday, 15 June, 1883, Dasahara day, the tenth lunar day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha. Devotees have come to see Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. On the occasion of Dasahara, Adhar and M. have a holiday.

Rakhal's father and his father's father-in-law have arrived. Rakhal's father is married for a second time. His wife's father had heard of Thakur a long time ago. He practices sadhana and has now come to see him. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot after his meal. He glances at the father-in-law of Rakhal's father again and again. The devotees are sitting on the floor.

The Father-in-law — Sir, can one attain Bhagavan while living in the household?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Why not? Live like a mud fish. It lives in the mud, but the mud does not stain its body. Or live like a woman of easy virtue. She attends to all her household chores, but her mind remains tied to her lover. Fixing your mind on the Lord, attend to all your worldly work. But this is very difficult. I told the

Brahmos, 'You can't place tamarind pickles and a pitcher of water in the room of a patient suffering from delirium.' If you do, how will he recover? Just think of tamarind pickles and your mouth begins to water. For a man, woman is like tamarind pickles. Besides, the desire for sensuous enjoyment is ever there; it is like the pitcher of water. One can't find fault with this desire. It is that the patient wants to drink the whole pitcher of water! Oh, how very hard it is! Worldly life has so many problems. 'If the householder comes this way, he is hit with a stick and if he goes that way, he is beaten with a broom. If he follows another way, someone throws a shoe at him!' Besides, meditation on Bhagavan is not possible unless you practice in a solitary place. If you want to make an ornament after melting gold, but you are frequently called away, how will you be able to melt it? If you want to husk rice, you have to do it alone, by yourself. You have to occasionally pick out grains of rice to examine whether or not they are properly husked. If you are called away a number of times while husking, how will you complete the husking job properly?

What is the way? Develop deep dispassion (*vairagya*) – his earlier story – conversation with Gangaprasad

A Devotee — Sir, is there a way?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, there is. If you develop deep dispassion, you can succeed. What you know to be unreal should at once be given up forcibly. When I was ill, I was taken to Gangaprasad Sen. Gangaprasad said, 'You will have to take *swarnapatpati* (an Ayurvedic medicine preparation of gold). But don't drink water. Instead, take pomegranate juice.' Everybody wondered how I could do without water. I firmly resolved not to take it. I said to myself, 'I am a paramahamsa! I am no

ordinary *hamsa* (swan), I am a *rajahamsa* (king swan) – so I shall take milk[1].'

"One should live in solitude for some days. When you have touched the Grand-dame, there is no danger in being out of the game. Once you have been turned into gold, you can stay anywhere. If you gain bhakti by living in solitude, if you attain Bhagavan, you may even live in a family. (To Rakhal's father) That is why I ask these boys to stay here. They will develop love for Bhagavan by living here a few days. Then they can very well live in the family."

Vice and virtue – sannyasa a great panacea for malady of the world

A Devotee — If it is the Lord who does everything, why do we say that such and such act is sinful – or is good or bad? One commits sin also by His will.

The Father-in-law of Rakhal's Father — How can we understand what His will is? As Pope remarked: Thou Great First Cause, least understood[2].

Sri Ramakrishna —There is virtue as well as vice, but He is not tainted by them. There are good and bad smells in the air, but the air itself is free of them. It is the same with His creation. There are virtue and vice, real and unreal. In the case of trees, some bear mangoes, others jackfruit, and yet others hog-plums. You know, even wicked people are also needed. They send a ruffian to an estate where the inhabitants are rough. Then alone is the estate properly administered.

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[1] Hamsa has two meanings, one a swan and the other a desireless ascetic
[2] Alexander Pope, 2nd verse of "The Universal Prayer"

Sri Ramakrishna again talks about the life of the household.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Do you know what happens when you live as a householder? A lot of your mental powers are unnecessarily expended. This wastage of mental powers can be made up only by embracing sannyasa. Your father gives you your first birth. Your second birth is when your sacred thread ceremony is performed. And the third one is when you enter monastic life[1].

" 'Lust and greed.' These indeed are the two obstacles. The attachment to a woman leads one away from the path to the Lord. A man is unable to realize what has brought his downfall. When I went to the Fort, I hardly knew that I was going down a slope. When the carriage reached the Fort, I observed how far down I had come. Ah, She doesn't let man know! Captain said, 'My wife is spiritually wise.' When an evil spirit possesses a person, he does not know that he is possessed. He just says, 'I am all right.' (Everybody sits perfectly still.)

"It is not only lust which is a danger in family life. There is anger, too. When you are thwarted in your desire, you get angry."

M. — When a cat reaches out to snatch fish from my plate, I can't do anything about it.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why not? You must beat it once, there is no harm in that. The householder must hiss [threaten], but never pour venom. Reason? One must not harm anybody. However, you have to make a show

[1] Except ye be born again ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven – Christ (John 3)

of anger to save yourself from the enemy or he will hurt you. But one who has renounced need not even hiss.

A Devotee — Sir, it seems extremely difficult to attain Him while living a householder's life. How many householders can do it? We don't see such men!

Sri Ramakrishna — Why not? In the countryside [Kamarpukur], there is a Deputy [Magistrate] who is a great gentleman, Pratap Singh by name. He possesses many great qualities! He gives in charity, meditates and has developed love for the Lord. Once he sent for me. There are people like him.

Chapter II

Need of sadhana – faith in words of Guru – Vyasa's faith

Sri Ramakrishna — Sadhana (practice of spiritual disciplines) is essential. Why will you not succeed if you practice sadhana? If you have genuine faith, you don't have to work too hard. You must trust the Guru's words.

"Vyasadeva had to cross the Jamuna. The *gopis* (milkmaids) had to cross at the same time, but there was no ferry. The milkmaids said, 'Maharaj, what do we do?' Vyasadeva said, 'Well, I will take you across, but I am feeling very hungry. Do you have something for me to eat?' The milkmaids had milk and *khira* (sweetmeat of milk and rice) and also a lot of butter. Vyasadeva ate everything they had. 'Maharaj, what about our crossing?' the gopis asked. Vyasadeva then stood on the bank and said, 'Oh, Jamuna, if I have eaten nothing, let your waters part so that we may all cross.' As he said this, the waters parted. The gopis were amazed. They

said to themselves, 'He has eaten so much just now, yet he says that he has eaten nothing!'

"This is firm faith: It is not I, but Narayana within the heart who has eaten.

"Shankaracharya was a knower of Brahman, but initially he had ideas of differentiation. He did not have absolute faith in the oneness of God. One particular day he was coming up the steps after a bath in the Ganges when he chanced to touch the body of a *chandala* (pariah) carrying a load of meat. He exclaimed, 'Oh, I have touched you!' The *chandala* said, 'Master, you have not touched me, nor have I touched you. The pure Atman is neither the body, nor is it the five elements[1], or the twenty-four cosmic principles[2].' Shankara then realized the oneness of God.

"When Jadabharata, carrying the palanquin of King Rahugana, began to talk about knowledge of the Atman, the king came down from the palanquin and asked him who he was. Jadabharata said, 'I am not this, not that. I am pure Atman. I have full conviction that I am pure Atman.' "

Sri Ramakrishna and elements of yoga: yoga of jnana and yoga of bhakti

" 'I am That, I am the pure Atman' – this is the conviction of jnanis (men of spiritual wisdom). On the other hand, devotees say, 'It is all the manifestation of the glorious wealth of Bhagavan.' Were there no riches,

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[1] Earth, water, fire, air and space

[2] The twenty four cosmic principles are the following, viz. – the five gross elements (earth, water, fire, air, space); the five pranas (vital airs) (prana, udana, samana, vyana, apana); the five organs of sense; the five organs of work; the mind; the determinative faculty (buddhi); the ego; *chitta*. All belong to Prakriti, or Nature, and are different from Purusha or Consciousness.

how could you know a wealthy man? Yet it is a different matter if God, because of the devotion of an aspirant, says, 'You are indeed the same as I.' Suppose, on returning from the bazaar, a king's valet takes the king's seat and says, 'Sir, I am the same as you,' people would think that the valet is crazy. But suppose the king is so happy with his valet that he says one day, 'I say, come and sit beside me. It will not be wrong. You are indeed the same as I.' If the valet then goes and sits beside the king, there is nothing wrong with it. It is not right for an ordinary man to say that he is the same as the Lord. The wave comes from water, not water from the wave.

"The fact is that unless your mind is steady, there can be no yoga, whatever path you may take. The mind of a yogi is under his control. The yogi is not controlled by the mind.

"When the mind becomes steady, breathing stops and one experiences *kumbhaka*[1]. The same *kumbhaka* is experienced in Bhakti Yoga (path of devotion). The breath becomes suspended by following the path of devotion, too. As one repeats, 'My Nitai is like a mad elephant,' one is filled with a deep spiritual mood. Then one cannot complete the whole line. One says, 'Elephant, elephant!' and after that one is only able to say, 'Ele!'

"In the state of bhava, breathing is suspended and one experiences *kumbhaka*.

"Suppose someone is sweeping the floor with a broom and another person comes and tells him, 'Brother, so-and-so is no more. He is dead.' If the dead person is not related to him, the man with the broom goes on sweeping and says casually, 'Alas, is it so? The

[1] Suspension of breath

poor fellow is dead. He was such a good man.' And he goes on sweeping. If the deceased had been a near and dear one, the broom would have fallen from his hand and he would have sat down, exclaiming, 'Aie.' His breathing would have stopped and he wouldn't be able to think of the work he was doing. Don't you see this with women? If one of them stands still, amazed at seeing something or hearing some news, the other women say to her, 'I say, you have gone into bhava!' Here, too, the breathing has stopped. That is why she has become speechless, only able to exclaim 'Aie!' "

Marks of a jnani – *sadhanasiddha*[1] and *nityasiddha*[2]

"It doesn't help just to repeat Soham (I am That). There are marks of a jnani. Naren's eyes protrude. His eyes and forehead have good marks.

"Besides, everybody is not at the same level. There are four classes of human beings: the *baddha* jivas (bound ones), the *mumukshu* (seekers after liberation), the *mukta* (liberated) and the *nitya* jivas (ever-free). It is not that all these people have to take to sadhana (spiritual practice) – there are *nityasiddhas* (ever perfect) and *sadhanasiddhas* (perfected by sadhana). Some people attain the Lord after practicing a great deal of sadhana, while others are perfect from their birth, for example Prahlada. The Homa bird lives high up in the sky. When it lays its egg, it falls toward the earth. During the fall, the egg breaks and a chick emerges. Even then it goes on falling. It is still so high up that it develops its wings during its fall. When it is close to the earth, the chick realizes that if it hits the earth, it will be crushed. At once it shoots upward

[1] One perfected by devotional practices
[2] One perfected from birth; ever-perfect

toward its mother, uttering, 'Mother, mother, where are you?'

"The *nityasiddhas,* like Prahlada, practice sadhana later in life. They have already attained the Lord before the practice of sadhana. It is like the bottle gourd or the pumpkin which fruits before it flowers. (Looking at Rakhal's father) A *nityasiddha,* even if he is born in a lower family, does not become less spiritual than he was. The gram, even if it falls on a dung heap, still sprouts into a gram plant."

Vidyasagar and special manifestation of power in some – mere learning

"God has granted more power to some than to others. In one there is the light of a single earthen lamp, while in another it is a blazing torch. I recognized Vidyasagar's limit of intelligence from one of his remarks. I could see how far his intelligence went. When I told him that there was a special manifestation of God's power in some, Vidyasagar said, 'Sir, do you mean that He has granted more power to one and less to another?' I immediately replied, 'Indeed, it is so! Had there not been more power in one and less in another, why would you have become famous? It is when I heard of your learning, your charitable disposition and so forth that I came to see you. Of course, you have not grown two horns!' So learned, so famous is Vidyasagar to have said something so childish as: 'Has He granted more power to one and less to another?' You know how it is? The bigger fish like trout and carp are first to get caught in the net. Then the fisherman stirs the mud with his feet and minnows, mud fish and other small fish emerge and get caught in no time. If one has not realized the Lord, 'minnow and mud fish' come out of him. What does mere learning avail one?"

Section IX

Sri Ramakrishna in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Distinction between a learned man and a sadhu – bhakti according to Narada enjoined for the age of Kali

Today is Wednesday, 26 September, 1883. It is the 10th day of the dark fortnight of the month of Bhadra. Fewer devotees visit Sri Ramakrishna on Wednesdays since it is a working day. Usually the devotees come on Sundays when they are at leisure. Free at half past one in the afternoon, M. reaches the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar to see Thakur at three o'clock. These days Rakhal and Latu are staying with Thakur most of the time. Kishori had arrived two hours earlier. Thakur is seated on the smaller cot in his room. On arriving, M. prostrates himself before him. After making polite enquiries, Thakur talks of Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Well, did you meet Narendra? (Laughing) He commented that I still visit the Kali Temple, but when I am cured of my madness, I will no longer go there.

"He comes here off and on. He tells me that the members of his family are very cross with him. The other day he came in a carriage. Surendra had paid the carriage fare, so Narendra's aunt (his father's sister) went to Surendra's house to protest. She created a row.

While talking of Narendra, Thakur stands up. He goes to the northeastern verandah and stands there.

Hazra, Kishori, Rakhal and others devotees are there. It is afternoon.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is it that you are here today? Don't you have school?

M. — Today the school closed at half past one.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why so early?

M. — Vidyasagar owns the school, so whenever he visits, the boys are given a holiday to celebrate.

Vidyasagar and holding on to truth – life of Thakur spoken with his own holy lips

Sri Ramakrishna — Why doesn't Vidyasagar keep his word?

Holding on to truth and viewing other women as Mother,

Tulsi is a liar, if you do not realize Hari by this means[1].

"If you stick to truth, you can attain Bhagavan. The other day Vidyasagar said that he would come here, but he didn't show up.

"There is a great difference between a learned man and a sadhu. The mind of one who is a mere scholar remains attached to 'lust and gold,' while the mind of a sadhu remains tied to the lotus feet of Hari. The learned man says one thing and does another. Leaving sadhus aside, even those whose minds are fixed on the lotus feet of Hari are very different in their actions and words. I saw a young sadhu belonging to the sect of Nanak in Kashi. He was the same age as you. He

[1] A saying of Tulsidas, a great sage and poet of India

would call me a *premi* (loving) sadhu. His monastery is in Kashi. One day he invited me there. The head monk of the monastery was no different from a housewife. I asked him, 'What is the way?' He replied, 'Bhakti according to Narada is enjoined for the age of Kali.' He was reading a holy text. When he finished it, he said, 'Vishnu in water, Vishnu on land, Vishnu on the hill top; Vishnu pervades the whole world.' He ended with: peace, peace and perfect peace."

Observance of Vedic rites not for the age of Kali – the path of jnana

"One day he was reading the *Gita*. He was so strict in his orthodoxy that he would not read it looking at a worldly man. Mathur Babu was present. The sadhu turned his back on him while reading. It was the same sadhu of the sect of Nanak who said, 'There is a way: it is the path of devotion as enjoined by Narada.'

M. — Aren't these sadhus Vedantists[1]?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, these people are Vedantists, but they also believe in the path of bhakti. The fact is, in the age of Kali it is difficult to observe Vedic rites and rituals. A person said that he would observe the *purashcharana*[2] of the Gayatri mantra. I asked, 'Why? For the age of Kali you have the Tantric path. Can you not perform *purashcharana* according to the *Tantra*?'

"Vedic observances are very difficult to perform. These days one slaves for others [like the British masters]. It is said that if you slave like this for twelve

[1] Believers in the non-dual Brahman

[2] The performance of japa a certain number of times each day, methodically increasing and decreasing the amount

years or so, you acquire the traits of the master. You imbibe the qualities of those for whom you have been slaving for so long. You take on their *rajas* and *tamas* and other qualities like violence and indulgence in sense pleasures while you serve them. Not only are you their slave, but you also receive a pension from them.

"A Vedantist sadhu visited here. He danced to see the clouds and thoroughly enjoyed himself when there was a rainstorm. If anybody approached him while he was meditating, he would get very angry. One day I went to him. Oh, how upset he was! He always discriminated: 'Brahman is the only Reality and the world an illusion.' The appearance of so many different forms is because of maya, so he carried a prism from a chandelier with him. Through a prism you see many different colors. In fact, there is no colour at all. In the same way, there is really nothing but Brahman. But because of maya and egotism one sees a diversity of things. Lest he should become infatuated and become attached to it, this sadhu would not look at anything more than once. While taking his bath, he would discriminate at the sight of birds flying overhead. Together we would go to ease ourselves. When he heard that it was the pond of a Muslim, he did not use its water. Haladhari tested him in grammar – he knew grammar. They talked of consonants. He was here for three days. One day, hearing the sound of the sanai[1] while he was on the river embankment, he said, 'He who has realized Brahman goes into samadhi hearing such music.' "

Chapter II

[1] A wooden flute

Sri Ramakrishna, the Guru, in Dakshineswar – he exhibits the state of a *paramahamsa*[1]

While talking about the sadhus, Sri Ramakrishna exhibits the state of a *paramahamsa*. His conduct is childlike, his face beams with laughter and there is no cloth around his waist, he is quite naked; his eyes swim with joy. He again sits on the smaller cot and speaks in his charming voice.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — I heard Vedanta from the Naked One (Totapuri): 'Brahman is the Reality and the world an illusion.' The magician performs so many magic feats: he produces a mango plant, even bearing mangoes. But all his magic is just sleight of hand. Only the magician is real.

Mani — Our life is like a long sleep. I understand it, but I do not see it correctly. The mind can't even understand the sky. How can that very mind understand the world rightly just by seeing it?

Sri Ramakrishna — There is another way of looking at it. Not being able to see the sky properly, it looks as though it were touching the earth. How can a man understand rightly when he is delirious with fever?

Sri Ramakrishna sings in a sweet voice about the delirious fever of mankind and Dhanavantri[2].

O Mother Shankari[3], O great physician, what delirious fever I suffer, in spite of the grace of Thy feet.

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[1] Highest class of saints who have attained supreme knowledge and sanctity

[2] An excellent physician; the name of the physician of heaven (according to Hindu mythology)

[3] An appellation of Goddess Durga

This perishable transitory pride of mine is consuming me in its flames. What depraved attachment I have developed for 'me and mine'!

How can I sustain my life? My desire for wealth and friends is ceaseless!

O the bestower of all goodness, I continue to indulge in things illusory, wrong doing, sinful acts and so on.

Says Dasharathi: My eyes are full of the deep sleep of maya,

And my stomach filled with the worm of violence. I am going round and round as in a whirlpool of illusory action.

Day and night I am feeling distaste for Your name. Alas! will I be cured of this malady?

Mani — I said to Kishori, 'There is nothing in a box – but two people are trying to snatch it from each other, thinking there's money in it!'

Trouble in taking up a body – to be or not to be! The world is a mansion of joy

"Well, the body is the sole cause of all troubles. Thinking this, the jnani says to himself, 'I would rather give up this pillow case[1]. Only that will save me.' "

Thakur is going toward the Kali Temple.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why? This world is a deceptive veil. But it is also called the mansion of joy.

Mani — There is no uninterrupted joy here.

Sri Ramakrishna — True indeed.

[1] Meaning the outer sheath, the body

Thakur is now standing in front of the Kali Temple. He prostrates before the Divine Mother. Mani does the same. Thakur sits on the floor before the Mother on the lower platform in front of the shrine. He is clad in a red-bordered dhoti with part of it wrapped around his back and one end over his shoulder. Behind him is a pillar of the natmandir. Mani is seated close to him.

Mani — If that is so, why should one take up a body at all? I think the body is only for practicing some Karma Yoga (action). Who knows what one is doing! It only brings suffering and tribulation.

Sri Ramakrishna — When a gram falls on a heap of filth, it still sprouts into a gram plant.

Mani — So be it. Even then, aren't there the eight bonds?

Sachchidananda is the Guru – liberation by the grace of the Guru

Sri Ramakrishna — Not the eight bonds, but eight fetters[1]. But let them be there! By His grace, these eight fetters fall off all at once. You know what it is like? Just as all darkness is dispelled in a moment when a light is brought into a room that has been dark for a thousand years. The darkness doesn't go bit by bit. Haven't you seen the magician performing his feats? Making knots in a cord, he ties one of its ends to something and holds the other end in his hand. Then he shakes the cord once or twice. When he gives a jerk, all the knots in the cord untie. But others can't untie a single knot, howsoever much they try. All the knots open in a moment by the grace of the Guru.

[1] Hatred, shame, ancestry, pride, fear, secretiveness, caste and grief

Sri Ramakrishna the agent of change in Keshab Sen

"Well, how has Keshab Sen changed so much lately? Tell me. He used to come here very often. He learned how to bow down here. One day I said to him, 'Sadhus are not saluted the way you do it.' One day I was going to Calcutta with Ishan in a carriage. He had heard many things about Keshab Sen. How beautifully Harish has expressed it: 'All the cheques have to be cleared here. Only then will the bank cash them.' "(Thakur laughs.)

Mani listens to all this conversation in wonder. He has understood that Sachchidananda Himself clears the cheques in the form of the Guru.

His earlier story – instructions of the Naked One – one cannot know God

Sri Ramakrishna — Don't reason. Who can know Him? The Naked One (Totapuri) said, 'I have heard that this universe is created out of only a portion of God.'

"Hazra is inclined to reason a lot. He calculates that the world is created with so much, and so much is the remainder. When I hear his arithmetic, my head begins to ache. I know that I know nothing. Sometimes I think of God as good, and at other times bad. How can I know Him?"

Mani — True sir, who can know Him? One knows Him only as far as one's intellect can go, but he thinks he has understood it all. It is just as you say: An ant went to a mound of sugar. Just a grain of it filled the ant's stomach. And yet it said, 'Next time I am going to carry the whole mound to my home.'

Can one know the Lord? Self-surrender the only way

Sri Ramakrishna — Who can know Him? I don't even try. I simply call, 'Mother! Mother!' Let Her do Her will. If it is Her will, She will let me know Her, otherwise not. I have the attitude of a kitten. A kitten only calls out, 'Mew, mew.' Its mother may place it anywhere – maybe in the kitchen or on the master's bed. A little child only wants its mother. It doesn't know of her riches. It doesn't even want to know. All it knows is that it has a mother. So it doesn't worry. The son of the housemaid also knows that he has a mother. When he quarrels with the son of the master of the house, he says, 'I am going to tell my mother. I have a mother.' I also have the attitude of a son.

Placing his hand on his chest and pointing to himself, Sri Ramakrishna says to Mani, "Well, is there anything here? What do you say?"

Mani is speechless as he looks at Thakur. Perhaps he is saying to himself, "Is the Divine Mother living in Thakur's heart? Is it the Mother who has taken up his body for the good of mankind?"

Section X

Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab Chandra Sen in the Lily Cottage

Chapter I

In front of Keshab's house – 'he looks for you with a yearning heart as you come'[1]

Keshab, Prasanna, Amrit, Umanath, Keshab's Mother, Rakhal and M.

Wednesday, 28 November, 1883. It is the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of Kartik. A devotee is pacing the footpath to the east of the Lily Cottage gate. He seems to be eagerly waiting for someone.

To the north of Lily Cottage is the Mangal Bari. A number of Brahmo devotees live there. Keshab lives in the Lily Cottage. His disease has worsened. Most people say, "It appears that there is not much chance of his recovering this time."

Sri Ramakrishna is very fond of Keshab. He is coming to see him today from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. The devotee pacing outside is awaiting his arrival.

The Lily Cottage is situated on the western side of the Circular Road where he is walking. He has been waiting since 2:00 p.m. He sees many people on the road.

The Victoria College is situated on the eastern side of the road. A number of ladies from Keshab's Brahmo Samaj and their daughters study there. One can see deep into the school building from the road.

[1] A song by Jaydeva

To the north there is a big garden house inhabited by an English gentleman. The devotee on the road has been observing for a long time that there seems to be some misfortune in the house. A little later, he sees a coachman and a groom in black livery bringing a hearse. These arrangements have been going on for the last one-and-a-half or two hours.

Somebody has parted from this mortal world, hence all the arrangements.

The devotee wonders, "Where does one go when one leaves the body?"

A number of carriages rattle southward. The devotee is keenly watching them to see if Thakur is in one.

It is almost five o'clock when Thakur arrives in a carriage. He is accompanied by Latu and one or two other devotees. M. and Rakhal are also present.

Keshab's family members lead Thakur upstairs. There is a wooden cot on the verandah south of the drawing room. Thakur is invited to sit there.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi – he talks to the Divine Mother in ecstasy

Thakur has been sitting here for quite some time. He is impatiently awaiting Keshab. Keshab's disciples tell him humbly that Keshab is resting for awhile, but it will not be long before he comes.

Keshab suffers from a serious disease. His disciples and the members of his family, therefore, are very careful. Thakur is becoming more and more eager to see Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Keshab's disciples) — Look, what is the need for him to come? Why can't I go inside to see him?

Prasanna (humbly) — Sir, he will be here shortly.

Sri Ramakrishna — Go on, you're making an unnecessary fuss! Let me go in.

Prasanna talks about Keshab to divert Sri Ramakrishna's mind.

Prasanna — He is in a different state of mind. He talks to the Mother like you. The Mother speaks to him and he listens, laughs and cries.

"Keshab talks to the Mother of the Universe. Hearing Her, he sometimes laughs and sometimes weeps."

Thakur is overwhelmed with emotion on hearing this. He passes quickly into samadhi.

It is winter, so Thakur is clad in a warm coat of green cashmere with a shawl over it. His body is erect, his eyes fixed, he is completely merged in samadhi. He remains in this state for a long time. His samadhi is not coming to an end.

It is evening. Thakur comes down to a somewhat natural state. A lamp has been lighted in the adjacent parlour. They are all trying to take Thakur to that room. It is with great difficulty that they manage to do so.

There is a lot of furniture in the room: a couch, chairs, coat hanger and also a lamp. Thakur is made to sit on the couch.

As he sits down, he again loses outer-consciousness and merges in ecstasy.

Casting his glance on the couch, he mutters something like one intoxicated, "It was of some use before. What is the need for it now?"

(Looking at Rakhal, he says) "Rakhal, you have come!"

Vision of the Mother of the Universe and conversation with Her –immortality of the soul

What does Thakur behold as he talks? He says –

"O good! So You have come, Mother! How You show off in your Benarasi sari!

Mother, please don't trouble. Come and sit down. Do sit."

Thakur's ecstasy continues. The room is well lighted. Brahmo devotees are all around him. Latu, Rakhal, M. and others are also seated near him. Thakur talks spontaneously in the state of bhava.

"The body and the soul. The body has come and it will go. But the soul is immortal. It is just like the betel-nut. If the nut is ripe, its shell does not adhere to the nut. In the unripe state, it is very difficult to get the shell apart from the nut. When you have seen Her, when you have attained Her, body-consciousness vanishes – one feels that the soul is separate from the body."

Keshab enters the room by the eastern door. They who had seen him in the Brahmo Samaj temple or in the Town Hall are struck dumb seeing him. He is a veritable skeleton covered with skin. He is not able to stand up. He holds to the wall as he walks. It is with great difficulty that he sits down facing the couch.

In the meantime Thakur gets up from the couch and sits on the floor. Seeing Thakur, Keshab salutes him for a long time, lying prostrate on the floor. After the salutation, he sits up. Thakur is still

in the state of ecstasy. What is he saying to himself? He is talking to the Divine Mother.

Chapter III

Brahman and Shakti Indivisible – God's divine sport in man

Now Keshab raises his voice and says, "I have come, I have come." He holds Sri Ramakrishna's left hand and begins to stroke it gently. Thakur is intoxicated in bhava. He is saying many things spontaneously. All the devotees listen to him spellbound.

Sri Ramakrishna — As long as one retains one's *upadhis*[1], one has the perception of plurality and of persons, as Keshab, Prasanna, Amrita and so on. When one has attained ultimate jnana, one is aware that it is one Consciousness behind many things.

"Moreover, when one has acquired ultimate jnana, one sees that the same Consciousness has differentiated into the world, its creatures and the twenty-four cosmic principles.

"Even so, there is a special manifestation of God's power in some. Truly He has become all – but at certain places there is greater manifestation of His power, in others less.

"Vidyasagar asked, 'So, has God given more of His power to one and less of it to another?' I said, 'If it were not so, how could one person defeat fifty others? Besides, why should we have come to see you?'

"There is more power of God in that receptacle in which He manifests His lila (divine sport).

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[1] Adjuncts; semblances; the limitations imposed on the Self through ignorance by which one is bound to life.

"The landlord can be found anywhere in his estate but he is often to be seen in the drawing room. The heart of the devotee is the Lord's drawing room. He likes to enact His lila in the heart of a devotee. His power especially descends in the heart of a devotee.

"What are the signs of it? Wherever much work is done, there His power is especially manifested.

"The Adyashakti (Primeval Power) is not different from the Parabrahman (Supreme Brahman). You cannot think of the one without thinking of the other. For example, think of the gem and its lustre! If you do not hold a gem, you cannot think of its effulgence. Similarly, you cannot think of the gem without thinking of its brilliance. It is like the snake and its serpentine movement. Without thinking of the snake, you cannot think of its movement. Similarly, forgetting the wriggling movement of the snake, you cannot think of the snake."

Brahmo Samaj and seeing God in man – the difference between the aspirant and the perfected

"Adyashakti (the Primordial Power of Brahman) has differentiated into the phenomenal world, living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. It is a case of involution and evolution[1].

"Why do I care so much for Rakhal, Narendra and the other young men? Hazra said, 'Why do you go about

[1] Involved, the totality of creation lies dormant in its potential state; evolved, it is differentiated into all that is. M. says in his Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Part I: You go backwards to the Supreme Being and your personality becomes lost in His personality. You then retrace your steps. You get back your ego (personality) and come back to the point where you started only to see that the world and your ego or self were involved in the same Supreme Being.

thinking of these young men? When will you give your mind to God?' (Keshab and others smile slightly.)

"This set me to thinking seriously about it. I said to the Divine Mother, 'What is this, Mother? Hazra asks why I think so much of the young men.' Then I asked Bholanath. Bholanath said, 'One can find the same illustration in the *Mahabharata*. When a person comes down from samadhi, where can he rest his mind? He cannot help seeking the company of devotees endowed with the quality of sattva.' This dictum of the *Mahabharata* at once relieved my mind. (All laugh.)

"Hazra is not to blame. When a person is a spiritual aspirant, he should give his whole mind to God, saying, 'Not this, not this.' It is different in the case of a perfected soul. After attaining God, one realizes the fact of involution and evolution. When the butter is taken out of the buttermilk, one realizes that the butter is not essentially different from the buttermilk, nor the buttermilk essentially different from the butter. One has full realization that God has become everything. Only at some places He manifests Himself in a greater degree than in others.

"When the ocean of ecstasy is agitated, even dry land is pole deep under water. Initially one must take the circuitous course of the river to reach the ocean. But when there is a flood, even dry land comes under pole-deep water. You can then row your boat straight to the ocean. You don't have to go roundabout along the course of the river. When the harvest of paddy has been reaped, one need no longer go around the balk – one may walk straight over the field to any point.

"After God-realization, one sees that God manifests Himself in all things. However, there is a greater degree of His manifestation in the human being. And He is manifested more in devotees endowed with

the quality of sattva – people who have no desire at all to enjoy 'lust and gold'. (Everyone is silent.) When a person comes down from samadhi, where can he rest his mind? He seeks the association of pure devotees endowed with sattva guna, who have given up the enjoyment of 'lust and gold'. Otherwise, with what will he engage himself?"

Brahmo Samaj and the Motherhood of God – the Mother of the Universe

"He who is Brahman is indeed the Adyashakti. When He is inactive, I call Him Brahman, I call Him Purusha. When He creates, preserves, dissolves and performs such other actions, I call Him Shakti, I call Him Prakriti. Purusha and Prakriti. He who is Purusha[1] is indeed Prakriti[2]. Together they constitute the *anandamaya* (All-Blissful male aspect of God) and *anandamayi* (All-Blissful female aspect of God).

"He who is aware of manhood is also aware of womanhood. He who knows the father also knows the mother. (Keshab laughs.)

"One who has a sense of darkness also has a sense of light. One who knows the meaning of night also knows the meaning of day. One who has the feeling of joy also has the feeling of grief. Do you see this?"

Keshab (laughing) — Yes sir, I do.

Sri Ramakrishna — What Mother do I mean? Why, the Mother of the Universe! She who has created the Universe is preserving it. She who is always protecting Her children and providing them what they want: *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kama*

[1] Male aspect of God
[2] Female aspect of God

(fulfillment of desires) and *moksha* (liberation). A true child cannot live apart from its mother. It is his mother who knows everything. The boy just eats, drinks and plays; he knows nothing.

Keshab — That is quite true.

Chapter IV

His earlier story – Brahmo Samaj and describing glories of the Lord

Sri Ramakrishna comes down to the sense world as he talks. He laughs and talks with Keshab. The room is full of people. They listen to Thakur with full attention, fixing their eyes on him. They observe that neither Thakur nor Keshab say, "How do you do?" or "How do you feel?" No words are spoken except about the Lord.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Keshab) — Why do the Brahmos dwell so much on the glory of God? 'Oh Lord, You have created the moon, you have made the sun and the stars!' What is the need of all this? Many people praise a garden when they see it. How many want to see the owner? What is greater, the garden or its owner?

"After drinking wine, who cares to enquire how much wine is in the wine shop? A single bottle suffices!"

His Earlier story – theft of jewelry in the shrine of Vishnu and Mathur Babu

"When I met Narendra, I never asked him who his father was or how many houses his father owned.

"You know how it is? Human beings admire wealth. So they think that the Lord, too, admires wealth. They think that if they praise God's riches, He

will be pleased. Sambhu said to me, 'Bless me so that I may die leaving all my wealth at His lotus feet.' I told him, 'It is wealth to you, but what can you give God? To Him all this is wood and dust!'

"When the jewelry in the shrine of Radhakanta was stolen, Mathur Babu and I went to the shrine. Mathur Babu said, 'Away with you, Bhagavan, you aren't worth anything! They took all the jewelry from your body but you could do nothing about it!' I asked him, 'What are you saying? Your jewels are no more than lumps of clay to Him. He who has Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) as His Shakti (consort) is not always guarding the little offering of money that you make to Him. You should not speak in this way!'

"Does the Lord care for wealth? No, He is under the control of bhakti. What does He value? Not money but a feeling heart for Him, intense love, devotion, discrimination and dispassion for His sake."

The form of God depends upon the worshipper – the *trigunatita*[1] devotee

"One's idea of God varies according to one's nature. The devotee with the quality of tamas sees that the Divine Mother eats meat, so he sacrifices a goat for Her. The devotee of *rajasic* qualities prepares rice and different kinds of dishes to offer Her. The devotee with the quality of *sattva* does not like to make a show of his worship to the world. In fact, people don't even know that he worships. In the absence of flowers, he offers worship with vilwa leaves and water of the Ganges. He just offers a handful of sugared puffed rice or *batasas* (sweet cakes) for the deity's dinner. At times he may offer a little *payas* (rice with milk pudding).

[1] Beyond the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas

"And then there are the *trigunatita* devotees [who are beyond the three qualities of nature]. They are like children. Their worship consists purely of chanting His name. Yes, the name of God alone and nothing else."

Chapter V

Conversation with Keshab – treatment of the Atman in the Lord's hospital

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing, to Keshab) — You are ill. Well, there is a reason for it. The intense devotional feeling within you has disturbed your body. When one is emotionally surcharged, one doesn't understand what happens. Much later, you see that it has wreaked havoc on the body. I have noticed that when a big steamer is sailing in the Ganges, one is not aware of it. But lo! After awhile, one sees that waves of water are splashing against the bank, causing great commotion! Sometimes the water may break the bank, washing off portions of it.

"An elephant entering a hut soon makes it totter to its foundations and at last pulls it down. The elephant of bhava has entered the cottage of your body and is creating havoc there.

"Do you know how it happens? When a house catches fire, many things are burned and there is much noise and confusion. The fire of spiritual wisdom first burns up lust, anger and other such enemies. Later it destroys the sense of I-ness[1]. Lastly, it brings about a great turmoil [in the body].

"You may be thinking it is all over. But it isn't – as long as the least trace of disease remains uncured, He does not release you. If your name has been entered as a

[1] The false ego that says 'I am the doer'

patient in the hospital books, you cannot get away. The physician in charge (Doctor Sahib) doesn't allow you to leave the hospital while the least trace of disease remains. Why did you get your name entered in the hospital books?" (All laugh.)

Hearing of the hospital, Keshab laughs again and again – he is not able to control his laughter. He stops for awhile but laughs again. Thakur continues talking.

His Earlier Story: Sri Ramakrishna's illness – treatment by Kaviraj Rama

Sri Ramakrishna (to Keshab) — Hriday used to say, 'I have never witnessed such bhava (fervour) and such illness, too.' I was at the time very ill with diarrhea of a rather severe type. And it seemed like myriads of ants were eating into my brain. But the words I spoke night and day were all concerning the Lord. Rama Kaviraj of Natagore came to treat me. He saw me sitting and talking to people and he said, 'Has this man gone totally out of his wits that he goes on talking like that with a body made of mere skin and a couple of bones?'

(To Keshab) "Everything is ordained by Her will. Thou doest Thy will alone, oh Mother Divine.

"Thou doest Thy will alone, O Mother Divine. O Tara, Thou art free to will.

Thou doest Thine Own work, Mother. But (foolish) man takes all credit to himself, saying, 'It is I who have done it.' "

"The gardener clears the soil round the roots of the Basra[1] rose to give it the benefit of the night dew. The dew adds freshness and strength to the plant. I think

[1] A superior quality rose

that He is digging round about you to the very roots. (Thakur and Keshab laugh.) It seems that when you come next time, your work will be greater and more abiding than ever."

Sri Ramakrishna wept for Keshab and vowed to offer a green coconut and sugar to Mother Siddheshwari

"Whenever I hear that you are ill, my heart is sorely troubled. The last time you were unwell, I wept during the last part of the night and prayed, 'Mother, if something untoward happens to Keshab, with whom shall I talk?' Then I went to Calcutta and presented offerings of green coconut and sugar to Mother Siddheshwari. I prayed to the Mother for your welfare.

Everyone looks with wonder and amazement on Thakur's unspeakable love and anxiety for Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna — This time, however, I have not felt it so much. I must tell you the truth.

"But I did feel a little worried for two or three days."

The venerable mother of Keshab comes to the eastern door, by which Keshab had entered the drawing room. Umanath says to Sri Ramakrishna, who is seated near the door, "Here is mother bowing down to you."

Sri Ramakrishna smiles. Umanath says, "The mother asks you to bless him so that he may get well soon." Sri Ramakrishna says, "Offer your prayers to the Divine Mother who is Bliss everlasting. It is only She who removes all troubles."

He says to Keshab –

"It would be better for you not to stay in the inner apartments for long hours. With children around you, you run the risk of sinking in the sea of ignorance. You will feel better if you only talk about the Lord."

Having spoken so solemnly, Sri Ramakrishna laughs like a child. He says to Keshab, "Here, let me examine your hand." He feels the weight of Keshab's hand, like boys do. At last he says, "No, your hand is light enough. It is only the hands of those who think evil and do evil that are not." (All laugh.)

Umanath again addresses Sri Ramakrishna from the door: "Mother requests you to bless Keshab."

Sri Ramakrishna (gravely) — What power do I have? She alone can bless. Thou doest Thine Own work, Mother. But (foolish) man takes all the credit to himself, saying, 'It is I who have done it.'

"It is on two different occasions that the Lord smiles. One is when two brothers divide a field between themselves. They measure it with a rope and say, 'This side is mine and that is yours.' The Lord laughs, thinking: The universe is Mine. These fellows take little parts of it and say, 'This side is mine and that is yours.'

"The Lord laughs a second time. The son is suffering from a serious disease. His mother is weeping. The physician comes and says, 'Fear not, mother, I shall cure him.' The physician doesn't know that nobody has the power to save when the Lord slays." (Everybody is agape with wonder.)

Just at this moment, Keshab begins to cough – he coughs for a long time. It doesn't stop. Everybody feels sad hearing him coughing. After a long time, the cough stops for awhile. Keshab is not able to stay in the room any longer. He prostrates himself to salute Sri Ramakrishna, his head touching the ground.

Then, with great difficulty, holding to the wall, he slowly goes back to his room by the same door.

Chapter VI

Brahmo Samaj and Vedic gods – only a man of mean intelligence wants to be a guru

Amrita – Keshab's elder son – Dayananda Saraswati

Sri Ramakrishna will depart after taking some sweetmeats. Keshab's elder son comes and sits by his side.

Amrita says, "This is Keshab's eldest son. Please bless him by placing your hand on his head." "It is not given to me to bless," Sri Ramakrishna says with a smile as he gently strokes the boy's body.

Amrita (smiling) — Well, then you may stroke his body. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna talks to Amrita and other Brahmo devotees about Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Amrita and others) — It is not given to me to say of a person, 'Let him be healed.' I do not even ask the Divine Mother to grant me this power. I only ask the Divine Mother, 'Mother, pray grant me pure bhakti[1].'

"How great Keshab is – honoured alike by men of the world who seek wealth and by holy men. I once met Dayananda in the garden house. He frequently left his room, saying, 'Keshab Sen, Keshab Sen.' He was asking

[1] Sincere love unmixed with worldly desires of any kind, e.g., the weal of the body, pleasure, money, fame etc.

everybody if Keshab had come. Perhaps Keshab was expected that day.

"Dayananda used to call the Bengali language *Gauranga Bhasha* (the language of Gaur).

"I suppose he [Keshab] did not believe in the Vedic deities and the efficacy of the *homa* (sacrificial fire), so Dayananda said, 'God has made so many things, couldn't He make deities?' "

Thakur speaks highly of Keshab before his disciples.

Sri Ramakrishna — Keshab is not a man of low intelligence. Very often he has said to many [of his disciples], 'If you have any doubts, go to him [Sri Ramakrishna].' It is my way also to say, 'Let Keshab increase a million-fold.' What shall I do with fame?

"Yes, Keshab is great – honoured alike by men of the world and by holy men who seek God alone."

Sri Ramakrishna will take some sweet snacks before he leaves by cab. The Brahmo devotees accompany him to the cab.

Coming down the steps, Thakur sees that there is no light downstairs. He says to Amrita and other devotees, "All these places should be well lighted. Such an omission leads to poverty. See that such an omission does not take place again."

With two or three devotees, Thakur sets out in a cab to return to the Kali Temple.

Section XI

Sri Ramakrishna in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar with Devotees

Chapter I

Bhakti Yoga – principle of samadhi – spiritual states of Sri Chaitanya (Mahaprabhu)

Sunday, 9 December, 1883. It is the tenth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Agrahayana (eighth month of the Hindu calendar). It is one or two o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room on the smaller cot talking about Lord Hari. Adhar, Manomohan, Shivachandra of Thanthania, Rakhal, M., Harish and other devotees are there. Hazra lives here these days. Thakur is describing the spiritual states of Sri Chaitanya (Mahaprabhu).

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Chaitanya Deva used to have these three states.

1. The conscious state – in this state his mind would roam between the gross and the subtle.

2. The semi-conscious state – in this state his mind was in the causal[1] state, in the enjoyment of the causal.

3. The innermost state – his mind would merge into the Great Cause[2].

"This conforms beautifully to the five sheaths (*koshas*) of the *Vedas*. The gross body is concerned with

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[1] *Karana*
[2] *Mahakarana*

the *annamaya*[1] and the *pranamaya*[2] sheaths. The subtle body means the *manomaya*[3] and the *vijnanamaya*[4] sheaths. The causal body corresponds to the *anandamaya*[5] sheath. The Great Cause is beyond the five sheaths. When the mind merges in the Great Cause, it results in what is called nirvikalpa or jada samadhi.

"When Chaitanya Deva was in the conscious state, he would chant the name of God. In the semi-conscious state, he danced with the devotees. And when he experienced the innermost state, he would be absorbed in samadhi."

M. (to himself) — Is Thakur alluding to his own states? Chaitanya Deva also experienced these states.

Sri Ramakrishna — Chaitanya was an incarnation of bhakti (love and devotion). He came to teach love of God to mankind. Have love for God and everything else is done for you. There is no need at all for Hatha Yoga.

Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga

A Certain Devotee — Sir, what is Hatha Yoga?

Sri Ramakrishna — In Hatha Yoga, one is more concerned with the body. A Hatha yogi puts a bamboo tube in his anus for washing the inner organs of the body. He draws ghee (clarified butter) and milk through his organ of reproduction. He practices exercises to

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[1] Gross physical sheath sustained by food

[2] Subtle, vital sheath consisting of five pranas: prana, apana, samana, vyana, and udana. It vitalizes and holds together the body and mind for the continuation of life; its gross manifestation is the breath.

[3] Sheath of mind which receives sense impressions

[4] Sheath of intellect which discriminates or wills

[5] Body of bliss, so-called because it is nearest to the Blissful Atman

train his tongue. He sits in a fixed posture and sometimes levitates. All these are the actions of *prana* (the vital breath). A magician, while performing magic feats, turned his tongue to touch his palate and immediately his body became stiff. People thought he was dead. He was buried and remained in a grave for many years. After a long time the grave was somehow opened and that man regained outer consciousness. As soon as he was conscious, he cried out, 'Look at my magic! See my feats!' (All laugh.) All these are actions of *prana*.

"Vedantists don't accept Hatha Yoga. Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga. In Raja Yoga one unites with God through the mind. One communes with God by means of love and reason. It is a good path of union with God. Hatha Yoga is not well-suited for the age of Kali in which life depends on food."

Chapter II

Austerities of Sri Ramakrishna – his near and dear ones – great centres of pilgrimage of future

Sri Ramakrishna is standing on the path by the Nahabat. He sees M. seated on a side verandah behind the fence and absorbed in deep meditation. Is he meditating on the Lord? Thakur is on his way back from Jhautala (willow grove) after having a wash.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well! So you are meditating here. You will soon succeed. Just practice a little and someone will appear to tell you the right way.

M. is startled when he sees Thakur. He remains seated on his *asana* (meditation seat).

Sri Ramakrishna — The time is ripe for you. The bird doesn't hatch its egg before the right hour. I have indicated your spiritual ideal (abode). It is truly your 'abode'.

Saying this, Thakur tells Mani again what his spiritual ideal (abode) is.

"It is not that everybody has to practice a lot of austerities – though I had to make a great deal of effort. I used to lie down with my head on the ground and the whole day would pass by while I wept and called out, 'Mother, Mother!' "

Mani has been coming to Thakur for the last two years or so. He has been educated in English, so Thakur sometimes calls him 'Englishman'. Mani is college-educated and he is married.

He has heard Keshab and other learned men lecture. He enjoys reading English philosophy and science. But since he has met Thakur, he has been finding the learned books of European scholars and lectures in English and other languages unattractive. Now he wishes only to see Thakur day and night and to listen to his holy conversation.

These days M. deliberates especially upon one instruction of Thakur. Thakur has said, "You can only see the Lord if you take to sadhana (spiritual disciplines)." He also has said, "Indeed, the aim of human life is God-realization."

Sri Ramakrishna — Just practice a little and someone will come to tell you the right way. You must observe the fast of *ekadashi*[1].

"You are my own, my near and dear one. Why else would you come here so often? While listening to the

[1] The eleventh day of the lunar fortnight

kirtan (devotional songs), I saw Rakhal among the cowherds of Braja. Narendra belongs to a very high spiritual ideal (abode). And Hirananda! What a childlike temperament he has! He is so sweet! I long to see him, too."

His earlier story – intimate companions of Gauranga – tulsi grove – service rendered by Mathur Babu

"I saw the intimate companions of Gauranga (Chaitanya Deva), not in bhava (ecstasy), but with my physical eyes. Formerly, I was in such a state that I had visions with my physical eyes. Now I see things in ecstasy.

"With the physical eyes I saw Gauranga and his intimate companions. I saw you, too, among them. Also Balaram.

"Why do I suddenly stand up when I see somebody? You know, it's as if I were meeting an old acquaintance after a long time.

"I used to weep and pray to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I am dying to see the devotees! Please bring them to me quickly.' At that time whatever came to pass in my mind would happen.

"I had planted a grove of tulsi in the Panchavati for performing japa and meditation. I had the idea that it should be enclosed by a fence of bamboo canes. Later I found that a bundle of bamboo canes and a small piece of string had come floating in with the tide in front of the Panchavati. A labourer of the temple joyfully informed me about it.

"In that state I could not perform worship. I said, 'Mother, who will look after me in this state? Mother! I am not strong enough to bear my own burden. And I like to hear about You, I like to feed Your devotees. I

like to offer something to them who visit me. How is it possible, Mother? Mother, please provide a rich person to help me!' That is why Mathur Babu rendered me so much service.

"And I said, 'Mother, I shall have no child, but I want a particularly pure boy devotee to always live with me. Pray give me such a boy.' So I got Rakhal. Those who are intimate with me are either a portion of the divinity or one *kala*[1] thereof."

Thakur again goes toward the Panchavati. M. accompanies him. Thakur laughs and talks on various topics.

His earlier story – wondrous vision of the form – branch of the banana tree

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — You see, one day I saw a wondrous form extending from the Kali Temple to the Panchavati. Do you believe it?

M. is aghast. He takes a leaf or two from a branch in the Panchavati and puts them in his pocket.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you see where that branch fell off? I used to sit under it.

M. — I took a green branch from this tree and have it at my home.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Why?

M. — I am overjoyed when I see it. In the end, this spot will become a great centre of pilgrimage.

[1] One sixteenth of the power of divinity

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What kind of centre of pilgrimage? Like Panihati?

A great festival is held at Panihati to commemorate Raghava Pandit. There is a large gathering. Sri Ramakrishna attends the festival almost every year. There he dances in ecstatic love during the kirtan just as Sri Gauranga (Chaitanya Deva) did. Unable to hold himself back at the call of his devotees, he came again to reveal his image of love during the kirtan.

Chapter III

Narration of the Lord's story

It is evening. Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the smaller cot in his room meditating on the Divine Mother. Arati of the deities is being performed one after the other in the shrines. One can hear the sound of conch shells and the ringing of bells. M. is to stay here for the night.

After some time, Thakur asks M. to read the 'Bhaktamala' to him. M. reads.

The story of king Jayamal

"There was a king named Jayamal. Of pure nature, he had an ineffable love for Lord Krishna. He observed the rules of worship strictly, according to *Navadha* bhakti (devotion of nine rites). His devotion was as strong as a line drawn on rock.

"He was only happy when engaged in the worship of the Deity Shyamalasundara[1] and he knew no other gods or goddesses. At dawn he regularly sat down for four hours to worship Him.

[1] An appellation of Lord Krishna

"He would not think of anything but His worship at this time, even if there was danger to his treasury or a thunderbolt struck from above.

"Having come to know of it, a rival king invaded Jayamal's kingdom while he was engaged in worship.

"Without their king's command, the army chief and soldiers could not go to battle. They stood waiting for his orders as the enemy gradually surrounded the fort. Even so, the king was not moved.

"His mother came to him beating her forehead, and cried loudly in sorrow, 'Everything is being taken away! There is complete destruction! Yet you are so unconcerned!'

"Jayamal said, 'Mother, why do you pester me? What can one do when the Giver Himself takes back what He has given? What He protects, no one can take away. All our efforts are certainly in vain.'

"In the meantime Shyamalasundara, the Deity, armed Himself and rode the king's horse to the battlefield. He destroyed the enemy's army, then tied the horse and returned to the worship.

"His worship over, King Jayamal came out and saw his horse panting and perspiring profusely from head to foot. He asked, 'Who rode my horse? And who has tied him to the shrine?' No one knew who had ridden the horse and who had brought it back.

"Suspecting something unusual, the king warily went to the battlefield with his soldiers. There he saw enemy soldiers lying dead in the field. Only one was spared, their chief king. Surprised, he asked the king what had happened.

"The enemy king, putting a cloth around his neck[1] and offering worship to King Jayamal with folded hands, made his submission: 'What fight could we put up against your wonderful soldier? He could conquer the three worlds.'

"I don't ask for wealth, nor do I ask for a kingdom. You may take my kingdom if you will tell me who the blue-hued soldier is who destroyed my whole army. He won my heart as soon as I saw him.

"King Jayamal understood that it was all the doing of Shyam (the blue-hued One, Sri Krishna). The enemy king also understood the mystery and began to chant prayers, holding Jayamal's feet. He said, 'I take refuge at the feet of the one by whose blessing Sri Krishna has showered His grace on me. May your Shyam accept me.' "

The reading from the scripture over, Thakur talks with M.

Dogmatism in Bhaktamala – who is an intimate one? Janaka and Shukadeva

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you believe it? Do you believe that He Himself vanquished a whole army, riding a horse?

M. — The devotee called upon Him with a yearning heart. So I believe it. But whether the Lord was actually seen riding a horse, I don't know. He could have come on horseback, but I am not sure if He was actually seen.

[1] One puts a piece of cloth round one's neck to indicate humility

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — This book contains beautiful stories of devotees. But the book is dogmatic. It runs down other beliefs.

The next day Thakur is talking to M. standing on the garden path. Mani says to him, "I must come and stay here."

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, you come to me so often. What does it signify? People go to a sadhu and see him just once. What does it mean that you come here so often?

M. is silent. Thakur himself replies to his question.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Does one visit unless one is very intimate? One who is intimate is one who is very near and dear, one's very own – like father, son, brother and sister.

"I don't say everything to you at one time. If I did, why would you come again to see me?

"Shukadeva went to Janaka seeking Brahmajnana (the knowledge of Brahman). Janaka asked him first to pay his *dakshina*[1]. Shukadeva said, 'How is the teacher's fee due before the instruction is given?' Janaka laughed and said, 'When you have gained Brahmajnana, you will not be able to differentiate between the guru and the disciple. So I ask for the teacher's fee in advance!' "

[1] A fee or gift given to the teacher

Chapter IV

Reflections in the heart of the disciple

It is the bright fortnight. The moon has risen. M. is strolling on the garden path of the Kali Temple. On one side of the path are Sri Ramakrishna's room, the Nahabat, the Bakultala and the Panchavati. On the other side, the bright waters of the Bhagirathi (the holy Ganges) reflect the moonlight.

M. is talking to himself, "Can one really realize God? Sri Ramakrishna says so. He says, 'Do a little and someone will come and tell you the way.' In other words, he has asked me to practice some spiritual disciplines. Well, I have married and have children. Can one married and with children still attain Him? (Thinking for awhile) Certainly one can. Otherwise, why should he have said so? Is it not possible by His grace?"

"One sees the universe in front – sun, moon, stars, living beings and twenty-four cosmic principles. How have they come into existence? Who is their Creator? Moreover, what am I to Him? This life is in vain without this knowledge.

"Sri Ramakrishna is the best among men. I have never seen such a great, saintly person in my life. He certainly has seen the Lord. If not, to whom does he talk day and night, crying, 'Mother, Mother!' And how is it that he has so much love for the Lord – such love that he loses all outer consciousness? He goes into samadhi and becomes inert. And then sometimes he laughs, sometimes he weeps, sometimes he dances and sings, intoxicated with divine love."

Section XII

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

It is the full moon day of the month of Agrahayana[1], the Sankranti[2], Friday, 14 December, 1883, time about 9:00 a.m. Sri Ramakrishna is standing near the door of his room on the southeastern verandah. Ramlal stands nearby. Rakhal and Latu are also not far away. M. enters and salutes Thakur by touching his head to the ground.

Thakur says, "So you have come! It is a very auspicious day." M. will stay with Thakur for a few days and practice *sadhana* (spiritual disciplines). Hasn't Thakur said, "Do a little and somebody will come to tell you the way?"

Thakur had said to M., "It is not right for you to take your meals daily from the guest house. It is intended for the sadhus and the poor. You should bring your own cook here." Consequently, M. has brought a cook with him.

Where is his food to be cooked? M. drinks milk, so Thakur has asked Ramlal to arrange it with the milkman.

Ramlal is reading the *Adhyatma Ramayana* to Thakur. M. is seated beside Thakur.

"Ramachandra is returning to Ayodhya after marrying Sita. On the way he is accosted by Parashurama. Having heard that Rama has broken Shiva's bow,

[1] Eighth month of the Hindu calendar
[2] The last day of the month

Parashurama creates a great deal of trouble. Dasharatha is full of fear. Parashurama throws a bow to Rama and asks him to string it. Rama smiles, holds it with his left hand, strings it and then twangs it. Putting an arrow to the bow, he says to Parashurama, 'Tell me, where I should shoot it.' Parashurama's arrogance crumbles. Realizing that Sri Rama is the Supreme Brahman, he chants a hymn of praise to him."

> Sri Ramakrishna goes into ecstasy hearing Parashurama's hymn. Every now and then he utters, "Rama, Rama" in a sweet voice.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ramlal) — Please read the story of Guhaka, the boatman.

> When Ramachandra went to the forest to fulfill a pledge to his father, it startled Guhaka. Ramlal reads from the Bhaktamala –

"Guhaka began to shed tears and his voice cracked. Almost motionless, he gazed at Rama like a puppet.

"Slowly approaching Rama, he said, 'Please come into my house.' Rama called him a friend and embraced him. Guhaka then surrendered himself to Rama, saying:

" 'It is good that you are my friend. I surrender my body and soul at your feet. You are my soul, my wealth, my kingdom, my love, my liberation and all meritorious deeds. I am dying of love for you. I dedicate myself at your feet.'

"Ramachandra is to spend fourteen years in the forest with matted hair and wearing the bark of trees for clothes. Hearing this, Guhaka matted his own hair and put on a cloth of bark; he ate nothing but fruits and root vegetables. After fourteen years, when Rama did

not return from exile, Guhaka was preparing his own funeral pyre when Hanuman came and told him that Rama was coming. At Hanuman's words, Guhaka was overjoyed. Soon Ramachandra and Sita arrived by the Pushpaka[1] chariot.

"Ramachandra, the compassionate, the source of supreme joy, the gracious loving Lord of the devotees and the mine of all virtues, embraced his great and dear devotee, Guhaka, who was thrilled with joy. The Lord and the servant remained in deep embrace while tears drenched their bodies. Blessed you are, Guhaka! There was the chant of '*jai*, *jai*' (victory, victory) from the heavenly abode."

Keshab Sen content with what comes to him without effort – the way – deep dispassion and renunciation of worldly life

Sri Ramakrishna is resting awhile after his meal. M. is seated nearby. Soon Dr. Shyam and some other people arrive.

Sri Ramakrishna sits up and begins to talk.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not that one must always work. When God is realized, there is no duty to perform. When the fruit appears, the flower falls off by itself.

"There is no obligatory worship like *sandhya*[2] for him who has realized God. Sandhya ends in the Gayatri[3]. The recitation of the Gayatri is enough.

[1] It is the chariot of Kubera which can fly through air at great speed

[2] Worship and meditation performed at dawn, noon, and sunset by orthodox Hindus

[3] A Vedic mantra (sacred text) which brahmins and other twice-born Hindus repeat everyday while meditating on the Supreme Being. "May we meditate on the effulgent Light of Him who is worshipful and who

Gayatri ends in Omkar[1]. You don't even have to chant the Gayatri mantra – just repeating Om is enough. How long are there such duties as sandhya? As long as, at the name of Hari or Rama, hair of the body does not stand on end, or tears of joy flow. It is not right to worship for the sake of wealth, or for winning a lawsuit."

A Particular Devotee — Everybody is trying to earn money. I see it. Hasn't Keshab Sen given away his daughter in marriage to a prince?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is different with Keshab. To a true devotee, the Lord provides everything without any effort on his part. The real son of a king gets a monthly allowance automatically. I am not talking of pleaders and advocates who earn money by becoming slaves to others and working so hard. I say, 'One should be the real son of the king.' He who has no desire, who never asks for money, gets it automatically. The *Gita* says: 'That which comes without effort[2].'

"The real brahmin is he who has no desire – he accepts food even from a *dome*[3]. He does not ask for anything. Everything comes to him by itself."

A Particular Devotee — Sir, how should a householder lead his life?

Sri Ramakrishna — He must live like a mudfish. He must develop love for the Lord by meditating on Him in a solitary place away from home. He can then live with

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has given birth to all worlds. May He direct the rays of our intelligence toward the path of good."

[1] The Vedic symbol for the Supreme Being

[2] Gita 4:22

[3] A caste of Hindus whose duty is to cremate the dead

his family without attachment to it. He lives in the mud but does not allow it to soil his body. Such a person leads a life of nonattachment in the world.

Sri Ramakrishna notices that Mani is all attention to his words.

Sri Ramakrishna (casting a glance at Mani) — One can realize the Lord when one has developed deep dispassion (*vairagya*). He who develops it feels that the world is a forest on fire – it is ever burning! He looks at his wife and son as a death well. When one has such dispassion, one leaves one's home. But living with nonattachment alone is not enough. 'Lust and greed' constitute maya (illusion). If you recognize maya it will take flight, ashamed of itself. A person covered himself with a tiger skin to frighten others. He whom he was trying to frighten said, 'I have recognized who you are! You are our own 'Hare'.' The man in the tiger skin laughed and went away to frighten somebody else.

"All women are forms of Shakti (Divine Energy). It is the Adyashakti (Primeval Power) that has become woman and appears to us in the form of women. The *Adhyatma* (*Ramayana*) says: Narada and other saints sang the praises of Rama, saying, 'Oh Rama, you are the forms of all men and all the forms of women are the manifestations of Sita. You are Indra, Sita is Indrani; You are Shiva, Sita is Shivani; You are an aspect of man and Sita of woman!' What more can I say? Where there is a male, you are that and where there is a female, it is Sita."

Renunciation and *prarabdha*[1] – Sri Ramakrishna prohibits *vamachara*[2]

(To the devotees) "One cannot renounce by a mere wish. One has to consider the *prarabdha* and the *samskaras* (tendencies of past life). A yogi said to a king, 'Please come sit with me and meditate on Bhagavan.' The king said, 'Master, I will not be able to do so for long. I still have some desire for sense enjoyments. If I stay in this forest, I might even create a kingdom here. I still have the desire for sense enjoyments.'

"When he was a boy, Natabar Panja used to graze cattle in this garden. But he had great desire for sense enjoyments. That is why he established a castor mill and is earning a lot of money from it. He does a lot of trading in castor oil in Alambazar.

"According to one sect, spiritual disciplines must be practiced in the company of women. I was taken to a group of women by people of the Kartabhaja sect. All the women came and sat near me. When I addressed them as mother, they said to each other, 'Oh, he is only a beginner – he doesn't yet know the 'ghat' (the way).' In their sect he who is unripe is a beginner. Then he becomes an aspirant and lastly *siddha* of the *siddhas* (supremely perfect).

"A woman approached Vaishnavcharan and sat near him. When asked, Vaishnavcharan said, 'She has the attitude of a child.'

"One easily experiences a downfall by thinking of a woman as one's wife. Taking her as the Mother is a pure attitude."

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[1] Karma which is stored up and begun to bear fruit

[2] Religious practice, prescribed in the Tantra, to be performed by a man in collaboration with a woman.

The devotees from Jhansa Ripade rise, saying, "We take our leave. We will see and pay homage to Mother Kali and the gods."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and idol worship – yearning and God realization

Mani is strolling alone in the Panchavati and other areas of the Kali Temple. Thakur has said, "By practicing a little spiritual disciplines, one can realize God." Is Mani thinking about that? And about deep dispassion? And that maya takes to its wings when she is recognized?

It is about half past three. Mani is again sitting in Sri Ramakrishna's room. A teacher from the Broughton Institution has brought some students to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur is talking with them. The teacher asks a question every now and then. The topic of conversation is idol worship.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the teacher) — What is wrong with idol worship? The Vedanta holds that wherever there are 'existence, light and love,' God manifests. Thus, there is nothing but God in all the objects we see.

"Just see how long little girls play with dolls. Till they get married and live with their husbands. When they get married, they put away their dolls and other toys in a wicker basket. When you have attained God, what is the use of worshipping the idol?"

He looks at Mani and says –

"One attains God when one develops intense love for Him. A lot of yearning is necessary. When one has great yearning, the whole mind goes to Him."

Childlike faith and God-realization – Govinda, the husband – the boy Jatila

"There was a girl who became a widow at a very early age. She had never seen her husband's face. Seeing the husbands of other girls, she asked her father one day, 'Father, where is my husband?' Her father replied, 'Govinda is your husband. If you call Him, you will see Him.' Hearing this, the girl went into her room and, shutting the door, she began to cry and call out, 'Govinda! Please come. Let me see you. Why don't you come?' Hearing the cries of the little girl, Bhagavan could not hold Himself back – He appeared before the girl.

"A childlike faith is needed! Such as the yearning of a child to see its mother. Such longing heralds the dawn. It is followed by sunrise. One sees the Lord after such intense longing.

"Listen to the story of the boy Jatila. To get to school, he had to go on horseback through a forest. On the way, he would feel frightened. When he told his mother about it, she said: Why fear? You should call out, 'Madhusudana.' The boy asked, 'Who is Madhusudana?' The mother replied, 'Madhusudana is your elder brother.' After that, when he felt afraid going through the forest alone, he cried out, 'Brother Madhusudana.' When there was no reply, he called out, 'Where are you, brother Madhusudana? Please come, I am so afraid!' Bhagavan then could not hold Himself back. He came and said, 'Here I am. What is there to fear?' And he accompanied the boy to the passage leading to the school and said to Jatila, 'I will come whenever you call Me. Don't be afraid.' Such childlike faith! Such yearning!

"A brahmin used to worship Bhagavan daily in his house. One day he had to go out on business. Before

going he said to his young son, 'Offer food to Bhagavan today. The deity must be fed.' The boy did so. But Bhagavan sat still – He would neither talk nor eat. Having waited for some time, the boy saw that Bhagavan did not move. He was very sure that He would come, take his seat on his *asana,* and eat his meal. The boy said again and again, 'Bhagavan, please come and eat. It is already very late. I cannot be here much longer.' Bhagavan, however, did not say anything. The boy began to cry, saying, 'Lord, my father asked me to feed you. Why don't you come? Why don't you eat here?' He cried yearningly for some time. Then he saw Bhagavan come smiling to take His *asana* (seat) and eat the meal. After serving Him, the boy went out of the shrine. The members of his family said, 'You have fed the Lord. Bring the offered food downstairs.' The boy said, 'Yes, yes. I have fed Him and Bhagavan has eaten everything.' They said, 'What are you saying?' The boy said simply, 'Why, Bhagavan has eaten the food!' They all went to the shrine and were speechless with wonder!"

> It will be a long time till evening. Sri Ramakrishna stands on the southern side of the Nahabat and talks to Mani. The Ganga flows in front of them. It is winter, so Thakur is wearing a shawl.

Sri Ramakrishna — Will you sleep in the room in the Panchavati?

Mani — Won't they give me the upper floor room of the Nahabat?

> Sri Ramakrishna will talk to the manager about Mani. He will indicate a room for him. Mani has liked the room on the upper floor of the Nahabat. He is poetic by temperament. By staying there, he will be

able to enjoy the view of the sky, the Ganges, the moonlight, the flowering trees and so forth.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why wouldn't they assign the room to you? I suggested the room in the Panchavati because so much repetition of Hari's name and meditation have been practiced there.

Chapter III

To love the Lord is the end of life

Incense has been burnt in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Thakur is seated on the smaller cot and meditating. Mani is seated on the floor. Rakhal, Latu and Ramlal are also in the room.

Thakur says to Mani, "The main thing is to develop bhakti for God, to love Him." He asks Ramlal to sing. He sings in a sweet voice. Thakur sings the initial words of every song, letting him sing the rest.

As asked by Thakur, Ramlal sings 'the sannyasa of Gauranga.'

What an exquisite bright form of Sri Gauranga – his eyes streaming with the tears of love – have I seen in Keshab Bharati's hut!

Gauranga is dancing mad like an elephant. He sings and then rolls on the dust, tears streaming from his eyes.

He calls on Hari, weeping, piercing the mortal world and heaven with his thundering voice.

Then he repeatedly prays for liberation of the slave, with a straw under his teeth and his two palms joined together.

He wears the robe of a yogi after having his locks of hair shaved.

One cries with one's heart seeing him so surged with bhakti and *prema* (ecstatic love).

Having renounced all, he has come to distribute *prema*, overwhelmed as he is by the sorrows of mankind.

Premdas wishes to wander from door to door like a slave at the feet of Sri Chaitanya.

Ramlal sings again: Sachi weeps and says, "Nimai! How can I live without you?" Thakur says, "Please sing that song."

1. I am not hesitant to grant liberation. I hesitate to grant pure bhakti... [See Section V for complete song.]

2. Can everybody have the vision of Radha? Can one have the love she had?

It is extremely rare indeed. No adoration, no sadhana – how can one attain the treasure?

Unique are the raindrops that fall on the new moon of the month during the Libra zodiac sign in *swati nakshatra*[1]. Does it rain like that at any other time?

Thakur again says to Ramlal, "Please sing that song: Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers…" Thakur adds lines to the song along with Ramlal.

O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers are so full of compassion.

I went to Kashi but Vishveshvara told me that I had come to Sachi Devi's house in Nadia. O Lord, I have recognized you.

I have been to several places. But nowhere have I seen a compassionate one like you.

You were Kanai and Balai in Braja. Now hiding these forms you are Gaur and Nitai in Nadia.

[1] A particular conjunction of stars

In Braja you played hide and seek; in Nadia your sport is to roll in the dust uttering, 'Hari, Hari,' intoxicated with love.

Your sport in Braja was full of action. In Nadia it is only repeating the name of Hari.

O Gauranga, the compassionate one, the whole of your body is covered. Only your two slanting eyes have been spared.

O the saviour of the fallen, hearing your redeeming name, I feel so assured in my mind.

I have reached you with great hopes. O the compassionate one, Lord Gauranga, give me shelter under your feet.

Jagai and Madhai have been liberated. O Lord, the redeemer of the holy, I need your assurance.

You even raise the *chandala* up in your arms and utter *Haribol*[1] to him with so much compassion, you Lord of the indigent.

Sri Ramakrishna's devotees practice sadhana in solitude

Mani is alone in the upper story room of the Nahabat. It is quite late at night. Today is the full moon day of Agrahayana. The sky, the Ganges, the Kali Temple, the spires of the shrine, the garden paths and the Panchavati seem to be swimming in moonlight. Mani, all alone, is meditating on Sri Ramakrishna.

At about 3:00 a.m. he rises. He goes toward the Panchavati to the north. Sri Ramakrishna has talked to him about the Panchavati. Mani doesn't like to stay in the Nahabat anymore. He has made up his mind to live in the Panchavati room.

Stillness reigns everywhere. There was a flood tide of the river at 11:00 p.m. He had heard the

[1] To chant the name of Lord Hari

repeated sound of the tide. Now he proceeds toward the Panchavati. He hears a sound from far off, as if somebody is wailing from the Panchavati grove in pain, "Where are you, brother Madhusudana?"

It is full moon. The rays of the moon stream down through the branches of the banana trees.

He proceeds further and sees from a distance that one of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees is seated in the middle of the Panchavati. It is he who has been calling aloud from that solitary spot, "Where are you, brother Madhusudana?" Mani watches him silently.

Section XIII

Sri Ramakrishna with Prankrishna, M. and other Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Prankrishna, M., Ram, Girindra and Gopal with Sri Ramakrishna

It is 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, 5 April, 1884, the twenty-fourth day of Chaitra. M. comes to the Dakshineswar Temple and sees Sri Ramakrishna sitting on the smaller cot in his room, smiling. A number of devotees, including Prankrishna Mukherji, are sitting on the floor.

Prankrishna is from the aristocratic Mukherji family of Janai. His home is in Shyampukur in Calcutta. He is the head of the auction house of McKenzie Lyal known as the Exchange. Though a householder, he is very interested in discussions of the Vedanta. He is devoted to the Paramahamsa Deva [Sri Ramakrishna] and often comes to see him. One day he took Sri Ramakrishna to his house and held a celebration in honour of his coming. He takes his daily morning bath at the Baghbazar ghat and when a boat is available, he goes directly to Dakshineswar to see Thakur. Today, too, he hired a boat. Hardly had it left the bank when the river became choppy. M. asked Prankrishna to let him off the boat. In spite of assurances of safety from Prankrishna and his friends, M. insisted. He said, "You must put me on land. I shall go to Dakshineswar on foot." Prankrishna had to let him go.

Reaching Dakshineswar, M. finds Prankrishna and the others talking with Thakur on spiritual matters. They had arrived a few moments before M. He salutes Thakur by touching his head on the floor and takes his seat.

Humanity and divinity of incarnation

Sri Ramakrishna (to Prankrishna) — But He is manifest more in the human being. If you say, 'How can one who is subject to hunger, thirst and other human needs, and who may be suffering from disease or sorrow, be an avatar,' the reply is, 'Even Brahman laments when bound by the five elements.'

"You see, Ramachandra wept in his suffering at Sita's pangs of separation. And once He Incarnated Himself as a sow to kill Hiranyaksha (the demon). When Hiranyaksha had been killed, Narayana still did not want to go back to heaven. He stayed in the body of the sow and had a big litter. He was very happy living with the young ones. The gods exclaimed, 'What does it mean? Bhagavan doesn't want to return.' So they all went to Shiva and humbly told him the situation. Shiva went to the sow and tried to persuade it to return, but it began to suckle its young ones. (Everybody laughs.) Then Shiva pierced the sow's body with his trident. Narayana came out, laughing merrily, and went back to heaven."

Prankrishna (to Thakur) — Sir, what is the *Anahata Shabda*?

Sri Ramakrishna — The *Anahata Shabda* goes on continuously by itself – it is the sound of Om. It originates in the Supreme Brahman. Only yogis can hear it, not those who are attached to the sense world. Yogis know that this sound rises from the navel and

that it also originates in the Supreme Brahman, resting on the Ocean of Milk[1].

Keshab Sen's question about the afterlife

Prankrishna — Sir, what is the afterlife like?

Sri Ramakrishna — Keshab Sen asked the same question. As long as a man lives in ignorance – in other words, as long as he doesn't realize the Lord – he has to be born in this world. But when he has attained jnana, he does not have to come to the world any longer, to the earth or to any other world.

"The potter puts his pots out to dry in the sun. You must have noticed that some of the pots dry hard and others do not. When a cow or some other animal happens to walk over them, some of them break. If a hard pot breaks, the potter throws it away, for it is of no use. But when a soft one breaks, he collects its clay and again puts it on the wheel to make another pot. It means that until one has realized God, one has to go back into the hands of the 'potter.' In other words, one has to repeatedly return to this world.

"What is the use of sowing boiled paddy seed? It can never sprout into a plant. When a man has been baked (perfected) in the fire of jnana, he is not used for new creation – he attains salvation."

Vedanta and ego – Vedanta and 'awareness of a witness' – jnana and vijnana

"According to the *Puranas*, the devotee is one entity and Bhagavan is another. I and you are separate entities. The body is only a small earthen bowl. Inside the body

[1] According to Hindu mythology, the Lord rests on the Ocean of Milk (ocean of Great Cause) after the end of each creation

there is the mind, the intellect and the water of ego. Brahman is like the sun. He is reflected in the water. Thus the devotee sees the form of the Lord.

"In the Vedanta, only Brahman is real; all else is maya, like a dream, a nonentity. The stick of I-ness lies on the ocean of Sachchidananda. (To M.) Listen to this carefully. If you take out this stick of ego, there remains only one ocean of Sachchidananda. But as long as there is the stick of ego in it, it looks split into two – one part of the water here, and the other part there. When one attains the knowledge of Brahman one goes into samadhi. Then this I-ness vanishes.

"For this reason, Shankaracharya preserved his 'I of knowledge' – to teach mankind.

(To Prankrishna) "But a jnani (man of spiritual knowledge) has certain characteristics. One may think that he has attained jnana, but what are the signs? He cannot harm anybody, he becomes childlike. When the philosopher's stone touches a steel sword, its steel turns into gold. This gold cannot injure. Outwardly you may see anger and egoism in him, but in reality the jnani has none.

"From a distance a burnt piece of rope still looks like a rope. But if you go near it and blow on it, it blows away. There is only a semblance of anger and egoism in a jnani. In reality there is no anger, or egoism.

"The child has no attachment. It makes a doll house and if anybody touches it, it begins to cry loudly, jumping around in protest. Later, it breaks the doll house itself. Sometimes it obstinately says, 'My father gave this cloth to me; I won't give it to you.' And next it forgets about the cloth when given a doll to play with; it leaves the cloth behind and goes away.

"All these are the signs of a jnani. Perhaps he is very rich – he has big pictures in his house, a horse

driven carriage and so on. But he leaves all this behind and goes to Kashi[1].

"According to Vedanta, even the state of waking is not of any significance. A woodcutter was dreaming when somebody woke him up. Irritated, he cried out, 'Why have you disturbed my sleep? I was a king and father of seven boys. The boys had already been educated and trained in weaponry. I was on my throne, ruling my kingdom. Why did you destroy my world of happiness?' The man said, 'But it was a dream, what does it matter?' The woodcutter said, 'Go on! You don't understand. To be a king in a dream is as true for me as to be a woodcutter. If it is true to be a woodcutter, then it is also true to be a king in a dream.' "

> Prankrishna is always talking about jnana. That must be why Thakur is telling him about the state of a jnani. Now he talks of the state of a vijnani. Is he hinting at his own state?

Sri Ramakrishna — Reaching the Atman through the path of 'neti, neti' (not this, not this) is jnana. By reasoning 'neti, neti,' one goes into samadhi and attains the Atman.

"What is vijnana? You must know God in a special way. One person has heard of milk, another has seen it, and yet another has drunk it. He who has only heard of milk is an ajnani (a man of ignorance), he who has seen it is a jnani (a man of spiritual knowledge), and he who has drunk it has attained vijnana. That is to say, he has known God in a special way. When one sees the Lord and talks to Him as a near and dear one, it is *vijnana*.

"Initially one must start discriminating 'neti, neti'. God is not the five vital elements[1], nor the senses. He is

[1] Benares; a holy place of the Hindus

neither the mind, nor the intellect nor the ego. He is beyond all cosmic principles. If you are to climb a roof, you have to leave the steps behind one by one. The steps are not the roof. But when you have reached the roof, you perceive that the steps are made of the same material as the roof, namely bricks, lime and brick-dust. He who is the Supreme Brahman has become the universe and all its living beings. He has also become the twenty-four cosmic principles. That which is Atman has become the five vital elements. Then why is the earth so hard if it is made out of the Atman? All is possible by His will. Flesh and bones have resulted from blood and semen. How hard is sea foam!"

Can a householder attain vijnana? He needs to perform sadhana

"When one has attained vijnana, one may live in the family. Then one realizes very well that God has become the universe and its living beings, that He is not outside the world. When Ramachandra attained jnana, he said, 'I shall not live in the household.' Thereupon Dasharatha sent Vaishishtha to explain it to him. Vaishishtha said, 'Rama! If there is no Lord in the household, you may renounce it.' Rama was silent at this. He knew very well that there is nothing without the Lord. So he did not renounce the world. (To Prankrishna) The main thing is that you need the divine sight. You develop this sight when your mind becomes pure. Just consider the Kumari Puja (Thakur's worship of an unmarried girl). This girl had excreta and urine inside her body. But I saw her as the very manifestation of Bhagavati. Take the case of the wife and son. A man loves both of them, but each with a different attitude. So it is said that it all depends on one's mind. The attitude of the pure mind is very

[1] Namely earth, water, fire, air and ether

different from the impure. It is this pure mind with which one sees the Lord in the household. You need to practice sadhana (spiritual disciplines) for it.

"Practice of spiritual disciplines is needed. One has to know that one gets easily bound when one has physical relations with one's wife. A woman naturally loves her husband, just as a man loves his wife. That is how both of them quickly fall spiritually.

"But there is a great advantage to family life. One may have physical relations with the wife when it is especially needed. (Smiling) Why are you laughing, M.?"

M. (to himself) — Since householders cannot renounce fully, all at once, Thakur is allowing this much. Isn't one-hundred percent brahmacharya (celibacy) totally impossible while living in the family?

A Hatha Yogi (practitioner of Hatha Yoga) enters.

A Hatha Yogi has been living in the Panchavati for the last few days. He takes only milk and opium, and practices Hatha Yoga. He doesn't eat rice and lentils. However, he hasn't enough money for the milk and opium. When Thakur went to the Panchavati, he had a word with the Hatha Yogi. The Hatha Yogi said to Rakhal, "Please request the Paramahamsa to arrange it for me." Thakur sent the message that he would see if the gentlemen from Calcutta would help when they visit him.

The Hatha Yogi (to Sri Ramakrishna) — What did you say to Rakhal?

Sri Ramakrishna — I told him that I would find out if any gentleman was willing to give some money. But nobody did. (To Prankrishna) It seems you don't like these people.

Prankrishna doesn't reply.

The Hatha Yogi leaves.

Thakur resumes the conversation.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and telling the truth – believe in God's sport as a human being

Sri Ramakrishna (to Prankrishna and other devotees) — Besides, you must always be firm in telling the truth while leading a household life. You can, indeed, realize Bhagavan simply by being truthful. I am not so firm about telling the truth now as I used to be. Before, if I once said that I would take a bath, I would begin to doubt whether I had taken a full bath, even when I had stepped into the Ganges, recited the sacred words, and poured a little water on my head. If I said that I would go to a particular spot to ease myself, I would go only there. I went to Ram's house in Calcutta and happened to say that I would not eat *luchi* (fried bread). When I was given food, I was very hungry. But since I had said that I would not take luchis, I just filled my stomach with sweetmeats. (All laugh.)

"Now I am not so particular about speaking the truth. Once I happened to say that I would go to ease myself, but felt no special need for it. What was I to do? I asked Ram[1]. He said, 'You need not go.' Then I reasoned, 'All is Narayana, Ram is Narayana too. Why should I not accept his word?' The elephant may be Narayana, but so is the mahout. When the mahout is asking me not to go near the elephant, then why should I not obey him? Thinking this way, I am now less strict about being truthful."

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[1] Ram Chatterji, the attendant of Sri Radhakanta in the temple

His earlier story: Vaishnavcharan's instruction – believe in God's sport as a human being

"Now I find that I am undergoing a change. Many days ago Vaishnavcharan said that one attains *purna* (ultimate) jnana only when one sees God in man. Now I see that it is He who is moving about in all the different forms. Now He is in the form of a sadhu, now a deceitful person, and now a rascal. So I say, 'Narayana in the form of a sadhu, Narayana as a deceitful person, Narayana as a rascal, and Narayana as a wicked person.'

"Now I ask myself, how can I feed everybody? I have the desire to feed everyone. So I make a person stay here and I feed him."

Prankrishna (looking at M. and laughing) — He is a good man. (To Sri Ramakrishna) Sir, he forced us to land him from the boat.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — What happened?

Prankrishna — He was on the boat. Seeing a few waves on the river, he said, 'Let me land.' (To M.) How did you get here?

M. (laughing) — On foot.

Sri Ramakrishna begins to laugh.

Difficult for the householders to give up worldly work – the pundit and practice of discrimination

Prankrishna (to Ramakrishna) — Sir, I am thinking about giving up work. When one is busy at work, one can think of nothing else. (Pointing at a gentleman companion) I am training him in my job. When I give it

up, he will attend to it. I feel that I can't engage in work any longer.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, it is very troublesome. It will be very nice if you can take to contemplation of God now. But though you say so, will you be able to give it up? Captain also said the same. Householders say so, but they cannot do it.

"So many pundits talk of jnana. They only talk of it, but they don't put their words into practice. They are like vultures that soar high but their gaze remains fixed on the charnel pits. In other words, they remain attached to 'lust and gold,' to the world. When I hear of a pundit having discrimination[1] and nonattachment[2], I am in awe of him. Otherwise, they are like dogs and goats to me."

Prankrishna salutes Thakur and prepares to leave. He asks M whether he will accompany him. M replies, "No, you go ahead." Prankrishna laughs and says, "And you must also leave!" (All laugh.)

M. strolls near the Panchavati and then takes his bath at the ghat where Sri Ramakrishna usually bathes. Then he goes for the darshan[3] of Bhavatarini and Radhakanta and offers his obeisance. He says to himself, "I was told that the Lord is formless. Why, then, am I paying obeisance to deities? Sri Ramakrishna believes in gods and goddesses with form. Is that the reason I am doing this? I know nothing about the Lord, nor do I understand. When Thakur believes in them, I, an insignificant fellow, should also have faith."

M. is having the darshan of Bhavatarini. He sees that She has a human head and a sword in Her

[1] *Viveka*
[2] *Vairagya*
[3] Act of seeing in order to pay homage

two left hands. With Her two right hands She is granting assurance and fearlessness. On the one hand, She is so terrible, and on the other, the gracious and loving Mother of the devotees – the meeting point of both attitudes. The Mother, compassionate to the lowly, to the devotee, so affectionate! But it is also true that the Mother is terrible, the picture of death! Why two opposite attitudes in one person? Only She knows.

It is Thakur's explanation that is coming to M.'s mind and he is thinking about it. It is said that Keshab Sen accepted Mother Kali in Thakur's presence. Keshab would say, "Is this the Goddess who was Spirit and Consciousness manifesting Herself in a clay image?"

Sri Ramakrishna, the man in samadhi, is conscious of pots and pans

Now M. comes and sits close to Sri Ramakrishna. Seeing that he has taken his bath, Thakur gives him prasad of fruits and so forth. M. takes them to the semi-circular verandah. He leaves the brass pot of drinking water on the verandah and quickly comes in to sit close to Thakur again. Thakur says, "Did you bring the brass pot?"

M. — Sir, I'll bring it immediately.

Sri Ramakrishna — Bah!

M. is embarrassed. He goes to the verandah and brings the brass pot into the room.

M.'s home is in Calcutta but, because of family problems, he lives in a rented house in Shyampukur. His place of work is nearby. His father, brothers and others live in the paternal house. Thakur wants him to live in his parental house because it is more convenient to meditate on the Lord in a joint family.

Though Thakur has been saying this off and on, unfortunately M. has not returned to his parental house. Thakur raises this topic again today.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, are you going back home now?

M. — I am not the least inclined to go there.

Sri Ramakrishna — But, why? Your father has renovated the whole house.

M. — I have suffered so many troubles in that house. There is no way that I can go there.

Sri Ramakrishna — Who are you afraid of?

M. — Everyone!

Sri Ramakrishna (gravely) — This fear is as unsubstantial as being afraid of the boat!

The deities have been offered holy food. Arati is being performed as the cymbals and bells ring. The Kali Temple is filled with joy. Hearing the sound of arati the indigent, sadhus and fakirs all run toward the guest house. Some of them have a sal leaf plate and the others, a metal plate and a drinking pot. They all partake of the prasad (sacramental food). Today M., too, takes the prasad of Mother Bhavatarini (Kali).

Chapter III

Keshab Chandra Sen and the Navavidhan – the Navavidhan has some substance

Thakur is resting after his meal. In the meantime Ram, Girindra and many other devotees arrive. They

offer him salutation by touching their heads on the floor, and then they take their seats.

The topic of conversation turns to Keshab Chandra Sen's Navavidhan.

Ram (to Sri Ramakrishna) — Sir, it doesn't seem to me that the Navavidhan has done much good. If Keshab Babu had been genuine, why would his devotees come to their present plight? According to me, there is no substance in him. It is like sounding some broken pieces of earthenware and then locking the door – people would think that there is a lot of money inside. But actually there are only broken pieces of baked clay. Outsiders don't know what is inside.

Sri Ramakrishna — There is definitely some substance in him. If not, why would so many people honour him? Why don't people see the greatness of Shivanath? Unless the Lord wills, greatness is not honoured.

"Yet, unless a person renounces the world, he can accomplish nothing wonderful and people do not accept him. People say, 'He is a householder, he enjoys 'lust and gold' secretly while he tells us that the Lord is the only Reality and the world is transitory like a dream.' Unless one has renounced the world completely, his word is not accepted by everybody, even though some worldly people may accept it. Keshab lived a householder life, so he was also interested in his family. Worldly people have to be protected. He lectured a great deal, but he also made full provision for his household. What a son-in-law he had! I entered his house and saw big cots! When you live a householder's life, such luxuries come automatically. What is the world if not a place for sense enjoyment?"

Ram — Keshab got those cots when his ancestor's property was divided. It was his share. Sir, you may say anything, but Vijay Babu told me that Keshab Sen said to him, 'I am a portion of Christ, of Gauranga (Chaitanya Deva). And you should say that you are Advaita.' And do you know what he said? That you also belong to the Navavidhan. (Thakur and others laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — I don't know, brother. I don't even know the meaning of Navavidhan! (All laugh.)

Ram — Keshab's disciples say that he has harmonized jnana and bhakti.

Sri Ramakrishna (surprised) — How is that, brother? Then what does the *Adhyatma* (*Ramayana*) contain? Narada began to sing a hymn of praise to Ramachandra, 'O Rama! You are the same Supreme Brahman that the *Vedas* talk of. You have been living with us as a human being and, though you look like a man, in reality you are not a human being. You are that Supreme Brahman.' Ramachandra said, 'Narada, I am extremely pleased with you. Please ask for a boon.' Narada said, 'Rama, what boon can I ask? Grant that I may have pure bhakti for your lotus feet. And may you not enchant me with your world-bewitching maya.' The *Adhyatma* (*Ramayana*) contains only jnana and bhakti.

> Now the conversation turns on Amrita, a disciple of Keshab.

Ram — Amrita Babu has become quite a different person.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, I saw him rather sick the other day.

Ram — Sir, let me tell you about his lecture. The moment the drum is sounded, they all say, 'Victory to Keshab.' Didn't you say that 'dal[1]' is formed in small shallow pits of stagnant water? One day Amrita Babu said in his lecture, 'The holy man [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] says that sects are formed in small pits. But brother, one needs the sects, one definitely needs them. I tell you the truth: they are indeed needed.' (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna — What is this? Shame! Shame! Shame! What a lecture!

> Now the topic of discussion is that some people like to praise their leader.

Sri Ramakrishna — The musical play of Nimai Sannyasa (the renunciation of Sri Chaitanya) was to be enacted at Keshab's house. I was invited to it. That day I heard somebody call Keshab and Pratap 'Gaur and Nitai'. Prasanna then asked me what I was. I noticed that Keshab was looking at me to see what I would reply. I replied, 'I am the servant of the servants of your servant, I am the dust of dust.' Keshab laughed and said, 'He can never be caught.'

Ram — Keshab sometimes used to say that you were John the Baptist.

A Devotee — And sometimes he would say that you are the Chaitanya Deva of the nineteenth century.

Sri Ramakrishna — What does that mean?

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[1] The word has two meanings: 'sedge' and 'sect'

The Devotee — It means that Chaitanya Deva has incarnated again in the nineteenth century. And you are he.

Sri Ramakrishna (indifferently) — Leave it alone. But tell me now how my hand[1] can be set right. My only care now is to see that my hand is cured.

The topic turns to Trailokya's songs. Trailokya sings the name of the Lord and devotional songs in Keshab's Samaj (society).

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah, how beautifully Trailokya sings!

Ram — How? Are all his songs all right?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, all right. Otherwise, why do his songs attract my mind so much?

Ram — He has composed all the songs in the *bhava* (attitude) he has borrowed from you. Keshab Sen used to describe these very attitudes at the time of performing worship. Trailokya Babu would then compose songs in the same mood. Just take this song –

It is a fair of joy in the mart of love.

How Hari is sporting merrily with the devotees!

"You enjoy yourself in the company of devotees. Noticing this, he has composed all his songs in the same mood."

[1] Some days ago Sri Ramakrishna fell down and broke his hand. A bandage was tied around his hand for several days. The hand is bandaged even now.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Please don't torment me anymore. Why do you want to involve me in that? (Laughter.)

Girindra — The Brahmo devotees say that the Paramahamsa Deva lacks the faculty of organization.

Sri Ramakrishna — What does that mean?

M. — That you don't know how to form and run an organization. That you are not intelligent enough. That's what they say. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram) — Now please tell me why my hand broke? Please stand up and lecture on this topic. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna instructs the Brahmos, the Vaishnavas and the Shaktas on sectarianism

"The Brahmos insist that God is formless. Let them say so. It is enough to call on Him sincerely. If you are sincere, He, being *antaryami*[1], will surely make you know, make you understand, what His real nature is.

"Yet it is not good to say that only what you know of Him is right and others are wrong. That since we take Him as formless, He is formless and can't have form. Or that He has a form and so cannot be formless. Can a man reach the end of God?

"In the same way, the Vaishnavas and Shaktas are opposed to each other. The Vaishnavas say, 'He is our Keshab [Sri Krishna].' The Shaktas say, 'He is our Bhagavati, the only giver of liberation.'

[1] God as the Inner Controller

'I took Vaishnavcharan to Mathur Babu. Vaishnavcharan is a man of discrimination and great learning. But he is a rigid Vaishnava. On the other hand, Mathur Babu is a devotee of Bhagavati. They were having a nice conversation when Vaishnavcharan said, 'Only Keshab [Krishna] grants liberation.' No sooner did Mathur Babu hear these words than his face flushed with anger. He said, 'My foot!' (All laugh.) Was he [Mathur] not a Shakta (worshipper of Shakti)? It was natural for him to react that way. In the meantime I tried to distract Vaishnavcharan by stroking his body.

"I see that all those who harp on religion are actually quarrelling among themselves. The Hindus, the Mohammedans, the Brahmos, the Shaktas, the Vaishnavas, the Shaivites are all quarreling with each other. They haven't gained the intelligence to understand that He who is called Krishna is Shiva, and also the Primeval Power. He is the same Being who is known as Christ or Allah. There is but one Rama, and He is known by a thousand names.

"There is one Substance; it is called by different names. Everybody is asking for the same one Substance. Yet there is a difference of place, person and name. A pond has a number of ghats. The Hindus draw water from one ghat and, filling their brass pots, they call it *jal*. The Mohammedans take water from the other ghat and, filling their skin bags, they call it *pani*. While the Christians take water from a third ghat and call it water. (All laugh.)

"When a person says that this substance is not *jal* but *pani,* or it is not *pani* but water, or not water but *jal*, it becomes ridiculous. That is the reason why there are different groups, ill will and quarrels. Resorting to fights with staves, and scuffling and killing in the name of religion is not good. Everybody is going toward God.

When one is sincere and yearns for Him, one attains Him.

(To Mani) "Listen to this. The *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, the *Tantras*, all these religious texts seek Him alone and none else. Whom the *Vedas* call Sachchidananda Brahman, the *Tantras* call Sachchidananda Shiva and the *Puranas* call Sachchidananda Krishna."

Sri Ramakrishna has heard that Ram sometimes cooks his own meal in his home.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Do you cook for yourself sometimes?

Mani — No, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Look here. Put a little cow's ghee (clarified butter) in your meals. You will feel your body and mind becoming very pure.

Chapter IV

The father is dharma, he is the heaven and he is the supreme austerity

They have been talking quite a long time about Ram's household life. Ram's father is a staunch Vaishnava and Sridhar (Sri Krishna) is worshipped in his house daily. His father married a second time when Ram was very young. The father and stepmother lived with Ram, but Ram was not happy living with his stepmother. She is now forty. Ram is sometimes cross with his father because of his stepmother. This is the topic of conversation today.

Ram — My father is not the good man he was.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Do you hear? His father is not good – but he is.

Ram — There is no peace when she (the stepmother) comes to the house! Something unfortunate is bound to happen. Our household is breaking apart. I say it would be better for her to go and live with her parents.

Girindra (to Ram) — Why don't you keep your wife at her father's house in the same way? (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Are they like pots and pans, that the pot be here and its lid somewhere else? Shiva here and Shakti there?

Ram — Sir, we are living happily indeed. But when she comes to the house, family life falls apart.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, you can build a house for them elsewhere. This is another way. Give them their monthly expenses. Parents are big gurus. Rakhal once asked me whether he could eat from the same plate his father had used. I said, 'What are you saying? What has happened to you that you can't eat from your father's plate?'

"But this is the fact: they who are real devotees do not give their leftover food to anyone – not even to dogs."

Worship the guru as your Ideal Deity – the guru not to be given up even if he is immoral

Girindra — Sir, what if the parents are guilty of some grave offense, that they have committed a serious sin?

Sri Ramakrishna — Let them! The mother, even if she is of easy virtue, should not be forsaken. When the woman guru of a certain family became immoral, it was said that her son be made the guru. I said, 'But why? You want to give up the yam and take the shoot. Even if she has gone wrong, what does it matter? You must take her as the guru.' 'Even though my guru visits the tavern, he is still my ever-blissful guru.'

Chaitanya Deva and his mother – a man's debts – his duties

"Are parents such insignificant persons? No spiritual or other effort can be achieved if they are not pleased. Chaitanya Deva was intoxicated with love for God. Yet before embracing sannyasa, he implored his mother for many days. He said, 'Mother, I will come every now and then to see you.'

(To M., reprimanding him) "And I tell you, your parents have reared you. And you have so many children. Yet you have left home with your wife and children. 'Leaving behind the father and mother, the baul becomes a Vaishnava and comes away with his wife and son.' Your father is well provided for. Were it not so, I would say, 'Shame on you!' (Everybody in the room is silent.)

"There are certain debts a man must pay: the debt to the deity, to the rishi, to the father, to the mother and also to the wife. Till you pay back the debt to your parents, you can achieve nothing.

"You have to pay back the debt to the wife too. Harish has left his wife to live here. Had there been no

provision for her, I would have called him wicked and a rascal.

"When you have attained jnana, you look on your wife as the embodiment of Bhagavati (Divine Mother). The Chandi says, 'The Divine Power dwells in all elements in the form of the Mother.' She Herself has become your mother

"All women are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. So I cannot scold Brinde (the maidservant). Some people recite verse after verse from the scriptures and talk big, but they act quite the opposite. Ramprasanna[1] is arranging for milk and opium for that Hatha Yogi. He said, 'Manu talks of service to the sadhus.' On the other hand, his old mother hasn't enough to eat. She has to go to the bazaar herself. When I see this, I feel so annoyed."

Who is free from all debts? Sannyasi and his duties

"But then, this is also specifically true. If a person feels intoxicated with God's love, there is no father, no mother, and no wife for him. He may have so much love for the Lord that he may appear to be mad! Such a person has no duties. He is freed from all his debts. What is intoxication with love for God like? In that state one forgets the world. One even forgets one's body that is so dear. Chaitanya Deva had this state. He jumped into the sea unaware that it was a sea. He would fall hard on the ground again and again. He lost hunger, thirst and sleep. He was not at all conscious of his body."

[1] Ramprasanna is a devotee from Ariadaha and the son of Krishnakishore

The Elder Gopal on pilgrimage – Sri Ramakrishna is present, so why go on pilgrimage? Adhar's invitation – Ram's vanity – Sri Ramakrishna meditates

> Thakur suddenly says, "Ah, Chaitanya!" (To the devotees) Was Chaitanya He who is Indivisible Chaitanya (Consciousness)? Vaishnavcharan used to say, '"Gauranga is a bubble of the same Indivisible Consciousness.'"

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you intend to go on pilgrimage?

The Elder Gopal — Yes sir, I may visit some places.

Ram (to the Elder Gopal) — He says that one becomes a *kutichaka* after being a *vahudaka*. The sadhu who visits many holy places is a *vahudaka*. One who doesn't desire to move around, who settles down peacefully at one place on an *asana* is known as a *kutichaka*.

"And he also says this: A bird was sitting on the mast of a ship. It did not know when the ship came out of the holy Ganges and entered the black waters of the ocean. When it became aware of the ocean, it wanted to know where the land was. Flying to the north and finding no shore, it returned. Having rested for awhile, it flew south, but found no shore there either. Out of breath, it returned. Then it flew to the west and to the east after resting awhile on the same mast. When it found land or shore nowhere, it perched peacefully on the mast."

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Elder Gopal) — As long as one thinks that the Lord is somewhere 'there', one is ignorant. But when one thinks that God is definitely 'here', that is jnana.

"Somebody wanted a smoke. He went to his neighbour's home to get a light. It was quite late at night, so the neighbours were all asleep. When he had knocked for a long time, somebody came downstairs to open the door. Seeing the caller, he asked, 'What is the matter?' The former said, 'Nothing more than this: I am addicted to smoking, you already know about that. So I have come for a light.' Then the man said, 'You are a fine man indeed! You have taken the trouble to come here and knocked so long. But you have a lantern in your hand!' (All laugh.)

"What man desires, it is already with him. Yet, he wanders from place to place!"

Is Thakur hinting that he is present there? Why then go on pilgrimage?

Ram — Sir, I now understand why the guru asks some disciples to visit all the four *dhams*[1]. When he goes from place to place and sees that what he sees 'here' is what he sees 'there,' he returns to his guru. All this is done so that the disciple may have firm faith in the words of the guru.

When the conversation stops for awhile, Sri Ramakrishna praises Ram.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Oh, what qualities Ram has! How he serves devotees and looks after them! (To Ram) Adhar told me that you were very hospitable to him.

Adhar's house is in Sobhabazar. He is a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. The Chandi was sung at his house. Thakur and a number of devotees were

[1] Places of pilgrimage

present, but Adhar had forgotten to invite Ram. Ram is a very proud man. He told some friends of his displeasure at this negligence. So Adhar went to Ram's house to apologize.

Ram — Adhar is not to be blamed. I have learned that it was Rakhal's mistake – Rakhal was given the responsibility.

Sri Ramakrishna — You must not find fault with Rakhal. You can bring up mother's milk by pressing his throat [meaning a fairly young and immature person].

Ram — Sir, they say that the Chandi was sung there.

Sri Ramakrishna — Adhar didn't know about that. Just see, the other day he accompanied me to Jadu Mallick's house. When we were leaving, I asked him why he had not offered *pranami* (offering of money to the deity) to Mother Simhavahini[1]. He replied, 'Sir, I didn't know that I was supposed to offer *pranami*.'"

"And even if one is not invited, what is wrong with going to the place where Hari's name is sung? One should go even uninvited where the name of Hari is being chanted. There is no need for an invitation."

[1] The Goddess seated upon a lion

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar and attends a Performance of Chaitanya at Calcutta

Chapter I

Conversation about Rakhal, Narayan (Naran), Nityagopal and the Younger Gopal

It is Sunday, 21 September, 1884, (the sixth day of Aswin, 1291 B.Y.). A number of devotees have gathered in Sri Ramakrishna's room – Ram, Mahendra Mukherji, Chunilal, M. and many others are there.

Chunilal has just returned from Vrindavan. He and Rakhal went there with Balaram. Rakhal and Balaram have not yet returned. Nityagopal is also in Vrindavan. Thakur talks of Vrindavan with Chunilal.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is Rakhal doing?

Chunilal — Sir, he is all right now.

Sri Ramakrishna — Isn't Nityagopal coming back?

Chunilal — He is still there. I saw him before I left.

Sri Ramakrishna — Who is accompanying your wife and the others?

Chunilal — Balaram Babu said that a good and suitable person would be sent to accompany them. He didn't give the name.

Thakur now talks to Mahendra Mukherji about Narayan. Narayan goes to school and is 16 or 17 years old. He visits Thakur off and on. Thakur is very fond of him.

Sri Ramakrishna — He is very guileless, isn't he?

As he says 'guileless', Sri Ramakrishna is filled with joy.

Mahendra — Yes sir, very guileless.

Sri Ramakrishna — His mother came the other day. I was frightened to find her so egotistical. She found out that you and Captain visit here. She must have definitely thought that I and Narayan were not the only ones who come to the temple. (All laugh.) There was some sugar candy in the room. Seeing it she said, 'Nice sugar candy that is!' She must have concluded from this that there is no dearth of food here.

"Then perhaps I said to Baburam in her presence, 'Please keep some sandesh for Narayan and yourself.' Ganu's mother and some other women said, 'Oh God, how he bothers his mother to pay the ferry charges to come here!' His mother said to me, 'Please ask Narayan to marry.' I replied, 'It depends on his destiny. Why should I interfere in such matters?' (All laugh.)

"He doesn't work hard in his studies, so she said, 'Please ask him to study hard.' I said to Narayan, 'You must study hard.' Then she said again, 'Please tell him more emphatically.' (All laugh.)

(To Chunilal) "Well, why doesn't Gopal come?"

Chunilal — He has blood diarrhea.

Sri Ramakrishna — Does he take any medicine?

A courtesan acting in theatre – his past story – Thakur sees a balloon going up and is inspired

Today Thakur is to visit the Star Theatre[1] in Calcutta and witness the Chaitanya Lila (play of Chaitanya). He will go with Mahendra Mukherji in his carriage to see the play. They discuss where they should sit to get a good view. Somebody suggests that a one Rupee seat gives a good view. Ram says, "Why? We will take a box."

Thakur laughs. Somebody says, "Courtesans act in these plays. They play the role of Chaitanya Deva, Nitai and others."

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — I shall look upon them all as the All-Blissful Mother.

"Let them act as Chaitanya Deva. Seeing an imitation custard apple made of *sola* (a dry plant), one has the feeling of a real custard apple.

"A devotee walking on the road saw a number of *babul* (acacia) trees. The devotee was instantly absorbed in bhava (divine fervour). He remembered that the beautiful handle of the spade in the garden of Shyamasundar [Krishna] is made of the same wood. It at once brought the thought of Shyamasundar to his mind! When they took me to the Fort Maidan to see the balloon, I saw a European boy standing against a tree with his body bent at three places. Immediately, I was inspired with Krishna and went into samadhi!

[1] The premises of the Star Theatre is now the Kohinoor Theatre

"Chaitanya Deva was passing by the Meda village. He was told that they make *khol* (drum, used in kirtan) with clay from this village. At once he went into ecstasy.

"Seeing a cloud or the neck of a peacock, Radha could not control herself. She would be overcome with the presence of Sri Krishna and lose all outer consciousness."

Thakur is now silent for awhile. After some time, he resumes the conversation: "Radha's *mahabhava* – the *prema* (intense love) of the gopis was desireless. A genuine devotee has no desire. He merely prays for pure love for God. He doesn't ask for occult powers, or any other power."

Chapter II

Instructions by the Naked One – the eight occult powers are an obstacle in attaining the Lord

Sri Ramakrishna — Occult powers bring great troubles. The Naked One (Tota Puri) counseled me, saying, 'A man who had occult powers was sitting on the seashore. The sea became stormy. Afraid that the storm would harm him, the man said, 'Let the storm halt at once.' His words could not remain unfulfilled. A ship with a mast was passing. When the storm died down so abruptly, the ship sank. All the passengers occupying the ship went down with it. Thus he contracted the sin of drowning so many people! The sin resulted not only in losing his occult powers, but also sent him to hell.'

"A sadhu possessed many occult powers. This also made him very proud. But this man was basically a good fellow and had a lot of *tapasya* (penance) to his credit. Bhagavan one day came to him disguised as a sadhu and said, 'Maharaj, I hear that you have acquired many occult powers.' The sadhu asked him very

cordially to sit down. Just then an elephant was passing that way. The second sadhu said, 'Well Maharaj, can you kill this elephant by a mere wish?' The first sadhu said, 'Yes, it is possible.' Saying so, he took a little dust, muttered a few words and threw it on the body of the elephant. Lo! It died, writhing in pain. The visitor sadhu thereupon said, 'You indeed have great powers! You have killed the elephant.' The first sadhu began to laugh. The other sadhu then said, 'Well, can you bring the elephant back to life?' The other sadhu said, 'That, too, is possible.' Saying so, he muttered a few words and threw some dust on the elephant. It staggered up. The other sadhu then said, 'Oh, how powerful you are! But I ask you this: What have you gained by killing the elephant and then bringing it back to life? What spiritual progress were you able to achieve by it? Has it helped you to realize Bhagavan?' Saying so, that sadhu disappeared.

"Religion is a very delicate matter. Even the smallest trace of desire can stop you from attaining Bhagavan. A thread does not pass through the eye of a needle if its end has any fibers sticking out.

"Krishna said to Arjuna: Brother, if you wish to attain Me, even one of the eight occult powers will obstruct your reaching Me.

"The fact is that one becomes proud if one possesses occult powers. And this makes one forget the Lord.

"A cross-eyed gentleman came to see me. He said, 'It is good that you are a paramahamsa. Please perform *sawastyayana* (a religious practice for the attainment of worldly desire) for me.' What low intelligence! A paramahamsa should perform a *sawastyayana*! It is an occult power if one cures a person by performing *sawastyayana*. Pride stops you from attaining the Lord.

Do you know what it is to be proud? Say, there is a high mound. You will see that it cannot hold rainwater; the rainwater just runs off. On the other hand, low land holds water. It helps plants to germinate and grow into trees. The trees later bear fruits."

Love all – love dispels egoism and leads to God-realization

"So I say to Hazra, 'Don't think that you alone understand everything and that everyone else is a fool. You must love everyone. Nobody is a stranger. Hari dwells in all beings. Nothing exists without Him.' Bhagavan said to Prahlada, 'Ask for a boon.' Prahlada replied, 'I have had Your vision. I need nothing else.' But Bhagavan would not listen. Then Prahlada said, 'If You want to grant me a boon, then please don't punish those who have troubled me.'

"It means that it was the Lord Hari Himself who had inflicted troubles on him. By harming those people, one would be harming the Lord Himself."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna surcharged with madness of jnana – his caste differentiation

His earlier story of 1857 – he meets a person with the madness of jnana just after the Kali Temple was founded – Haladhari

Sri Ramakrishna — Radha was seized with the madness of *prema* (ecstatic love) and also with the madness of bhakti – just like Hanuman. Seeing Sita entering the fire, he went toward Rama to hit him. And then there is the madness of jnana. Just after the Kali Temple was founded, I saw a jnani who looked crazed.

People said that he belonged to the Brahmo Society of Rammohan Roy. A shoe on one of his feet was tattered. He was holding a bamboo branch in one hand and an earthen pot with a mango plant in the other. He took a dip in the Ganges and then entered the Kali Temple. Haladhari was sitting in the shrine. Later, the man began to sing a hymn in frenzy –

Kshon kshon Khattangadharini[1] etc.

"He went near a dog, held its ear and shared its food. The dog did not react. I had also begun to experience a state of divine madness. I embraced Hriday and said to him, 'Oh, Hriday! Am I also going to be put in such a state?'

"My state of madness! Narayan Shastri came and saw me strolling with a bamboo pole on my shoulder. He told people that I was in divine intoxication. In such a state, one does not distinguish one's own caste from others. The wife of a man of low caste would cook a vegetable and send it to me and I would eat it.

"After the beggars and indigents had eaten and left the Kali Temple, I would take their leaf plates and touch them to my head and face. Haladhari said to me, 'What are you doing? You are eating the leftover food of these indigents. How will you marry off your children?' This made me very angry. Haladhari was my elder cousin brother. But what did it matter? I said to him, 'Oh rascal, is it for this that you study the *Gita* and the Vedanta? Don't you teach that only Brahman is the reality and the world illusory? You think that I am also going to have children! Fie on your study of the *Gita*!'

[1] Divine Mother wearing a dress of a particular kind of grass

(To M.) "Look here, mere study does not help. A person may be able to recite musical notation very nicely. But it is very difficult to play it."

Thakur is further describing his state of intoxication of jnana.

His past story – in Navadvip with Mathur – Thakur falls at the feet of Chine Sankhari

"I was on a boat trip with Mathur Babu for several days. During that trip we visited Navadvip. I saw that the boatmen were cooking very good food in the boat and Mathur Babu knew that I would ask for it and eat it. So he said, 'Father, do come here, come away.'

"But I can't do it now. Now I am in a different state of mind. Now I only eat rice given by a pious man, a brahmin, or that offered to deities.

"What states have I passed through! In my village I would say to Chine Sankhari and the other companions of my age, 'Brother, I fall at your feet. Just utter Haribol once.' And I could fall at anybody's feet. Chine said, 'Oh brother, it is your first experience of *anuraga* (divine love). That is why you see everyone as equal.' When a stormy wind blows, it raises a lot of dust and one sees no difference between the tamarind and the mango trees – one cannot distinguish the mango tree from the tamarind tree."

What does Sri Ramakrishna believe in: in household life or complete renunciation? Keshab Sen's doubt

A Devotee — How will a householder be able to go on with his duties of the world, if he experiences such madness of bhakti, or of *prema* (intense love), or of jnana?

Sri Ramakrishna (looking at the householder devotee) — There are two classes of yogis: *vyakta* (one who can be seen outwardly as a yogi) and the other, *gupta* (who hides his yoga). A householder is a *gupta* yogi, he doesn't let others know of it. The householder renounces mentally, not externally.

Ram — This is like comforting a young boy. One can be a jnani in the household, but not a vijnani.

Sri Ramakrishna — If he wants finally to be a vijnani, he can become so. It is not right to renounce the household by forcing yourself.

Ram — Keshab Sen used to say, 'Why do so many people go to him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna]? He will one day gently sting them. Then they will run away from him.'

Sri Ramakrishna — Why should I sting gently? I tell people, 'Do 'this' and do 'that' too – live in the family and also call on the Lord.' I don't ask them for complete renunciation. (Laughing) Keshab Sen one day said in one of his lectures, 'Oh Lord, grant that we may dive into the river of bhakti and be carried to the ocean of Sachchidananda.' All the ladies were behind a screen. I said to Keshab, 'How could you all dive together? If you did that, what would happen to these ladies? First climb to dry land and then dive. And then again climb up to the dry land.' Keshab and all other began to laugh. Hazra said to me, 'You are very fond of rajasic[1] people – those who have a lot of money, name, fame, and public respect.' If that is so, why do I love Harish, Noto (Latu) and others? Why am I fond of Narendra? He doesn't even have salt to eat with his roasted banana!

[1] People endowed with the quality of rajas

Sri Ramakrishna comes out of his room and goes toward the Jhautala talking with M. on the way. A devotee accompanies him with a washing pot and a hand towel. He is to go to Calcutta to witness the Chaitanya Lila – this topic is being discussed.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M., as they approach the Panchavati) — Ram does everything in a rajasic way. What is the need to spend so much for a seat?

What Thakur means is that there was no need to buy tickets for the box class.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna at a devotee's place in Hathibagan – Mahendra Mukherji's service to him

Sri Ramakrishna is going from Dakshineswar to Calcutta by Mahendra Mukherji's carriage. It is Sunday, 21 September, 1884, the sixth of Aswin, the second day of the bright fortnight of the month of Aswin. It is five o'clock. Mahendra Mukherji, M. and a couple of other persons are also in the carriage. The carriage hasn't gone far when Thakur goes into the state of samadhi while meditating on the Lord.

The samadhi breaks after a long time. Thakur says, "And Hazra tries to teach me. Rascal!" After awhile, he says, "I shall take some water." Thakur often says this after coming out of samadhi, to bring his mind down to the outer world.

Mahendra Mukherji (to M) — Shall I bring something to eat?

M. — He will not eat now.

Sri Ramakrishna (still in the ecstatic mood) — I shall eat. I shall ease myself.

Mahendra Mukherji has a flour mill in Hathibagan. He is taking Thakur to the mill. After resting for awhile, Thakur will go to the Star Theatre to see the Chaitanya Lila. Mahendra's house is in Baghbazar, a little to the north of the Madan Mohan temple. His father is not acquainted with the Paramahamsa Deva, so Mahendra hasn't taken Thakur to his house. Priyanath, his second brother, is a devotee.

A cotton carpet has been spread over a wooden cot in Mahendra's mill. Thakur is sitting there talking on spiritual matters.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M. and Mahendra) — Hearing the narration of the Chaitanya Charitamrita, Hazra said, 'It is all the sport of Shakti (Divine Power). There is no Vibhu[1] in it.' Can there be Shakti without Vibhu? He is trying to disprove the teachings of this place [of Sri Ramakrishna].

Brahman pervades all as Vibhu – a pure devotee doesn't want the six supernatural powers

"I know that Brahman and Shakti are not separate from each other. They are like water and its wetness, or fire and its power to burn. God is present in the form of Vibhu, though there is greater manifestation of His Shakti in some, less in others. Besides, Hazra says, 'When one attains Bhagavan, one acquires the six supernatural powers like Him. There will be six powers in one's grasp, which may or may not be used.' "

M. — One must have the six powers in one's grasp! (All laugh.)

[1] All-pervading Consciousness

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Yes, one must possess them. But what a low intellect! He who has never enjoyed powers is eager to possess them. The pure devotee never prays for these powers.

Betel leaves have not been served in the mill. Thakur says, "Please fetch some betel leaves." He has to go to ease himself. Mahendra gets a pot of water and holds it in his hand. He will accompany Thakur out in the open space. Seeing Mani standing in front of him, Thakur says to Mahendra, "You don't have to carry it. Give it to him." Mani takes the washing pot and accompanies Thakur to the open space inside the mill. After the wash, Thakur is offered a smoke from the hookah. Thakur says to M., "Is it already *sandhya* (twilight hour)? If so, I shall not smoke from the hookah. When *sandhya* is approaching, one should remember Hari and forget everything else." Saying this, Thakur sees whether he can count the hair on his hand. If he cannot, it is already dusk.

Chapter V

Chaitanya Lila in the theatre – Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi

M., Baburam, a devotee of the lineage of Nityananda, Mahendra Mukherji and Girish

Thakur's cab arrives in front of the Star Theatre on Beadon Street at about 8.30 p.m. He is accompanied by M., Baburam, Mahendra Mukherji and one or two other devotees. They are purchasing the tickets. Girish Ghosh, the manager of the theatre, comes to Thakur's carriage with some theatre employees. They welcome him and cordially take him upstairs. Girish knows the Paramahamsa Deva by name. He is extremely happy that Thakur has come to witness the performance of Chaitanya Lila. Thakur is given a seat in the southwestern box. M. is seated beside him.

Baburam and one or two devotees are seated behind them.

The theatre hall is well lit. The seats on the ground floor are filled. Some boxes are also occupied. Each box has an attendant who fans the spectators from behind. Girish has appointed an attendant to fan Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna is as happy as a child to see the theatre hall.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M., laughing) — Ah! It is very nice! It is good we came. I get inspired when there are many people around. I then clearly see that He has become all.

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — What will they charge us?

M. — They will not charge us anything. They are glad that you came.

Sri Ramakrishna — It's all the Mother's greatness!

The curtain rises. All the spectators turn their eyes toward the stage. The first scene shows a meeting of sin and the six enemies[1]. It is followed by a dialogue between discrimination, dispassion and bhakti.

Bhakti says, "Gauranga has taken birth in Nadia. That is why the learned and the rishis and munis are coming in disguise to see him."

Blessed is the earth that Lord Gauranga has appeared in Nadia.

Behold, the demi-gods are coming by a flying chariot to have a glimpse of Lord Hari.

[1] The six passions: lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and envy

And lo! All the rishis and munis filled with divine love are coming too.

The demi-gods and goddesses, the rishis and munis, sing a hymn of praise to Gauranga, looking upon him as an incarnation of God. Seeing them, Thakur passes into an ecstatic mood. He says to M., "Ah! How wonderful it is."

The demi-gods and goddesses, the rishis and the munis sing the hymn –

Men — Keshab, bestow your compassion on us, the lowly, you who roam the groves and glades (of Vrindavan).

Women — You, the beloved Madhava, the charming Mohan playing the flute.

Chorus — Haribol, Haribol, Haribol (chant the name of Hari), O my mind!

Men — The lad of Braja, the tamer of Kaliya, the serpent and the dispeller of fear and harm.

Women — You with slanting eyes and the peacock feather arching on your forehead, the heart-throb of Radha!

Men — It was you who lifted the Govardhan Mount. Wild flowers decorate your person. O Damodara, the destroyer of Kamsa's pride.

Women — O Shyam, you sported with the milkmaids of Vrindavan.

Chorus — Haribol, Haribol, Haribol (chant the name of Hari), O my mind!

As the demi-goddesses sing, "You with slanting eyes and the peacock feather arching on your forehead, the heartthrob of Radha," Sri Ramakrishna goes into deep samadhi. The concert goes on, but he is unaware of the external world.

Chapter VI

Witnessing of Chaitanya Lila – Sri Ramakrishna becomes intoxicated with intense love of Gaur

Jagannath Misra (Nimai's father) has received guests. The child Nimai is strolling and singing joyfully with the companions of his age –

Where is my Vrindavan and where is mother Yashoda? Where is my father, Nanda, and where, brother Balai?

Where are my twin cows, black and white, and where is my bewitching flute? Where can I find Sridama, Sudama and the other cowherd boys?

Where is my Jamuna's bank and where my banana grove? Where, my milkmaids and my Radha?

The guests offer food to Bhagavan with their eyes shut. Nimai comes running and eats the holy food. The guests recognize him as Bhagavan and sing the hymn of the ten avatars[1] to please him. While taking leave of Misra and Sachi, they sing another hymn –

Victory to Nityananda and Gaur, victory to the redeemer,

The refuge of the helpless, the soul of the embodied soul and the dispeller of fear!

[1] The ten avatars: The fish, the turtle, the sow, Narasimha (half man, half lion), vamana (a dwarf), Parashurama (a warrior sage in Hindu mythology), Rama, Krishna, Buddha and the Kalki avatar (the name of the next and last Incarnation according to the Puranas)

In every new age You sport in a new way. A new role with every new wave, You who bear the burden of the universe.

You take away the fire of the world with the rain of Your divine love, You the distributor of the joy of Your divine sport.

The hope of the lowly, the destroyer of all sins and the remover of all cause of fear.

As Thakur hears the hymn, he again passes into an ecstatic mood.

On the bank of the Ganges in Navadvip, after their dip in the Ganges, the brahmins and the men and women perform worship. Nimai snatches the food offering and eats it. A brahmin is very annoyed with him and shouts, "You mischievous boy! You are snatching the holy food of Vishnu's puja. You will be totally ruined!" Nimai still grabs it and is about to run away. Most of the women are very fond of this boy. They cannot bear to see Nimai leaving. They call out, "Nimai, come back! Do come back!" But Nimai does not listen to them.

Somebody knows the great mantra that will force Nimai to return. He begins to chant, "Haribol, Haribol." Immediately Nimai returns, repeating, "Haribol, Haribol."

Mani is seated beside Thakur. He is exclaiming, "Ah!"

Thakur cannot contain himself any longer. He begins to shed tears of love looking at Mani as he utters, "Ah."

Sri Ramakrishna (to Baburam and M.) — Listen here, if I pass into an ecstatic mood or samadhi, you must not create a fuss about it. Worldly people will think that I am feigning it.

> It is the sacred thread ceremony of Nimai. Nimai is in the robes of a sannyasin. He is surrounded by Sachi and the women of the area. Nimai sings a song to beg for alms –
>
> > O give me alms my mother. I am a new yogi roaming about weeping.
> >
> > O the people of Braja, I love you. O mother, that is why I have come! See, I am fasting.
> >
> > See mother! A yogi is repeating, 'Radha, Radha,' at your door. The time is up and he has to return. Mother, I live alone on the bank of Jamuna.
> >
> > The water from my eyes meet the water of the Jamuna and flows slowly to mix with the waves in a gentle roar.
>
> Everybody leaves except Nimai who stays alone. The gods in the guise of brahmin men and women are singing a hymn.

Men — The light of the moon shines in you. You have the form of *vamana* (a dwarf).

Women — You, the beloved of the milkmaids, the wanderer among the beautiful groves of Vrindavan.

Nimai — Victory to Radha, Sri Radha.

Men — The boys of Braja are with you. Your beauty puts to shame the pride of Madan, the god of love.

Women — Your love has intoxicated the gopis of Braja. There are waves of ecstasy.

Men — You who delude the demons, you are the Lord Narayana, the dispeller of the fear of gods.

Women — You roam about in Braja and beg love from the gopis.

Nimai — Victory to Radha, Sri Radha.

Sri Ramakrishna enters samadhi hearing the song. The curtain drops. The concert orchestra is playing a single tune.

Worldly people want to hold onto both: the world and God – Gangadas and Srivas

Srivas and others are in conversation in front of Advaita's home. Mukanda sings in a sweet voice –

O my mind, don't go to sleep. You have remained oblivious, intoxicated with maya for so long.

Who are you? Why have you come? You have forgotten yourself.

Come out of this bad dream, open your eyes and see.

You are living with transitory things. Look for the eternal within yourself.

Come out of the darkness and see the bright light of the sun.

Mukanda has a very sweet voice. Sri Ramakrishna is praising him to Mani.

Nimai is at home. Srivas has come to see him. First he meets Sachi. Sachi weeps and says, "My son doesn't show interest in domestic duties."

I constantly tremble with fear ever since Viswarupa (her eldest son) left, lest Nimai should also embrace sannyasa.

Nimai arrives now. Sachi says to Srivas –

Alas, look at him. What crazy looks he has!

Tears from his eyes have drenched his chest.

Tell me, please tell me, how I can free him of this mood.

Nimai weeps, holding Srivas's feet and says –

O Lord, where do I have bhakti for Krishna?

My wretched life is now of no avail!

Tell me, O Lord, where is Krishna? How can I attain Krishna?

Kindly give me the dust of your feet so that I may be able to attain Banmali[1].

Sri Ramakrishna continues to look at M. and wants to talk, but cannot. His throat is choked with emotion, his cheeks drenched with tears. He stares at Nimai, holding the feet of Srivas. Nimai is saying, "O Lord, how do I have love for Krishna?"

Nimai is not able to give lessons to his students. Gangadas was his teacher. Gangadas has come to instruct Nimai. He says to Srivas, "Revered Srivas, we are brahmins too. We, too, worship Vishnu. You people have ruined the household life (of Nimai)."

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — It is a householder's instruction, 'Do this and also do that.' When a householder teaches, he wants you to hold onto both the world and God.

M. — True, sir.

Gangadas further instructs Nimai, "I say Nimai, you are well versed in scriptures. Discuss it with me.

---

[1] An appellation Sri Krishna; one wearing a garland of wild flowers

What is more important than the householder's dharma? Please explain it to me. You are a householder, so why do you conduct yourself otherwise?"

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — See, he is saying this to uphold both sides [worldly and spiritual].

M. — Yes, sir.

Nimai says: I am not willingly unmindful of the household life. On the contrary, I wish for both sides to be taken care of. But –

Lord, I do not know at all why all this is happening.

Alas! What I am doing is through the attraction of my heart!

I wish I could live in the family, but I cannot.

My soul is flying out and there is no way to bring it back.

It is ever longing to jump into the deep sea.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah!

Chapter VII

A descendant of Nityananda's family in the theatre and Sri Ramakrishna's inspiration – M., Baburam, the Goswami from Khardaha, of the lineage of Nityananda

Nityananda has arrived at Navadvip. He has been looking for Nimai, and Nimai for him. At that very moment, he meets Nimai. When they meet, Nimai says –

My life is blessed. My dream has come true. You had hidden yourself after appearing in a dream.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M., in a voice choked with emotion) — Nimai says, 'I saw you in a dream.'

Srivas is seeing the six-armed divine form and he sings his praises. Sri Ramakrishna also sees the six-armed divine form absorbed in bhava. Gauranga is in ecstasy. He talks to Advaita, Srivas, Haridas and others in an ecstatic mood.

Recognizing the ecstatic mood of Gauranga, Nitai sings –

O the Beloved of my soul, where is Krishna in the grove?

Please bring me my Krishna, O my beloved friend! Whom does Radha know except Krishna?

Sri Ramakrishna passes into samadhi on hearing the song. He remains in this mood for a long time. The orchestra goes on. Thakur's samadhi comes to an end. In the meantime, a gentleman from Nityananda Goswami's lineage of Khardaha comes in and stands behind Thakur's chair. He is thirty-four or thirty-five. Seeing him, Thakur is filled with joy. Holding his hand, he talks to him for a long time. He asks him a number of times to take a seat close to him, saying that he feels greatly inspired by his presence. He holds his hand and shows his love and regard by bringing the hand to touch his face.

As the Goswami leaves, Thakur says to M., "He is a great scholar. His father is a great devotee. When I go to Khardaha for the darshan[1] of Shyamasundar, his father feeds me offered food worth more than a hundred rupees."

"He has very good traits. Just nudging him a little easily arouses his consciousness. I get greatly inspired

[1] To see and pay homage

looking at him. Had he been here a little while longer, I would have stood up [in ecstasy]."

What Thakur means is that if he had been with the Goswami a little longer, he would have gone into an ecstatic mood.

The curtain rises. Nityananda is seated on the main road with his hand on his head to stop his bleeding. Madhai has thrown a brass pot at him and its edge has hurt him. But Nitai is absolutely indifferent to it – he is intoxicated with the love of Gauranga, filled as if up to the neck. Sri Ramakrishna is absorbed in an ecstatic mood. He watches Nitai embracing Jagai and Madhai. Says Nitai –

Come on, Jagai and Madhai, come dancing. Let us utter Haribol to our hearts' content.

If you have struck me, you have done well. Sing 'Hari, Hari' and dance.

Repeat Haribol. The lovers will embrace you in love divine.

Raise, O raise, the name of Hari. Let the word resound all around.

You have not yet tasted *prema*. O brother, say Haribol and weep. Then you will see the moon in your heart.

O brother! I will lovingly dole out His name. That is why Nitai is calling so lovingly.

Now Nimai is talking to Sachi about his sannyasa.

Sachi falls into a swoon. Seeing her faint, many in the audience sob with grief. Sri Ramakrishna, however, remains perfectly self-composed. Except that one can see a tear in the corner of his eye.

Chapter VIII

Sri Ramakrishna intoxicated with the love of Gaur

The performance ends. Sri Ramakrishna gets into a carriage. A devotee asks him, "How did you like it?" Thakur laughs and says, "The performance was truly the same as the reality."

The carriage is proceeding toward Mahendra Mukherji's mill. Suddenly Thakur passes into an ecstatic mood. After a long time, he murmurs lovingly:

" 'Oh, Krishna! Oh, Krishna! Jnana is Krishna! *Prana* (vital breath) is Krishna! The mind is Krishna! The Atman is Krishna! The body is Krishna!' And he adds, 'The beloved of my soul, oh Govinda! You are my life.' "

The carriage arrives at Mukherji's mill. Mahendra treats Thakur to refreshments with the utmost hospitality and love. Mani is seated nearby. Thakur says lovingly to him, "Please take something." Then he himself gives some prasad of sweetmeats to him.

Now Sri Ramakrishna is going to the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. He is accompanied in the carriage by Mahendra Mukherji and two or three other devotees. Mahendra is to leave the carriage after some distance. Thakur is full of joy and begins to sing –

O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers …[1]

Mani sings with him.

Mahendra intends to go on pilgrimage. This is the topic of conversation with Thakur.

[1] For the complete song, see Section XII, Chapter III of this volume

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahendra, laughing) — The sprout of *prema* (divine love) will wither away before it starts to develop within you.

"But come back quickly. Oh, for so many days I had been thinking of visiting your house. It is good that I visited it once."

Mahendra — Sir, my life is blessed.

Sri Ramakrishna — You are already blessed. And your father is also a nice man. I met him the other day. He has faith in *Adhyatma* (*Ramayana*).

Mahendra — Sir, grant that I may have bhakti by your grace.

Sri Ramakrishna — You are very large-hearted and guileless. One cannot attain Bhagavan without being guileless and generous. One must shun hypocrisy.

Mahendra takes his leave near Shyambazar. The carriage moves on.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — What has Jadu Mallick done?

M. (to himself) — Thakur is so interested in the welfare of everyone! Has he incarnated in a human body to teach bhakti, like Chaitanya Deva?

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna in Sadharan Brahmo Samaj – Instructions to Vijay Goswami

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna in the temple of Sadharan Brahmo Samaj

M., Hazra, Vijay, Shivanath and Kedar

Today Sri Ramakrishna has come to the city of Calcutta. It is Friday, 26 September, 1884, the *saptami* puja[1] day. Thakur has a number of engagements to attend. It is the great Shardiya (autumn) festival. Almost every Hindu house in the metropolis is performing the *saptami* puja of the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna will pay homage to the image in Adhar's house and take part in the joyous festival of the All-Blissful Mother. He also wishes to see Shivanath.

With umbrella in hand, M. strolls the footpath of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj about midday. One o'clock strikes, and then two, but Thakur does not arrive. Now and then M. sits on the steps of Mahalnavish's dispensary and watches the joy of the boys on Durga Puja and how young and old alike are engaged in various activities.

Thakur's carriage arrives around three o'clock. Stepping down from the carriage and seeing the Samaj temple in front of him, Thakur joins his hands

[1] The autumnal worship of Goddess Durga on the seventh day of the lunar fortnight

in salutation. He is accompanied by Hazra and one or two other devotees. Seeing Thakur, M. salutes him, falling at his feet. Thakur says, "I will go to Shivanath's house." Hearing that Thakur has arrived, the Brahmo devotees gather around in no time. Taking Sri Ramakrishna with them, they reach the door of Shivanath's house in the area where the Brahmos live. Shivanath is not at home. What to do? Soon Vijay Goswami, Mahalnavish and other workers of the Brahmo Samaj arrive. They greet Thakur and take him to the Samaj temple. "Please rest awhile," they say. "Shivanath should return soon."

Thakur sits down with a smiling face, full of joy. An *asana* was prepared for him below the dais where the musical party will sing devotional songs. Vijay and other Brahmo devotees sit in front of him.

Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and signboard – harmony between formless God and God with form

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing to Vijay) — I was told that there was a signboard here saying that people of other faiths cannot come in. Narendra said to me, 'You shouldn't go to the Brahmo Samaj. It would be better to go to Shivanath's house.'

"But I say everybody is calling upon God. One should give up jealously and antagonism. Some people say that God is with form, others say that He is formless. I say that he who has faith in God with form should meditate on Him as such, and he who believes in the formless God should meditate on God without form. Yet dogmatism is not good: to say that my faith is correct and others are wrong. It is good to believe that one's faith is right – but that one does not know whether the faith of others is right or wrong, true or untrue. The reason is that until you have God's vision, it is not possible to know His true nature. Kabir said, 'God with form is my mother, the Formless is my father.

With whom can I find fault? Whom can I worship? Both pans of the scale are equally heavy.'

"All of you – Hindus, Mohammedans, Christians, Shaktas, Shaivites, Vaishnavas, the ancient Brahmajnanis of the era of the rishis and the present day Brahmajnanis among you – are asking for the same Substance. A mother provides food that suits each stomach. She cooks fish differently for each of her five children. She doesn't make *pulao*[1] and *kalia*[2] for all of them because their digestions are different. For some she makes fish curry. But the mother loves all her children equally.

"Do you know my attitude? I like to eat fish prepared in all different ways. I have a feminine nature! (All laugh.) I like to eat fried fish, fish smeared with turmeric, sour fish, small dry fish cooked with spiced vegetables and the rest. Furthermore, I like the seasoned head of fish as well as *pulao* and *kalia* dishes. (All laugh.)

"Do you know how it is? Different religions are based on different times, places and people. But all the religions are only different paths. The paths are themselves not the Lord, though if you have sincere bhakti and tread any path, you can reach Him. If there is an error in a particular path you choose, He will correct it if you are sincere. Suppose one sets out yearningly to visit Lord Jagannath [at Puri] and instead of going toward the south, he goes north. Somebody will surely tell him the way. He will tell him not to proceed, but to turn south. This fellow is sure to see Lord Jagannath sooner or later.

---

[1] A highly spiced fish dish of rice and meat cooked in clarified butter
[2] A rich curry of fish

"At the same time you must not say that paths other than your own are erroneous. It is for the Creator of the universe to take care of that. Our duty is to somehow have the darshan of Lord Jagannath. (To the Brahmos) Your path is very good. You take Him as formless. This is indeed good. Bread sweetened with sugar candy, whether eaten straight or sidewise, will always taste sweet.

"Even so, it is not good to be dogmatic. You have heard the story of the chameleon. A man went out to ease himself. He saw a chameleon on a tree trunk. He came and told his friends that he had seen a red chameleon. He was absolutely sure that it was red. Another person went to the tree and said that he had seen a green chameleon. He was also convinced that it was green and no other colour. But the man who lived under the tree said, 'What both of you have said is correct, but the creature is sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow and sometimes it has no colour at all.'

"The *Vedas* talk of God as both *saguna*[1] and *nirguna*[2]. You people just call Him formless. You are staunch believers in that one concept. That's all right, let it be. When you know one of His aspects truly, you will come to know of His other aspects too. God Himself will make you understand. You people who come here know this gentleman, and that one too (pointing at one or two Brahmo devotees)."

[1] With attributes
[2] Without attributes

Chapter II

Instructions to Vijay Goswami

Vijay is still a member of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj – he is a paid preacher of this Samaj. However, he does not agree with the rules and regulations of the present Brahmo Samaj. He also associates with believers in God with form. This has caused estrangement with the authorities of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. Many of the Brahmo devotees of the Samaj are displeased with him. Thakur suddenly addresses Vijay –

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vijay, smiling) — They condemn you because you meet people who believe in God with form. The devotees of God must have a firm and steadfast understanding[1] – like the blacksmith's anvil. It receives hammer blows unceasingly, but it remains unchanged. Unfriendly people may find fault with you and speak ill of you, but if you sincerely love Bhagavan, you will bear all this. Is it not possible to meditate on the Lord while living with the wicked? Remember the rishis who used to meditate on the Lord in forests with tigers, bears and other wild animals around them. Unfriendly people have the nature of tigers and bears – they chase offensively and can harm you.

"You must be careful of many types. First, an important, wealthy man. Rich people can harm you if they wish. You have to talk to them very cautiously. You might even have to agree to something they say. Then there is the dog which you may chase away but it continues to follow you and bark. You have to stand up to it and pacify it with gentle sounds. Then there is the bull, which would attack you with its horns. You have to

[1] *Kutastha* intellect

pacify it also with gentle words. Next there is the lunatic. When you arouse his anger, he will abuse you right and left, even your fourteen ancestors. You should say to him, 'How do you do, uncle?' This will please him. He may even sit and smoke with you.

"When I see a wicked person I am on my guard. If one of them comes and asks if I have a hubble-bubble for him, I say, 'Yes, yes, I have.'

"Some people have the nature of a serpent. You don't know when they will strike. You have to decide on a strategy to face their attack. If you don't consider carefully what to do and you become angry, you may feel like harming him in return to a greater extent. So it is essential that you associate with the holy from time to time. It is only by keeping the company of holy men that you can discriminate between the real and the unreal."

Vijay — I have no time. I remain so busy with work.

Sri Ramakrishna — You are a religious teacher (*acharya*). While others may have leisure, the preacher never has. When the administrator of an estate brings order in one part of it, the landlord sends him to govern another. Likewise, you also never get leisure. (All laugh.)

Vijay (folding his hands) — Please bless me.

Sri Ramakrishna — These are words of an ignorant person. It is the Lord alone who blesses.

Instruction to Brahmo householders – family life and sannyasa

Vijay — Kindly give us instructions.

Sri Ramakrishna (glancing around the Samaj hall with a smile) — This is good in a way – both spiritual and worldly pursuit here. There is the Reality and also absorption in worldly pursuits here. (All laugh.) By 'scoring' too many points, I have been 'burnt' [out of the game]. (All laugh.) Do you know the game called 'nax'? If you score more than 17 points, you are 'burnt'. It is a game of cards. He who scores less than 17 points, maybe 5, 7 or 10, is an expert player. By scoring many points, I am out of the game.

"Once I heard Keshab Sen deliver a lecture at his house. The ladies were seated behind a screen. Keshab Sen said, 'Oh Lord! Bless us that we may dive deep and disappear altogether in the river of bhakti.' I smiled and said to Keshab, 'If you go deep into the river of bhakti, what will be the fate of those who are seated behind the screen? Therefore, do this: dive, but then come up to the shore from time to time. Don't remain in deep waters after you dive.' Hearing this, Keshab and the others burst into laughter.

"Never mind! If you are sincere, you can attain the Lord even while living a family life. 'I' and 'mine' are ignorance. Jnana is knowing, 'Oh, Lord! It's all You and Yours.'

"Live in the household like a maidservant in a rich man's house. She attends to all her chores, she brings up the master's children and calls his son her Hari. But she knows quite well that it is not her house, nor is the boy her son. She attends to all her duties, but inwardly her mind dwells on her native village. Similarly, perform all your household duties, but keep your mind fixed on the Lord. And know that the home, the wife, the son, none are yours. They are all His. You are merely His servant.

"I ask you to have mental renunciation. I don't ask you to leave home. You can attain God if you live unattached with your family and seek Him sincerely."

Brahmo Samaj and yoga of meditation – subjective and objective yoga

(To Vijay) "I used to meditate with my eyes shut. Later on, I asked myself whether the Lord is present when I shut my eyes and not present when I open them. I open my eyes and see that the Lord dwells in everything – He pervades man, birds, beasts, plants and trees; He manifests in the sun and the moon, in water, on dry land, in everything."

Shivanath and Kedar Chatterji

"Why do I like Shivanath? Because he has meditated on the Lord for so long. He who meditates on the Lord has substance and God's power in him. And He who sings well, or plays musical instruments well – anybody who is expert in any branch of knowledge – has divine power within. The *Gita* says this too[1]. And the Chandi says that one who is endowed with exquisite beauty has substance too, has God's power in him. (To Vijay) Ah, what a mood Kedar has developed! As soon as he comes to see me, he begins to weep. His eyes are always full of tears, like the *chanabara*[2] soaked in syrup."

Vijay — There [in Dacca] we only talk of you[3]. He is now very eager to see you.

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[1] Whatever being is glorious, prosperous, or powerful, know that to have sprung but from a spark of My splendour. (Gita 10:41)

[2] Bengali sweetmeat made of fried cheese

[3] Kedar Nath Chatterji, a great devotee, was in Dacca on government duty. Vijay Goswami also used to go to Dacca off and on. He met him there. Both being devotees, they enjoy each other's company.

After some time, Thakur rises. The Brahmo devotees salute him. Thakur returns their salute. He gets into the carriage. He is to go to Adhar's house for the darshan[1] of the image of the Goddess.

[1] To see and pay homage

Section XVI

Sri Ramakrishna in Ram's House with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna in the house of Ram on the Mahashtami Day

Sunday, 28 September, 1884, the Mahashtami[1] day. Sri Ramakrishna has come to Calcutta to have the darshan of the image of the Goddess. The Shardiya (autumnal) festival of Durga is being celebrated in Adhar's house. Thakur is invited for three days. Having had the darshan of the image at Adhar's house, he then goes to Ram's house. Many devotees, including Vijay, Kedar, Ram, Surendra, Chunilal, Narendra, Niranjan, Narayan, Harish, Baburam and M. are present. Balaram and Rakhal are in Vrindavan *dham* (place of pilgrimage).

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling at Vijay and Kedar) — A nice meeting since you both have the same bhava (spiritual mood). (To Vijay) Well, what about Shivanath? Did you…

Vijay — Yes sir, he knows about your going to his house. I have not seen him, but I sent word to him. He knows about it.

Sri Ramakrishna had gone to Shivanath's house to see him, but because of the latter's busy schedule, he

[1] The eighth lunar day of the bright fortnight of Aswin or Kartik which is the second day of the autumnal worship of Goddess Durga

had not been at home. Vijay had told him about the visit later.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vijay and others) — I had four desires in my mind.

"One, that I might eat fish curry with eggplant. Two, that I might meet Shivanath. Three, that I might see devotees repeating the name of Hari on their rosaries. And lastly, that I might see and salute the Tantrik practitioners drinking eight annas worth of wine on the *ashtami*[1] day."

Narendra is seated in front of Sri Ramakrishna. He is 22 or 23 years old. While talking, Thakur glances at him. He immediately stands up and goes into samadhi. Placing his foot on Narendra's knee, he stands there in samadhi. He is totally unconscious of the outside world. His eyes are fixed.

God personal and impersonal – Sachchidananda and *Karanandamayi*[2] – *rajarshi*[3] and *brahmarshi*[4] – *Ishvarakotis* and *jivakotis* – the class of *nityasiddhas*

Sri Ramakrishna comes down from samadhi after a long time. He is still inebriated with divine joy. In a spiritual mood, speaking to himself, he repeats the name of God. Then he says, "Shall I say Sachchidananda! Sachchidananda! Sachchidananda? No. Today is the Mother's day. She is the source and giver of divine intoxication, Karanandamayi. Doh, re, mi, fa, soh, la, ti. It is not right to stay at ti – one cannot stay there long. I would rather stay a note below."

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[1] The eight day of either fortnight of the lunar month
[2] The Divine Mother, giver of divine inebriation
[3] A royal ascetic sage
[4] One who has attained Brahman and teaches its essence to others

"Gross, subtle, causal[1] and Great Cause[2]. When one reaches the Great Cause, it is all quiet. One cannot utter a word.

"*Ishvarakotis* (godmen) can return from the state of Mahakarana. The incarnations of God are *Ishvarakotis*. They ascend to high spiritual states and come down. They climb up onto the roof and come down again by the staircase to move around on lower floors. It is the case of involution and evolution. There is a seven-storied building. Some have access to the outer apartments only, but the prince can roam about on all seven stories.

"There is a kind of fireworks rocket that emits flower-like sparks. It first throws out sparks in one pattern – and then in another. It never stops emitting different patterns of sparks.

"And there is another kind of rocket which, if you light, shoots up for awhile with a hissing sound and then falls down. If an ordinary person goes up after practicing spiritual disciplines, he cannot come back to tell his experience. The *jivakoti* (individual soul) may attain samadhi after practicing spiritual disciplines, but he cannot come back from his samadhi and tell his experiences.

"But then there is the class of the *nityasiddhas*[3] – they seek the Lord from birth and nothing worldly attracts them. The *Vedas* speak of the Homa bird who lives high in the sky. When its egg hatches, the chick falls toward the earth. It keeps falling for many days. During the fall its eyes open. When it is nearing the ground, it gains the awakening – it realizes that as soon as its body touches the ground it will die. In an instant

[1] Karana
[2] Mahakarana
[3] Spiritually perfect since birth

the bird shrieks and darts directly upward toward its mother. Falling to earth means sure death. It is frightened at the sight of the ground and begins to yearn for its mother. She dwells high up in the sky. It flies swiftly and directly toward her! It sees nothing else.

"Those who accompany an incarnation of God are either *nityasiddhas*, or in their last birth."

(To Vijay) "You people have both yoga and bhoga (spiritual inclination and worldly enjoyment). King Janaka had both yoga and bhoga. Thus he was a rajarshi, both a king and sage. Narada was a *devarshi*[1] while Shukadeva was a *brahmarshi* (a sage who had attained Brahman).

"Shukadeva was a *brahmarshi*. He was not a jnani – he was the very manifestation of jnana. Who is a jnani? He who has attained jnana (spiritual wisdom) through the practice of religious disciplines. Shukadeva was the embodiment of jnana, in other words a storehouse of jnana. He became a jnani effortlessly – not by the practice of spiritual disciplines."

While talking, Sri Ramakrishna comes down to the natural state. He will now be able to talk with the devotees.

He asks Kedar to sing. Kedar sings –

Song 1 –

O friend, how can I tell you what is in my mind?

It is forbidden to speak.

Without a real and sympathetic friend, I cannot survive.

The man who can know one's mind can understand it.

[1] A godly person endowed with Supreme Knowledge

He is easily recognized. There are only one or two such people.

Such a person is filled with bhava, becomes absorbed in joy, and he comes and goes through the upstream course.

(A man in bhava frequents the 'upstream course[1]'.)

Song 2 –

The wave of Gaur's love has touched my body.

By its thunder all heretics are crushed and the universe submerged.

I feel my mind should remain absorbed in divinity.

The crocodile of the intense love of moon-like Gaur has swallowed me, O my friend!

Is there any real friend who knows my misery, who can drag me out, holding my hand?

Song 3 –

He who does not recognize the shortcomings of love...

After the songs, Thakur talks to the devotees again. Keshab Sen's nephew, Nandalal, is there. He is seated beside Thakur along with one or two Brahmo friends.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vijay and others) — Somebody brought a bottle of wine. I tried to touch it but couldn't.

Vijay — Ah!

Sri Ramakrishna — When one enjoys a divine mood, one is already inebriated. One doesn't have to drink

[1] Such a person is put in exalted spiritual states – his Kundalini reaches to higher spiritual centres.

wine. The *charanamrita*[1] of the Mother intoxicates me – exactly as if I had drunk five bottles of wine.

The states of a jnani and of a devotee described – rules governing the food of the jnani and the devotee

Sri Ramakrishna — In this state one cannot always take every kind of food.

Narendra — In the matter of drinking and eating, the best is that which chance brings.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is true of a particular state of mind. For a jnani nothing is prohibited. According to the *Gita* the jnani does not eat, he just makes an offering to his Kundalini.

"This does not hold true for the devotee. Now my mood is such that I can't eat unless I am given *bhoga* (food offered to the deity) by a brahmin. Formerly, the state of my mind was such that I would enjoy inhaling the smell of the burning corpses on the other side of Dakshineswar. Now, I can't eat food offered by everyone.

"Though I cannot eat everything, once in awhile I do. Once they took me to Keshab Sen's theatre (Nava Vrindavan). There I was served luchis and a curry seasoned with dry chilies. I don't know whether it was a washerman or a barber[2] who brought the food to me. (All laugh.) I ate it heartily. Rakhal asked me not to eat so much. (To Narendra) You will succeed now. You are in 'this' as well as in 'that'[3]! You may eat everything now.

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[1] The water in which the Deity is bathed

[2] Washermen and barbers are considered to be belonging to a low caste

[3] Meaning that Narendra is attending to both the spiritual life and the worldly life

(To the devotees) "Blessed is the man who is attracted by the Lord, even though he may eat pork. On the other hand, shame on him who is attached to 'lust and greed,' even though he may be eating *havishya*[1]."

His earlier story – Brahmajnana and loss of caste distinction after first state of God-intoxication – journey to Kamarpukur – Dhani, the blacksmith's wife – Ramlal's father – initiation into Allah's name through Govinda Rai

"I had the desire to eat lentils in the house of a blacksmith. I had heard since childhood that blacksmiths said brahmins didn't know how to cook food. So I went and ate at their home – but there was the smell of the iron smithy in it. (All laugh.)

"I received the sacred mantra of Allah from Govinda Rai. He cooked rice with onion in the Kuthi. I took some of it. I ate cooked vegetables in (the Baranagore) garden house of Mani Mallick. But then I developed some aversion to it.

"When I went to my native village [Kamarpukur], Ramlal's father was afraid that I would go and eat in any and every house. He was afraid that I might be declared an outcaste. For this reason I couldn't stay long in the village. I came back."

Right conduct according to the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras*

[1] A holy food consisting of boiled rice with clarified butter

"The *Vedas* and the *Puranas* talk of right conduct. What the *Vedas* and *Puranas* prohibit is recommended in the *Tantras* as good.

"What spiritual states have I passed through! I would open my mouth wide as if it would touch both heaven and the nether world. And I would utter, 'Ma,' (Mother) as though I were pulling the Mother inside, just as the fishes are pulled along with the net."

Song –

O Kali! I am going to devour You this time. O You who are full of compassion for the lowly, I will surely eat You up.

Though I say that I will eat You, yet I'll not take You into my stomach.

Instead I'll make You sit on the lotus of my heart where I shall worship You with my heart.

(I am born under the constellation Ganda yoga (evil star).)

The child who is born under the Ganda yoga constellation eats his own mother.

This time either You will eat me, or I will devour You. And thus the two will become one.

I will smear my hands, face and other parts of the body with black (black being the colour of Kali).

When Yama (god of death) comes and binds me tight, I shall rub his face with Kali (Kali in two senses: one, Mother Kali, and the other, blackness).

If You say that I shall be in trouble with Kala[1] by eating Kali, I tell you that I am not afraid of it.

I will defy him while uttering the name of Kali.

[1] Shiva, the consort of Kali

I shall eat the vegetables of the *Dakinis* and *Yoginis*[1]. I will snatch the string of skulls from them and make a sour broth with it.

I will make him understand well that I am Ramprasad, the son of Kali.

Whether it means spiritual disciplines or brings the death of the body, whatever it may be, I shall certainly do it.

"I was like one gone mad. Such madness results from deep longing."

Narendra sings –

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love.

What need is there for knowledge or reason?[2]

While listening to the song, Sri Ramakrishna again goes into samadhi.

When he comes down from the samadhi, he takes up the mood of Girirani[3] and sings the *agamani*[4] song. Says Girirani, "O residents of this place, has my Uma come?" Intoxicated with intense love, Thakur sings the song.

After the song, Sri Ramakrishna says to the devotees, "You see, it is the Mahashtami day. So the Mother has come! That is why I feel such an arousal of divine inspiration!"

Kedar — Lord, you yourself have come. There is no Mother other than you.

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[1] The spirits of destruction
[2] For complete song see Volume I, Section XII
[3] Wife of King Himalaya and mother of Uma
[4] Any of the songs about the coming of Uma, Shiva's wife, to her father's house

Thakur glances in another direction and begins to sing the following song in a casual manner –

O *sakhi*[1]! Where is He for whom I am going mad?

Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva have together broken Navadvip like mad gods.

And I have seen another mad person in Vrindavan who has made Radha his king and stands there in the garb of a police officer.

Another mad fellow I saw on the road to Navadvip carrying his love for Radha in his *kamandala*[2]. He roams about with it, saying, 'Here is nectar.'

Again going into an ecstatic mood, Thakur sings –

You are the river of nectar, O Mother Shyama! Who can fathom your various moods?[3]

While Thakur is singing the song, Vijay suddenly stands up and says, "Haribol, Haribol." Intoxicated with divine emotion, Sri Ramakrishna begins to dance with him and other devotees.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees

After the singing of devotional songs, Sri Ramakrishna, Vijay, Narendra and the other devotees sit down. All eyes are fixed on Thakur. It is not yet dusk. Thakur talks to them, making polite enquiries. Kedar folds his hands and in a most humble and sweet manner tells Thakur something. Narendra, Chunilal, Surendra, Ram, M. and Harish sit close to them.

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[1] The milkmaid friend of Radha

[2] Mendicant water pot

[3] For the full song see M. the Apostle and the Evangelist, Vol. 1, Section 13, Chapter 2

Kedar (very humbly, to Sri Ramakrishna) — How can I get rid of my dizziness?

Sri Ramakrishna (lovingly) — It does happen. I also had it. Apply some almond oil. They say it cures dizziness.

Kedar — I shall do that, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Chunilal) — I say, brother, how are you?

Chunilal — Everything is fine with me. Balaram Babu, Rakhal and the others are well in Vrindavan.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why did you send so much sandesh?

Chunilal — I have just come from Vrindavan, sir...

> Chunilal had accompanied Balaram to Vrindavan. He was there for several months. His vacation ended, he is now back in Calcutta.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Harish) — Wait a couple of days before you go to Dakshineswar. You fell ill there. The same could happen again.

(Lovingly to Narayan) "Come and sit near me. Come to Dakshineswar tomorrow and have your meal there. (Pointing at M.) Come with him. (To M.) What do you say?"

> M. wants to go to Dakshineswar with Thakur this very day. He becomes thoughtful. Surendra has been there for a long time. He went home once, but has come back and is now standing beside Thakur.

Surendra drinks liqour. He used to drink so much that Thakur had begun to worry about him. However, Sri Ramakrishna didn't ask him to give up drinking altogether. He said to him, "Look here, Surendra, whatever you drink, first offer to the Divine Mother. And take only so much that you are not dizzy and you do not stagger. When you actively keep your mind on the Divine Mother, you will develop some aversion to drinking. She is the source of *karanananda*[1]. When you attain Her, you feel a natural bliss."

Surendra is standing beside Sri Ramakrishna. Glancing at him, Thakur suddenly asks, "Have you been drinking wine?" Saying so, he goes into an ecstatic mood.

It is dusk. As he regains a little external awareness, Thakur repeats the Divine Mother's name and begins to sing happily –

The Mother is always lost in the ecstasy of joy in the company of Shiva.

Though drunk with nectar, She reels but does not fall.

Erect She stands on Shiva's bosom and the earth trembles under Her steps.

More than mad, both are indifferent to fear and shame.

It is already dusk. Sri Ramakrishna is uttering the name of Hari, clapping his hands in between. He chants in a sweet voice, "Haribol[2], Haribol, Harimaya, Haribol, Hari, Hari, Haribol."

And then he chants the name of Rama, "Rama, Rama, Rama! Rama, Rama, Rama! Rama, Rama."

Sri Ramakrishna's prayer – how to pray?

[1] Bliss of divine inebriation
[2] Repeat the name of Hari

Now Thakur prays –

"Oh, Rama! Oh, Rama! I am without bhajan[1], without sadhan (austerity), without devotion (bhakti), without ritualistic worship! I take refuge in You, oh Rama; in You I take refuge! I don't want creature comforts, oh Rama! Nor worldly esteem, nor the eight occult powers, nor even a hundred occult powers, oh Rama! I take refuge in You, Your refuge alone, oh Rama! Just grant that I may develop pure love for Your lotus feet, oh Rama! And may I never be deluded by your world-bewitching maya! Rama, my Rama! My refuge!"

While Sri Ramakrishna prays thus, everyone's eyes are fixed on him. Hearing his compassionate voice, many devotees shed tears.

Ram stands close by.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram) — Ram, where were you?

Ram — Sir, I was upstairs.

Ram was upstairs arranging a feast for Thakur and the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling at Ram) — Isn't it better to stay at a lower level than to go up? Water collects on low ground, but it flows off higher levels.

Ram (laughing) — True, sir.

Leaf plates for dinner have been laid on the terrace. Ramachandra takes Thakur and the devotees to the terrace and makes them eat heartily. Sri Ramakrishna, then accompanied by Niranjan, M. and

[1] Singing of devotional songs

others, go to Adhar's house. The Mother of the Universe has arrived there – it is the Mahashtami day! Adhar had prayed especially that Thakur be present, for then alone would his worship be successful.

Section XVII

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees on Navami Puja Day in Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra, Bhavanath and others in Dakshineswar

Monday, 29 September, 1884, the Navami Puja[1] day. It is early morning. The *mangalarati*[2] of Mother Kali has already been performed. The *roshan chowki*[3] is playing the morning *raga ragini* (modes of Indian music) from the Nahabat. The gardeners with large wicker baskets in their hands and the brahmins with puja baskets are going to gather flowers for the worship of the Mother of Universe. Sri Ramakrishna has been awake since before dawn. Bhavanath, Baburam, Niranjan and M. stayed here last night. They slept on the verandah of Thakur's room. When they open their eyes, they see Thakur dancing in divine inebriation. He is uttering, "Victory, victory to Durga! Victory, victory to Durga!"

He is just a child! Without a dhoti around his waist, he dances, pacing the room and uttering the Divine Mother's name.

After awhile he says, "*Sahajananda*[4], *Sahajananda*." Then he repeats the name of Govinda, "Govinda, you are my life, my life breath."

The devotees are now awake. They watch Thakur intently in his ecstatic mood. Hazra is also

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[1] The third day of Durga Puja
[2] Waving of lights before the deity at dawn
[3] Symphony of sanai and other musical instruments
[4] The spontaneous joy of ecstasy

there. He is sitting on the verandah to the southeast of Thakur's room. And Latu is there. He renders personal service to Thakur. Rakhal is in Vrindavan these days. Narendra visits Sri Ramakrishna from time to time. He is to come today.

The devotees had slept on the small verandah to the north of Sri Ramakrishna's room. It is winter, so they had closed the wicker door. When they have finished washing their faces, Thakur comes and sits on a mat on the northern verandah. Bhavanath and M. are seated close to him. Other devotees come in from time to time and take their seats.

Jivakotis[1] are skeptics and *Ishvarakotis*[2] have unshakable faith

Sri Ramakrishna (to Bhavanath) — You know, *jivakotis* do not have faith easily. On the other hand, *Ishvarakotis* need no proof for their belief, they have unshakable faith. Prahlada began to weep suddenly when he wrote the letter 'K' because it reminded him of Krishna. The nature of the jiva is beset with doubts. He says, "Yes, it is so, no doubt, but ..."

"Hazra will never believe that Brahman and His Shakti (Power) are inseparable, that the Power and the Being possessing the Power are not different from each other. I call God Brahman when He is inactive. But when He creates, preserves and dissolves, I call Him Shakti. But the substance is one, it is indivisible. Think of fire and you are immediately reminded of its power to burn. Similarly, when you think of burning power, you are reminded of fire. You cannot think of one without thinking of the other.

"Then I prayed, 'Mother, Hazra tries to upset the belief of 'this place'[1]. Either give him the right

[1] Ordinary human beings
[2] Godmen

understanding, or take him away from here.' The very next day he came and said, 'I agree with you [that Brahman and Shakti are inseparable]!' He said, 'Vibhu (the All-pervading Being) exists everywhere.' "

Bhavanath (laughing) — Did you really feel disturbed at this idea of Hazra?

Sri Ramakrishna — My state has changed. I can no longer carry out discussions and arguments with people. I am not in the state of mind to discuss and argue with Hazra. Hriday[2] said to me in Jadu Mallick's garden, 'Uncle, don't you want to keep me with you?' I said, 'No, I am not in that state of mind. I can no longer get into arguments with you.'

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna in Kamarpukur – the world full of divine consciousness – childlike faith

"What is jnana and what is ajnana? It is ajnana (ignorance) when you think that the Lord is far away from you. When you know Him to be here [within you], that is jnana.

"When you have gained the right *jnana* (spiritual knowledge), everything seems to be full of divine consciousness. I used to talk to Shibu[3] when he was very small, four or five years old. He was in the countryside [Kamarpukur]. There was thunder and lightening in the clouds. Shibu said, 'Uncle, God is

[1] Thakur referred himself to 'this place'

[2] At that time Hriday was not allowed to enter the temple garden. He had displeased the proprietor of the garden. Hriday wanted Thakur to request the proprietor to hire him again. Hriday rendered a lot of personal service to Thakur, but he would speak harshly and reprimand him at the same time. Thakur was very tolerant of him.

[3] Shivaram, nephew of Thakur

striking flints!' (All laugh.) One day I saw him catching a grasshopper. The leaves of a nearby tree were shaking. He said to them, 'Be still, I have to catch the grasshopper.' The child was seeing divine consciousness in everything! The simple faith of a child! If you don't have childlike faith, you can't attain Bhagavan. Oh, what a state I was in! One day I was bitten in a meadow. I was afraid it might have been snake bite! What should I do? I had heard that if a snake bites a second time, it takes back its own poison. I began to look for it in the place I had been bitten, so that it might bite me again. Somebody asked me what I was doing. When I told him, he said it must bite in exactly the same place where it had bitten before. Hearing that, I got up. Perhaps it was a small scorpion that bit me.

"And one day I heard Ramlal say that autumn dew was good for one's health. So, coming by carriage from Calcutta, I stuck my head out of the window to be exposed to the dew. I fell ill after this." (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna and medicine

Thakur now goes into his room and takes his seat. Both of his feet are somewhat swollen. He asks the devotees to see whether a depression is formed on the skin when it is pressed. A small depression did form, but everybody told him that it was nothing.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Bhavanath) — Please ask Mahendra of Sinthi to come and see me. I will feel reassured if he says it is nothing.

Bhavanath (smiling) — You have great faith in medicine. We don't have so much.

Sri Ramakrishna — God makes the medicine and He Himself is the physician. Dr. Gangaprasad asked me

not to drink water at night. I stuck to it as if it were an injunction of the *Vedas*. I look upon him as Dhanavantri[1] himself.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra, Bhavanath and others – he goes into samadhi

Yesterday Thakur had gone to Calcutta on the Mahashtami day for the darshan of the image of the deity. He first visited Ram's house and later went to Adhar's for the darshan of the deity. A number of devotees had gathered there. When Thakur saw Narendra, he went into samadhi. He stretched his foot toward Narendra's knee and went into samadhi standing there.

Today Hazra comes in and takes his seat. After some casual conversation, Thakur says to him, "Look here, yesterday there were so many people at Ram's house – Vijay, Kedar and many others. Why do I feel such strong emotion when I see Narendra? I saw Kedar as the 'abode' [realm] of *karanananda* (joy of divine inebriation)."

In the meantime Narendra enters the room. Sri Ramakrishna is beside himself with joy. Having saluted him, Narendra talks with Bhavanath and others. M. is also there. A long mat covers the floor of the room. While talking, Narendra lies on the mat, flat on his stomach. Looking at Narendra, Thakur suddenly goes into samadhi. He sits on Narendra's back in this state of samadhi.

Bhavanath sings –

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,

Do not deprive me of bliss.

[1] The name of the physician of heaven

My mind knows nothing but Thy lotus feet[1].

Thakur comes out of his samadhi and sings –

You are the river of nectar, O Mother Shyama! Who can fathom your various moods?

Thakur sings another song –

Chant, chant, O my mind, the hallowed name of Durga,

Obeisance to You, Gauri. Obeisance to You, Narayani.

Only when You shower Your compassion on this sorrowing servant of Yours, shall I know Your greatness.

You, Yourself, are the dusk, the daytime and the night.

Sometimes You become man and sometimes a charming lady.

You hold the bow when You are Rama and the flute as Krishna.

With Your disheveled hair, You have captivated the heart of Shiva.

O Mother, You are the ten great powers. You, Yourself, are the ten avatars.

In what form are You incarnating to liberate me this time?

O Mother, Yashoda worshipped You with hibiscus flowers and vilwa leaves.

By placing Krishna in her lap, You fulfilled her heart's desire.

Where else do I live, O Mother, than in groves?

May my heart remain tied to Your red feet night and day!

[1] For complete song, see Section IV, Chapter III of this volume

I may die anywhere, I may die of any calamity, I must call out the hallowed name of Durga in my last moments.

If you ask me to go away, pray tell me, to whom shall I go?

O Mother! Who else has this nectar sweet name, Tara?

You may ask me to leave You, but I shall never do it.

O Mother! I will cling to Your feet and tinkle as the little bells of Your anklet.

When You sit with Shiva I shall tinkle at Your feet: Victory to Shiva, victory to Shiva!

If Your feet are scratched when I write Your name on them,

I shall write it on the ground so that You may place Your feet on it.

Mother, if You fly in the sky, becoming a kite, I shall live as a fish in water.

Pray, lift me from there with Your claws.

Hurt by Your claws, O All-Blissful Mother, when I quit this mortal frame,

Kindly grant me, then, both of Your red feet.

O Mother Kali, the beloved of Kala (the Absolute), take me across.

You have made a boat with Your two feet to liberate me.

You are Yourself heaven, the mortal world, and the nether world.

Hari, Brahma and the twelve Gopalas have all sprung from You.

You Yourself, are the Sarvamangala[1] of Golaka[2], the Katyayani[3] of Braja and the Mother Annapurna of the infinite forms of Kashi.

The one who treads the path uttering, 'Durga, Durga,' Shiva protects, holding his trident in hand.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna in the company of Narendra, Bhavanath and others – he goes into samadhi and dances

Hazra, seated on the northeastern verandah, is counting the beads of his rosary. Thakur comes and sits in front of him. He takes Hazra's rosary in his own hands. M. and Bhavanath are there with him. It is about ten o'clock.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hazra) — Look, I cannot tell the beads of the rosary. No, no, perhaps I can. I can do it by holding the rosary in my left hand. But I cannot repeat the name of God.

Having said so, Thakur tries to repeat the Name on the rosary. But as soon as he starts, he passes into samadhi.

Thakur remains in samadhi for a long time, still holding the rosary. The devotees watch him, speechless with wonder. Hazra remains seated and also watches him wonderstruck. Thakur gains external consciousness after a long time. He exclaims, "I am feeling hungry." He often says this to bring his mind to the normal plane.

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[1] One who is the source of all good; an appellation of Goddess Durga
[2] Part of heaven which is the abode of Narayana
[3] A name of Goddess Durga

M. goes out to bring something for him to eat, but Thakur says, "No brother, I will first go to the Kali Temple."

Sri Ramakrishna performs Kali Puja on the Navami puja day

Thakur goes south toward the Kali Temple via the brick courtyard. On the way he pays obeisance to Shiva in the twelve temples. The Radhakanta temple is to his left. He then goes there and offers his obeisance. Reaching the Kali Temple, he salutes the Mother. He takes a seat and offers flowers at Her lotus feet. He also offers flowers to his own head. When leaving, he says to Bhavanath, "Take these articles with you – the green coconut offered to the Mother and the holy *charanamrita*." Thakur then returns to his room with M. and Bhavanath. As soon as he reaches his room, he offers obeisance to Hazra. 'What are you doing, sir?' Hazra cries out as he rises. He asks, "What is this?"

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Why, is something wrong?"

Hazra often argues with Thakur that the Lord indeed exists in everybody and that everybody can attain Brahmajnana by the practice of spiritual disciplines.

It is mealtime. The bells for the arati and food offering to the deities have rung. All the brahmins, Vaishnavas and indigents go toward the guest house to have Mother's prasad and that of Radhakanta. The devotees will also partake of the Mother's prasad, seated where the brahmin employees of the guest house sit for their meals. Thakur says, "Everyone must go and eat there. What do you say? (To Narendra) No. You eat here."

"All right, Narendra and I will eat here." Bhavanath, Baburam, M. and the others leave for the guest house.

After taking some prasad, Thakur rests awhile – though not for long. The devotees are talking on the verandah. Thakur joins them and is happy in their company. It is two o'clock. They are all seated on the northeastern verandah. Suddenly Bhavanath appears from the southeastern verandah in the garb of a brahmachari. He is in ochre cloth, *kamandala* in hand, and is smiling. Thakur and all the devotees laugh.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — This shows the state of his mind. That is why he is dressed this way.

Narendra — He is in the garb of a brahmachari. I would like to put on the garb of a *vamachari* (practitioner of Tantrik rituals). (Laughter.)

Hazra — You have to procure the five ingredients: wine, meat, fish, posture and women, and the mystic circle [of Bhairavis].

Sri Ramakrishna does not comment on *vamachara*[1]. He does not encourage this practice. In fact, he ~~laughed~~ laughs it away. He begins to dance like one intoxicated. He sings –

I shall not be distracted even if You make me forget.
The reason? I have had the vision of Your red feet.

His earlier story – Rajnarayan's Chandi – Nakur Acharya's song

Thakur says, "Oh, how beautiful is Rajnarayan's singing of the Chandi! He sings and dances in the same way. And the songs of Nakur Acharya in our village! Ah, what dance! What music!"

A sadhu has arrived in the Panchavati. He is a hot-headed man. He uses foul language with anybody

[1] Practice of Tantrik rituals in collaboration with a woman

and everybody, and hurls curses. He comes in wearing wooden sandals.

He asks, "Can I get fire here?" Sri Ramakrishna folds his hands to salute the sadhu and remains standing in this posture till he leaves.

When the sadhu has gone, Bhavanath says, "How devoted you are to sadhus!"

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — You see, he too is Narayana, though a man of tamas. This is how one should treat people of tamasic nature. Besides, he is a sadhu!

Sri Ramakrishna and game of golakdham – 'the right person is victorious everywhere'

The devotees are playing the game of *golakdham*[1]. Hazra is also playing. Thakur comes in and stands there looking at them. The pawns of M. and Kishori reach 'heaven'. Sri Ramakrishna pays obeisance to both of them. He adds, "Both of you brothers[2] are blessed." (Aside to M.) "Don't play this game any more." Thakur continues to watch the game as Hazra's pawn reaches 'hell'. Sri Ramakrishna says, "What is the matter with Hazra? Yet again!"

In other words, Hazra's pawn has again entered 'hell'. Everyone giggles and laughs.

When all seven dice fall straight, Latu's pawn is completely out of the '*samsar*' (the world). Latu begins to dance with joy. Thakur says, "Just see how happy Latu is! He would have been very sad if that

[1] A kind of indoor game in which each player tries to get into heaven and on a false step falls into hell.

[2] Kishori was initiated by Sri Ramakrishna. He left his mortal frame exactly one year before M. He was a beloved of the sannyasin disciples of Thakur. Especially Swami Subodhananda and Swami Shivananda loved him. During his last years, he lived alone.

hadn't happened. (Alone to the devotees) It has its own significance. Hazra has the conceit that he will win here – but the law of the Lord is such that He does not insult a righteous person. The righteous man is victorious everywhere!"

Chapter IV

Sadhana with women not for Narendra and his like – *vamachara* criticized

His earlier story – visit to holy places – mystic circle of Bhairavis in Kashi – Sri Ramakrishna in the attitude of a child

Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the smaller cot in his room. Narendra, Bhavanath, Baburam and M. are sitting on the floor. Narendra refers to the Tantrik sects of Ghoshpara, Panchanami and others. Thakur describes their practices and condemns them. He says, "They can't follow spiritual practices correctly. They just satisfy sensual desires in the name of religion."

(To Narendra) "You need not listen to their practices."

"The Bhairavas and Bhairavis are like them. Once when I went to Kashi, they took me to a Bhairavi[1] mystic circle – every Bhairava[2] was with a Bhairavi. I was asked to drink wine. I said, 'Mother, I cannot touch wine.' Then they began to drink. I thought perhaps they would begin japa and meditation. But they didn't. Instead they began to dance. I began to fear that they might fall into the Ganges. Their circle was made on the bank of the Ganges.

[1] A female aspirant of the Tantrik sect
[2] A male aspirant of the Tantrik sect

"Great respect is shown to husband and wife if they take up the role of Bhairava and Bhairavi.

(To Narendra and other devotees) "Do you know what my attitude is? I have a filial nature, the attitude of a son toward his mother. Regarding a woman as mother is a very pure attitude. There is no danger in it. Considering a woman as sister is not inferior. But looking on a woman as one's mistress, the attitude of a 'hero,' is beset with difficulties. Tarak's father used to practice this rite. It is a very difficult path. It is impossible to maintain the correct spirit in this path.

"There are different ways to reach the Lord. As many faiths, so many paths. It's like going to the Kali temple on different roads. Even so, some paths are pure, while others are dirty. One must take a pure path.

"I have seen so many faiths, so many paths. Now I don't like them anymore – they just argue with each other. However, you who are with me are my own. I tell you, I have reached the conclusion that He is the whole, while I am a part of Him; He is the Master, I am His servant; and sometimes I feel that I am He and He is me."

The devotees listen to Thakur in deep silence.

Sri Ramakrishna and love of mankind

Bhavanath (humbly) — When you don't get along well with a person, your mind becomes disturbed. Then you can't love everybody.

Sri Ramakrishna — First talk it out with that person. Try to make up with him. If you fail in your efforts, don't worry. Take refuge in God and meditate on Him. There is no need to give up God and feel depressed because of other people.

Bhavanath — Christ and Chaitanya both said to love everyone.

Sri Ramakrishna — Love you must, for God abides in all. But when you come across a wicked person, salute him from a distance. Chaitanya Deva did the same thing. He would restrain his spiritual feelings in the presence of those of a different nature. At Srivas's home, he forced Srivas's mother-in-law out of the room, dragging her by the hair.

Bhavanath — She was turned out by somebody else.

Sri Ramakrishna — Could anybody do it without his [Chaitanya Deva's] consent? What else to do if the two minds don't agree? Should one keep worrying about it the whole night? The mind, which should be given to God, should not be wasted in futile things. I say, 'Mother, I want none – neither Narendra, nor Bhavanath, nor Rakhal. Only You do I want. What use is a man to me?"

> When Mother Chandi arrives in the house, I will hear any number of hymns in Her praise.
>
> And any number of ascetics, yogis and sadhus with matted locks will come as well.

"Having attained Her, I shall have attained everything. Coins are clods of earth, and clods of earth are coins. Gold is clay and clay is gold – saying this, I gave them all up. I threw them into the Ganges. Then I began to fear that Mother Lakshmi might be angry with me because I had disregarded her glory. Lest She should stop giving me food, I said, 'Mother, I only want You and nothing else.' Having attained Her, I shall attain all."

Bhavanath (smiling) — This is astute calculation!

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Yes, only that much calculation!

"Bhagavan appeared before a certain person and said, 'I am very pleased with your penance. Ask me for a boon.' The aspirant said, 'Bhagavan, if you are granting me a boon, then please grant that I may eat on a gold plate with my grandson.' So much was accomplished in one boon! He became wealthy, begot a son, and then a grandson."

Chapter V

Lord is the refuge – Sri Ramakrishna's devotion to his mother – in the joy of devotional songs

The devotees are in the room while Hazra is seated on the verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you know what Hazra wants? He needs some money. His family is in distress. He is in debt. That is why he practices japa and meditation – to get some money.

A Devotee — Can't God fulfill a devotee's desire?

Sri Ramakrishna — If it is God's will. But the Lord doesn't take all the burden of a person unless he is intoxicated by intense love for Him. Someone holds a child by the hand and makes him sit for his meal at a feast. Who does so in the case of old people? When one

meditates on Him and cannot take care of himself, the Lord then takes responsibility for him[1].

"He [Hazra] does not enquire about his family. Hazra's son said to Ramlal, 'Ask my father to come home. We shall not ask him for anything.' Hearing this, I began to weep."

Life of Sri Ramakrishna spoken with his own holy lips – visit to Vrindavan

"Hazra's mother said to Ramlal, 'Ask Pratap to come home and ask your uncle [Sri Ramakrishna] in my name to send Pratap.' I asked him to go, but he didn't listen.

"How great is one's mother! How long Chaitanya Deva had to implore his mother before he was allowed to leave family life. Sachi [Chaitanya Deva's mother] said, 'I will cut Keshab Bharati[2] asunder!' Chaitanya Deva had to beseech her to give her approval for his sannyasa. He said, 'Mother, if you don't approve of it, I won't go. But if you keep me at home, I shall not survive. Besides, mother, you will be able to see me whenever you remember me. I shall not be far from you. And I will come to see you every now and then.' It was only then that Sachi permitted him to leave.

"As long as his mother was alive, Narada could not leave her to practice austerities. He had to take care of her, you see. It was only after her death that Narada went away to practice spiritual disciplines in order to realize Hari.

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[1] Persons who meditate on Me, worship Me in all beings, never harbouring any other thought, to them thus ever zealously engaged, I carry what they lack and preserve what they already have. (Gita 9:22)

[2] The guru of Chaitanya Deva who initiated him into sannyasa

"When I was at Vrindavan I did not want to return. It was arranged for me to stay with Gangama[1]. She had her bedding on one side of the room, and mine was on the other. I resolved not to return to Calcutta. 'How long must I eat Kaivarta's [proprietors of Dakshineswar temple, who belong to the low caste of fishermen] food?' I asked myself. But Hriday said, 'No, you must return to Calcutta.' He pulled me one way and Gangama dragged me the other. I had a great desire to stay on with her. Suddenly, however, the thought of my mother came to me. My whole attitude changed immediately. 'My mother is old now,' I said to myself. 'If I keep worrying about her, how can I meditate on the Lord? I would rather return to her. There I will meditate on the Lord with a free mind.'

(To Narendra) "You, too, please ask Hazra to go home. The other day he said he would go and stay there for three days. But he did nothing about it.

(To the devotees) "Today we talked of Ghoshpara and such Tantrik ways. Govinda! Govinda! Govinda! Let us now utter the name of Lord Hari. Let there be some cheese pudding after the dish of lentils."

Narendra sings –

O my mind! Rest assured that there is the stainless Primal Purusha.

He is the beginningless Truth and cause of all causes. He pervades the moving and the unmoving world as *prana* (vital breath).

He is ever living, resplendent, the haven of all. The man of faith alone beholds Him.

He is beyond the senses, the eternal, the essence of consciousness, and dwells in the cave of the hearts of all.

[1] A great woman saint of Vrindavan

He is adorned by the different qualities of jnana and prema. Man is rid of all grief by meditating on Him.

He has numberless qualities, He is of ever-serene countenance. None can reach His depths.

But He reveals Himself by His grace to those who take shelter at His feet, knowing them to be humble and helpless by His grace.

Ever-forgiving and the source of all good, He is ever the giver of help in the sea of sorrows.

He is ever just and He bestows fruit in accordance with our good and bad deeds.

He is the most loving, the ocean of mercy and the treasure house of grace. By hearing of His glories one's eyes are filled with tears.

Behold Him and be blessed. He is the haven of all hungry hearts.

Wonderful is His nature, of peerless beauty without stain, which no human speech can describe.

O my brother! Become a beggar at His door and worship Him alone day and night.

Song 2 –

The full moon of divine love rises on the firmament of divine wisdom.[1]

Thakur is dancing round and round. The others are also singing and dancing. It is a mart of joy. The song ended, Thakur begins to sing again.

Song 3 –

The Mother is always lost in the ecstasy of joy in the company of Shiva.

[1] For complete song refer Section I, Chapter II of this volume

Though drunk with nectar, She reels but does not fall.

Erect, She stands on Shiva's bosom, and the earth trembles under Her steps.

More than mad, both are indifferent to fear and shame.

Thakur is very happy to see that M. has joined in the music. When the song ends, Thakur says to M. with a smile, "It has been so nice. Had there been a drummer, it would have been much more intense. It would have sounded: Tak tak ta dhina, dak dak da dhina."

The singing of devotional songs ends at dusk.

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna at Adhar's House – enjoys Devotional Songs with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna with Vijay, Kedar, Baburam and other devotees

Kedar, Vijay, Baburam, Narayan, M. and Vaishnavcharan

It is Wednesday, 1 October, 1884, the eleventh day of the bright fortnight of Aswin. Accompanied by Narayan and Gangadhar, Thakur has come to Adhar's house from Dakshineswar. On the way he had suddenly passed into ecstasy and said, "That I should count the beads! Away with that! This emblem of Shiva has sprung up from the earth by itself."

Sri Ramakrishna has reached Adhar's house. A number of devotees have gathered there: Kedar, Vijay, Baburam and many others. Vaishnavcharan, the musician, has arrived. As directed by Thakur, every day when he returns home from office, Adhar listens to Vaishnavcharan's kirtan. Vaishnavcharan sings very sweetly. Today he is going to sing. When Thakur enters Adhar's drawing room, all the devotees rise and take the dust of his feet. After he has taken his seat with a smiling face, the devotees also sit down. When Kedar and Vijay have bowed to him, Thakur asks Narayan and Baburam to pay obeisance to them. He asks Kedar and Vijay to bless the two young boys so that they may gain love for God. Pointing to Narayan, he says, "He is very open

and guileless." The devotees gaze at Baburam and Narayan.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Kedar and other devotees) — I just happened to meet you on the way. Had I not, you would have reached the Kali Temple by now. It is by the Lord's grace that we met beforehand.

Kedar (humbly, folding his hands) — The Lord's will! It is indeed your will.

Thakur laughs.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna in the joy of kirtan with the devotees

The kirtan begins. Vaishnavcharan sings a love tryst, ending it with a *rasa* (play of Radha and the milkmaids) kirtan. Just as the kirtan depicting the meeting of Radha and Krishna begins, Thakur dances, filled with divine love. The devotees also sing and dance, forming a circle around him. After the singing is over, everybody sits down.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vijay) — He sings beautifully.

Saying this, he points at Vaishnavcharan and asks him to sing the song beginning with 'The beautiful Gauranga.' Vaishnavcharan sings –

The beautiful and youthful Gauranga of golden hue is the best dancer.

When the song ends, Thakur says to Vijay, "How did you like it?" Vijay says, "It was wonderful!" Now Thakur himself begins to sing about the divine emotion of Gauranga –

Surely Gauranga would be in ecstasy.

What else can he who is the treasure house of ecstasy have?

He laughs, weeps and dances, surcharged with divine emotion.

Seeing a forest, he thinks of it as Vrindavan. Seeing the sea, he thinks it to be the Jamuna.

He who has Krishna within and Gaur without surely will have ecstasy.

Gaur sobs and weeps. He holds his own foot and says:

Where are you, Radha, full of ecstatic love?

Mani sings along with him.

Thakur's song ends and Vaishnavcharan sings again –

O my Vina[1], play Hari, Hari!

Without Hari's compassion, you will not gain the Supreme Essence.

The name of Hari destroys all sorrows. Chant 'Hare Krishna, Hare'.

By Hari's will you will have no worry!

O Vina, utter but once the name of Hari. There is no haven except the name of Hari.

The servant, Govinda, says, 'Days are passing. Don't be drowned in distress.'

Thakur sings the different tunes emulating the musician. He says to Vaishnavcharan, "Sing this way, like professional musicians."

Vaishnavcharan sings –

O my tongue, always repeat the name of Sri Durga.

Who else can save you from danger but Sri Durga.

[1] A stringed musical instrument

The boat of Durga's name sails on the lake of faith to take you across the sea of the world.

By practicing the instructions of the compassionate Guru, your boat reaches the bank.

If you were to say that the six enemies in the form of wind will create a storm around your boat,

Rest assured that the boat of Durga's name will reach the bank even in the storm, since it is piloted by Mrityunjay (Shiva, the immortal one).

O Mother, You are heaven, You are the mortal world, and You are the nether world.

It is from You that Hari, Brahma, the twelve Gopalas, the ten great sciences, and the ten avatars have sprung.

You will have to take me across this time, taking up one form or the other.

You are the moving and the unmoving. You are the gross and the subtle.

You are creation, preservation and dissolution. You are the root of the universe.

You are the Mother of the three worlds and their savior.

You are the Shakti (Power) of all and You are Your own Shakti too.

Thakur and the musician sing again and again the following lines of the song –

You are the moving and the unmoving. You are the gross and the subtle.

You are creation, preservation and dissolution. You are the root of the universe.

You are the Mother of the three worlds and their savior.

You are the Shakti (Power) of all and You are Your own Shakti too.

The musician starts another song –

Air, darkness, the void, the firmament, the ten quarters of the globe and all directions have come into existence by receiving Your light.

All the immortal ones including Brahma and Vishnu have taken their bodies because of the light of Your Shakti.

The Ida[1], the Pingala[2], the Sushumna[3], the Vajra, the Chitrini[4] are all pulsating because of the Sahasrara[5].

Rows and rows of lotuses are in the middle and the upper regions of Chitrini.

There is white and golden lightening.

Two lotuses are open, one is still in bud.

There are two couples upward facing and downward facing.

Mother, You, in the shape of a swan, are moving as the Kundalini in the lotus.

Above is the naval chakra called Manipura[6].

On it is the blood-red lotus of ten petals.

In this lotus dwells Your fire power.

When this fire is taken away, everything is extinguished.

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[1] The spiritual column on the left side of the spine

[2] The spiritual column on the right side of the spine

[3] The spiritual canal situated in the center of the spinal cord and extending from the base of the spine to the brain. It is through the Sushumna that the Kundalini rises.

[4] Vajra and Chitrini are two *nadis* (spiritual columns), Sushumna has Vajra inside it and Chitrini is within the latter. Chitrini's lustre is Om and it is subtle as a spider's thread; it pierces all the lotuses of the Sushumna. Within Chitrini is the Brahman-nadi, the channel along which the Kundalini passes.

[5] Thousand-petalled lotus in the cerebrum, the abode of Shiva

[6] The third centre in the Sushumna

In the lotus of the heart is the inward lake like the sky, on which floats the Anahata lotus.

There, is the gold-coloured, twelve-petalled, lotus-shaped arrow of Shiva.

In that lotus your Shakti lives as *jiva* and *prana*.

Above that, in the throat, is the Vishuddha lotus of sixteen petals, of the colour of smoke.

In this lotus Your Shakti lives as ether.

When ether is reached, the whole of ether becomes one unbounded space.

Above it is the thousand-petalled lotus within the cerebrum.

This is the most secret spot of the Guru.

It is in this lotus that the Supreme Shiva is present in His universal form.

He dwells alone in this white, thousand-petalled lotus.

It is in this lotus that Shiva is in the form of a shadow.

Shiva casts His reflection in the Brahmarandra[1]. When you reach there, Shiva becomes His own form.

There, You enjoy Yourself happily with Shiva.

When the merrymaking is over, Shiva takes the form of a reflection.

[1] The spiritual opening at the top of the head through which yogis say the soul leaves the body when merged with the Absolute

Chapter III

About God with form and God without form with Vijay and other devotees – mound of sugar

Kedar and some of the devotees stand up. They are going home. Kedar salutes Thakur and says, "Well, I take your leave now."

Sri Ramakrishna — Are you going back home without telling Adhar? That would be impolite.

Kedar — 'When God is pleased, everyone is satisfied'. When you stay, we all in a sense stay. But I am not feeling well. I am particularly uncomfortable when there is talk of marriage and worldly conventions. There are social obligations[1]. I had some trouble before.

Vijay — You are leaving him [Thakur] here ...

Just at this moment, Adhar arrives to take Thakur in to eat. Leaf plates have been laid inside. Thakur rises and says to Vijay and Kedar, "Come on. Come with me." Vijay, Kedar and other devotees sit with Thakur and partake of the prasad.

After eating, Thakur again goes to the drawing room and takes his seat. He is surrounded by Kedar, Vijay and other devotees.

Kedar makes a submission and apologizes – Vijay has vision of the gods

Folding his hands, Kedar says to Thakur very humbly, "Please pardon me for hesitating to eat here." Perhaps he thinks to himself, "If Thakur has

[1] Kedar was a brahmin, while Adhar belonged to a lower caste. Due to social obligations, Kedar did not want to eat at Adhar's home.

eaten here, certainly a lowly person like me should not have hesitated to eat!"

Kedar works in Dacca. A number of devotees visit him there and bring sandesh and other sweets for him. It is this that Kedar humbly discusses with Sri Ramakrishna.

Kedar (humbly) — Many people bring me things to eat. Tell me, oh Lord, what is your command?

Sri Ramakrishna — Even if a devotee is a *chandala* (pariah), you can take food from him. For seven years I was in a state of God-intoxication. When I went to my native village [Kamarpukur], what a state I was in! I even ate from the hands of a public woman. But now I can't do that.

Kedar (in a sweet voice, before leaving) — Lord, transmit your power to me. So many people visit me! What do I know?

Sri Ramakrishna — It will come about, brother! It does come when you are a sincere seeker of the Lord.

Before Kedar leaves, Yogendra, the editor of the Bangavasi [a Bengali paper], enters. He salutes Thakur and takes his seat.

They talk about God with form and God without form.

Sri Ramakrishna — God is with form and He is formless. How much more He is, we do not know. It will not do to say that He is formless.

Yogendra — There is a wonderful thing about the Brahmo Samaj. Even a boy of twelve sees the formless God. But in the Adi Brahmo Samaj, they don't object

very much to God with form. They even attend worship at the houses of rich men.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — He has beautifully said that even he (a boy of twelve) sees the formless God.

Adhar — Shivanath Babu does not accept God with form.

Vijay — That is his mistake. As he [Thakur] says, the chameleon is sometimes this colour and at other times a different colour. He who lives under the tree understands it correctly. During meditation, I saw a movie – several gods saying many different things. I said to myself, 'I shall go to him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] and request him to explain.'

Sri Ramakrishna — You had the right vision.

Kedar — The devotee accepts God with form. The devotee sees God with a form in his intense love for Him. Dhruva had the vision of Bhagavan and said to Him, 'Why don't your earrings move?' Bhagavan said, 'They will move if you touch them.'

Sri Ramakrishna — You must accept all these, brother – God with form and God without form. I was meditating in the Kali Temple when I saw Ramani, a prostitute. I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, You have this form too!' That is why I say you must accept all. You can never tell when She may appear before you in any form She likes.

Saying so, Thakur begins to sing.

A God-inspired mendicant has arrived...

Vijay — God has infinite power. Can He not reveal Himself in one particular form? How amazing! All these people who are a speck of the dust of His feet try to know all about Him!

Sri Ramakrishna — People read a little of the *Gita*, or the *Bhagavata*, or the *Vedanta* and conclude that they have understood everything. An ant went to a mound of sugar. One grain of sugar filled its stomach. It took another grain in its mouth and returned home, saying to itself, "I shall bring the whole mound next time." (All laugh.)

Section XIX

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees in Dakshineswar

Chapter I

With Vedantavagish, Ishan and other devotees in Dakshineswar

It is Saturday, 11 October, 1884. Sri Ramakrishna is lying on the smaller bedstead of his room in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. It is about two o'clock. Priya Mukherji and M. are seated on the floor.

Having left the school at one o'clock, M. has just reached the Kali Temple, at about two.

Sri Ramakrishna — I went to Jadu Mallick's house. Right away he asked me, 'How much is the carriage fare?' When somebody said, 'Three rupees, two annas,' he came to me and enquired about it. Next he secretly asked the coachman who was standing behind Shukul Thakur. The coachman said, 'Three rupees, four annas.' (General laughter.) Jadu ran to us again and asked, 'How much did you say the fare was?'

"A broker visited Jadu. He said to him, 'There is a parcel of four *kathas*[1] of land in Burrabazar for sale. Would you like to purchase it?' Jadu asked, 'What is the price? Can you bring it down?' I said, 'You are not a serious buyer. You are just asking to while away time. Isn't that true?' He turned to me and laughed. This is the way with worldly people. They want people to come to them so they will be known in the marketplace.

[1] A measure of unit equivalent to 320 sq. cubits

"Jadu had been to Adhar's house. I told him, 'Adhar was delighted that you went to his house.' Jadu said, 'What? Really? Was he really very pleased?'

"A certain Mallick went to Jadu's house. I could see from his eyes how clever and deceitful he was. Looking him straight in the eye, I said to him, 'It's not good to be too clever. The crow is a very clever bird, but it eats excreta of others and dies.' I also saw that he was wretched and not well off. Speechless with wonder, Jadu's mother asked me, 'Baba (father), how did you know all this, that he had nothing?' I knew it by looking at his face."

Narayan arrives. He sits on the floor.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Priyanath) — Well, your Hari is a fine person.

Priyanath — He is all right, but not particularly good. He does have a childlike nature.

Narayan — He addresses his wife as mother.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is that possible? Even I can't do that! He calls her mother! (To Priyanath) You see, he is a very calm boy. And his mind is directed toward God.

Now Thakur takes up other topics of conversation.

"Do you know what Hem said? He said to Baburam that God alone is the Reality and all else an illusion. (All laugh.) No, brother, he meant it. He told me that he would take me to his house and sing devotional songs. But he didn't. Later he said, 'If I take up drums and cymbals, what will people say?' He became frightened that people might think he was crazy."

The Ghoshpara ladies look on Haripada as Gopala[1] – dispassion since youth and women

"Haripada has come under the influence of a Ghoshpara woman who doesn't leave him alone. He said, 'She takes me on her lap and feeds me, as if I were Gopala.' I cautioned him that such a filial attitude brings about a downfall.

"You know, even if one has attained Bhagavan, one should keep a distance from women. And it is extremely harmful to frequent women of bad motives and be fed by them. They rob you of spirituality.

"You can safeguard your love of God only by being very cautious. Bhavanath, Rakhal and others once cooked their own food. They had just started eating when a baul[2] came and sat with them, saying that he would also like to eat. I said, 'There is not enough to eat, but if anything is left, we will keep it for you.' This angered him and he left. On the Vijaya festival day people allow anybody to feed them with their own hands. It is not right. You must only eat from the hands of a pure devotee.

"You must be very cautious about women. Don't listen to them when they display their Gopala bhava (motherly attitude toward a boy) to you. There is the proverb: 'A woman can devour even the three worlds.' When some women see an attractive young man, they set various kinds of snares to trap him. And this they call their Gopala bhava!

"They who have felt dispassion since their youth, they who wander about yearning for Bhagavan, they who have not entered family life, indeed belong to a separate class. They are pure aristocrats. In their deep

[1] Baby Krishna
[2] Mendicant minstrels of Vaishnava sect

dispassion they remain fifty cubits away from women lest the latter should bring a change in their attitude. If, however, they fall into the clutches of a woman, they no longer remain blue-blooded. Their attitude changes and they come down to a lower level of spirituality. They who have the right kind of dispassion from an early age belong to a higher spiritual ideal ('abode'). They have an extremely pure attitude. They never allow a single stain to touch them."

How to conquer the senses – practice of sadhana in the attitude of woman

"How can one conquer the senses? One should assume the feminine attitude. For a long time, I had the attitude of a maidservant of God. I used to dress myself like a woman and wore jewelry and a scarf on my head. I would perform arati with my head covered. Had I not, how could I have kept my wife with me for eight months? Both of us were the maid companions of the Divine Mother!

"I couldn't say that I was a male. One day I was in an ecstatic state when she [the Holy Mother] asked me, 'How do you think of me?' I replied, 'As the All-blissful Mother.'

"There is a sect which believes that whoever has breasts like a woman is a woman. Arjuna and Krishna did not have womanly breasts. Do you know the attitude in which Shiva is worshipped? The worship of the Shivalinga (the emblem of Shiva) is the worship of Mother's genital organ and that of the Father[1]. When a devotee worships it, he prays, 'Lord, please grant that I am not born again. That I may not again have to pass through a mother's womb after the union of semen and blood.' "

[1] Motherhood (or Shakti) and Fatherhood (or Brahman)

Chapter II

Sadhana in the company of women – Sri Ramakrishna prohibits it again and again

Sri Ramakrishna is talking of the feminine attitude. Priya Mukherji, M. and some other devotees are there. In the meantime a tutor from Tagore's family comes in with a number of boys of Devendra Nath Tagore's family.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Sri Krishna has a peacock feather on his head. The feather bears the emblem of the female sex. It means that Sri Krishna is carrying Prakriti[1] on his head.

"When Krishna danced with the gopis, he assumed the attitude of a woman (prakriti). That is why he is seen dressed as a woman in the rasa[2]. If you don't have the feminine attitude, you have no right to be in the company of women. Only when one assumes the feminine attitude, can one participate in rasa and enjoy women's company. However, the *sadhaka* (aspirant) must be very cautious. He should remain far away from women. He should not associate frequently even with a woman of great devotion. When you are climbing up onto the roof, you must not sway. If you are unsteady, there is a danger of falling. The weak should hold onto a support when they climb.

"But it is different in the state of a *siddha* (man of spiritual perfection). There is no danger after one has attained Bhagavan's vision. One becomes fearless to a great extent. Once you have reached the roof, you have reached the goal; you can dance there. But you must not dance on the steps. And he who has climbed up to the

[1] Female principle of God
[2] Festival of dancing of Krishna with Radha and the gopis

roof, no longer needs to renounce what he formerly renounced. The roof is made of bricks, lime and brick dust; the steps are made of the same material. After the vision of Bhagavan, one realizes that the body of the woman about whom he had to be so cautious is the body of Bhagavati (Mother of the Universe). Thereafter he worships her as the Mother and there is no great risk of falling.

"One mustn't forget that when you have once touched the Grand-dame (in the game of hide and seek), you are free to do what you like."

The yoga of dhyana (meditation) and Sri Ramakrishna – looking outwardly and inwardly

"When a man's mind is turned outward, he sees the gross and his mind dwells in the *annamaya kosha*. Next is the subtle body. When the mind functions in the subtle body, it dwells in the *manomaya kosha* and *vijnanamaya kosha*. Next comes the *karana* (casual) body. When the mind goes to the causal body, there is only bliss – the mind dwells in the *anandamaya kosha*. It is the same as the semiconscious state of Chaitanya Deva.

"Next the mind is merged – it vanishes – in *Mahakarana* (the Great Cause). When the mind vanishes, there is no more news of it. This is the inmost state which Chaitanya Deva experienced.

"Do you know what that inmost state is? Sri Dayananda said, 'Come into the inner apartment and shut the door!' But not everybody can go inside the inner apartment.

"I used to correlate this with the flame of a lamp. I would think of the flame's red colour as gross. The white inner part, I would think of as subtle. And the

innermost black part, I named the *karana* (body of ecstasy).

"There are signs that one is meditating correctly. One of the signs is that a bird will sit on your head, thinking you are an inert object."

His earlier story – first meeting with Keshab in 1864, Keshab in meditation – one can also meditate with eyes open

"I saw Keshab for the first time in the Adi (Brahmo) Samaj. Several people were sitting on the dais. Keshab was in the middle. He was motionless, like a log of wood. I said to Mathur Babu, 'Look at his float. The fish has eaten the bait.' Because of his power of meditation he achieved all that he desired (name, fame and so forth) through the grace of the Lord.

"One can also meditate with eyes open. And it is also possible while talking. Imagine the painful twinge of a toothache!"

The Tutor from the house of Tagore — Yes sir, I know it quite well. (Laughter.)

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — When you have a toothache you attend to all your duties, but your mind remains attached to the toothache. In similar fashion, you can meditate with your eyes open – and also while talking.

The Tutor — God's name is the redeemer of the fallen, so I feel reassured. He is compassionate.

His earlier story – conversation with the Sikhs and Krishnadas

Sri Ramakrishna — The Sikhs also said that God was merciful. I asked them, 'How is He merciful?' They answered, 'Why Maharaj, God has created us as human beings. He provides us with everything, and He protects us from danger at every step.' I rejoined, 'How is He great to create us, rear us and then feed us? If you have a son, will people from Vamanpara[1] look after him?'

The Tutor — Sir, some people succeed spiritually in no time, while others do not. How do you explain that?

Dispassion of Lala Babu[2] and Rani Bhavani – sattva guna results from samskaras[3]

Sri Ramakrishna — You know, one succeeds spiritually to a large extent as the result of the *samskaras* of the previous life. But people think it takes place all of a sudden.

"Somebody drank a bottle of wine in the morning. He began to stagger and behave like a mad man. People were surprised that a bottle should turn one's head so much. Then somebody said, 'Let me tell you, he has been drinking the whole night.'

"Hanuman set fire to the golden city of Lanka. People were amazed that a monkey could burn the whole city. But later they said that it was the sigh of Sita and the wrath of Rama which burnt everything.

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[1] Meaning people from another part of town; it is an another locality

[2] Lala Babu, the pride of Bengal, was Krishna Chandra Singh of Pikepara. He developed dispassion (vairagya) in his youth. He had an estate yielding seven lakhs of rupees annually. At the age of thirty, he renounced all his possessions and went to live in Mathura. In his fortieth year, he took to the life of holy begging. He died at the age of forty-two. His wife, Rani Katyayani, was childless. His guru was Krishnadas Babaji, the translator of Bhaktamala into Bengali.

[3] Tendencies inherited from one's past births

"And then look at Lala Babu, a very wealthy man. Unless one has good samskaras from a previous birth, can one have such dispassion as Lala Babu? And Rani Bhavani! Though a woman, she possessed such spiritual knowledge and love of God!"

Rajas in Krishnadas – doing good to the world

"In one's last birth one is endowed with sattva guna[1] and one's mind is attached to Bhagavan. One feels a deep longing for Him and the mind rejects worldly experiences.

"Krishnadas Pal came here. I saw that he had rajas[2] prominent in him. Since he was a Hindu, he took his shoes off outside. After a short conversation with him, I realized that there was not much substance in him. I asked him what he thought the duty of a man was. He said, 'Doing good to the world.' I said, 'Who are you that you can do good to the world? Is the world so small that you can do good to it?' "

Thakur is overjoyed to see Narayan. He makes him sit beside him on the smaller cot and pats him affectionately. He gives him some sweets to eat and says lovingly, "Will you have some water?" Narayan is a student at M.'s school. At home he was beaten for visiting Thakur. Thakur says tenderly to him with a smile, "Get a long leather jacket made for yourself. Then you won't feel the blows."

Thakur says to Harish, "I would like to smoke the hubble-bubble."

Thakur forbids spiritual practice with women companions as in Ghoshpara again and again

[1] Qualities that lead Godward
[2] Qualities that cause action, which in turn pull the mind away from God

And then addressing Narayan, he says, "The adopted mother of Haripada came here. I warned Haripada about her. She belongs to the Ghoshpara sect. I asked her, "Have you found your supporter [man]?" She said, "Yes, so and so Chakravarti."

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Oh! Nilkantha came that day. What a spiritual mood he was in! He said that he would come again and sing. Today they are dancing over there. Please go and have a look. (To Ramlal) There is no oil. (Peeps into the container) No, there is no oil in the container.

Chapter III

Union of Purusha and Prakriti – who were Radha and Krishna? Adyashakti

Vedantavagish, Dayananda Saraswati, Col. Olcott, Surendra and Narayan

Sri Ramakrishna is now pacing back and forth – from inside his room to the southern verandah. Next he goes to the western semi-circular verandah to have a glimpse of the Ganges.

Effect of good and bad environment: images, trees and young boys

After awhile he sits down on the smaller cot. It is three o'clock. The devotees come in and sit down again on the floor. Thakur sits silent on the smaller cot. From time to time he glances at the wall of the room where a number of pictures hang. To his right is the picture of Goddess Vinapani (Saraswati) and close by, the picture of Nitai and Gaur singing devotional songs with devotees. In front of Thakur, there are the pictures of Dhruva, Prahlada, and an image of Mother Kali. To his right on the wall is the

image of Mother Rajarajeshvari, and on the back wall that of Jesus raising the drowning Peter. Suddenly Thakur says to M., "Look here, it is good to keep the picture of sadhus and sannyasins in the room. When you wake up in the morning, it is good to see the face of a sadhu or a sannyasin instead of other people. To have English pictures on the wall – pictures of rich men, or a king, or a queen, or a prince, or a European couple strolling together – gives rise to rajas."

"The company you keep makes your character. That is why even pictures influence you. After all, birds of a feather flock together! A paramahamsa keeps a few boys with him. He allows boys five or six years old to be near him. In the state of a paramahamsa, one likes the company of children. Children are not subject to the gunas – sattva, rajas, or tamas.

"When you see a tree, you are reminded of a hermitage where rishis practice austerities."

A brahmin from Sinthi enters the room. He salutes Thakur. He has studied Vedanta in Kashi.

Sri Ramakrishna — How do you do? It's been a long time since your last visit.

The Pundit (smiling) — Household duties, sir. And you know well that it is hard to find time.

The pundit sits down and talks to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna — You were in Kashi for a long time. Tell me what you saw there. Tell me something about Dayananda[1].

[1]Dayananda Saraswati (1824 -1883). He was in Ananda Bagh in Kashi in 1869 holding discussions. From December 1872 to March 1873, he stayed in Tagore's Pramod garden house in Nainal Bagan in Calcutta. It

The Pundit — I did meet Dayananda. You also met him.

Sri Ramakrishna — I went to meet him in a garden on the other side of the Ganges. Keshab Sen was supposed to come that day and he was very eager to meet Keshab – like a chatak bird anxious for a drop of rainwater. He is a great scholar. He made fun of the Bengali language, calling it '*Gauranga Bhasha*' (the language of Gaur.) He believes in gods but Keshab didn't. Dayananda said, 'God has created so many things, can He not create gods as well?' But he believed in the formless God too. When Captain repeated the name of Rama, Dayananda said, 'You could just as well have repeated sandesh, sandesh.'

The Pundit — Religious scholars had long discussions with Dayananda in Kashi. At the end, all of them stood against him. The discussion rose to such a pitch that he had to flee to save himself. All of them shouted with one voice: 'Despise what Dayananda said!'

Sri Ramakrishna and Theosophy – do Theosophists yearningly seek the Lord?

(The Pundit continues) "I also met Colonel Olcott. He says that each one is a great soul. And that there exist the regions of the moon, the sun and the stars – that the subtle body can go to these regions. He talked about such other things. Well sir, how do you find Theosophy?"

Sri Ramakrishna — Bhakti is the one thing needed – love for the Lord. Do they (the Theosophists) seek bhakti? If so, it is good. If their ideal is God-realization, it is good. Just by believing in the lunar, the solar and

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was then Sri Ramakrishna, Keshab and Captain met him. Perhaps Captain also met Thakur during that time.

the stellar regions, and in great souls, does not mean that one is seeking the Lord. One should practice spiritual disciplines to gain bhakti for His lotus feet; one must call for Him with a longing heart.

Saying so, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing a song of Ramprasad.

Song –

How can you, O my mind, know God, groping as you are like a mad man in a dark room?

He can be grasped only through ecstatic love; it is impossible to grasp Him otherwise.

The great yogi communes with God from age to age to attain ecstatic love.

As soon as love arises, He draws the soul as a magnet draws a piece of iron.

"God is not to be found in any religious text, philosophy, or in the Vedanta. You will not succeed unless you are restless for Him."

Song –

Neither through the *Vedas*, the *Tantras*, nor the six systems of philosophy can you know Him.

He is adroit in the bliss of divine love and dwells within as everlasting joy.

"You need to have deep longing for God. Listen to this song."

Can everybody have the vision of Radha?[1]

Avatars also engage in *sadhana* to serve as examples to mankind – God-realization is possible only through *sadhana*

[1] For complete song, refer Section XII, Chapter III of this volume

"Sadhana (spiritual disciplines) is essential. Can one see the Lord quickly, without any effort?

"Somebody asked, 'Why can't I have the vision of the Lord?' The answer to his question came to my mind. 'If you want to catch a big fish,' I said to him, 'you have to make arrangements for it. First prepare the bait and take the rod and line in your hand. At the smell of the bait, fish will come up from deep waters. The movement of the water will show that a big fish is coming.'

"If you want to eat butter, how will it help you to go on repeating, 'There is butter in the milk.' You will have to work hard churning the milk to get the butter. You can't have the vision of the Lord just by repeating that the Lord exists. You have to practice *sadhana*.

"Even Bhagavati (the Mother of the Universe) practiced penance seated on five skulls to serve as an example to mankind. Sri Krishna was the Supreme Brahman Himself. He also performed austerities for the instruction of mankind after he found the Radhayantra[1]."

Radha indeed is the Primeval Power and Prakriti – Purusha and Prakriti – Brahman and His Power are inseparable

"Sri Krishna is Purusha[2] and Radha is Prakriti[3]. She is the *Chitshakti*[4], the Primeval Power. Radha is Prakriti endowed with the three gunas. She embodies the

[1] A mystic diagram symbolizing Radha
[2] Male aspect of God
[3] Female aspect of God
[4] Power of Divine Consciousness

qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. It is like peeling an onion. At first its skin is dark red, then lighter red, and inside it is white. The Vaishnava scripture talks of 'Kam-Radha', 'Prem-Radha' and 'Nitya-Radha'. Chandravali was 'Kam-Radha', Srimati (another name of Radha) was 'Prem-Radha' and Nanda had the vision of 'Nitya-Radha' with Gopal (baby Krishna) in her lap[1].

"The *Chitshakti* and Brahman of Vedanta are identical – like water and its wetness. The moment you think of the wetness of water, you are reminded of water. And the moment you think of water, you must think of its wetness. Take the example of the snake and its wriggling movement. The moment you think of the serpentine movement, you are reminded of the snake. When do I call Him Brahman? When He is inactive and unattached to work. A man may put on clothes, yet he remains the same man as when he was naked. He was naked, now he is clothed. He may again take off his clothes. The snake has poison inside, but it does not affect the snake. It is poison only for him who is bitten by the snake. Brahman Himself is unattached to work.

"Prakriti shows its grandeur where there is name and form. Sita said to Hanuman, 'Dear child, I, myself, am Rama in one form and Sita in another. I, myself, am Indra – and also Indrani in another form. I am Brahma in one form and Brahmani in the other. Similarly, I am Rudra in one form and Rudrani in another[2].' All names and forms are the manifestation of the power of *Chitshakti*. Indeed, it manifests itself everywhere – in meditation as well as in the one who meditates. As long as I am conscious that I am meditating, I am in Her

[1] Kam-Radha is amorous love; Prem-Radha is pure and ecstatic love and Nitya-Radha, everlasting love. Nanda was the foster father of Sri Krishna.

[2] Indrani, Brahmani and Rudrani are the consorts of Indra, Brahma and Rudra

jurisdiction. (To M.) You must internalize all this. You must hear the *Veda* and the *Purana* and carry out what they instruct.

(To the Pundit) "It is good to associate with sadhus every now and then. Man always suffers from the disease of worldliness. The company of sadhus mitigates it to a large extent."

Instruction to Vedantavagish: associate with sadhus; none is mine; attitude of a servant

"I and mine! Jnana (spiritual wisdom) is the belief: 'Oh, Lord, it is You who do everything. Only You are my own. Besides, all these – home, family, near and dear ones, friends and the whole universe – all are Yours. Indeed, everything is Yours.' And ajnana (nescience) is the belief: 'I do all this; I am the doer. It is my home, my family, my sons, my friends and all worldly activities.'

"A guru was explaining to his disciple that only the Lord was his own and none else really belonged to him. The disciple said, 'Sir, my mother and my wife have so much love for me. If they don't see me, it is all darkness for them. Oh, how they love me!' The guru said, 'You are mistaken. Let me show you that none of these is yours. Take some of these pills with you. Swallow them when you go home and lie down. People will think that you are dead, but you will remain conscious of the external world. You will be able to see and hear everything. Then I will visit your home.'

"The disciple did as he was instructed. As soon as he reached home, he swallowed the pills and lay down. He appeared unconscious. His mother, his wife, and other members of the family began to wail. Just then his guru arrived in the guise of a physician. When they told him why they were grieving, he said, 'There is medicine for it. It will bring him back to life and he will

get up. But let me tell you that my medicine first has to be taken by one of his relatives before it is given to him. The person who swallows it will die first. You are all here: mother, wife and so on. I am very sure that one of you will take the pill and save the young man.'

"The disciple heard all this. First the physician called the mother who was wallowing in grief. He said, 'Mother, no more wailing for you. Just take this medicine and your son will be saved. But you will die.' The mother took the pills in her hand and began to think about it. After a great deal of reflection, she cried, 'My son, I have other sons and daughters! I am wondering what will happen to them if I die! Who will look after them and feed them?' Next the physician called the wife and gave her the medicine. The wife was also weeping bitterly. She took the medicine in her hand. She had heard that she would die if she took it. With tears in her eyes, she said, 'I say, he has already met his destiny. Tell me, what will happen to my little children? Who will protect them? How can I take this medicine?' By this time, the disciple had recovered from the effects of the medicine. He had understood that nobody was really his own. He immediately got up and left with his guru. The guru said to him, 'There is none but the Lord who is your own.'

"So the right thing is to act upon that which endears Him to you, that which develops bhakti for His lotus feet. You see, this world is ephemeral. There is no real stuff in it."

The householder cannot renounce completely – jnana cannot enter the inner apartments, but bhakti can

The Pundit (smiling) — Sir, I feel total dispassion (*vairagya*) when I come here and see you. I feel like going away and leaving the world.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, why renounce? You people should renounce the world mentally. Live in your household with a spirit of nonattachment.

"Surendra brought his bedding, intending to stay here from time to time. For one or two days, he did come and stay. Then his wife said to him, 'You may go wherever you like during the day but at night you must not leave home.' Surendra was helpless – he could not spend the night away from his home![2]

"And look here, it is futile to just reason. Be restless for Him and learn to love Him. Reasoning and jnana are like men who can only enter the outer rooms. But bhakti is like women who can go into the inner apartments.

"You have to establish a specific kind of relationship with the Lord to attain Him. Sanaka and other rishis nurtured the *shanta* (peaceful) attitude, while Hanuman had the *dasa* (servant) attitude. Sridama, Sudama and the cowboys of Braja took up the *sakhya* attitude (of a friend), while Yashoda had the *vatsalya* (filial) attitude – she took the Lord as her son. Srimati (Radha) took up the *madhura* attitude (that of a sweetheart).

"Oh, God! You are the Lord, I am your servant. This bhava is the *dasa* (servant) attitude. It is a very good attitude for a spiritual aspirant."

Pundit — Yes, sir.

Chapter IV

Instructions to Ishan – Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga – signs of jnana

The Pundit from Sinthi has gone. Twilight is fast approaching. Music for the arati begins in the Kali Temple. Thakur bows before the pictures of the deities. He sits on the smaller cot, preoccupied with some thought. A number of devotees come in again and sit on the floor. There is silence in the room.

An hour has elapsed when Ishan Mukherji and Kishori arrive. They salute Thakur and take their seats. Ishan is very fond of rituals like *purashcharana*[1] described in the holy books. He is a Karma Yogi. Thakur now talks.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is no use repeating, 'Jnana, jnana.' There are two signs that mark the attainment of spiritual knowledge. One is *anuraga*, that is, love for God. You may reason and discuss, but if you have no love for the Lord, no devotion for Him, it is all futile. The second sign is the awakening of the Kundalini power. As long as the Kundalini lies dormant, one does not gain jnana. You may read book after book and reason them out but have no restlessness for God. That is not a sign of jnana.

"When the Kundalini power awakens, one experiences bhava[2], bhakti[3] and *prema*[4]. This is called Bhakti Yoga.

"Karma Yoga is an extremely difficult path. By practicing Karma Yoga, one gains many occult powers – power to perform miracles."

Ishan — I am going to meet Hazra Mahashay.

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[1] The methodical increase and decrease of the repetition of the holy mantra.
[2] Ecstasy
[3] Devotion and love for God
[4] Intense love for God

Thakur remains silent. After awhile Ishan returns to the room, accompanied by Hazra. Thakur is still seated silently. After awhile Hazra says to Ishan, "Let's go. He is going to meditate." Both Ishan and Hazra leave.

Thakur is still seated silently. Shortly he begins to meditate. He counts japa on his fingers, then he touches his fingertips first to the top of his head, then to his forehead, his throat, his heart and lastly his navel.

Is he meditating on the Primeval Power through the six spiritual centres? Is this the communion with God talked about in the Shiva Samhita and other holy texts?

Chapter V

The path of nivritti[1] – karma falls off after God-realization

Instructions to Ishan: arise and awake – path of Karma Yoga is extremely difficult

Ishan goes to the Kali Temple with Hazra. Thakur has been meditating. It is about 7.30 p.m. Just then Adhar comes in.

[1] Non-worldliness

After awhile Thakur goes for the *darshan*[1] of Mother Kali. After Her darshan he picks up some flowers offered at the feet of the deity and brings them to touch his forehead. Next he pays obeisance to the Mother, circumambulates round Her and fans Her with the *chamara*[2]. He is filled with divine emotion. Coming out of the shrine, he sees Ishan performing sandhya with *koshakushi*[3].

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ishan) — Are you still here? Have you been performing evening worship? Listen to this song.

Filled with divine emotion Sri Ramakrishna sits beside Ishan and sings in a sweet voice –

What need of going to the Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi, Kanchi if the lips can utter 'Kali, Kali' when my life ebbs away?

He who utters Kali in all the three *sandhyas*[4] needs no daily ritualistic worship.

Worship itself follows his footsteps but can never overtake him.

Charity, kindness and vows no longer appeal to him.

For Madan, the poet, all worship means the red feet of the Blissful Mother.

Who can know the qualities of the holy name of Kali,

The praises of which are sung by the God of gods, Mahadeva Himself?

---

[1] To see and pay homage

[2] A fan made of the white hair from the tail of the chamari yak, used in Hindu ritual worship

[3] A kosha is a small water container, a kushi is a small spoon for removing water from it. Both are usually made of copper and are used in ritualistic worship.

[4] At dawn, noon and twilight hour

"How long does one have to perform evening worship and other rituals? As long as one does not develop bhakti for His lotus feet, as long as the eyes do not fill with tears while repeating His name, and as long as the hair of one's body does not stand on end."

> Says Ramprasad: Knowing the truth that Kali is the Supreme Brahman, I bowed before both bhakti and salvation and gave up all ideas of what *dharma* and *adharma* are.

"The blossom falls off as soon as the fruit appears. When one develops bhakti, when one attains the Lord, sandhya and other rituals fall off.

"When the daughter-in-law of the house is pregnant, the mother-in-law gradually frees her from work. When she has been pregnant for nine months, her mother-in-law does not allow her to work at all. When the infant is born, the mother only attends to it, taking it in her lap. She doesn't have to attend to any other work. Similarly, when one has attained the Lord, one gives up rituals like sandhya.

"By leisurely playing the drum at a slow beat, you cannot attain much. A deep dispassion (*vairagya*) is needed. Stretching the year to fourteen months is futile. It seems you have no firm determination, no grit. You are like flattened rice soaked in milk. Be up and doing! Gird your loins!

"That is why I don't like the song, 'Fasten thyself to Hari, O Brother. You will sooner or later succeed.' I don't like this 'you will sooner or later succeed'. I want deep dispassion. I say the same to Hazra."

Sri Ramakrishna and principle of yoga – 'lust and greed' are impediments to yoga

"You ask me why you don't develop deep dispassion. There is a reason for it. You have a strong desire for sense enjoyments, your mind is filled with *pravritti*[1]. I say the same to Hazra. In the countryside before they bring water to the fields, they make mud ridges on all four sides of the field so that water can't flow out. They are mud ridges, but they have water outlets here and there. There are holes. Water is brought with full force to the field, but it goes out through the holes. Our desires are like these holes, these outlets. You may be practicing *japa* (repetition of God's name) and austerities, but at the back of your mind, you have desires for sense enjoyments. From the outlets of desire, everything leaks out.

"One catches fish with a bamboo trap. Ordinarily bamboo is straight, but when bent to the ground, it acts as a fish trap. Desire for sense enjoyments is the fish, so the mind remains bent toward the world. If there is no desire, the mind naturally orients upward, toward the Lord.

"Do you know how? Like the needles of a scale. Because of the weight of 'lust and greed,' the upper needle does not align itself with the lower needle. Thus one strays from the path of yoga. Haven't you seen the flame of a lamp? It flickers by just a puff of air. The state of yoga is like the flame of a lamp where there is no wind.

"Our mind is spread out in different directions. A part of it has reached Dacca, a part Delhi and another part Coochbehar. You have to collect this mind and concentrate it to a point. If you want a cloth worth sixteen annas[2], you have to pay this amount to the cloth merchant. Even if there is a slight obstacle, yoga is not

[1] Worldliness
[2] Equivalent to one Rupee

possible. If the telegraph wire is broken, howsoever small the break may be, it will not convey your message."

Trailokya and the power of faith – work without expectation of reward – compel yourself to say: You are my Mother

"You are living a householder's life. What harm is there in that? But one has to surrender the fruit of one's actions completely to the Lord. One must not expect any reward whatsoever.

"Even so, the fact is that the desire for bhakti is not to be counted as desire. It is all right to desire bhakti and to pray for it.

"You have to employ the tamas of bhakti. You must force the Mother."

> The lawsuit between the Mother and the son shall gain great momentum, says Ramprasad.
>
> I shall only lie restfully when the Mother, having pardoned me, raises me in Her arms.

"Trailokya once said, 'As I have taken birth in her family, I have a right to her property.'

"I say, you have your own Mother. She is no artificial Mother, She is not even a godmother. Whom can you force, if not Her? Just say –

> Mother, am I a prematurely born child of weak constitution? I am not afraid of Your red angry eyes!
>
> This time I am going to file a suit in the court of Srinath (Shiva) and I will be awarded the decree on just one point.

"She is your own Mother. Compel Her! If you are a part of someone, you are also attracted by him. Because I am

a part of the Divine Mother, She attracts me. He who is a genuine worshipper of Shiva receives a portion of Shiva. Some of Shiva's characteristics enter into him. He who is a genuine Vaishnava is endowed with some of elements of Narayana. Besides, you have no worldly duties now. Take to meditation for some days. You have seen that there is no real substance in the world."

Thakur sings in his sweet, melodious voice –

O my mind, just think about it. Nobody really belongs to anyone in the world. There is mere illusion in the world.

Don't forget the *Dakshina*[1] Mother Kali by getting ensnared in Her maya.

It is just for two or three days that people call you the lord, the master.

They will cease to call you the master when the Master in the form of death arrives.

Just think about it. Will your friends and relatives accompany you when you are dying?

This beloved wife of yours will sprinkle Ganges water on you to evade evil.

Arbitration, leadership, desire to build hospitals and dispensaries, desire to have fame and learning – all these mark the early stages of life – God-realization after giving up the pacifier

"What are you doing as the leader, arbitrator and such things? I hear that they select you as their arbitrator to settle their disputes and quarrels. You have been doing this for a long time. Let them who care to do it, do it. Now give more and more of your mind to God's lotus

[1] Bestower of happiness and bliss

feet. They say, 'Ravana died in Lanka while Behula wept her heart out[1]!'

"The same was said by Sambhu. He said, 'I will found hospitals and dispensaries.' He was a devotee. So I said to him, 'Will you ask Bhagavan for hospitals and dispensaries when you have His vision?'

"Keshab Sen asked me, 'Why can't I see the Lord?' I replied, 'You are busy with name and fame, scholarship and so on. That's why you don't see Him.' As long as the infant continues to suck on the pacifier, the mother does not come to him. After awhile the infant throws away the pacifier and cries aloud. The mother then takes down the rice pot from the fire and comes to it.

"You are engaged in arbitration. The Mother says to Herself, 'My son is doing fine as a leader. Let him enjoy himself.' "

All this time Ishan has been holding Thakur's feet. He says humbly to him, still holding his feet, "It is not that I have been doing all this willfully."

Mahamaya at the root of all desires – that's why one takes to *karmakanda*[2]

Sri Ramakrishna — I know, it is the Mother's game. Her sport indeed! Mahamaya wants to keep everybody bound to the world. You know how it is? "Many boats float on the ocean of the world. How many of them sink!" Again, "Out of a hundred-thousand kites, only one or two have their strings cut through and are thus set free; oh, how then You laugh and clap Your hands!" Similarly, out of a million people, only one or two attain

[1] Behula was unrelated to Ravana and lived many years later. This saying shows how man gives way to totally irrelevant matters.
[2] Work; activity

liberation. All the rest remain bound by the Mother's will.

"Haven't you seen the game of hide and seek? It is the Grand-dame's will that the game should continue. If everybody were to touch the Grand-dame, the game would not continue. So the Grand-dame does not want everybody to touch her.

"You see, in large shops big sacks of rice are placed as high as the roof. Besides rice, lentils are also stored there. To save them from mice, the shopkeeper puts some sweetened puffed rice in a straw basket. They taste sweet and have their own smell, so all the mice busy themselves eating from the basket, not knowing about the big sacks. Similarly, man is enchanted with 'lust and greed' and does not seek the Lord."

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna has no desire other than devotion to God

Sri Ramakrishna — Rama said to Narada, 'Please ask me for a boon.' Narada said, 'Rama, there is nothing that I need. What boon can I ask for? But if you grant me a boon, please grant that I may have pure love for your lotus feet. And that I may never be deluded by your world-bewitching maya.' Rama said, 'Narada, ask

for some other boon.' Narada again said, 'No, Rama! I don't want anything else. Only grant that I may have pure love for your lotus feet.'

"I prayed to the Divine Mother, saying –

Mother, I don't ask for worldly esteem,

I don't ask for the eight occult powers, Mother.

O Mother, I don't want a hundred powers!

Nor do I ask for creature comforts, Mother.

Only grant, O Mother, that I may gain pure love for Your lotus feet.

"The *Adhyatma* (*Ramayana*) says this: Lakshmana asked Rama, 'Rama, you live in so many *bhavas* (spiritual states) and aspects. On which aspect should I meditate?' Rama said, 'Brother, know for certain that wherever you find *urjita* (ecstatic, deep) bhakti, my presence is there.' In *urjita* bhakti one laughs, weeps, dances and sings. If you see such bhakti developed in a person, know for certain that the Lord has manifested in him. Chaitanya Deva reached that state.

The devotees listen to Thakur, speechless with wonder. They hear all these words as if they were a celestial message from above. Some of them say to themselves, "Sri Ramakrishna says, 'One laughs, weeps, dances and sings in ecstatic love.' But it is not that only Chaitanya Deva had reached this state. Thakur also has this very state. Does it mean then that the Lord Himself has manifested here at this spot?"

Thakur continues to shower his nectarine words – words relating to the path of *nivritti*[1]. He continues what he has been telling Ishan in his deep serious voice.

[1] Non-worldliness

Ishan must beware of sycophants – Sri Ramakrishna and doing good to the world

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ishan) — Don't let flatterers deceive you. Flatterers gather around a worldly man.

"Vultures gather where they find the carcass of a dead cow."

The worldly teach observance of rituals but the all-renouncing ones instruct contemplation on the lotus feet of the Lord

"There is no real substance in worldly people. They are like a heap of cow dung. Flatterers come to them and say, 'You are so generous and wise. You are so devout.' These are not just words, but bamboo sticks thrust at them. What folly! So many householders keep the company of brahmins and pundits day and night just to hear their flattery!

"Worldly men are slaves of these three: They are the slaves to their wives, to money, and to their masters. What real substance do they have in themselves? A certain person, I shall not name, earns eight hundred rupees a month. But he is a slave to his wife. He rises when she orders him to rise, and he sits down at her bidding.

"What is the use of being a leader, or an arbitrator? You have engaged yourself in enough acts of kindness and welfare work. It is quite another class of people who engage in such activities. It is the time for you to give your mind to the lotus feet of the Lord. Attaining Him, nothing remains to be attained. God comes first. Acts of kindness, welfare work, doing good to the world, emancipating mankind – all these are secondary. Why worry about them?

"Ravana died in Lanka while Behula wept her heart out[1]!

"It is the same with you. It would be nice if an all-renouncing person imparts to you spiritual instructions. But it would not be right to take the advice of a worldly man, whether he be a brahmin, a pundit, or anybody else."

Ishan be inebriated – this is the Mother's instruction

"Be inebriated! Be mad in the ecstatic love of the Lord! Let people say that Ishan has gone mad and that he cannot attend to anything now. When you become inebriated in this way, they will not approach you for leadership, or arbitration. Throw away your *koshakushi* (utensils for ritualistic worship). Live up to the name of Ishan (an appellation of Shiva)."

Ishan — "O Mother, make me mad with Thy love. What need have I of knowledge or reason?"

Sri Ramakrishna — Madness, or otherwise? Shivanath said, 'Too much contemplation on the Lord makes one lose one's head.' I rejoined, 'What do you mean? Can one ever become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness? He is the nature of Eternity, Purity and Consciousness, through whose power of perception one perceives everything and through whose Consciousness all is made conscious.' He said that it happened to Mr. Kirni – too much contemplation had made him go insane. This is possible since these people dwell on worldly matters. A line in a song says, 'Such thoughts have filled the body and driven out jnana.' The jnana that is talked of here means the knowledge of the external.

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[1] Behula was unrelated to Ravana and lived many years later. This saying shows how man gives way to totally irrelevant matters

With his hands touching the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, Ishan sits there listening to all his words. He casts his glance now and then on the stone image of Kali in the centre of the temple. In the light of the earthen lamps the Mother appears to be smiling, manifesting Herself within the image. She seems happy to be hearing the *Veda*-like *mantra* of Sri Ramakrishna in a physical form.

Ishan (to Sri Ramakrishna) — Everything you have said with your holy lips is coming from there.

Sri Ramakrishna — I am an instrument, She is the Being who uses the instrument; I am the house and She the dweller; I am the chariot, while She is the charioteer; I move the way She drives me; I speak the way She makes me speak.

"In the Kaliyuga (age of Kali) one does not hear celestial voices from above. But She certainly talks through the lips of a child, or a mad person.

"No person can become a guru. Everything happens by the will of the Lord. When His grace dawns, the vilest sin, a long-lasting sin, or long-lasting ignorance is dispelled in a moment.

"When a light is suddenly brought into a room that was dark for a thousand years, does the darkness vanish little by little, or does it disappear instantly? Surely, the moment the light is brought in, all darkness is dispelled.

"What can a man do? He can talk a great deal – but eventually everything rests with the Lord. It is like the lawyer, who says, 'I have said all I have to say. The rest is in the hands of the judge.'

"Brahman is inactive. When, however, He creates, preserves and dissolves, or performs any activity, He is

called Adyashakti (Primeval Power). We have to please this Adyashakti. Don't you know what the Chandi says? The gods sang a hymn in praise of Adyashakti, for it is only when She is pleased that Hari will wake up from His slumber of yoga."

Ishan — Yes, sir. Brahma and other gods sang this hymn of praise at the time of the slaying of Madhu and Kaitabha (the two demons).

Song –

Mother, You are the mystic words 'Svaha' and 'Vashat[1]' uttered while performing *homa*[2] and *yajna*. You are Svadha[3], the mystic word, uttered during observance of *shraddha*[4].

You are the inmost Self of the mantra. You are the nectar of immortality. O Everlasting One, You are the three lengths of time for pronouncing a vowel sound.

And You are eternal and unutterable. You are especially manifest in the half matra (consonant).

O Goddess, You are Savitri[5], the Primeval Mother. You created the universe, and it is supported by You. You are sustaining it, and ultimately You will devour it.

You, the embodiment of the universe, are the creator while creating it, the preserver in sustaining it, and at the end, You are the destroyer during its dissolution.

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[1] Svaha and Vashat are mystic syllables uttered while offering oblations to gods

[2] Sacrificial fire

[3] Svadha is a mystic syllable uttered while offering oblations to ancestors

[4] A religious ceremony in which meals are offered to the deceased ancestors

[5] The presiding deity of Om

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna and *karmakanda*[1] – *karmakanda* is hard, so the path of Bhakti Yoga is more suitable

The devotees are seated all around Sri Ramakrishna in front of the Kali Temple. Speechless with wonder, they have been listening to the words issuing from the holy lips of Thakur.

Now Thakur rises. He comes to the platform in front of the temple and offers obeisance by prostrating himself to the Mother. All devotees immediately come to him and lie on the ground at his feet. They all seek the dust of his feet. When they have made salutations at his feet, Thakur comes down from the platform and, accompanied by M., talks to him as he goes toward his room.

Sri Ramakrishna (singing, to M.) —

Says Ramprasad: Knowing the truth that Kali is the Supreme Brahman, I bowed before both bhakti and salvation and gave up all idea of what is dharma[2] and what is adharma[3].

"Do you know what dharma and adharma are? Dharma means ritualistic religion. For example, giving away in charity, performing *shraddha*[4], feeding the indigent and so on.

"This kind of dharma is known as *karmakanda*. It is an extremely difficult path. It is very difficult to perform *nishkama karma*[5]. So one is asked to pursue the path of bhakti.

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[1] Ritualistic work and rites
[2] Righteousness
[3] Unrighteousness
[4] Respectful offering and well wishing to departed ancestors
[5] Work without the expectation of reward

"Somebody observed *shraddha* in his house. A number of people were partaking of the feast. A butcher was taking a cow to slaughter. The cow was so hard to control that the butcher was completely out of breath. It occurred to him, 'Why not eat with these people partaking of the shraddha feast? After eating, I can force the cow away.' He did so – but when he slaughtered the cow, the fellow who had arranged that shraddha feast incurred the sin of slaughtering a cow.

"So I say, the path of bhakti is better than *karmakanda*."

Thakur enters his room accompanied by M. He is humming a tune. What he had just been saying about the path of *nivritti* (non-worldliness) is expressed in the tune. Thakur is humming the lines –

At the end, Mother, may I just have a garland of bones and a pot of hemp[1].

Thakur sits on the smaller cot. Adhar, Kishori and other devotees enter and sit on the floor.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — I saw Ishan. There was no marked spiritual progress in him. What do you think? He has performed *purashcharana* for five months. It would have brought a lot of change in any other person.

Adhar — It was not right to have said all those things to him in our presence.

Sri Ramakrishna — What are you saying? He is a man of great japa! How can words affect him?

[1] Hemp and a necklace of bones are characteristics of Shiva, the embodiment of renunciation

After awhile Thakur says to Adhar, "Ishan is a very benevolent person. Besides, he performs so much japa and austerities."

Thakur is silent for awhile. The devotees sitting on the floor look at him intently.

Suddenly Thakur refers to Adhar, "You have both, yoga[1] and *bhoga*[2]."

[1] Communion with God
[2] Desire of sense enjoyments

Section XX

Sri Ramakrishna in Samadhi with Devotees in the Dead of Night of the Kali Puja in Dakshineswar

Chapter I

M., Baburam, Gopal, Haripada, Niranjan's relative, Ramlal and Hazra

It is Saturday, 18 October, 1884, the occasion of the Kali Puja. The worship will start at ten or eleven o'clock at night. A number of devotees intend to see Sri Ramakrishna in this deep dark night of the new moon. They are coming in hurriedly.

M. has come alone about eight in the evening. Reaching the garden, he sees that the great celebrations at the Kali Temple have already started. The glow from the lamps in the Temple light up the shrine beautifully. Every now and then the music of the *roshan chowki*[1] is heard. The employees of the Temple move about quickly from one place to another in the garden. The villagers of Dakshineswar have heard that there will be a celebration tonight at the Kali Temple of Rasmani. Late at night, a musical play will be staged. Many people from the village – old men, women and children – frequently come to the Temple for the darshan of the deity.

The Chandi was recited earlier in the evening by Rajnarayan. Thakur, full of divine joy, heard it with the devotees. Today the Mother of Universe will be worshipped, so Thakur is overwhelmed with joy.

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[1] A symphony of sanai and other instruments

Arriving at eight o'clock, M. finds Thakur seated on the smaller cot with a number of devotees sitting on the floor facing him. They are Baburam, the Younger Gopal, Haripada, Kishori, a young man related to Niranjan and another young man from Ariadaha. Ramlal and Hazra come and go intermittently.

The relative of Niranjan is seated in front of Thakur. He is meditating as Thakur had asked him to do.

M. salutes Thakur and sits down. After awhile, Niranjan's relative salutes Thakur and takes his leave. The other young man from Ariadaha offers his obeisance and rises to leave with him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Niranjan's relative) — When will you come next?

The Devotee — Possibly on Monday, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (lovingly) — Do you need the lamp? Would you like to take it with you?

The Devotee — No, sir. I don't live far from the garden. I don't need it.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the young man from Ariadaha) — Are you also leaving?

The Boy — Sir, I have a slight cold.

Sri Ramakrishna — Then you must cover your head on your way home.

They both salute Thakur again and leave.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees, in the dead of night at the Kali Puja in Dakshineswar – in the joy of devotional songs

It is a deep dark night of the new moon and the worship of the Mother of the Universe is being performed. Sri Ramakrishna is leaning against a pillow on his cot. He is in a pensive mood. He says a word or two to the devotees now and then.

Suddenly he looks at M. and the devotees and says, "Oh, how that young man meditates!" (To Haripada) "I say, what a meditation it was!"

Haripada — Yes, sir. He was just like a log of wood.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Kishori) — Do you know him? He is a cousin of Niranjan.

Again there is complete silence. Haripada is gently stroking Thakur's feet. Thakur had heard the Chandi sung late in the afternoon. It is as though it now comes spontaneously from him. He softly sings –

Is there anybody who knows Kali, She who is the consort of Kala[1]? Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her.

The yogi meditates on Her at the *Muladhara*[2] and *Sahasrara*[3].

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[1] The Spirit of Eternity

[2] Muladhara is the first lotus with four petals and is the root of the Sushumna in the spine. The Kundalini is coiled up at the Muladhara lotus.

[3] Sahasrara is the lotus of a thousand petals which is the goal of the spiritual energy (Shakti) awakened by the yogi at the Muladhara. When the Shakti reaches the Sahasrara and becomes united with Shiva or Brahman, the result is samadhi, Brahmajnana.

A goose and a gander go about in this wilderness of lotuses and associate with each other. They are Kala and His consort.

My Divine Mother is the most beloved of Shiva (the Absolute), even as Sita is the most beloved of Rama.

She appears in Her majesty in each *ghat* (finite being) as an individual, just as She pleases. She is *Ichhamai*[1].

It is the Mahakala (Spirit of Eternity, Absolute) that knows the greatness of my Divine Mother – greatness, which is hidden from the view of ordinary beings. Who else can know to such an extent?

My Divine Mother gives birth to the Universe – now think of Her greatness!

Says Prasad (the psalmist): 'To think that one can know Her is to think that one can swim across the mighty ocean. People only laugh at the idea.'

I understand this well enough with my mind, but alas, my *prana* (heart) will not see this. It is a dwarf aspiring to get to the moon.

Thakur sits up. It is the day of the worship of the Mother, so he is going to recite Her name. Next he sings with great enthusiasm –

Song –

All this is the sport of my mad Mother (whose maya has deluded the three worlds). All this is the infallible secret play of that lady.

She Herself is mad, mad is Her husband, and so are both of Her disciples.

One cannot see in what form She is, what attributes are Her's, how She conducts Herself, or what Her *bhava* (mood) is.

[1] She has Her own way in everything

With burning poison in his throat Shiva chants Her name.

She starts a controversy between God Personal and God Impersonal.

She breaks one clod of earth with another.

This lady is happy with everything except work which angers Her.

Says Prasad, 'Float the raft patiently on the sea of life.

It will drift up with the tide and drift down when it ebbs.'

Thakur is intoxicated with divine love as he sings the songs. He says, "All these songs indicate the state of divine inebriation." He then sings –

1. O Kali! I am going to devour You this time…

2. Therefore, I ask You, O Kali...

3. O ever blissful Kali, the enchantress of the heart of almighty Mahakala.

You dance alone. And You sing alone, clapping Your hands.

O Mother, You are the first Cause, the Eternal One, in the form of the Void and wearing the moon on Your forehead.

When the universe did not exist, where did You find Your string of severed human heads?

You alone are the Mover in everybody; we are but instruments in Your hands.

We move as You make us move; we speak as You make us speak.

But the restless Kamalakanta gently chides You, saying,

'Mother, the Destroyer of all, holding Your sword, now You have devoured both my virtue and vice!'

4. If I die uttering, 'Victory to Kali, victory to Kali!'

I shall assuredly attain Shivahood. Then what is the use of going to Benares?

Infinite are my Mother Kali's forms. Who can find the end of Kali?

Knowing a little of Her greatness, Shiva lies prostrate at Her red-hued feet.

As the song ends the two sons of Rajnarayan come and salute Thakur. Rajnarayan had chanted the Chandi in the evening in the natmandir. His two sons had chanted with him. Thakur sings the song again with the boys.

All this is the sport of my mad Mother.

The younger boy says to Thakur, "Can't we have that song again, 'O Lord, so full of compassion...' "

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers…" Saying so, he sings the song.

Song –

O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers are so full of compassion[1]…

The song ends. Ramlal enters the room. Thakur says to him, "Sing a little. It is the day of the worship of Kali." Ramlal sings –

Who is this Woman who lights the battlefield?

Her body is like a dark storm cloud. And Her teeth flash like lightening.

Her hair is disheveled and She runs about fearlessly among the gods and the demons.

She destroys the demons with terrible laughter on Her face. Thus She flashes like lightening in battle.

[1] For complete song refer Section XII, Chapter III

The drops of diligence falling on Her body of red lotuses look beautiful!

Beholding Her Sea of Beauty, the moon has shed its lustre.

Is it impossible that Shiva, who enthralls the Universe, is lying at Her feet as though dead?

Kamalakanta wonders who this Woman with the gait of an elephant can be.

2) Who is this Woman in the midst of the battlefield, dark as the sky at midnight?

She who is floating like a blue lotus on the red sea of blood…

3) The bee of my mind drinks deep at the blue lotus-like feet of Mother Shyama[1] …

The music and the dance end. The devotees again sit on the floor and Thakur sits on the smaller cot.

He says to M., "You were not here. How nice the Chandi was!"

Chapter III

In samadhi, on the occasion of Kali Puja – voice from above concerning intimate disciples

Some of the devotees go into the Kali Temple for darshan of the deity. Others, having paid their homage, sit alone on the ghat steps on the bank of the Ganges and silently recite the Name. It is about eleven o'clock deep in the night. The Bhagirathi (Ganges) flows toward the north in flood tide. One has glimpses of the dark-coloured water under the light of the lamps on the bank.

[1] For complete song refer Section II, Chapter VII of this volume

Ramlal comes to the Mother's shrine with a book titled *Rituals of Worship* to place in the shrine. Seeing Mani looking eagerly at the Mother, he says, "Would you like to come in?" Mani enters the shrine gratefully. He sees the Mother beautifully decorated. The shrine is well lit. There are two lamps in front of Her and chandeliers hang from the ceiling. The offerings of worship fill the floor of the shrine. At Mother's feet are hibiscus flowers and vilwa leaves. The priest in charge of clothing Her has decorated the Mother with various garlands. Mani sees a *chamara* (yak tail fly whisker) hanging in front of him. It suddenly comes to his mind how Sri Ramakrishna fans the Goddess with the same *chamara*. Hesitatingly he asks Ramlal whether he can use the *chamara* for awhile. Ramlal permits him to fan the Mother with it. The worship has not yet started.

All those devotees who had gone out return to Sri Ramakrishna's room and assemble there.

Beni Pal has sent an invitation for Thakur to visit the Sinthi Brahmo Samaj the next day. He had, however, made a mistake in the letter concerning the date.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Beni Pal has sent an invitation. But I would like to know why he has given this date?

M. — Sir, there is a mistake. The letter has not been written carefully.

Thakur is now standing in the room with Baburam beside him. He is talking about Beni Pal's letter. He touches Baburam and at once passes into samadhi.

The devotees stand all around Sri Ramakrishna. They gaze in speechless wonder at this great saint in samadhi. His left leg is extended and his neck is bent a little forward. He has placed his hand at the nape of Baburam's neck, near the ear.

After some time he comes out of samadhi. He stands with his hand on his cheek, appearing worried.

Smiling a little, he addresses the devotees –

Sri Ramakrishna — I have seen how far you all have advanced. I have seen Rakhal, him (Mani), Surendra, Baburam, and many others.

Hazra — Me?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes.

Hazra — Is there still much bondage?

Sri Ramakrishna — No.

Hazra — Did you see Narendra?

Sri Ramakrishna — No, I didn't see him. But I can say this, that he is a bit entangled. But I saw that everybody will succeed.

(Casting his glance at Mani) "I saw that all were hiding themselves."

The devotees are speechless and listen to the wonderful words of Thakur, as though a voice from above.

Sri Ramakrishna — But I passed into that mood when I touched him (Baburam).

Hazra — Who comes first?

Sri Ramakrishna doesn't reply. After awhile, he says, "All are not like Nityagopal."

Thakur is still thoughtful. He stands in the same mood.

He adds, "I wish Adhar Sen had less work. But then I am afraid his British boss might scold him. He might say, 'What is all this nonsense?' " (All smile a little.)

Thakur returns to his seat. The devotees are sitting on the floor. Baburam and Kishori gently stroke Thakur's feet.

Sri Ramakrishna (looking at Kishori) — Why so much service today!

Ramlal enters and prostrates himself to salute Thakur. He takes the dust of his feet in a deep devotional mood. He is going to offer worship to the Mother.

Ramlal (to Thakur) — May I go now?

Sri Ramakrishna — Om Kali, Om Kali. Offer the puja very carefully. Then you have to sacrifice a ram.

It is a deep dark night. The puja has begun. Sri Ramakrishna comes to watch the worship. He witnesses the puja, standing near the image of Mother Kali. Now the sacrifice. People stand in rows. The sacrificial ram has been consecrated before the Deity. Now the animal is being taken away for slaughter.

Sri Ramakrishna leaves the shrine and returns to his room. He is not in a frame of mind to see the animal slaughtered.

Some devotees stayed in the Mother's shrine till two o'clock. Haripada comes to the Kali Temple and says, "Let's go. They are asking for us. The food is ready." The devotees take the prasad of the Goddess and sit down wherever they can find a place.

It is morning. The *mangalarati*[1] of the Mother has been performed. In front of the Mother is the natmandir. A musical play is being staged there. The Mother is watching it. Sri Ramakrishna arrives from the bigger brick courtyard of the Kali Temple to see the play. He is accompanied by Mani. Mani is about to leave.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why are you leaving now?

Mani — You are going to Sinthi this evening. I also plan to be there, but I am going home first.

While talking they reach the Mother's shrine. The natmandir is not far away. A theatrical performance is going on there. Mani prostrates and takes the dust of Thakur's feet.

Thakur says, "Well, you may leave now. Just bring two pieces of simple cloth for me to use with my bath."

[1] Waving of lights before the deity at dawn

Section XXI

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees in the House of a Marwari Devotee

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at the Burrabazar house of a Marwari devotee

Today Sri Ramakrishna has made an auspicious visit to 12 Mallick Street in Burrabazar. The Marwari devotees are celebrating the Annakuta[1] festival to which he has been invited. A couple of days earlier he had enjoyed the Shyama Puja (Diwali) in Dakshineswar with the devotees. The next day, again accompanied by devotees, he had gone to the Brahmo Samaj festival in Sinthi. Today is Monday, 20 October, 1884, the second lunar day of the bright fortnight in the month of Kartik. In Burrabazar they are still enjoying Diwali (the festival of lights).

At about three o'clock M. goes to Burrabazar with the Younger Gopal. He is carrying in one hand the two pieces of cloth Thakur had asked him to purchase. They are wrapped in a piece of paper. As they reach Mallick Street, they see a big crowd. Bullock carts and horse drawn carriages have jammed the street. Coming to house number 12, he notices Thakur sitting in a carriage. It cannot move because of the traffic jam. Baburam and Ram Chatterji are also in the carriage. Thakur smiles when he sees M. and Gopal.

Sri Ramakrishna gets down from the carriage with Baburam. M. leads the way. Reaching the house

[1] Annakuta means a stupendous heap of cereals. In this festivity a large quantity of food is offered to the Deity and distributed among indigents.

of the Marwaris, they see a number of cloth bales lying in the courtyard. Every now and then goods are loaded into the bullock carts. Accompanied by the devotees, Thakur goes upstairs. The Marwaris take him to a room on the third level which contains an image of Mother Kali. Thakur offers It his salutations and takes his seat. He now talks to the devotees with a smile on his face.

A Marwari begins to gently stroke his feet. Thakur says, "No, no. No need for that." Then reflecting for a few minutes, he says, "Well, you may do so for awhile." All his words are full of compassion.

Thakur says to M., "What about your school?"

M. — Sir, it's a holiday.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — And tomorrow we have recitation of the Chandi at Adhar's house.

The Marwari devotee, the master of the house, sends a pundit (priest) to meet Thakur. The pundit salutes him and sits down. Thakur discusses many spiritual subjects with him.

Sri Ramakrishna's desire – the desire for bhakti[1] – meaning of bhava, bhakti and *prema*[2]

The topic of the conversation is now the avatar.

Sri Ramakrishna — The avatar incarnates for the devotees and not for the jnani.

The Pundit —

Paritranaya sadhunam vinashaya cha dushkritam.

Dharma sansthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge.

(Gita 4:8)

[1] Devotion and love for God
[2] Ecstatic love

[I am born age after age for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of dharma.]

"The avatar comes, first, for the joy of the devotees, and second, to subjugate the wicked. But the jnani is free from all desires."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — But I am not free from all desires. I have the desire for bhakti.

> The pundit's son comes in at this moment, takes the dust of Thakur's feet, and sits down.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well! What is your understanding of bhava[1] and what is bhakti?

The Pundit — Meditation on the Lord makes the mind tender. This is called divine fervour. It is like ice melting when the sun rises.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, what is *prema*?

> The pundit speaks in Hindi. Thakur answers him in very sweet Hindi. In reply to Thakur's question, the pundit explains the meaning of *prema* in his own way.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the pundit) — No, prema doesn't mean that. Prema means loving God in such a way that one forgets the world. To such an extent that one even forgets the body which is so dear. Chaitanya Deva had prema.

The Pundit — Yes, sir. It is the state in which one acts like a mad man.

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[1] Divine fervour

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, some people develop bhakti, but others don't. Why is this?

The Pundit — The Lord is impartial. He is the *Kalpataru*[1]. He gives whatever one asks. Even so, one has to approach the *Kalpataru* to ask.

Since the pundit is speaking in Hindi, Thakur turns to M. and translates into Bengali.

The secret of samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna — Well tell me, how does one go into samadhi?

The Pundit — There are two kinds of samadhi: Savikalpa[2] and Nirvikalpa. In Nirvikalpa samadhi the mind ceases to think.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes. The mind takes the form of the Reality. There is no distinction between the meditator and the object of meditation. And then there are two kinds of samadhi: *Chetana*[3] and *Jada* samadhi[4]. Narada and Shukadeva attained *Chetana* samadhi. What do you think?

The Pundit — That is so.

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[1] The wish-fulfilling tree of heaven

[2] In *Savikalpa* samadhi the aspirant retains the distinction between self and God

[3] In *Chetana* samadhi the aspirant retains consciousness of his I-ness as he communes with God

[4] In *Jada* samadhi the aspirant appears like an inert object as he communes with God

Sri Ramakrishna — And then there are *Unmana* samadhi[1] and *Sthita* samadhi[2]. What about them?

The Pundit keeps silent. He says nothing.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, is it possible to gain occult powers by performing *japa* and austerities? For example, walking over the Ganges on foot?

The Pundit — It is indeed possible to attain occult powers, but the devotee doesn't want them.

After some more conversation, the pundit says, "I shall come to Dakshineswar for your darshan on the ekadashi day[3]."

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah, you have a very good son.

The Pundit — Maharaj, a wave passes out over the surface of a river and another follows it. All is transitory.

Sri Ramakrishna — There is substance in you.

After some time the pundit salutes Sri Ramakrishna and says, "I have to perform worship. May I leave now?"

Sri Ramakrishna — No, no. Stay.

The pundit sits down again.

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[1] In *Unmana* samadhi the functioning of the mind does not totally cease as the aspirant communes with God

[2] In *Sthita* samadhi the aspirant gets fully established in the Self

[3] Eleventh day of the lunar fortnight

Sri Ramakrishna raises the topic of Hatha Yoga. The pundit continues to speak in Hindi. Thakur says, "Though it is a kind of austerity, a sadhu practicing Hatha Yoga identifies himself with the body. He has no other thought than of the body."

The pundit again asks for permission to leave. He is to perform worship.

Thakur now talks to the pundit's son.

Sri Ramakrishna — After some study of *Nyaya*, the *Vedanta* and other systems of philosophy, one understands the *Srimad Bhagavata* better. What do you think?

The Son — True, sir. It is essential to study the Samkhya philosophy[1].

And thus the talk continues off and on for awhile.

Thakur lies down, leaning a bit on a pillow. The pundit's son and some devotees sit on the floor. While reclining, Thakur hums the following song –

Fasten thyself to Hari, O Brother. You will sooner or later succeed.

Adverse circumstances will change.

It redeemed Anka, and it redeemed Banka. It has redeemed Srijana, the butcher.

It has redeemed Ganika by teaching Shuka, and it has redeemed Meera.

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[1] One of the six systems of orthodox Hindu philosophy founded by Kapila. Samkhya postulates two ultimate realities, Purusha and Prakriti. Declaring that the cause of suffering is man's identification of Purusha with Prakriti and its products, Samkhya teaches that liberation and true knowledge are attained in the supreme consciousness, where such identification ceases and Purusha is realized as existing independently in its transcendental nature.

Chapter II

Is there no avatar now?

The master of the house comes and salutes Sri Ramakrishna. He is a Marwari devotee. He is very devoted to Thakur. The pundit's son is still there. Thakur asks, "Is the Panini grammar studied in this part of the country?"

M. — Yes, Panini!

Sri Ramakrishna — Are *Nyaya*, the *Vedanta* and the rest also studied?

The host doesn't answer Sri Ramakrishna, but asks him a question instead.

The Host — Maharaj, what is the way?

Sri Ramakrishna — Chanting His name and glories, associating with sadhus, and praying to Him with a longing heart.

The Host — Sir, bless us that worldliness may be substantially reduced in our minds.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — How much do you have? Eight annas (fifty percent)? (Laughter.)

The Host — Only you are aware of it, sir. Without the blessings of a *mahatma* (elevated soul), nothing can be achieved.

Sri Ramakrishna — If you please God, everyone else is pleased. It is He who dwells in a *mahatma's* heart.

The Host — When God is attained, nothing else remains to be attained. When He is attained, all worldly work falls off. When one finds a rupee, one doesn't care to run after a pice[1].

Sri Ramakrishna — Some *sadhana* (spiritual practice) is essential. When you perform sadhana, you gradually feel joy in it. If there is a pot of treasure buried very deep in the ground and one wants to possess it, one has to work hard to dig it out. One perspires, but if the spade touches the pot while digging, one hears its metallic sound and feels joy. The louder it sounds, the more joy. Go on calling upon Rama and meditate on Him. Rama will arrange everything for you.

The Host — Maharaj, you, yourself, are Rama.

Sri Ramakrishna — What are you saying? The wave belongs to the river. The river does not belong to the wave.

The Host — Rama resides within *mahatmas*. Rama is not visible in any other form. These days there are no avatars.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — How do you know there is no avatar at the present time?

The host is silent.

Sri Ramakrishna — Not everyone can recognize an avatar. When Narada went to see Rama, Rama stood up and prostrated before him, lying on the ground, saying, 'We are worldly people. If sadhus like you don't visit us, how can we be sanctified?' And when he went to the

[1] Hundred pice equal one Rupee

forest to redeem the pledge [of his father], he saw that a number of rishis had given up eating when they heard of Rama's exile. Many of them didn't know that Rama was himself the Supreme Brahman.

The Host — You, indeed, are that very Rama.

Sri Ramakrishna — For God's sake, you must not say such things!

> Saying so, Thakur salutes him with folded hands and says, "That Rama dwells in all beings; that Rama exists everywhere in the world. I am your servant. That Rama Himself has become all human beings, birds and beasts."

The Host — Maharaj, we don't know this ...

Sri Ramakrishna — You are Rama whether you know it or not!

The Host — You are beyond attachment and hatred.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why? I paid an advance of three annas to a coachman who was to take me to Calcutta. But he never turned up. I became very angry with him. He was a bad man, indeed. How he made me suffer!

Chapter III

The worship of the Wearer of the peacock crown (Lord Krishna) at the Annakuta festival in Burrabazar

> Sri Ramakrishna is resting for awhile. In the meantime, the Marwari devotees on the roof start singing devotional songs for the festival of the Wearer of the peacock crown (Lord Krishna). A food offering

has been arranged. Some devotees come to escort Sri Ramakrishna to have the darshan of the Deity. Seeing the image of Sri Krishna, Thakur salutes the Deity and takes some offered flowers to touch his head.

Thakur passes into ecstasy as he sees the Deity. Folding his hands, he says, "O Govinda, You are my vital breath, my very life! Victory to Govinda, to Govinda! Vasudeva, the embodiment of Sachchidananda! O Krishna, my Krishna. Jnana is Krishna, mind is Krishna, prana (vital breadth) is Krishna, atman (soul) is Krishna, body is Krishna, caste is Krishna, family is Krishna! O Govinda, You are my vital breath, my very life."

Uttering these words, Thakur goes into samadhi where he stands. Ram Chatterji holds him as long as he is in samadhi.

After quite some time, the samadhi ends. In the meantime, Marwari devotees have entered the room to carry the image of Sri Krishna outside. It is installed on a throne. A holy feast has been arranged outside for the occasion.

Thakur comes down from his samadhi. The Marwari devotees joyfully take the image of Sri Krishna, installed on a throne, out of the room.

Food is offered to the Deity while the Marwari devotees put up a curtain. After the offering of food, arati is performed and music starts. Sri Ramakrishna fans the image with a *chamara*.

Now the brahmins are fed. All this takes place on the roof in the presence of Thakur. The Marwaris earnestly request him to eat. Thakur sits down to eat and the devotees also partake of the prasad.

On the main road of Burrabazar – passing through Diwali scenes

Thakur takes his leave. It is already dusk. The road is very crowded. Thakur says, "Let's get out of the carriage. It can go by a back street." He has only gone a little distance when he sees a betel-leaf seller huddled inside his small shop in front of a house. To enter it one has to bend one's head. Thakur says, "How troublesome it is to be shut in such a tiny space! Strange is the nature of householders! And they are full of joy in such a life!"

After making a detour, the carriage reaches the party. Thakur again gets into it with Baburam, M. and Ram Chatterji. The Younger Gopal sits on the roof of the carriage.

A beggar woman with a boy in her arms approaches the carriage and asks for alms. Thakur notices her and says to M., "Do you have any money with you?" Gopal gives her a pice.

The carriage rolls through Burrabazar. There is a lot of hustle and bustle because of Diwali (the festival of lights). It is a dark night, but the whole bazaar is illuminated with lights. Passing through the lane of Burrabazar, the carriage reaches the Chitpur Road. This street is also well lit and terribly crowded with men lined up like ants. The crowd eagerly watches the shops so beautifully decorated on both sides of the road. Some of them are sweetmeat shops where various kinds of sweets are artistically arranged on metal plates. Other shops sell scents and roses decorated in various ways with pictures. Well-dressed shopkeepers sprinkle rose water on those who pass by with sprinklers. The carriage reaches a scent shop. At the sight of the pictures and illumination, Thakur expresses his joy like a five-year-old child. There are crowds all around. Sri Ramakrishna calls out, "Please try to go farther." He laughs as he says it. Laughing loudly, he says to

Baburam, "I say, try to move forward! What's the matter with you?"

'Go forward' – Sri Ramakrishna cannot hoard under any circumstance

The devotees are amused. They understand that Thakur is saying, "Go forward toward the Lord. Don't be satisfied with where you are." It is as the brahmachari who said to the woodcutter, "Go forward." When the woodcutter went farther, he saw a forest of sandalwood trees. After a few days, going still farther, he came across a mine of silver. Next he went ahead and found a gold mine. Ending at last with pearls and jewels! So Thakur exhorts again and again, "Proceed! Go forward!" The carriage rolls on. Thakur has noticed that M. has brought some pieces of cloth for him. Two short unbleached ones and two washed ones. But Thakur had only asked him to buy the short cloths. Thakur says, "Leave me the short cloths. Keep the others yourself. You may give me one."

M. — Right, sir. I shall take one of them back.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, take both of them for the time being.

M. — As you please.

Sri Ramakrishna — You can bring the cloths when I need them. You see, yesterday Beni Pal brought some food to take back in the carriage for Ramlal. I told him not to give me anything to carry. I cannot hoard.

M. — Yes sir, it doesn't matter. I shall take both the bleached ones back.

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately) — If any desire arises in my mind, it is indeed for the good of you all. You are my own. I shall ask for it when I need it.

M. (humbly) — It will be as you wish.

The carriage now reaches the shop where *chillum*[1] is sold. Sri Ramakrishna says to Ram Chatterji, "Ram, please buy a pice worth of *chillum*."

Sri Ramakrishna now talks about a devotee.

Sri Ramakrishna — I told him that I was going to Burrabazar the next day and I would like to meet him there. Do you know what he said? 'The tram ticket will cost four pice. How can I come?' Yesterday I went to Beni Pal's garden. He acted like a preacher, though nobody had asked him to lecture. He began to sing so that people would know that he was one of the Brahmos. (To M.) Tell me, what do you think of that? He said that he would have to spend an anna[2] to come to Burrabazar!

Now the topic of the conversation turns again to the *Annakuta* festivity arranged by the Marwari devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — What I saw here is exactly like it is in Vrindavan. Rakhal and others are seeing all this there. The Annakuta (mound of cereals) there is much higher; there is also a greater crowd; and there is the Govardhan Mount. There are such differences.

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[1] Bowl of hookah which holds tobacco and cinder

[2] Sixteen annas constitute one Rupee

Hindu Ideal – the Sanatana Dharma[1]

"The upcountry people of India have such great devotion to God! Have you noticed? They possess the real bhava (spirit) of the Hindus. Indeed theirs is the Sanatana Dharma (eternal religion). Did you notice the immense joy with which they carried the divine image? It was joy at the thought of carrying the throne of Bhagavan on their shoulders.

"The Hindu ideal indeed is Sanatana Dharma. All the religions that you see now have come about by God's will. And by His will they will disappear, they will not last. So I say, 'Salutations at the feet of even the devotees of today.' The Hindu ideal has ever been and will last forever."

M. has to return home. He takes the dust of Thakur's feet and gets down from the carriage near Sobhabazar. Thakur proceeds joyfully in the carriage.

[1] Eternal Religion

Section XXII

Sri Ramakrishna at Panchavati in Dakshineswar with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar and reading from *Devi Choudhurani*

Saturday, 27 December, 1884, seventh day of the bright fortnight in the month of Paush. The devotees are on Christmas holidays, so a number of them have come to see Sri Ramakrishna. Many of them came in the morning. When M. and Prasanna arrive, they see that Sri Ramakrishna is in the southern courtyard near his room. They salute him by touching his feet.

This is Sarada[1] Prasanna's first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna says to M. "Why haven't you brought Bankim with you?"

Bankim is a schoolboy whom Thakur had met in Baghbazar. Noticing him from a distance, he had said, "He is a fine boy."

A number of devotees have arrived, among them Kedar, Ram, Nityagopal, Tarak and Suresh (Mitra). Other young devotees are also present.

After some time, Thakur goes to the Panchavati with them. The devotees surround him, some standing, others seated. Thakur is sitting on the brick platform at the foot of the Panchavati with his face toward the southwest. Smiling, he asks M., "Have you brought the book?"

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[1] Later Swami Trigunatitananda

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Read a portion of it. I would like to hear it.

Sri Ramakrishna and duties of a king

The devotees are eager to see the book. It is *Devi Choudhurani*. Thakur has heard that Devi Choudhurani contains accounts of *nishkama karma*[1]. He has also heard of Bankim, its writer. He will be able to gauge the author's state of mind by hearing what he has said in the book. M. says, "A girl had fallen into the hands of dacoits. Her maiden name was Prafulla; later she became ~~known as~~ Devi Choudhurani. The dacoit into whose hands she fell was called Bhavani Pathak. He was a good man at heart. He made Prafulla practice sadhana[2] and bhajan[3]. He also taught her how to perform *nishkama karma*. This dacoit used to rob the wicked and distribute the money to the poor in charity. He said to Prafulla, "I conquer the wicked and protect the good."

Sri Ramakrishna — This is the duty of a king.

M. — At another place the book talks of bhakti. Bhavani Pathak sent a girl named Nishi to live with Prafulla. She had great love for God. She used to say that Sri Krishna was her husband. Prafulla was already married, though she lived alone with her mother; her father had died. Prafulla's neighbours had accused her falsely and ostracized her, so Prafulla's father-in-law would not take her to his house. Instead, he made his son marry again. But Prafulla was very fond of her

[1] Work done without expectation of reward
[2] Spiritual practices
[3] Devotional singing

husband. On hearing the following account, you will be able to follow the story –

Nishi — I am the daughter of Bhavani Pathak. He is my father. He has dedicated me in a way.

Prafulla — In what way?

Nishi — Completely to Sri Krishna.

Prafulla — How do you mean?

Nishi — My beauty, youth and soul are all His.

Prafulla — Is he your husband?

Nishi — Why not? He is my husband who has full right to me.

Prafulla heaved a sigh and said, "I can't tell. You have never seen your husband, that is why you are saying so. Had you seen your real husband, your mind would never have gone to Sri Krishna."

The stupid Brajeswar (Prafulla's husband) didn't know [that his wife loved him so much].

Nishi said, "Any girl can be attracted to Sri Krishna, for He is possessed of infinite beauty, infinite youth, infinite splendour and infinite qualities."

This young lady was Bhavani's disciple, but Prafulla was illiterate. She didn't say anything in reply. The fathers of the Hindu social law knew that the Lord is infinite and that the infinite cannot be placed within the small cage of the heart, though the finite can be. They knew that the infinite Lord of the Universe dwells within the cage of the heart as Sri Krishna. A husband is clearly finite. Thus the first

step to pure love is to take the husband as the Lord Himself. That is why a Hindu woman looks upon her husband as the deity himself. All other societies are inferior to the Hindu society from this point of view.

Prafulla was an ignorant girl. She could not understand any of this. She said, "Friend, I can't understand all these arguments. You haven't yet told me your name."

The friend said, "Bhavani Thakur has given me the name of Nishi (night). I am Nishi, the sister of Deva (day). One day I will take you to meet Deva. But please listen to what I was saying. The Lord alone is the supreme husband. A woman's husband is the deity to her. Sri Krishna is the husband of them all. Why should we have two deities, two gods? If you divide the little bhakti of this small heart into two, what else will remain?"

Prafulla — What do you mean? Is there a limit to a woman's bhakti?

Nishi — There is no limit to a woman's love. But bhakti is one thing, love another.

What comes first, spiritual disciplines or education?

M. — Bhavani made Prafulla practice spiritual disciplines.

"During the first year, Bhavani did not let any man enter Prafulla's house. Nor did he allow her to talk to a man outside. The next year he removed the restriction of speaking to a man, but he still did not let one enter her house. In the third year, when Prafulla's head was shaved, Bhavani Thakur took a few select disciples with him to her house. Prafulla, with her shaven head and eyes cast down, talked with them about the scriptures.

"After this she began her formal education. She studied grammar, *Raghuvamsa*, *Kumar* (*Kumar Sambhava*), *Naishadha* and Shakuntala. She also studied some *Samkhya* philosophy, *Vedanta* and *Nyaya*."

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you know what this means? People like the author of this book believe that jnana is impossible without education. They think that first one should learn how to read and write, that the Lord comes later. In other words, they think that reading and writing are necessary for knowing the Lord. But if you wish to talk to Jadu Mallick, what use is it to know how many houses, how much wealth, how many company shares he has? What is the need of this information? One must somehow enter Jadu Mallick's house and talk to him, whether one flatters his gatekeepers or is pushed aside by them. If you wish to know about his property or riches, you can know it by asking Jadu Mallick directly! Then you will know it very easily. Rama comes first, His splendour, the world, come later. That is why Valmiki repeated the sacred word Mara: Ma means Ishvara, and ra signifies the world, His splendour.

The devotees drink the nectar of Thakur's words, speechless with wonder.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and *nishkama karma* – dedicate result to God and cultivate bhakti

M. — When she had finished her studies and practiced spiritual disciplines for quite some time, Bhavani Thakur went to see Prafulla again. He intended to impart to her the knowledge of *nishkama karma*

(selfless work). He recited the following verse from the Gita –

Tasmad asaktah satatam karyam karma samachara,

Asakto hy acharan karma param apnoti purushah.

(Gita 3:19)

[Therefore, constantly perform your obligatory duty without attachment; for by doing duty without attachment, man verily obtains the Supreme.]

"There are three characteristics of nonattachment:

"(1) Control of the senses, (2) Lack of egotism and (3) Dedication of the fruit of action to Sri Krishna.

"One cannot practice religion without giving up egotism. He recited another verse from the Gita –

Prakriteh kriyamanani gunaih karmani sarvasah,

Ahamkara vimudhatma karta aham iti manyate.

(Gita 3:27)

[The Gunas of Prakriti perform all karma. With the understanding clouded by egoism, a man thinks, 'I am the doer.']

"Then he asked her to surrender all the fruits of action to Lord Krishna. He recited from the Gita –

Yat karoshi yad asnasi yaj juhoshi dadasi yat.

Yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kurushva mad arpanam.

(Gita 9 :27)

[Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give away, whatever austerity you practice, oh son of Kunti, do it as an offering to Me.]

"He talked to Prafulla of the three characteristics of *nishkama karma* (selfless work)."

Sri Ramakrishna — These are nice words from the *Gita*. They cannot be refuted. But note this. The author speaks of offering the fruits of action to Sri Krishna, but not cultivating bhakti for Him.

M. — That has not been emphasized here.

Calculating intelligence does not move one forward – one must take a plunge

"Now they talked of how to make use of wealth. Prafulla said, 'All wealth must be offered to Sri Krishna.' "

Prafulla — When I have made an offering of all my work to Sri Krishna, I offer my riches to him too.

Bhavani — All?

Prafulla — Yes, all.

Bhavani — But it is impossible to remain unattached to work. Attachment creeps in when you have to earn your food. You have two alternatives: you can either live on alms – or you will have to preserve your body with the help of money. Even a person living on alms becomes attached to it. So you must use your money to maintain your body.

M. (smiling to Sri Ramakrishna) — That much is calculating intelligence!

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, this is calculating intelligence – a business-minded intellect! But he who wants the

Lord takes a plunge at once. He doesn't calculate that so much is needed for preserving the body.

M. — Next Bhavani asked her how she would offer her wealth to Sri Krishna. Prafulla replied, 'Sri Krishna dwells in all beings. So I will distribute my wealth amongst them.' Bhavani said, 'Good. Very good.' And then he began to recite more verses from the Gita.

Yo mam pashyati sarvatra sarvam cha mayi pashyati,

Tasya aham na pranashyami sa cha me na pranashyati.

Sarvabhuta sthitam yo mam bhajati ekatvam asthitah,

Sarvatha vartamanah api sa yogi mayi vartate.

Atmaupamyena sarvatra samam pashyati yah Arjuna,

Sukham yadi va dukham sa yogi paramo matah.

(Gita 6:30-321)

[He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me is never lost to Me, nor do I become lost to him.

He who is established in oneness and worships Me abiding in all beings, that yogi lives in Me, whatever his mode of living may be.

That yogi, Oh Arjuna, is regarded as the supreme, who judges pleasure or pain everywhere by the same standard that he applies to himself.]

Sri Ramakrishna — These are marks of the highest class of devotee.

Worldly men and their language – influence of one's natural instincts

M. continues to read.

"A great deal of labour is required for charity to all beings. Some display of dress, sense enjoyments and luxury are necessary. Bhavani, therefore, said, 'Sometimes one needs a bit of shopkeeping.' "

Sri Ramakrishna (displeased) — One needs shopkeeping! Words reveal a man's true nature. If a person worries night and day about worldly affairs and continues to deceive people, his words convey that attitude. He who eats radish, belches radish. Instead of talking of shopkeeping, he could have said it in a much better way, namely, 'One must act as if one is the doer, knowing very well that one is not the doer.' The other day somebody was singing a song that talked of 'profit' and 'loss'. I asked the fellow to stop singing it. What one worries about night and day gushes forth in whatever he says!

Chapter III

The way to God-vision – life of Thakur spoken with his own holy lips

The reading of the book continues. Now the topic is God-realization. Prafulla has now become Devi Choudhurani. It is the seventh day of the bright fortnight of the month of Vaishakha. Devi is seated in a houseboat and talking with Deva. The moon has risen. The boat is anchored on the Ganges. Devi and her two friends are seated on the roof of the boat. They are discussing whether the Lord can be seen. Devi said, "Just as the nose perceives the fragrance of

flowers, similarly the mind perceives the Lord. 'The Lord is visible to the mind.' "

Sri Ramakrishna — Perception by the mind! God is not visible to this mind, but to the purified mind! Then this mind disappears. Even one who has the least trace of attachment to sense objects does not succeed. When the mind is purified, you may call it the pure mind, or the pure Atman.

Telescope of yoga – Sri Ramakrishna on fidelity to husband

M. — The author says later that the mind cannot perceive the Lord easily. Prafulla says, 'To perceive Him you need a telescope. And this telescope is yoga (communion).' Next, as in the *Gita*, she talks of the three kinds of yoga: Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. It is with the telescope of these yogas that one sees the Lord.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is very fine. These are the words of the *Gita*.

M. — At last Devi Choudhurani met her husband. She said to him, 'You are my God. I was trying to learn how to worship another God, but I could not. You have taken the place of all my gods.'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — 'Couldn't learn'! This is called *pativrata dharma* (fidelity of a chaste woman to her husband). This, too, is a path.

The reading of the book is over. Thakur smiles. The devotees wait eagerly for him to say something.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing, to Kedar and other devotees) — From one point of view, *pativrata dharma* is not bad. We worship the Lord in an image. Can't we worship Him in a living person? It is He who is sporting as man.

His earlier story – state of Brahmajnana in Thakur and his seeing the Lord in all creatures

"What states have I passed through! I was filled with the bhava of Hara and Gauri (Shiva and Parvati) for a long time. I also spent many days in the bhava of Radha and Krishna, as well as Sita and Rama. When I was in Radha's bhava I used to repeat, 'Krishna, Krishna.' And when in the state of Sita, I would repeat, 'Rama, Rama.'

"Even so, there was no end to His sport! After going through all these states, I said, 'Mother, there is separation in all these states. Pray grant me the state in which there is no separation.' After that I stayed in the bhava of Indivisible Sachchidananda for quite some time. I removed the pictures of gods from my room.

"I began to see Him in all creatures. My offering of worship dropped. It was only this bel tree to which I used to come to pick a few leaves. One day when I was going to pick a leaf, a little bark of the tree was detached. I saw that the tree was filled with consciousness! I felt sad in my heart. I tried to pick durva grass but couldn't. I had to force myself to pick it.

"I cannot cut a lemon. The other day I did it with great difficulty, uttering 'Victory to Kali!' Just as an animal being slaughtered for sacrifice to the Goddess. One day when I was gathering flowers, She showed me that the flowers on the tree were Virat[1]. I saw that the

[1] Omnipresent God; all-pervading Spirit

worship was over and there were bouquets of flowers on the forehead of Virat! I could not pick any flowers then.

"God sports as a human being. I see man as the veritable Narayana. Just as by rubbing pieces of wood you get fire, similarly one has the vision of the Lord in man when his love for God becomes very intense. If the bait is of good quality, big carp gulps it eagerly.

'When you are intoxicated with ecstatic love, you see God in all beings. The gopis (milkmaids) saw Sri Krishna in all beings – saw everything filled with Sri Krishna. They would say, 'We indeed are Krishna!' This was their state of intoxication with God. Looking at trees, they would say, 'These are hermits practicing austerities, they are meditating on Sri Krishna.' Seeing dry grass they would say, 'Just see, the hair of the earth is standing on end at the touch of Sri Krishna.'

"A chaste and devoted wife looks upon her husband as God. Why not? If you can worship God in an image, why not in a living person?"

Avirbhava[1] in an image – when does one see the Lord in man? The *nityasiddha* (ever-perfect) and the world

"Three things are necessary for God's *avirbhava* in an image: one, the devotion of the priest; two, a beautiful image; and three, the devotion of the master of the house. Vaishnavcharan said, 'At the end of one's life, one's interest becomes centered in God's sport as a human being.'

"Yet it has to be noted that unless you have had God-vision, you cannot see Him in this way (sporting as a man). Do you know what the marks of God's vision are? One acquires the nature of a child. Why does one acquire a child's nature? Because the Lord Himself has

[1] The Divine presence manifesting in the image of the Deity

the nature of a child. So he who has God's vision acquires a child's nature."

Way to God-realization – deep dispassion and realization that He is your own Father

"You must see Him in this way. The question is how to realize God. Deep dispassion is the means. One should be able to say, 'What? You are the Father of the universe! Am I not a part of the world? How dare You not be kind to me, You rascal!'

"One develops the qualities of him whom one worships. If one worships Shiva, one acquires his nature. Say there is someone who is a devotee of Rama, who meditates day and night on Hanuman. He thinks that he has become Hanuman. At the end, his faith becomes firm like the pole star. He begins to feel that he has grown a short tail.

"One who is born into the spiritual heritage of Shiva acquires jnana, the nature of Shiva, and one who is born into the spiritual heritage of Vishnu acquires bhakti, the nature of Vishnu. They who belong to Shiva have the nature of a jnani and they who belong to Vishnu conduct themselves as devotees."

Chaitanya Deva is an incarnation – common man is feeble

M. — But what about Chaitanya Deva? You said that he had both jnana and bhakti.

Sri Ramakrishna (displeased) — It was different with him. He was an incarnation of the Lord. There is a lot of difference between him and ordinary beings. He had such dispassion that when Sarvabhauma poured sugar on his tongue, it did not get wet and was carried away

by the wind. He was always in samadhi! What a great victor of lust! And you compare him with a common man! The lion mates only once in twelve years, though it eats meat. On the other hand, the sparrow eats grain and mates night and day. It is the same with the avatar and the common man. The common man may give up lust, but he probably indulges in intercourse once in awhile. He cannot control himself. (To M.) Why be ashamed? He who attains God looks upon an ordinary being as a worm! 'One cannot succeed spiritually if one has shame, hatred, or fear.' These are all bonds. You know there are 'eight bonds[1].'

"The *nityasiddhas* (ever-perfect ones) have no fear of the world. Worldly life is like a game of chess for them; as in the game, they do not fear what the next move will bring.

"The *nityasiddha* may live a worldly life if he so desires. Some people can wield two swords at the same time. They become such an expert that if a sword strikes against a stone, the latter flies away at its blow."

Yoga is the way to God-vision – marks of a yogi

The Devotee — Sir, in what state of mind does one have the vision of the Lord?

Sri Ramakrishna — One can attain nothing unless one concentrates the mind to a point. The Bhagavata mentions that Shukadeva would walk around looking like a soldier with a bayonet. He would see neither this way nor that – his eyes were glued to his goal, Bhagavan. This is called yoga.

"The chatak bird drinks only rainwater. Let the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Godavari and other rivers be

[1] Hatred, shame, ancestry, pride, fear, secretiveness, caste and grief

full of water. Let the seven seas also be full of water. But it will not take water from any of these. It will only drink the rainwater from the cloud of *swati nakshatra*[1].

"He who has attained such yoga can have the Lord's vision. Till the curtain rises in a theatre, the audience talks of their homes, their offices, their schools and so on. As soon as the curtain rises, all talk stops at once. Then all eyes are fixed on the play. Even if one speaks a word or two after a long time, one talks only about the play.

"The man inebriated by wine talks only of the joy of drunkenness."

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna in Panchavati – avatar cannot be attributed to any guilt

Nityagopal is seated in front of Thakur. He is always absorbed, in a state of bhava, and doesn't utter a word.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Gopal! You are always silent!

Nityagopal (like a child) — I … don't … know.

Sri Ramakrishna — I understand why you don't speak! For fear you might commit a mistake.

"Certainly, indeed. Jaya and Vijaya were the doorkeepers of Narayana. They stopped Sanaka, Sanatana and other rishis from entering Narayana's palace. Because of this offense, they had to take birth thrice in this world.

[1] A particular conjunction of stars

"Sridama was the doorkeeper of Viraja[1] in Goloka[2]. Radha went to the house of Viraja and tried to enter. She wanted to catch Sri Krishna. Sridama stopped her, and Radha cursed him: 'Get away! You will be born as a demon in the mortal world!' Sridama also cursed her. (All smile a little.)

"But you must know that if a boy holds his father's hand, he can fall into a pit. But when the father holds the boy's hand, he need have no fear.

"The story of Sridama is given in the *Brahmavaivarta Purana*."

Kedar Chatterji lives in Dhaka. He is a government official. Formerly he was posted in Calcutta. He is a great devotee of Thakur. He has come across a number of devotees in Dhaka. They come to him occasionally to receive instruction. The devotees don't come to see him empty-handed. They bring a lot of sweetmeats and so forth as offerings.

Sri Ramakrishna's various moods and states for all types of people

Kedar (very humbly) — Can I eat what they bring me?

Sri Ramakrishna — There is no harm if they bring out of bhakti for the Lord. But if there is some motive behind it, it is not good.

Kedar — I have told them that I am free from all cares. I have said, 'He [Sri Ramakrishna] who has bestowed grace on me knows everything.'

[1] A woman companion of Sri Krishna
[2] The Abode of Vishnu

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — That is true. All kinds of people come here. So you find various moods here.

Kedar — What need have I to know so much?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — No, my dear, you must have a little of everything. If a person starts a grocery shop, he must keep a little bit of all kinds of things in his shop: *masur dal* (a kind of lentils), tamarind and so on.

"An expert musician can play a little on all instruments."

Thakur goes out to Jhautala to ease himself. A devotee takes the wash pot and leaves it there.

The devotees stroll around. Some of them walk toward Thakur's room, the others return to the Panchavati. Coming back, Thakur says, "I had to ease myself two or three times. I ate at Mallick's house. He is such a worldly man, my stomach was upset!"

Sri Ramakrishna, the man of samadhi, is reminded of his betel box

Thakur's betel box is still lying on the platform in the Panchavati. There are one or two other articles left as well.

Sri Ramakrishna says to M., "Bring that box and the other articles to my room." Saying so, Sri Ramakrishna goes south toward his room. The devotees follow him. One of them holds the betel box, the other the wash pot and so on.

Thakur rests at midday. Some devotees arrive and sit down. Thakur is leaning against a small pillow on the smaller cot. A devotee asks him –

Can the bhava of the jnani and of the devotee be in the same person? Practice of spiritual disciplines is needed

"Sir, can one know the Lord's attributes through knowledge?"

Thakur says, "Not through ordinary knowledge. You cannot know Him by that. You need to practice spiritual disciplines. And you must adhere to one attitude, for instance that of a servant. The rishis have the *shanta* bhava (of peace and serenity). Do you know the attitude of the jnani? To meditate on one's own real Self. (Laughing to a devotee) What is your attitude?"

The devotee doesn't reply.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — You have both attitudes: you want to meditate on your own real Self – and you certainly have the attitude of the servant toward his master. Am I not right?

The Devotee (smiling, but diffidently) — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — That is why Hazra says I can read the thoughts of people. This only comes about in a very advanced stage. Prahlada had reached that state.

"But practice of any attitude requires one to perform karma.

"A person pricks his hand with a thorn of the plum tree and his hand bleeds profusely. But he says, 'Nothing has happened to me, it hasn't pricked me.' On further enquiry, he says, 'It is all right, I am fine.' What use is merely saying it? One has to develop this attitude by practice."

The devotees listen to the nectarine words of Thakur.

Section XXIII

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar on Dolayatra Day

Chapter I

Dolayatra Day, Sri Ramakrishna and Bhakti Yoga

It is Dolayatra, Holi[1], and the birthday of Mahaprabhu (Sri Chaitanya). Sunday, 1 March, 1885, nineteenth day of Falgun and the full moon day. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot and is in samadhi. The devotees sit on the floor with their eyes fixed on him. Mahimacharan, Ram Dutta, Manomohan, Nabai Chaitanya, Narendra, M. and other devotees are there.

Thakur's samadhi ends, yet he is still full of divine fervour. Thakur says to Mahimacharan, "My dear sir, do tell me about the love of Hari." Mahima recites –

If God is worshipped with devotion, what is the need for asceticism?

If He is not worshipped, what again is the need for asceticism?

If the Lord is worshipped within and without, what is the need of asceticism?

If He is not so realized, asceticism will be of little avail.

Desist, O my child, desist from the practice of further austerities.

Go your way at once to Shiva – the ocean of divine knowledge.

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[1] Festival of colours

> From Him you learn how to love the Lord. Such love has been spoken of by the worshippers of Vishnu[1] – a love that never fails.
>
> A love that, like a dagger, cuts asunder the fetters of the world.

"The *Narada Pancharatra* speaks of it. A voice from heaven said these words to Narada when he wanted to practice austerities."

Ishvarakoti – Shukadeva's samadhi breaks – Hanuman and Prahlada

Sri Ramakrishna — There are the *jivakoti*[2] and the *Ishvarakoti*[3]. The bhakti of the *jivakoti* is ritualistic: It consists of worshipping with a prescribed number of articles, or repeating the name of God so many times, or performing so much *purashcharana*. Ritualistic worship leads one to knowledge of God, when the self merges in the Universal Soul never to return.

"The case is different with the *Ishvarakotis*. For them it is like involution and evolution. Saying, 'Not this, not this,' they get to the roof top and find that the staircase is made of the same material – bricks, lime and brick dust – as the roof itself. So they walk up and down the staircase and sometimes rest on the roof.

"Shukadeva was in samadhi – in nirvikalpa samadhi, jada samadhi. Bhagavan sent Narada to Shukadeva since he was to narrate the Bhagavata to Parikshit. Narada observed that Shukadeva was seated like a stone, absolutely dead to the world of the senses. Narada began to play upon the *vina*[4], singing and

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[1] God the preserver
[2] The ordinary human being
[3] Eternally free and perfect souls, born on earth for the good of mankind
[4] A stringed musical instrument

praising the form of Lord Hari in four verses. The first verse caused the hair of Shukadeva's body to stand on end. The second brought tears to his eyes. Then he saw, realized within himself, the spiritual form of the Lord. After jada samadhi, he again had the vision of the form of the Lord. Shukadeva belonged to the class of *Ishvarakotis.*

"Hanuman realized God without form and God with form and passed his days in meditating on a particular form of the Lord, viz., the form of Rama. This form was made of spirit and bliss everlasting.

"Prahlada sometimes lived in the attitude of Soham (I am That) and at other times in the attitude of a servant of God. How can such a person live without love of God? One should, therefore, cherish the attitude of the servant and master – 'Thou art the Master, I am Thy servant' – to taste the bliss of the Lord. The attitude of the lover is: Thou, oh Lord, art the *rasa*[1] and I the enjoyer of the *rasa*[2].

"There is no harm in keeping the 'ego of devotion,' or the 'ego of knowledge,' or the 'ego of a child.' Shankaracharya retained the 'ego of knowledge' for the purpose of teaching mankind.

"The self or ego of the child is not attached to things of the world. The child is beyond all gunas – he is not subject to any guna. He gets out of temper, but soon there is not a trace of anger left in him. He builds a playhouse now, and forgets all about it the next moment. His fondness for his playmates knows no bounds, but if he loses sight of them for awhile, he

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[1] Bliss, sweet like nectar

[2] "Surely by grasping the flavour (rasa), the individual soul becomes blessed. Who indeed, would breathe, who would remain alive, if this Bliss were not in the ether." Taittiriya Upanishad 2.7

forgets all about his old friends. The child is not subject to any of the three gunas – sattva, rajas and tamas.

"The devotee cherishes the attitude: 'Thou art my Lord, and I Thy devotee.' Such I-ness is the 'ego of devotion.' Why does the devotee retain the 'ego of devotion'? It has a meaning. Since one cannot get rid of one's I-ness, let the rascal remain the 'I of a servant' or the 'I of a devotee.'

"You may reason a thousand times, but the ego cannot be shaken off. The ego is like a water jar and Brahman is the shoreless ocean in which the water jar is merged. There is water inside the water jar as well as outside – all water everywhere. The water jar that you cannot shake off is the self or ego of the devotee. As long as there is the water jar [or ego] there are both I and You; one feels 'Thou art my Bhagavan, I Thy devotee,' 'Thou art the Lord, I am the servant of the Lord.' You may carry your reasoning to the highest point, but the self or ego still remains. But, of course, if there is no water jar, it is a different matter."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna teaches Narendra about sannyasa

Narendra comes in, falls at the feet of Thakur and sits down. Sri Ramakrishna talks with him. During the course of conversation, he comes down from the smaller cot and sits on a mat spread on the floor. The room is by this time filled with devotees and visitors.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — Are you doing well? Is it true that you are a constant visitor at Girish Ghosh's house?

Narendra —Yes, sir. I do go to see him, off and on.

Girish is a new disciple who met Sri Ramakrishna a few months ago. Thakur often speaks of the greatness of his faith, a faith which, he often says, cannot be girt about with both arms; and his longing for the Lord is as intense as his faith. At home he always thinks about Thakur and is, as it were, drunk with divine joy. Narendra often visits him, as do many other devotees, especially Haripada and Devendra. Girish talks to them only about Thakur. He is a man of the world, a householder. On the other hand, Thakur sees that Narendra will forsake worldly life. He will renounce 'lust and greed'. Thakur talks to Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna — Is it really true that you often go to see Girish Ghosh at his house?

Eligibility for sannyasa – dispassion at a young age – class to which Girish belongs – Ravana and demons have yoga and bhoga

"One may wash a cup that contains garlic many times, but the smell of garlic will not leave the cup. The boys who have not touched 'lust and gold' are pure vessels. When a person is rubbed with the garlic of 'lust and gold' for a considerable time, the smell of garlic persists in him.

"They are like mangoes pecked at and defiled by crows. Such a mango cannot be offered to Bhagavan. It is suspect even for personal use. It is as different as new earthen pots and the pots in which milk was once turned into curds. It is not safe to keep pure milk in vessels that once contained curds. The chances are that the milk will turn sour.

"They form a class by themselves. They have both yoga and bhoga[1]. It is like the attitude of Ravana who

[1] Enjoyment of the world

married the charming daughters of the Nagas and the Devas. Nevertheless, he attained Rama in the end.

"The asuras (demons) enjoyed worldly pleasures, but they attained Narayana in the end."

Narendra — Girish Ghosh has given up his old associates.

Sri Ramakrishna — He is a bull castrated in old age. I saw it in Burdwan. When I saw a bullock going toward a cow, I asked, 'What is this? It is a bullock!' The cart driver then said to me, 'Sir, it was castrated in old age. So it still has the old samskaras (inherent tendencies).'

"Some sannyasins were seated at a certain place when a woman chanced to pass by. They continued to meditate on God as before, but one of them looked at her out of the corner of his eye. This man was the father of three boys when he became a sannyasin.

"If you make a solution of garlic in a cup, will it not be hard to remove the garlic smell from the cup? Is it possible to make the babui plant bring forth mangoes? Of course, it is possible for a person who possesses occult powers to do this miracle. But it is not everybody who can attain miraculous powers.

"Does a man of the world, a householder, have enough time to spare for God? A certain man wanted to engage a Bhagavata pundit[1] to explain the Bhagavata to him. His friend said, 'Well, I know a good Bhagavata pundit, but there is one problem with him. He has some lands under cultivation which he has to look after every day. There are four ploughs and eight bullocks always at work. He has to look after them every day and has no time to spare.' The man who wanted the pundit said, 'I am not looking for a Bhagavata Pundit with ploughs

[1] A scholar well-versed in scriptures

and bullocks to look after, who has no time to spare. I am in quest of a learned pundit who can recite and explain the Bhagavata to me.'

"A certain king used to hear a pundit recite the Bhagavata everyday. At the end of the lesson for the day, the pundit would say to the king, 'Sir, do you understand?' The king would only reply, 'It is for you, first of all, to understand its meaning.' Every day when he got home, the pundit would think about what the king had said, if he understood the meaning himself. This fellow used to practice sadhana and bhajan. He felt an awakening of spirit within himself in the course of a few days. Then he saw that the only real thing was the worship of the lotus feet of God, that all else is illusion. Being sick of the world and its pleasures, he gave it up. He sent a message to the king, saying, 'Oh, king, I have indeed understood at last the true meaning (of the Bhagavata).'

"But do not, therefore, think that I look down upon them [men of the world]. Oh, no. I bring the knowledge of Brahman to use: that everything is but a manifestation of God. That all are Narayana. That all female generative organs are those of the Mother. Then I see no difference between a prostitute and an ideal wife who sets an example to others of conjugal love and devotion."

Everybody is customer of *kalai* pulse (lentils), that is influenced by female beauty and wealth

"Alas, I look in vain for customers who want something higher than *kalai* pulse. Everybody runs after 'lust and gold.' They are attracted by female beauty and power of wealth. But even the seat of Brahma (Lord the Creator) appears not worth striving for after the vision of the Lord.

"A certain person said to Ravana, 'You have been going to Sita in so many different disguises, why don't you approach her assuming the form of Rama?' Ravana replied, 'If I once behold Rama in the recess of my heart, Rambha and Tilottama (heavenly damsels) appear to me like ashes of the dead burnt at the crematorium. Then I can spurn even the high position of Brahma, not to speak of the beauty of another man's wife.'

"Verily these customers, every one of them, seek for *kalai* pulse. It is given to pure souls alone to attain pure love for the Lord, to have one aim and to have the mind fixed on the Lord."

The Nepalese lady, handmaiden of the Lord – servitude of worldly man

(To Manomohan[1]) "I must tell you, though you may take offense. I said to Rakhal, 'I would be more pleased to hear that you have plunged yourself into the Ganges and have been drowned than to have heard that you have been anybody's servant for the sake of money or worldly goods!'

"A young Nepalese lady once came here. She played on the *esraj*[2] beautifully and chanted the name of Lord Hari. When someone asked if she had married, she replied, 'Why should I take another master? I am already the handmaiden of Bhagavan.'

"With 'lust and greed' always around you, how is it possible to realize God? It is very hard indeed to live unattached in their midst. In the first place, one is a slave of one's wife. In the second place, one is a slave to money. And in the third place, one is a slave to him whom one serves for the sake of his living.

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[1] A householder disciple. Rakhal has married his sister.
[2] A kind of violin

"A fakir lived in a cottage in a certain forest. It was during the time when Akbar was the emperor of Delhi. Many resorted to this holy man. It occurred to him that he should treat his visitors with hospitality. But he thought, 'How can I do it without money? Let me go to Emperor Akbar. He is known for his kindness to holy men.' When he arrived, Akbar was saying his Namaz and the fakir took his seat in the prayer room. He heard Emperor Akbar saying at the end of the Namaz, 'Oh Allah! Grant me wealth, make me rich! And grant me this and that.' At once the fakir arose and was about to steal out of the room when the Emperor beckoned to him to be seated again. At the end of the Namaz, Akbar asked the fakir, 'You came and sat there. Why did you want to leave?' The fakir said, 'It is not something I should say to you. May I take your leave now?' When the emperor repeatedly pressed him, the fakir said, 'Many people visit my cottage, so I came to ask you for some money.' Akbar asked, 'Why were you leaving then?' The fakir said, 'When I saw that you yourself were a beggar, begging for wealth and riches, I thought to myself, why shall I go begging of a person who is himself a beggar? I had better beg of Allah.' "

His earlier story: Hriday Mukherji's abusive language – Thakur's state of sattva

Narendra — These days Girish Ghosh only thinks about these things.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is very nice. But why does he pollute himself with such abusive language? My present state of mind can't stand such rudeness. When there is a thunderclap, grosser objects are not so affected by it, but glass shutters move to and fro and rattle. My present nature is sattvic; it can't stand noise and clamour. That is why my Divine Mother sent Hriday

away. He had recently grown too rough for me. He would shout abusive language at me.

Does Narendra believe in avatar? Narendra belongs to the class of the renouncers – he has lost his father

"Did you agree with what Girish Ghosh says [as to God being incarnate in man]?"

Narendra — I didn't say anything. He said that he believes in avatars (divine incarnations). I thought it as well not to say anything.

Sri Ramakrishna — How great is his faith! Don't you think so?

The devotees' eyes are fixed on Thakur. He is sitting on a mat spread on the floor. M. is close to him. In front of him is Narendra and the other devotees are seated around them.

Thakur looks lovingly at Narendra without saying a word.

After awhile he says to Narendra, "My child, you cannot attain the end of life without renunciation of 'lust and greed'." Saying this, he becomes filled with divine emotion. He continues to look at Narendra with unspeakable love and sings, intoxicated with bhava –

Afraid am I to speak the word to you; equally afraid am I not to speak it.

The fear that arises in my mind is that I may lose you, yes, be robbed of you, my wealth, my treasure!

Knowing well your mind, we shall teach you the *mantra* (holy name) that is to bring you to the Beloved.

Now ready yourself to receive that *mantra* which enabled us on many occasions to steer the ship safely to land.

Thakur seems to be afraid that Narendra will leave him, that someone might pluck him out of his hand. Narendra is in tears as he looks at Thakur.

A visitor who has come to see Thakur for the first time is seated near him and watches everything.

The (visitor) Devotee — Sir, if 'lust and gold' are to be given up, how should the householder, who has a family to bring up, solve this problem?

Sri Ramakrishna — You are at liberty to live that way [with your wife and children]! What has passed between us does not concern you.

Thakur grants fearlessness and encouragement to the householder devotee

Mahimacharan sits speechless, holding his peace.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahimacharan) — Go on! Go deeper! You will get sandalwood. Go deeper still and you will come upon a silver mine! Yes, deeper still and you shall come upon a gold mine! Move on still further and you shall be placed in the midst of diamonds, rubies and sapphires! Yes, go forward!

Mahimacharan — Sir, something holds us back and keeps us from moving on.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Why? Let the reins be cut asunder by the sword of His holy name! His name is capable of cutting in twain the bonds of Death.

After the death of his father, Narendra has been put to great trouble. He has passed through many trials and great suffering. Thakur looks at him from time to time, and says to him, "Have you already turned out to be a *chikitsaka*[1]?"

A *vaidya* is a physician who has succeeded in killing a hundred patients.

A *chikitsaka* is a physician who has dispatched at least a thousand into eternity. (All laugh.)

What is Thakur referring to? That, at this age, Narendra has experienced a lot in life? That he has had a lot of contact with joy and sorrow?

Narendra smiles and keeps silent.

Chapter III

Dolayatra festival – Thakur offers coloured powder on Radhakanta, Mother Kali and devotees

Nabai Chaitanya is singing, the devotees are all seated. Thakur, who has been sitting on the smaller cot, suddenly rises and goes out of the room. The devotees remain sitting and the music continues.

M. accompanies Thakur toward Kali's shrine through the brick courtyard. At first he enters the Radhakanta temple and pays his obeisance by lying prostrate on the ground. Seeing him do so, M. also pays his obeisance. There is coloured powder in a big tray in front of the deity. Sri Ramakrishna has not forgotten that it is the day of the Dolayatra festival[2]. Taking a little powder from the tray, he applies it on the images of Radha and Shyam, and offers his obeisance once again.

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[1] A physician of many years' standing

[2] Holi; festival of colours

Now he proceeds toward Kali's shrine. He first climbs up the seven steps and stands on the platform. Having had the Mother's darshan, he enters the shrine. He offers some coloured powder to the Mother. After offering his obeisance, he returns from the shrine. Standing on the platform of the shrine, he says to M., "Why haven't you brought Baburam with you?"

Thakur walks back across the brick courtyard. With him are M. and another person carrying the tray of coloured powder. Entering his room, he applies some coloured powder on all the pictures except two – his own photograph and the picture of Jesus. Now he comes to the verandah where he finds Narendra seated at the entrance to the room. He is talking with some devotees. Thakur applies some coloured powder on Narendra's body and enters the room. M. accompanies him. He also receives the holy coloured powder.

Sri Ramakrishna enters and applies coloured powder on the bodies of all the devotees. They all salute him.

It is already afternoon. The devotees stroll around. Thakur talks with M. in a whisper. There is no one near. He talks to him about the boy disciples, "Well, everybody says, 'I am getting on well with my meditation.' How is it that Paltu can't fix his mind on God?"

"What do you think of Narendra? Isn't it true that there is no guile in him? But he has received several blows from the world lately. The light within him is a little hidden under the shadows of the world. But this state of things won't last long."

Thakur now and then steps into the corridor where Narendra is talking with a Vedantist.

Gradually the devotees come back to Thakur's room. Thakur asks Mahimacharan to recite a hymn

of praise to God. He recites from the *Mahanirvana Tantra*, third ullas (chapter), saying –

> In the lotus of my heart do I worship God the Absolute whom Hari (God, the preserver), Hara (God, the destroyer) and ~~Vidhi~~Brahma (God, the creator) all desire to know and upon whom yogis meditate with a view to realization. He is attributeless, undifferentiated, destroyer of the fear of birth and death, of the nature of Existence and Knowledge and the primal seed of the entire universe.

Be not afraid of the household

After reciting one or two more hymns, Mahimacharan recites the hymn to Shankaracharya which describes the world as a deep well and a wilderness. Mahimacharan is a householder devotee –

> O great Lord Shambhu[1], with the moon on your crest, the slayer of Kamadeva[2], with trident in hand, the unmoving Lord of the mountains!
>
> O consort of Uma, the Lord of all creatures! You who destroy the fear of the distressed! O Lord of the universe, protect me from the sea of misery of the world.
>
> O heartthrob of Parvati! You wear the moon on your forehead, Lord of every being! Lord of goblins! O you, the Lord of Parvati!
>
> O Vamadeva, the self existent one! Rudra, who carries a bow in his hand, protect me from the deep forest of worldly misery.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — Why do you say that the world is a well or a deep dense forest? These epithets are all very good for a beginner. Away with all fear when you are fastened to God! Then you may say:

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[1] An appellation of Lord Shiva
[2] The god of love

Verily is this world a mansion of joy.

Let me pass my days eating, drinking and rejoicing.

Janaka, the royal sage, how great was his power! Was there anything in which he was found wanting – spiritual, or temporal?

Ah, no! He was loyal to both matter and spirit and drank his cup of milk at the same time!

"Fear of what? Hold him fast! Never mind that it is 'a deep, dense forest overgrown with weeds and thorns'! Put on a pair of shoes and walk on in the thorny forest. Away with fear! He who touches the Grand Dame (the Divine Mother) in the game of hide and seek is spared from the necessity of taking any further part in this play.

"King Janaka wielded two swords: one of jnana (true knowledge), the other of karma (work). He who is an expert in handling these swords has nothing to fear."

Such conversation on spiritual matters continues. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot. M is seated close to it.

Thakur (to M.) — What he has said has drawn my mind away from lighter matters.

Thakur talks of Mahimacharan and of the verses recited by him on Brahmajnana. Nabai Chaitanya and other devotees sing again. Thakur joins them this time and, surcharged with deep devotional feelings, begins to dance during the kirtan.

At the end of the kirtan, Thakur says, "Chanting of the Lord's name with love is the one thing needed. All the rest is of little value. Prema and bhakti is the reality, all else is unreal."

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna on the day of Holi festival – secret talk

It is already evening. Thakur has gone to the Panchavati. He talks to M. about Binode, a student at M.'s school. At times Binode goes into bhava while meditating on the Lord. That is why Sri Ramakrishna has great love for him.

Now Thakur returns to his room, talking to M. As they approach the Bakultala ghat he says, "Well, some of them talk of me as an avatar. What do you think?"

Talking thus, they reach the room. Taking off his slippers, Thakur sits on the smaller cot. Close to the smaller cot, to the east, is a foot mat. M. sits on it and talks with Thakur. Thakur repeats his question. The other devotees are sitting at some distance. They don't understand what the two are talking about.

Sri Ramakrishna — What do you say about it?

M. — Sir, I too feel the same way. You are just like Chaitanya Deva.

Sri Ramakrishna — Is it full, or a part, or *kala*[1] of it? Give me your 'weight.'

M. — I don't understand 'the weight.' Yet God's power has incarnated itself in you. He surely dwells in you.

Sri Ramakrishna — True. Chaitanya Deva asked for divine power.

[1] One sixteenth of divine energy

Thakur is silent for awhile. Then he says, "But what about the six-armed one[1]?"

M. reflects, "Chaitanya Deva assumed the form of the six-armed one. The devotees saw him like this. Why has Thakur mentioned this subject?"

His earlier story: Thakur becomes surcharged with madness for the Lord – he weeps before the Divine Mother – he doesn't like reasoning and argumentation

The devotees are seated in the room at some distance. Narendra is engaged in a discussion. Ram Dutta has recovered from a recent illness. He is engaged in a hot discussion with Narendra. Thakur watches them talking.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I don't like such discussions. (To Ram) Please stop! You are not perfectly restored to health. Well, go on softly. (To M.) All this is not at all to my liking. I used to cry to the Divine Mother, 'Oh, Mother, one man says, 'It is thus, it is thus,' another man says, 'It is something else.' Reveal to me, Mother, what the truth is!'

[1] Shadbhuja; a form of Lord Vishnu

Section XXIV

Sri Ramakrishna arrives at a Devotee's House in Calcutta – Festivity at Girish Ghosh's House

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram's house with his intimate disciples

Narendra, M., Jogin, Baburam, Ram, Bhavanath, Balaram and Chunilal

24 April, 1885, Friday, the 10th day of the bright fortnight of the month of Vaishakh. Sri Ramakrishna has come to Calcutta today. About one o'clock, M. sees him sleeping in Balaram's drawing room. One or two devotees are also resting close to him.

Sitting beside him, M. gazes at the sleeping childlike figure. He says to himself, "What a wonder! He is such a great saint and even he is lying overcome by sleep like a common man. He, too, has assumed the nature of a human being."

M. gently fans him. After some time, Sri Ramakrishna's sleep breaks. He sits up, his clothes are disheveled. M. prostrates before him and takes the dust of his feet.

First evidence of Sri Ramakrishna's illness – April 1885

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately to M.) — How are you? I don't know, but there is a hard lump in my throat. I felt very uncomfortable early this morning. How can I be cured? (Worried) They made some mango pickle and I ate some of it. (To M.) How is your wife doing? The

other day she was looking rather ill. Give her something cold to drink.

M. — Something like coconut milk, sir?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, water sweetened with sugar candy will do her good.

M. — I moved back to my parents' home on Sunday.

Sri Ramakrishna — Very nice! It will be more convenient at your father's home. Your father and other relatives are there. You won't have to bother so much about the household.

While talking, Thakur's mouth becomes dry. Childlike as he is, he asks M., "I feel dryness in my mouth. Do you all feel the same way?"

M. — Jogin babu, does your mouth feel dry?

Jogindra — No. Perhaps he is feeling hot because of the heat.

Jogindra of Ariadaha is an intimate disciple of Thakur. Later, he renounced the world.

Thakur is sitting in disheveled clothes. Some of the devotees laugh.

Sri Ramakrishna — I am sitting like a mother ready to suckle a baby. (All laugh.) Well, my mouth is dry. Should I eat a pear, or a *jamrul* (a kind of juicy fruit similar to a star apple)?

Baburam — Let me get a *jamrul* for you.

Sri Ramakrishna — You don't need to go out in the hot sun.

M. is fanning him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Please don't fan me anymore. You have been doing it for a long time.

M. — But sir, I am not inconvenienced.

Sri Ramakrishna (tenderly) — Not feeling inconvenienced!

M. is a teacher in a nearby school. Finding a little time after class, he has come to meet Thakur at one o'clock. Now he rises to go back to his school. He takes the dust of Thakur's feet.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Are you going back now?

A Devotee — His school isn't over yet. He has come here during school hours.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — He is like a housewife with seven or eight children. She remains busy night and day with her household chores. But now and then she finds time to come to serve her husband. (All laugh.)

Chapter II

At Balaram's house in the company of intimate disciples

When M.'s school closes at four o'clock, he comes to Balaram Babu's house. He sees Thakur seated in the outer room with a smile on his face. Knowing that Thakur has arrived, the devotees arrive one by one.

The Younger Naren and Ram are there, as is Narendra. M. salutes Thakur and sits down. Because of the lump in his throat, Balaram has sent Thakur soft corn flour pudding on a tray from inside the house.

Sri Ramakrishna (seeing the corn flour pudding, to Narendra) — Oh, this is tasty stuff! A real mouth-watering sweet. Eat, eat it! (All laugh.)

Time has come for Thakur to go to Girish's house. Girish has arranged a festival to celebrate Thakur's visit to his home. Thakur is coming down from Balaram's second level room. He is accompanied by M. and a couple of other devotees. At the entrance porch they see a beggar from western India singing a song. Hearing the name of Rama, Thakur stops. He is facing south. In no time his mind turns inward. He stands there in this bhava for some time. He says to M., "A beautiful tune!" A devotee gives four pice to the beggar.

Thakur enters Bosepara Lane. Laughing, he says to M., "Well, you know what these people say? The rascals say, 'The Paramahamsa's battalion is coming!' " (All laugh.)

Chapter III

Difference between an avatar and a spiritually perfected man – discussion between Mahima and Girish

Thakur enters Girish's parlour with the devotees. Girish has invited many devotees. Most of them are already there. When Thakur arrives, they stand up. He sits down with a smile on his face. The devotees also sit down. Girish, Mahimacharan, Ram, Bhavanath and others are there. A number of devotees have accompanied Thakur, among them

Baburam, Jogin, both the Narendras, Chunilal and Balaram.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahimacharan) — Talking about you to Girish, I said, 'There is a very deep person. You are only knee deep.' Now please prove that I was right. Argue with one another and do not compromise. (All laugh.)

Mahimacharan and Girish begin a discussion. Soon Ram says, "Stop, stop! Let's have kirtan instead."

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram) — No, no. This, too, is important. They are Englishmen! Let me see what they say.

Mahimacharan believes that anybody can become Sri Krishna by practicing sadhana. Girish, on the other hand, believes that Sri Krishna was an avatar and however many spiritual disciplines a man may practice, he can never equal an avatar.

Mahimacharan — Do you know what I mean? It is like a bel tree becoming a mango tree if the obstructions are removed. And they can be removed by the practice of yoga.

Girish — You may say whatever you like but this cannot be done by means of yoga or anything else. Only Krishna can become Krishna. If anyone has all the attributes of another person, then he is none other than that person. If someone has the bhava of Radha, she is none other than Radha. So if I see all the attributes of Sri Krishna in somebody, then I will realize that I am seeing Sri Krishna himself.

Mahimacharan cannot carry on the discussion any longer. At the end he almost agrees with Girish.

Mahimacharan (to Girish) — Yes, both views are true. The path of jnana is by His will and the path of *prema* bhakti, too, is by His will. As he says, one may take different paths, but one reaches the same destination.

Sri Ramakrishna (aside to Mahima) — Why, is he not right that both views are true?

Mahima — Sir, what he says is right. Both views are correct.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you notice how great his [Girish's] faith is? He even forgot to drink water! Had you not agreed to his view, he would have torn your throat like a dog gulps meat. It is nice you had a discussion and have come to know each other. I have also learned a lot from it.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna in the joy of kirtan

The kirtan singer has arrived with his musicians and is seated in the middle of the room. The kirtan begins with a sign from Thakur – he has granted his permission.

Ram (to Sri Ramakrishna) — Please tell us what song you would like to hear.

Sri Ramakrishna — What can I say? (After a short reflection) All right, let it be of love for God[1].

[1] Bhakti

The musician sings of the attraction incited before the first acquaintance with the lover.

O my Gaur, the jewel among twice-born brahmins,

You chant 'Radha, Radha' as you weep and roll on the ground.

Gauranga is chanting Radha's name with such gusto!

Lo! Ganges of tears flow from his red eyes.

He rolls on the ground again and again.

He utters Radha's name and faints repeatedly,

His hair stands on end and his voice cracks.

Says Basu[1], 'Why is Gaur so restless?'

The kirtan continues. Radha's friends describe her state when she sees Sri Krishna for the first time on the bank of the Jamuna.

She comes outside her home a hundred times – now in, now out.

Out of tune with everything and breathing deeply, she looks at the Kadamba grove.

(Why has Radha become like this?)

Has she neither fear of the elders nor of the wicked? Has she attained some god?

She is ever so restless; she cannot even hold her dress, or her headdress.

She sits, then stands up with a start and her jewels fall off.

She is a princess, young in age, and a virtuous wife as well.

What does she crave, what is in her mind? I don't know her ways.

It seems she is trying to reach out to the moon.

[1] Author of the song

Says Chandidas[1], very humbly, 'She has fallen into Krishna's trap.'

The kirtan continues. Radha's *sakhis* (milkmaid friends) say to her –

Song –

Tell us, fair Radha, what is ailing you.

We see you distracted. Why are you tracing on the ground with your toenail?

Your golden countenance has turned pale, your finery has all fallen off.

Both of your eyes are red, your lotus-like face has withered.

O *sakhi*, why so? Our heart will break if you don't tell.

Hearing this, young Radha replies: I wish to gaze upon the face of the son of Jadu (Krishna).

The musician sings again. Hearing the sound of the flute ringing, Srimati (Radha) becomes like one mad. Srimati says to her milkmaid friends –

O friend! Who lives in the Kadamba forest? Whose music do I hear?

How has it penetrated through my ears to the heart?

Entering my heart, it has made me forget my duties. I have gone crazy.

My heart is restless, I can hardly breathe, and tears stream down my face.

I wonder who is playing the music.

Without seeing him, my heart is pierced in two and I cannot stay at home.

My soul is yearning for him, I long for his vision.

[1] Author of the song

Says Uddhava Das, 'You will be relieved only when you behold him.'

The music continues. Radha's soul is yearning for Krishna's sight. Srimati (Radha) says –

I heard a wondrous sound coming out of the Kadamba grove.

The next day, hearing about him from a minstrel, I was thrilled to my heart.

Another day, O my beloved friend, you uttered the sweet name of Krishna, sweetest of all names.

(Ah! Honey sweet, indeed, is the name of Krishna.)

I heard his virtues being chanted by wise men.

I am a weak and simple girl of the family, having, alas, to bear the sternness of elders.

He is such a lover! His love grows and grows. How can I contain myself?

The more I reflect, the more I am convinced that I cannot survive.

Says Uddhava Das, 'May somebody tell you how to meet that lover (Krishna).'

Hearing, "Ah! Honey sweet, indeed, is the name of Krishna," Thakur cannot contain himself. He loses all external consciousness and merges in samadhi. The Younger Naren stands on his right. As he regains a little awareness, he utters, "Krishna, Krishna," in a sweet voice. His eyes are filled with tears. Slowly he returns to his seat.

The musicians sing again. Vishakha runs out to get a picture of Sri Krishna and places it before Radha. It is a picture of the world-bewitching form. Seeing the picture, Radha says, "I have been in this plight since I saw him on the bank of Jamuna. I see the same person in the picture."

The kirtan continues. Radha chants –

He whom I saw on the bank of the Jamuna, I see in this picture.

He whose name Vishakha spoke is written on the picture.

He whose flute sends out its music is surely the jewel among the joyous.

He whose qualities were narrated by the minstrel, full of ecstatic love, has stolen my heart.

But for him none else is mine.

So saying, Radha fell into a swoon. Her friends raise her up.

Restored to her senses, she says, "Show me him whom I just saw."

And the friends assure her. So says Ghanashyam Das.

Thakur stands up again. The devotees join him in singing the kirtan.

1) Behold, the two brothers who shed tears on chanting Hari's name have come.

They who weep and make others weep, they who ask for *prema* (ecstatic love) even after receiving blows,

They who are Kanai and Balai of Braja, they who would steal butter in Braja,

They who are indifferent to caste, they who embrace even the lowest of the lowly,

They who are themselves inebriated and who inebriate others,

They who chant Hari's name though they are none other than Hari Himself,

They who redeemed Jagai and Madhai, they who don't distinguish between a friend and a stranger,

These two brothers, Gaur and Nitai, have come to redeem humanity.

2)Behold, the whole of Nadia is shaking under the waves of the divine love of Gaur!

Thakur again goes into samadhi. Gaining outer consciousness, he sits down again.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I don't remember which way I was facing.

Chapter V

Narendra and Sri Ramakrishna – conversation about Hazra – Narayana in the form of a deceitful person

Sri Ramakrishna resumes the conversation after he comes down from ecstasy.

Narendra (to Sri Ramakrishna) — Hazra has now become a good man.

Sri Ramakrishna — You don't know. There are people who hide a brick under their armpit to strike others and repeat Rama on their lips.

Narendra — No sir, I asked him all about everything. He has denied it.

Sri Ramakrishna — He has single-minded devotion. He performs some japa and austerities. But he is a man who doesn't pay fare to the coachman.

Narendra — No sir, he says he paid...

Sri Ramakrishna — Where did he get the money?

Narendra — Perhaps he got it from Ramlal – or some other person.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you ask him about all these things?

"I prayed to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, if Hazra is a deceitful person, please remove him from here.' And I told Hazra about it. After a few days he came and said to me, 'See, I am still living here.' (Thakur and the others all laugh.) But later he did leave.

"Hazra's mother sent me a message through Ramlal, 'Will Ramlal's uncle [Sri Ramakrishna] please send Hazra back home? I have cried so much that I have gone blind.' I tried to persuade Hazra in various ways. I said, 'Your mother is old. Go and see her once.' But he did not. At last his mother cried herself to death."

Narendra — This time he will go to his village.

Sri Ramakrishna — He will go now, the mean fellow! Go on, you don't understand. Gopal told me that Hazra was in Sinthi for a number of days. They used to provide him with rice, ghee and other provisions. He would say, 'Do I eat such inferior rice and ghee?' He went to Bhatpara with Ishan and asked Ishan to fetch water for his toilet. This annoyed the brahmins.

Narendra — I asked him about that too. He said that Ishan Babu had offered to do it himself. Besides, so many brahmins of Bhatpara honoured him.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — That is the result of his japa and austerities.

"And, you know what? It depends on physical traits. A dwarfish stature and dents here and there on the body are bad signs. Such a person takes a long time to attain jnana."

Bhavanath — Stop this, sir. Let's not continue such talk.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, it is not that. (To Narendra) You say that you can read a man's character. That's why I am telling you about it. What do I think of Hazra and others like him? I believe that just as there is Narayana in the form of holy men, so there is also Narayana in the form of the deceitful person, or Narayana in the form of a rogue. (To Mahima) What do you say? Is everybody Narayana (God)?

Mahimacharan — Yes sir, all are Narayana.

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna and the ecstatic love of the gopis

Girish (to Sri Ramakrishna) — Sir, what is meant by *ekangi* prema?

Sri Ramakrishna — *Ekangi* is one-sided love. For instance, water doesn't care for the swan, but the swan loves water. Besides *ekangi*, there are *sadharani*, *samanjasa* and *samartha* kinds of love. *Sadharani* prema is that in which the lover desires his own happiness irrespective of whether or not it makes the other person happy. This is like the bhava of Chandravali[1].

"As for *samanjasa* love, you want to make your counterpart as well as yourself happy. This is a superior kind of love.

"But the highest love of all is *samartha*. It is like Radha's love. She was happy only if Krishna was happy.

[1] One of the milkmaids in Braja

In this kind of love one feels that the other person must be happy, whether or not oneself is happy.

"This bhava of the gopis is the highest kind of love.

"Do you know who the gopis were? When Ramachandra was roaming in the forest, there were six thousand rishis seated there on whom Ramachandra cast his loving glance. They began to yearn to meet him. In some *Puranas* it is stated that those very rishis became the gopis."

A Devotee — Sir, who is an intimate disciple[1]?

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you know how it is? There are inner pillars and outer pillars in the natmandir. They who remain ever close to their master are the intimate disciples.

Harmony between Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga – Rama and Bharadvaja – Thakur's earlier story: his extraordinary vision – goes beyond God with form – the Holy Mother in Dakshineswar

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahimacharan) — The jnani neither wants God with form nor His avatar[2]. While wandering in the forest, Ramachandra came across a number of rishis. They received Rama in their *ashrama*[3] with great respect. They said, 'Rama, our lives are blessed to see you today. But we know you as Dasharatha's son. Bharadvaja and the other rishis say that you are an avatar. But we do not hold this view. We only meditate on that very Akhanda Sachchidananda[4].' Rama was happy and smiled at this.

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[1] Antaranga
[2] Divine incarnation
[3] Hermitage
[4] Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute

"Oh, what a state I was in! My mind merged into the Absolute. I was in this state for so many days! I forsook all bhakti and devotees and became inert. I saw that my own head was formless and that my soul was about to leave my body. I was wondering whether I should get Ramlal's aunt [the Holy Mother] here.

"I asked for all the pictures and portraits in my room to be removed. Later, when I regained outer consciousness, when my mind came down to a lower level, I began to feel very uneasy and restless. At last I said to myself, 'How shall I live?' Then my mind was directed to bhakti and the company of devotees.

"At that time I went about asking people what had happened to me. Bholanath[1] said to me, 'The *Mahabharata* talks of it: how a man would occupy his mind after coming down from samadhi. He needs bhakti and the company of devotees – otherwise, where would he rest his mind?' "

Chapter VII

Can one return from the state of samadhi – life of Thakur spoken with his own holy lips – Koar Singh

Mahimacharan (to Sri Ramakrishna) — Sir, can one return to the normal plane from samadhi?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — I will tell you when you are alone. You are the only one who deserves to know.

"Koar Singh[2] asked me the same question. There is a great difference between Ishvara (the Lord) and jiva

[1] Bholanath Mukherji was then a clerk in Rasmani's temple. Later he became the treasurer of the temple.
[2] A police officer

(the embodied soul). A jiva can at most attain samadhi by practicing *sadhana* (spiritual disciplines) and *bhajan* (singing of devotional songs). But when the Lord incarnates Himself as a human being, He can return to the normal plane even after samadhi. The jiva, you may say, belongs to the class of a king's officer. He can go only to the outer court of the king's palace. The king's palace is a seven-storied building. His son can move up and down all the seven stories; he can also come out of the palace. Everybody says that no one returns after samadhi. Then what about Shankaracharya, Ramanuja and other sages? They retained their 'I of knowledge' after coming down from samadhi."

Mahimacharan — That is so. Otherwise, how could they have written holy books?

Sri Ramakrishna — And then there were Prahlada, Narada and Hanuman. They, too, retained bhakti after samadhi.

Mahimacharan — True, sir.

Jnana and philosophical discussions – jnana after samadhi – 'I of knowledge'

Sri Ramakrishna — Indulging in philosophical discussions, some people feel that they have become very great. Perhaps they have studied a little Vedanta. When you have attained true knowledge, your I-ness disappears. In other words, you attain samadhi, you become one with Him and lose all your egotism. Without attaining samadhi, you do not develop true knowledge. You become one with Him on attaining samadhi. Then your ego vanishes.

"Do you know what it is like? Just as at midday when the sun shines directly overhead, a man does not

see his shadow anywhere around him. When you have gained true knowledge, attained samadhi, the shadow of egotism disappears.

"If, after attaining true knowledge, one's I-ness persists, know it to be either the 'I of knowledge,' or the 'I of devotion,' or the 'I of a servant.' This is not the 'I of ignorance.'

"Besides, there are two paths, one of jnana and the other of bhakti. Go by either path and you will reach Him. The jnani looks at Him in one way, the devotee in another. The God of the jnani is all splendour, while that of the devotee is all sweetness."

Sri Ramakrishna and narration of destruction of demons in Markanday Chandi – its significance

Bhavanath, seated close to Sri Ramakrishna, listens to all his words. Bhavanath is a great follower of Narendra and used to visit the Brahmo Samaj regularly.

Bhavanath (to Sri Ramakrishna) — I have a question to ask. I don't understand the Chandi. In the Chandi, the Goddess slaughters everybody, one after the other. What does it mean?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is all Her sport. I also used to think about it the same way. Then I saw that it was all maya (illusion). Her creation is, indeed, maya – and so is Her destruction.

Leaf plates have been laid on the terrace to the west of the room. Girish escorts Thakur and the other devotees to the terrace. It is the tenth day of the bright fortnight of Vaishakh. The whole creation seems to be smiling. The terrace is flooded with

moonlight. With Sri Ramakrishna seated in front of them, the devotees joyfully eat prasad[1].

Thakur seems mad, calling Narendra's name. Narendra is seated in the front row with other devotees. Every now and then Thakur enquires about him. Before he is halfway through the meal, he suddenly takes some curd and watermelon juice from his plate and carries it to Narendra. "Narendra, just eat this little bit," he says. Like a child, Thakur returns to his seat to finish eating.

[1] Sacramental food

Section XXV

Sri Ramakrishna in the Company of Devotees at Shyampukur

Chapter I

The Doctor and M. – what is the essence?

Thursday, 29 October, 1885, the sixth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Aswin. It is 10:00 a.m. Thakur is ill, so he is living in the Shyampukur neighbourhood of Calcutta. He is under the treatment of a doctor (Dr. Sarkar) who lives in Sankharitola. An attendant of Thakur is talking with the doctor at the latter's house. His duty is to visit the doctor daily to apprise him of Thakur's condition.

The Doctor — You know, Dr. Behari Bhaduri said that Goethe's spirit left the body, but he could still see it! That is very strange.

M. — The Paramahamsa Deva says that we need not bother ourselves with such matters. We come to earth to develop love of God for His lotus feet. He says: Somebody went to an orchard to eat mangoes. He took a piece of paper and pencil and began to count and record how many trees, branches and leaves were in the orchard. An employee of the orchard saw him. He asked him what he was doing. The man said, 'I am counting how many trees, branches and leaves there are. And I have come here to eat mangoes.' The employee of the orchard said to him, 'If you have come to eat mangoes, eat them. Why do you need to count how many leaves and branches there are?'

The Doctor — The Paramahamsa has gone to the essence of it, it appears.

The Doctor talks of various matters concerning his homeopathic hospital, such as how many patients visit it daily. He also shows M. a list of the patients. He tells him that Dr. Salzar and many other doctors discouraged him in the beginning and wrote against him in monthly magazines.

The Doctor and M. are now sitting in a carriage on the way to visit a number of the Doctor's patients. His first visit is in Chorbagan, then Mathaghasha Lane and Pathuriaghata. After seeing all these patients, he will visit Sri Ramakrishna. The Doctor visits the Tagore's of Pathuriaghata. He is delayed for some time there. On returning to the carriage, he again begins to talk.

The Doctor — I was talking with that gentleman about the Paramahamsa. It was about Theosophy and Colonel Olcott. The Paramahamsa is cross with this gentleman. Do you know why? This man thinks he knows everything.

M. — No, why should he be cross with him? But I did hear that they met once. The Paramahamsa Deva talked about spiritual matters with him. Maybe he did say, 'Yes, I know all this.'

The Doctor — This gentleman has donated thirty-two thousand, five-hundred rupees to the Science Association.

The carriage rolls on. It goes via Burrabazar. The Doctor talks about the service being rendered to Sri Ramakrishna.

The Doctor — Are you thinking of sending him back to Dakshineswar?

M — No, that would be very inconvenient for the devotees. If he is in Calcutta, they can regularly visit him and look after him.

The Doctor — But it is very expensive here.

M. — That is no problem for the devotees. They want to serve him as best they can. One would have to bear the expenses there as well as here. The worry is that they wouldn't be able to nurse him if he goes back.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna in the company of Dr. Sarkar, Bhaduri and others

Dr. Sarkar, Bhaduri, Dukari, the Younger Naren, M. and Shyam Basu

The Doctor and M. reach a two-storied building in Shyampukur. The building has two big rooms upstairs with verandahs facing the front – one running east-west and other north-south. The Doctor finds Sri Ramakrishna sitting with a smile on his face in the first room. Doctor Bhaduri and many devotees are with him.

The Doctor feels his pulse and enquires about his painful condition. Gradually, they begin to talk about spiritual matters.

Bhaduri — You know what it's like? It's all like a dream!

The Doctor — Is it all a delusion? The question is, whose delusion is it, and why? Besides, if you know that it's all delusion, why do you talk about it? I can't believe that God is real and creation is unreal.

Soham and attitude of a servant – jnana and bhakti

Sri Ramakrishna — 'You are the Lord and I am Thy servant.' This is a very nice attitude. As long as you take your body to be real, you have the feeling of 'I' and 'You'. Then the attitude of a servant to the Lord is the right attitude. The perception that I am He is not right.

"And what's more? Whether you look at a room from one side or from the middle, it is all the same."

Bhaduri (to the Doctor) — All the things I have said are in the Vedanta. One can know them only when one studies the scriptures.

The Doctor — But has he [Sri Ramakrishna] become so learned after studying the scriptures? He says the same thing that's written in the scriptures. Can't one be wise without reading the scriptures?

Sri Ramakrishna — But brother, I have heard so much!

Doctor — Mere hearing can bring about many misunderstandings. It is not that you have only heard.

Now the topic of conversation changes.

'He is mad' – Thakur allows others to take dust of his feet

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — Perhaps you said, 'He [Thakur] is mad.' That is why these people (pointing at M. and others) don't want to go to you.

The Doctor (looking at M.) — What! I only talked about your [Thakur's] egotism. Why do you allow people to take the dust of your feet?

M. — People weep if they're not allowed to.

The Doctor — They should be made to understand that it is their mistake.

M. — But why? There is Narayana (God) in all created beings.

Doctor — I have no objection to that. You should take the dust of everybody's feet.

M. — There is greater manifestation of His power in some than in others. There is water everywhere, but there is more of it in ponds, streams and the sea. Can you show the same respect to a new graduate in science as you do to Faraday?

Doctor — I like that. But why do you call him God?

M. — Why do we greet each other with namaskar? Because there is Narayana in the hearts of all. You haven't experienced these things, and you haven't thought much about them.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — Certain objects have more light. I have already told you that the rays of the sun fall one way on the ground, another way on trees, and quite another way on glass. On a mirror there is more light. And then think about this: are there devotees here at the same level as Prahlada? The heart and soul of Prahlada were dedicated to God.

The Doctor remains silent, as do the others.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — See, you are attracted to this [me]. You said to me that you loved me.

Sri Ramakrishna and the worldly being – 'You are greedy, fond of sense pleasures and proud'

The Doctor — I say this to you because you are a child of nature. People salute you by touching your feet. I feel hurt by it. I say to myself: he is such a good man and they are spoiling him. Keshab Sen's followers used to do the same to him. Listen to what I say.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why should I listen to you? You are greedy, fond of sense pleasures, and proud.

Bhaduri (to the Doctor) — In other words, you are a *jiva*[1]. The nature of an embodied being is this: to earn money, to desire name and fame, to be fond of sense enjoyments, and to be proud. All embodied beings behave this way.

The Doctor — If you say so, I'll just examine your throat and leave. What concern do I have with anything else? But when there is a discussion, I must argue properly.

[1] An embodied soul

They are all silent.

Involution and evolution – three kinds of devotees

After awhile, Thakur again talks with Bhaduri.

Sri Ramakrishna — You know, he [Dr. Sarkar] is following the path of involution by saying, 'Not this, not this.' He is discriminating in this way: the Lord is neither the embodied soul, nor the world. God is there even without His creation. When he [Dr. Sarkar] follows the path of evolution, he will accept everything.

"If you peel off the sheaths of a banana tree, one after the other, you reach its pith.

"The layers of sheath are different from the pith. Neither is the pith the sheath, nor the sheath the pith. At the end, the man sees that the sheath cannot exist without the pith and the pith cannot exist without the sheath. God has Himself become the twenty-four cosmic principles, He Himself has become man. (To the Doctor) There are three kinds of devotees: inferior, mediocre and superior. The inferior class of devotee says, 'God is out there.' He sees the Lord separate from His creation. The devotee of the mediocre class says, 'The Lord is *antaryami*[1].' He sees the Lord in the heart of all beings. The superior devotee sees that God Himself has become everything. That He alone has become the twenty-four cosmic principles. He sees that everything is filled with God, above and below.

"Please study the *Gita*, the *Bhagavata* and the *Vedanta*. Then you will understand all this.

"Doesn't God exist within His creation?"

[1] Inner Controller

The Doctor — No, he doesn't exist in a particular object. He exists everywhere. So he can't be sought after.

The topic of conversation turns to something else. Sri Ramakrishna remains in an ecstatic mood. This can lead to the aggravation of his disease.

The Doctor (to Sri Ramakrishna) — You must control your bhava. I also experience deep bhava. I can dance longer than you.

The Younger Naren (laughing) — What will you do if your bhava increases a little more?

Doctor — My controlling power will also increase with it.

Sri Ramakrishna and M. — You say so.

M. — Can you tell what one experiences in bhava?

After awhile, the topic revolves around money.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — I have no desire for it [money], you already know that. Am I pretending? No, that is not the case.

The Doctor — Even I don't want it! I keep money in an unlocked box. As for you, of course, there is no question.

Sri Ramakrishna — Jadu Mallick is absent-minded. When he sits for a meal, he absent-mindedly eats anything that is placed before him, whether the food is cooked deliciously or is bad. Even when somebody tells him not to take some article of food because it doesn't taste good, he says, 'Does it really taste bad? Yes, you are right!'

Thakur is perhaps hinting that it is one thing to be absent-minded after contemplation on the Lord and quite another thing to be absent-minded after thinking of worldly things.

Glancing at the devotees and pointing at the Doctor, Sri Ramakrishna laughs and says, "You see that when an article is *siddha*[1] (boiled), it becomes soft. He [the Doctor] was so hard. Now he is softening a little inside."

The Doctor — When an article is *siddha* (boiled), its exterior also softens. But in my case, that hasn't happened so far in this birth. (All laugh.)

The Doctor is ready to leave but he talks again to Thakur.

The Doctor — People take the dust of your feet. Can't you stop them?

Sri Ramakrishna — Can everybody realize Akhanda Sachchidananda (Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute)?

The Doctor — So you will not say what is right.

Sri Ramakrishna — Inclinations are different from man to man. And all men are not equally fit.

The Doctor — Then what are they?

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you know what the difference in inclinations means? Some like to eat fish gravy, others fried fish, others pickled fish, yet others take fish cooked with rice. Then there is also the difference of

[1] Siddha also means to become perfect

competency. I say first learn to aim at the banana plant, then at the wick of a lamp, and then at a flying bird.

Vision of the Indivisible – vision of Dr. Sarkar and Hariballab

It is evening. Thakur is absorbed in the contemplation of the Lord. He is so very ill, but it seems his illness has been put aside. Three or four of his intimate disciples seated close by look at him intently. Thakur remains in this state for quite some time.

Now Thakur returns to the normal plane. Mani is seated close to him. Thakur says to him privately, "See, the mind merged into the Indivisible Brahman – and I saw so many things! I saw the Doctor. He will succeed spiritually, but after some time. He will not need much more instruction. And I saw another person. It came to my mind that I should attract him, too. I shall tell you about him later."

Various instructions to householders

Shyam Basu, Dr. Dukari, and one or two other devotees have arrived. Thakur is now talking to them.

Shyam Basu — Oh, what a wonderful thing you told us the other day!

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What was that?

Shyam Basu — About what remains when one goes beyond *jnana* (knowledge) and *ajnana* (ignorance).

Sri Ramakrishna (smilingly) — Vijnana! The knowledge of many things is ignorance. Jnana consists of knowing that the Lord dwells in all beings. Knowing the Lord

intimately is vijnana. Talking with the Lord, knowing Him as your near and dear one, is called vijnana.

'There is the element of fire in wood, and fire is the essence. Knowing this is jnana. Burning this fire-wood, cooking rice over it, eating it, and then becoming strong is vijnana."

Shyam Basu (smiling) — And you said something about the thorn.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Yes, when a thorn pricks your foot, you look for another thorn to take it out. With the latter thorn you take out the former one and then throw both of them away. In the same way, to take out the thorn of ajnana, you have to acquire the thorn of jnana. When ignorance is dispelled, you throw away both knowledge and ignorance.

"Then comes vijnana."

Thakur is pleased with Shyam Basu. Shyam Basu is quite an elderly person and is now keen to meditate on the Lord for some days. Hearing of the Paramahamsa Deva [meaning Sri Ramakrishna], he has come to see him. He had seen him once before.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Shyam Basu) — Give up worldly matters completely. Talk of nothing else but God. When you come across worldly people, leave quietly. You have lived a worldly life for so long. You have seen that it is all hollow within, that the Lord is the only substance. Everything else is non-substance. The Lord is the only Reality, all else is ephemeral. What is this worldly life? It is like the fruit of the hog-plum tree. You feel like eating it, but what substance has it inside? If you eat kernel and rind, it gives you indigestion.

Shyam Basu — True, sir. What you say is indeed true.

Sri Ramakrishna — You have engaged in worldly matters for so long. If you give your mind to this confusion any more, you will not be able to contemplate the Lord. Passing some days in solitude is essential. The mind will not settle down unless you live in solitude. You should arrange for a place of meditation a little away from your home.

Shyam Basu remains silent for awhile. Perhaps he is reflecting on something.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — And see, you have lost all your teeth, so why celebrate Durga Puja now? (All laugh.) Someone asked, 'Why don't you celebrate the Durga Puja now?' The other fellow replied, 'Because now I have no teeth. I have lost the strength to chew goat meat.'

Shyam Basu — What sweet words!

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — In worldly life sugar and sand are mixed together. Like an ant, you must leave the sand and sift out the sugar. Only the adept can sift the sugar out. Arrange for a solitary place to contemplate Him – a place for meditation. Do please arrange it. I shall visit you there once.

Everybody remains silent for awhile.

Shyam Basu — Sir, is there birth after death? What will happen at the end of this life?

Sri Ramakrishna — Ask the Lord about it and call on Him sincerely. He will tell you. He will certainly make you understand. If you talk to Jadu Mallick, he himself

will tell you how many houses, how much money, and how many company shares he possesses. It's not right to try to know all this beforehand. First attain the Lord. He will make you understand what you want to know.

Shyam Babu — Sir, how many misdeeds a man does while leading a worldly life! How many sins he commits! Can this man attain the Lord?

Sri Ramakrishna — If a man practices spiritual disciplines before quitting his body, if he casts off his body while calling upon the Lord, while practicing spiritual disciplines, sins can never touch him. The elephant's nature is to smear itself again with dust after being bathed, but if the mahut pushes it inside its stable just after washing it, the elephant cannot soil itself.

> Thakur is suffering enormous pain! The devotees are amazed how he, the compassionate one, the sea of motiveless grace, grieved at the sufferings of mankind, night and day thinks of the welfare of humanity. He is encouraging the devotee, he grants him fearlessness, by telling him, "If one quits one's body while calling upon the Lord, one is never touched by sins."

Section XXVI

Sri Ramakrishna in Cossipore Garden House with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna in Cossipore garden house – Girish and M.

Moonlight bathes the Cossipore garden house, its garden paths and trees. On the eastern side of the house is a ghat[1] of the reservoir. To the west of the reservoir is a two-storied house. From the ghat's landing one can see light coming from a window of a second story room. One can see Sri Ramakrishna illuminated in it, sitting on his bed in the middle of the room. One or two devotees sit close to him, or go from this room to another. Thakur is ill and has been brought to the garden house for treatment. His devotees have gathered to nurse him. From the ghat, one also sees three lights of the lower story of the building. One light emanates from the southern room where the devotees stay. Another comes from the middle room, which is Holy Mother's. She has also come to nurse Thakur. The third light comes from the kitchen, which is on the northern side of the house. From the southeastern corner of this two-storied house, a path leads east down the middle of the garden to the ghat of the reservoir. It is bordered, particularly on the south, by numerous fruit and flowering trees.

In the moonlight Girish, M., Latu and another couple of devotees can be seen seated on the landing steps of the reservoir. They are talking about Thakur. It is Friday, 16 April, 1886, the fourth day of

[1] Steps and landing of a reservoir or river, made of brick

Vaishakh, 1293 (B.Y.), the thirteenth day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra.

After awhile, Girish and M. stroll the garden path and talk.

M. — What a beautiful moonlit night! This phenomenon has been going on for millions of years.

Girish — How do you know?

M. — There is uniformity in nature and its ways don't change. Western scientists see new planets with the help of a telescope. They have seen mountains on the moon.

Girish — It's hard to understand. I don't believe it.

M. — Why not? One can see correctly with the help of a telescope.

Girish — How do I know that they have seen it correctly? Perhaps they see it this way because of the light which passes through something that may be there between the earth and the moon.

The young devotees are always at the garden house to serve Thakur. Narendra, Rakhal, Niranjan, Sarat, Sashi, Baburam, Kali, Jogin, Latu and other devotees are living there. Those of the devotees who are family men come every day and sometimes stay at night. Other devotees come off and on. Today Narendra, Kali and Tarak have gone to the garden of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Narendra will meditate there under the Panchavati tree and carry out spiritual practices. He is accompanied by one or two brother disciples.

Chapter II

Thakur in company of Girish and other devotees – his affection for devotees

Girish, Latu, M., Baburam, Niranjan and Rakhal

Girish, Latu and M. go upstairs and find Thakur sitting on his bed. Sashi and one or two other devotees are there to nurse him. Baburam, Niranjan and Rakhal join them one after the other.

It is a big room. Medicines and articles of daily use have been placed close to Thakur. The door to the room at the top of the stairs faces north. In front of this door, there is also a southern door in the room by which one goes to a small roof terrace. Standing on the terrace one sees the trees, the bushes and flowers, the moonlight, and the not-very-distant main road.

The devotees have to stay awake at night. They do so in turns. After hanging a mosquito net and putting Thakur to sleep, those who are to spend the night in the room sit or lie down on a mat spread toward the eastern edge of the room. Thakur often cannot sleep because of his suffering, so those who nurse him have to spend hours of the night sitting up.

Today Thakur is a little better. The devotees enter and offer him obeisance by prostrating on the floor. Then they take their seats in front of him.

Thakur asks M. to bring the light closer. He talks to Girish affectionately.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — Are you keeping well? (To Latu) Give him a smoke and fetch a betel leaf for him.

After some time, he says, “Bring some refreshments for him.”

Latu — I have given him a betel leaf. I am going to the shop to fetch snacks.

Thakur is sitting up. A devotee had brought many garlands of flowers to offer him. He had put them around Thakur's neck one by one. Thakur has Lord Hari within his heart, so it is He who is being worshipped. The devotees look at him with wonder. Thakur takes two garlands from his neck and gives them to Girish.

Every now and then he asks, "Have the refreshments been brought?"

Mani is fanning Thakur. Kept close to him is a sandalwood fan which had been offered to him by a devotee. Thakur has given that fan to Mani and it is with it that Mani is fanning him. Thakur takes another two garlands from his neck and gives them to Mani while he is fanning.

Latu talks to Thakur about a devotee. A child of this devotee, seven or eight years old, had died about a year and a half ago. A number of times the boy had seen Thakur joyfully singing devotional songs with his devotees.

Latu (to Sri Ramakrishna) — Last night, he [M.] wept bitterly when he saw the boy's book[1]. The mother has gone almost insane at the loss of her son. She thrashes her children and knocks them down. She quarrels with her husband because he sometimes stays here.

Hearing about this sorrowful incident, Sri Ramakrishna is worried, but he doesn't speak.

Girish — Arjuna, who received the instructions of the *Gita*, fainted when he heard of Abhimanyu's loss. It is no wonder he is so distressed at the loss of his son.

How to attain the Lord in worldly life?

[1] It was M.'s son who had died

Refreshments have been brought for Girish: hot kichuris[1], luchis[2] and sweets from Fagu's shop in Baranagore. Thakur asks for refreshments to be placed in front of him and thus make them prasad (a holy offering). Then he gives the food to Girish with his own hands, saying, "Nice kichuris, these."

Girish is sitting in front of Thakur. He is to be served water from an earthen pot at the southeastern corner of Thakur's bed. It is summer, the month of Vaishakh. Thakur says, "Do have some nice cool water there."

Thakur is very ill. He hasn't even the strength to stand up.

What do the devotees see? Struck with wonder, they watch Thakur, who has no cloth around his waist – he is naked as a child – moving from his bed. He himself wants to give Girish water. The devotees stop breathing – that Thakur himself would pour water into Girish's glass! Taking a little water from the glass in his hand, he wants to make sure that it is cool. He finds that it is not sufficiently cold. But, thinking that better water is not available, he gives the same water rather unwillingly to Girish.

Girish is eating, the devotees are seated around him. Mani is fanning Thakur.

Girish (to Sri Ramakrishna) — Deben Babu has decided to renounce the world.

Thakur cannot always speak. He finds it painful. Touching his lower lip with his finger, he indicates as if to ask, "How will his family [wife and children] manage? How will they live and eat?"

Girish — I don't know what they intend to do.

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[1] Kind of pancake made of flour and pulses
[2] Fried bread

Everybody is silent, but Girish continues talking as he eats the refreshments.

Girish — Well sir, which way is more difficult: to renounce the world painfully, or to call upon Him while living in the household?

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Don't you know what the *Gita* says? One truly attains the Lord if one attends to worldly work in a detached spirit, if one lives the worldly life after knowing everything to be illusory.

"People who renounce the world painfully belong to an inferior class.

"Do you know what a householder jnani is like? It is as if he is in a glass house from where he can see inside as well as outside."

Again everybody is silent.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — The kichuri is hot and it is very nice indeed.

M. (to Girish) — It is from Fagu's shop. He is famous for it.

Sri Ramakrishna — Famous!

Girish (still eating, smiling) — Nice kichuri it is!

Sri Ramakrishna — Then only take the kichuri and don't eat the luchi. (To M.) But kichuri is a rajasic food.

Girish begins to talk about other things while he is still eating.

Difference between the mind of a worldly man and a genuine renouncer

Girish (to Sri Ramakrishna) — Well sir, at times the mind rises so high – and then it falls so suddenly! Why is this?

Sri Ramakrishna — This does happen when one leads a worldly life. The mind is first up, then down. First you feel so strong – and then so weak. You see, it is because one has to live amidst 'lust and greed'. In worldly life the devotee contemplates the Lord and repeats His name – but then he gives his mind to 'lust and greed'. He is like a housefly. Sometimes it sits on sandesh, at other times on a festering wound – and even on excreta.

"It is different with *tyagis* (those who have renounced the world). Taking their mind from 'lust and greed,' they give it to the Lord and only sip the sweetness of Hari's name. A genuine man of renunciation doesn't like anything but the Lord. When he hears worldly talk, he gets up and leaves. He only listens to Godly matters. The genuine renouncer talks of nothing but the Lord.

"The bee sits only on flowers, for it drinks honey. It likes no other thing."

Girish goes to the smaller terrace to wash his hands.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — God's grace is essential. Only with God's grace can one fix one's mind fully on Him. He has eaten a lot of kichuris. Please go and tell him not to eat anything else today.

Chapter III

Avatar is beyond the injunctions of the *Vedas* – ritual worship and inebriation in love of God

Girish comes back to the room and sits in front of Thakur. He is chewing a betel leaf.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — Rakhal and others know very well what is right and what is wrong, what is real and what is unreal. If they lead a family life, they do so intentionally. Rakhal has a wife and a son has been born to him too, but he has understood that all this is illusory and perishable. Rakhal and others will not get attached to the world.

"They are like mud fish. It lives in mud but its body is not stained by the mud."

Girish — Sir, I do not understand all this. If you want, you can make everybody unattached and pure. You can transform everyone, whether one is worldly or a man of renunciation. I say that when the Malaya breeze blows, it transforms ordinary wood into sandalwood.

Sri Ramakrishna — Unless there is substance inside, it cannot turn into sandalwood. The cotton tree and a few others do not turn into sandalwood.

Girish — I never heard of that.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is the law.

Girish — Nothing in you is according to law!

The devotees sit silent as they listen to him. At times the fan in M.'s hand ceases to move.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, it is possible. When the river of bhakti overflows, there is pole deep water in the fields.

"When a man is inebriated with God's love, he does not accept injunctions of the *Vedas*. He picks *durva* grass and doesn't pick it up from the earth. He picks whatever comes in his hands. While gathering tulsi leaves, he wantonly breaks its branches! Ah, what states of mind I have passed through!

(To M.) "Nothing more is needed after one has attained bhakti!"

M— True, sir.

Sita and Radha – different attitudes toward God in incarnations of Rama and Krishna

Sri Ramakrishna — One should adopt one particular attitude toward God. God in His incarnation as Rama demonstrated the attitudes of *shanta*[1], *dasya*[2], *vatsalya*[3] and *sakhya*[4]. In the incarnation as Krishna, you have all these attitudes, as well as *madhura*[5].

"Radha cherished the *madhura* bhava toward Krishna, a romantic attitude. Sita had a pure and chaste attitude, without the least trace of an illicit nature.

"It is all God's lila (divine sport), with different attitudes at different times."

An insane woman used to accompany Vijay to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. She would sing songs on Sri Krishna and Brahman for Thakur. Everyone called her Pagli [meaning crazy woman]. Now she occasionally visits the Cossipore garden house and

[1] Attitude of peace and serenity as practiced by rishis of yore
[2] Attitude of a servant toward his master
[3] Attitude of a mother toward her child
[4] Attitude of friendship
[5] Attitude of a lover

creates trouble by wishing to meet Thakur. The devotees have to be very careful about her.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish and other devotees) — Pagli cherishes the *madhura* bhava toward me. Once she went to Dakshineswar and suddenly started weeping. I asked her why she was crying. She replied, 'I have a headache.' (All laugh.)

"She went there again another day. I had just sat down to eat. She blurted out, 'Won't you be kind to me?' I went on eating in a light mood. She then said, 'Why do you push me out of your mind?' I asked, 'What is your bhava?' She replied, '*Madhura* bhava.' I said, 'I look upon all women as manifestations of the Divine Mother. All women are my mothers.' She then said, 'I don't know all that.' Then I called out to Ramlal and said, 'Oh, Ramlal! Just listen to what she is saying – about my pushing her out of my mind.' She still has that attitude."

Girish — Blessed is Pagli! Even if she goes mad, or receives a beating from the devotees, she thinks of you twenty-four hours a day! She may cherish any bhava toward you, but she can never come to grief!

"Sir, what can I say! Oh, what I was and what I have become by meditating on you! I was so indolent. Now that laziness has turned into resignation at the feet of the Lord. I used to be a sinner, now I have become humble. What else can I say!"

The devotees remain silent. Rakhal feels sorrow as he mentions about Pagli. He says, "I am sorry. She creates a row and suffers so much for it."

Niranjan (to Rakhal) — You have a wife. That's why you feel that way for her. As for us, we could kill her.

Rakhal (irritated) — How brave of you! And you talk like this before him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna]!

Instructions to Girish – attachment for money – its right use – earnings of a physician

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — 'Lust and greed' constitute worldly life. Many people think of money as though it were the blood in the body! But if you try too hard for it, you can perhaps one day lose it altogether.

"In my native village they make mud ridges around the fields. You know what these ridges are. Some make them with great care on all four sides of the field. Such ridges can be washed away by an overflow of rain water. But those who keep one end of the enclosure open can control flooding by building up that side with a mixture of sod [mud and grass], so that the water seeps out slowly. This allows a deposit of rich soil, which in turn yields a big paddy!"

Right use of money

"They who make the right use of money, that is, spend it on the service of the deities, of sadhus and devotees, and give it away in charity, succeed. Only they really achieve their goal.

"I cannot eat food brought by a physician or a Kaviraj. People who make money on other people's suffering earn not money, but blood and puss!"

Saying this, Thakur names two physicians.

Girish — Rajendra Dutta has a very open hand and a charitable disposition. He does not accept a penny from anybody. He engages himself in charity and meditation.

Section XXVII

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees in Cossipore Garden House

Chapter I

Rakhal, Sashi, M., Narendra, Bhavanath, Surendra, Rajendra and Dr. Sarkar

Cossipore garden. Rakhal, Sashi and M. are walking on the garden path in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna is ill. He has come to the garden house for treatment. He is in a second story room. The devotees nurse him there. It is Thursday, 22 April, 1886, the day before Good Friday.

M. — He is a like child – beyond the three gunas[1].

Sashi and Rakhal — Thakur has said that this is his natural state.

Rakhal — It is as though he were in a tower from where he can see everything and know everything, but others can't go there.

M. — He said, 'In this state one constantly has the Lord's vision.' One's mind in this state is like dry wood which catches fire immediately because there is no sap of worldliness.

Sashi — He said to Charu that there are many kinds of intelligence. The intelligence that leads to Bhagavan is

[1] According to Samkhya philosophy, the three qualities of Prakriti (Nature), consisting of rajas, tamas and sattva

the right intelligence. The intelligence that enables one to make money, build a house, or become a Deputy [Magistrate] or an attorney is *chirebeja* intelligence. It is unsubstantial, like thin and watery curd which only soaks roasted rice in watery curd. It is not superior, well-set thick curd. The intelligence that leads to the attainment of Bhagavan is superior, like well-set and thick curd.

M. — Ah, how wonderful!

Sashi — Kali Tapasvi[1] asked Thakur, 'What is bliss like? The Bhils[2] also have this joy. Though uncivilized, they sing and dance joyfully.'

Rakhal — He said, 'What! Is the bliss of Brahman the same as sense pleasure? Ordinary beings lead lives of worldly pleasure. But unless one is completely rid of the attachment to the senses, one cannot attain the bliss of Brahman. On the one hand, you have the joy of money, the joy of the senses, and on the other, there is the bliss of God-realization. Can these two ever be the same? The rishis enjoyed the bliss of Brahman.'

M. — Kali nowadays meditates on the Buddha. So he talks of that which is beyond all joy.

Rakhal — The topic of Buddha was also mentioned to Thakur. He said, 'Buddha was an avatar. What comparison can be made with him? Nothing but greatness can come out of the great.' Kali replied, 'But it is His power that manifests in everything. Both the bliss of Brahman and worldly pleasures are manifestations of His power.'

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[1] Later Swami Abhedananda
[2] A savage tribe of India

M. — And what did he [Thakur] say?

Rakhal — He said, 'What are you saying? Is the power to beget a child the same as the power through which one attains the Lord?'

Sri Ramakrishna in company of devotees – 'lust and greed' are great obstacles

Thakur is seated with the devotees in the hall of the second story of the garden house. His condition is getting worse. Dr. Mahendra Sarkar and Dr. Rajendra Dutta have come to examine him and try to help him with their treatments. Narendra, Rakhal, Sashi, Surendra, M., Bhavanath and many other devotees are in the room.

The garden house belongs to the gentlemen of Pikepara. Its rent is sixty to sixty-five rupees. The younger men have been living in the garden house and nursing Thakur night and day. The householder devotees come there regularly and also sometimes stay at night. They are also keen to serve him both day and night but they have duties – they have to attend to one work or another. They cannot stay there all the time to nurse him. Each one contributes as much as he can for the expenses of the garden house, but most of the expenses are borne by Surendra. Actually, the rental agreement of the garden house has been drawn in his name. A brahmin cook and a maidservant have been engaged permanently.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Dr. Sarkar and others) — There are a lot of expenses here.

The Doctor (pointing toward the devotees) — They are all prepared to pay. They don't have a problem bearing the expenses.

(To Sri Ramakrishna) — Now see, 'gold' is essential.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — Why don't you reply to him?

Thakur has asked Narendra to answer, but Narendra remains silent. The Doctor continues to speak.

Doctor — You need 'gold'. And 'woman' is also needed.

Dr. Rajendra — His wife cooks for him.

Dr. Sarkar (to Thakur) — Don't you see?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — It's big trouble!

Dr. Sarkar — If there are no troubles, everybody can be a *paramahamsa*.

Sri Ramakrishna — When a woman touches my body, I feel hurt. The spot she touches twinges, as if a horned fish has stung it.

Doctor — I can believe it! But can one do without it?

Sri Ramakrishna — When I touch money, my hand twists and my breathing stops. There is no harm in using money to lead a spiritual life, to serve deities, and to spend on sadhus and devotees.

"But one forgets the Lord if one leads a worldly life of maya in the company of a woman. A woman is none other than a form of the maya of the Mother of the Universe. When you have understood this correctly, you no longer wish to lead a worldly life. It is only when you have realized that all women are forms of the Mother that you can lead a spiritual life in the world. And

without God-realization, you cannot know what a woman is."

Thakur has been feeling a little better under homeopathic treatment.

Dr. Rajendra — When you get well, you must practice medicine as a homeopath. Otherwise, what is the use of your getting well? (All laugh.)

Narendra — Nothing like leather! (He means to say that for a cobbler there is nothing in the world as good as leather.) (All laugh.)

The doctors leave after some time.

Chapter II

Why has Sri Ramakrishna renounced 'lust and gold'?

Thakur is talking with M. about his state of mind with regard to women.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — They [the doctors] say that I can't get along without 'lust and gold'. They don't understand my state of mind.

"As soon as my hand touches the body of a girl, it twists and gives a trembling sensation.

"If I sit close to them and talk amicably, some sort of veil appears between us which is impossible to cross.

"If I am alone and a young woman comes in, I immediately fall into the state of a child and regard her as mother."

M., seated close to Thakur's bed, listens to all his words with wonder. A little distance from the bed,

Narendra is talking with Bhavanath. Bhavanath is married; he is looking for a job. He cannot come to the Cossipore garden house to see Thakur often. Sri Ramakrishna worries about his having entered family life. Bhavanath must be twenty-three or twenty-four years old.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — Give him enough courage.

Narendra and Bhavanath glance at Thakur and smile softly. Thakur points at Bhavanath and says again, "Be a brave man! Don't be deceived by her crying behind the veil, weeping as she blows her nose!" (Narendra, Bhavanath and M. laugh.)

"Keep your mind fixed on Bhagavan. He is a brave man indeed who, while living with his wife, does not have physical relations with her. Talk only about spiritual matters with your wife."

After awhile, Thakur again beckons Bhavanath and says, "Take your meal here today."

Bhavanath — As you please. Don't worry about me. I am quite all right.

Surendra comes in and sits down. It is the month of Vaishakh. The devotees bring garlands of flowers to Thakur every day in the evening. He wears them all around his neck, one on top of the other. Surendra is seated and is silent. Thakur is pleased with him and gives him a two-stranded garland. Surendra bows to Thakur, brings it to touch his forehead, and puts it around his neck.

Everyone gazes at Thakur without speaking a word. Surendra then salutes Thakur and rises to take his leave. When going out, he calls to Bhavanath, "Please hang the straw curtain. It's very hot." Surendra has brought a curtain of straw because of

the heat in Thakur's hall on the second level during the day.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna in the Cossipore garden with Hirananda and other devotees

Thakur instructs: 'All that exists is none but You' – character of Narendra and Hirananda

Cossipore garden house. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the hall on the upper floor. Hirananda, M. and one or two other devotees are seated in front of him. Hirananda had come with two friends. He is from Sindh[1], where he has been living since finishing college in Calcutta. Coming to know that Sri Ramakrishna was ill, he has come to see him. The Sindh province is about twenty-two hundred miles from Calcutta. Thakur has been very anxious to see Hirananda.

Pointing to Hirananda, Thakur perhaps means to tell M. with signs that the young man is indeed very good.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you know him?

M. — Yes sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hirananda and M.) — Both of you, please talk. Let me hear you.

Seeing that M. is silent, he says to him, "Is Narendra here? Please call him in."

Narendra comes upstairs and sits down near Thakur.

[1] Now a province in Pakistan

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and Hirananda) — Both of you, do talk for awhile.

Hirananda is silent but, after some hesitation, he begins to talk.

Hirananda (to Narendra) — Well, why does a devotee suffer?

Hirananda's words are honey sweet. Whoever has heard him has realized that his heart is full of love.

Narendra — The scheme of the universe is devilish! I could have created a better world!

Hirananda — Can you appreciate happiness if there is no sorrow?

Narendra — I am not giving a scheme for the universe. It is simply my opinion of the present scheme.

"But nothing remains to be done if you believe that our only refuge is in pantheism[1]. Everything is God. Putting one's faith in this resolves everything. God alone is the doer."

Hirananda — It is so easy to say all this.

Narendra chants the six stanzas on Nirvana.

Om, I am not the mind, the intellect, the ego, or the *chitta*[2]. Nor am I the ear, the tongue, the nostrils, nor the eyes. I am not the sky, nor land, nor light, nor air.

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[1] The doctrine that the universe, taken or conceived of as a whole, is God; or that all things are simply modes or manifestations of God

[2] Mind-stuff; it is the instrument that takes hold of some thought waves, absorbs them and sends them out as thoughts.

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss, the image of Shiva, the all-good.

I am neither prana[1], nor *pancha vayu* (the five vital airs), nor the seven elements, nor *pancha kosha*[2] (the five sheaths). Nor speech, nor hands, nor feet, nor genital organ, nor anus. I am pure Knowledge and Bliss, the image of Shiva, the all-good.

I have neither attachment, nor antipathy. Neither have I greed nor infatuation. I have neither vanity nor pride. I am not *dharma* (righteous works), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (desires) and *moksha* (salvation). I am pure Knowledge and Bliss, the image of Shiva, the all-good.

Neither am I virtue or vice, neither happiness or sorrow. I am not mantra, nor place of pilgrimage, not *Veda* or *yajna*. I am not food or an edible article, neither am I the eater. I am pure Knowledge and Bliss, the image of Shiva, the all-good.

Neither have I death, nor doubt, nor distinction of caste. I have neither father nor mother. I have no birth. I have neither friend nor relation, neither master nor disciple. I am pure Knowledge and Bliss, the image of Shiva, the all-good.

I am changeless, formless, and present in all the senses as the all-pervading power. I am beyond a companion, beyond salvation. I am pure Knowledge and Bliss, the image of Shiva, the all-good.

Sri Ramakrishna says to Hirananda by a sign to reply.

Hirananda — It is the same room, whether you see it from a corner or by standing in the middle. One experiences the same God, whether one says, 'Oh God, I

[1] The vital breath

[2] Annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha, manomaya kosha, vijnanamaya kosha and anandamaya kosha.

am your servant!' or, 'I am He, Soham!' You can enter a room through one door – and you can enter it through other doors as well.

Everyone is silent. Hirananda says to Narendra, "Please sing a song."

Narendra hums the tune and then sings the five stanzas of *kaupin*[1].

He who is always engaged in the words of Vedanta, he who is content with the grains of holy begging, he who roams about with a griefless conscience; such a person, clad in a loincloth, is the only blessed one.

He who sits under the shelter of a tree, he who uses his palms as a plate, and he who considers wealth to be as insignificant as the beggar's patched wrapper; such a person, clad in a loincloth, is the only blessed one.

He who is content with inner bliss, he who controls the cravings of his senses, he who delights night and day in the bliss of Brahman; such a person, clad in a loincloth, is the only blessed one.

As soon as Thakur hears, "He who delights night and day in the bliss of Brahman," he exclaims in a whisper, "Ah!" and makes a sign as if to say, "This, indeed, is a mark of a yogi."

Narendra completes the five stanzas of *kaupin*:

He who witnesses the moods of the body and the rest, he who witnesses his own real Self as the Atman, he who does not care to remember the within, the middle or the without; such a person, clad in a loincloth, is the only blessed one.

He who chants the holy word Om, who feels that he himself is Brahman, he who lives on alms and

[1] The loin cloth of a sannyasin

wanders everywhere; such a person, clad in a loincloth, is the only blessed one.

Narendra sings again –

Remember Him who is full of bliss, the support of this universe and the Formless one.

He is the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind and the Speech of speech.

He who is beyond speech, Life of life, Him you must adore.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — And that one, 'All that exists is none but You.'

Narendra sings this song –

We have given our hearts to You. All that exists is none but You.

We have found You alone as our own. You are all that exists.

You are the abode, the assurance of our hearts. Is there a heart where You do not dwell?

You are in every heart. You are all that exists.

Whether sages or humans, whether Hindus or Muslims, you have created them all. All that exists is none but You.

In Kaaba or temple, You are worshipped everywhere. All bow to You. All that exists is only You.

From heaven to earth and from earth to high heaven, wherever I cast my glance, I find You there. You are all there is.

I thought and I pondered, I looked all around. Nowhere did I find anybody like You. Jafar then realized that You are all there is.

Hearing the words, "You are in every heart," Thakur says by a sign that God exists in every heart, that He is *antaryami*[1]. "Wherever I cast my glance, I find You. You are all there is." Hearing this, Hirananda says to Narendra, "You are all. Now only You, You alone. Not me, but You."

Narendra — Give me one and I will give you a million (by putting '0s' (zeros) after the figure one). You are indeed I, I am indeed You, there is nothing else besides I[2].

Saying this, Narendra recites some verses from Ashtavakra Samhita. Everybody present sits silently.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hirananda, pointing to Narendra) — He seems to be walking with an unsheathed sword in his hand.

(To M., pointing at Hirananda) "What serenity! Like a king cobra with its hood down, seated quietly before a snake charmer."

Chapter IV

Thakur worships himself – secret talk – present M. and Hirananda

Sri Ramakrishna is in an introspective mood. Hirananda and M. are sitting close to him. There is complete silence in the room. Thakur's body is racked with terrible pain. Watching him, the hearts of the devotees are pierced. But he himself is seated with a smile on his face, making everyone forget his suffering.

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[1] Inner controller

[2] The microcosm is a perfect reflection of the macrocosm; the same Spirit animates both you and me.

Devotees have brought flowers and garlands as their offerings. Narayana (God) dwells in Thakur's heart. The devotees are, as it were, worshipping Him. Thakur takes a flower and places it on his head, then on his throat, heart and navel – as if a child is playing with flowers.

When he is overtaken by a divine mood, he says that the *mahavayu*[1] rises within him. He says that one experiences the Lord when the spiritual current rises. He now talks to M.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I didn't notice the current ascend my body.

"Now I am in the mood of a child. That is why I am playing with the flowers this way. Do you know what I see? I feel as if this body is a frame made of splints of bamboo and covered with a piece of cloth. The frame moves. Somebody dwells within who makes it move.

"The inside is hollow, like the shell of a pumpkin when its pulp and seeds are scooped out. There are no passions like lust etc. inside my body. Within, it is all very clean and ..."

Thakur finds it painful to speak. He is very weak. M. anticipates what Thakur wants to say and speaks it for him, "You see Bhagavan within your body."

Sri Ramakrishna — I see Him both within and without as Indivisible Sachchidananda. Indeed, it is Sachchidananda who dwells both within, taking the cover [of the body] as its support, and without. This is what I perceive.

[1] Spiritual current

M. and Hirananda listen to this account of the vision of Brahman. After awhile, Thakur looks at them and speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M. and Hirananda) — I feel that you are all my very own. No one appears to me as a stranger.

Sri Ramakrishna and state of yoga – vision of Indivisible Absolute

"I see that everyone is moving his head as if covered by a sheath [referring to their bodies].

"I see that when the mind unites with God, all physical pain is cast aside[1].

"Now I see that the Indivisible Absolute is only covered with skin and this sore in the throat is outside it."

Thakur is silent again, but after awhile he says, "Consciousness takes on the nature of matter and matter takes on the nature of Consciousness." When the body is diseased, you begin to feel as if you, yourself, have taken ill.

Hirananda requests further explanation. M. says, "When the hand gets scalded by hot water, you say that your hand has been burned by water. But that is not the case. It is the heat that has scalded your hand."

Hirananda (to Thakur) — Please tell us why the devotee suffers.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you mean bodily?

[1] And having gained which, he thinks that there is no greater gain than that, wherein established he is not shaken by the heaviest affliction. Gita 6:22

Both of them wait for what Thakur will say.

Thakur says, "Do you understand?"

M. whispers to Hirananda.

M. — It is to teach mankind. Here is an illustration. Though he is suffering so much bodily, his mind is one-hundred percent united with the Lord.

Hirananda — Yes, this is like Christ at the time of his crucifixion. Even so, it is a mystery why he is suffering so much.

M. — As Thakur says: It is the will of the Divine Mother. She is sporting in this manner. 'Wherein established he is not shaken even by the heaviest affliction.' (Gita 6:22).

Both Hirananda and M. talk in whispers. Thakur again makes a sign asking what they are talking about. Hirananda does not understand what Thakur means. Thakur, therefore, again makes the sign to ask what he has to say.

Hirananda — He is saying that your illness is for the instruction of humanity.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is nothing more than his guess. (To M. and Hirananda) My state is changing. I am asking myself not to say this to everyone: 'May you be illumined!' During the age of Kali, people are so sinful! I have to take the burden of their sins upon myself.

M. (to Hirananda) — He will not say it until the time is ripe. He will say it only to those whose time is ripe for enlightenment.

Chapter V

Worldliness[1] and non-worldliness[2]? He instructs Hirananda that non-worldliness alone is right

Hirananda is gently stroking Thakur's feet with his hand. M. is seated close by. Latu and one or two other devotees are going in and out of the room. Today is Friday, 23 April, 1886, Good Friday. The time is about 1 p.m. Hirananda has had his meal here today. Thakur has been very keen that Hirananda stays on.

Hirananda talks to Thakur as he strokes his feet. A smile plays on his face and his words are as sweet as before, as if he is consoling a child. Thakur is unwell. He is under the regular treatment of a physician.

Hirananda — Why do you worry so much? Have faith in the doctor and rest assured. You are just a child.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — How can one believe the doctor? He [Dr. Sarkar] said that I can't recover.

Hirananda — Then why worry so much? Let be what may.

M. (to Hirananda, aside) — He is not worrying about himself. It is for the good of the devotees that his body must be saved.

It is very hot, especially so as it is noon. A straw curtain has been hung. Hirananda rises and adjusts the position of the curtain. Thakur looks on.

Thakur (to Hirananda) — Do please send a pajama.

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[1] Pravritti
[2] Nivritti

Thakur is reminding him to send a pajama because Hirananda has said that the pajamas worn in his region would be very comfortable for Thakur.

Hirananda has not eaten well. The rice was not well cooked. Hearing about it, Thakur is very sad and says repeatedly to Hirananda, "Would you like a snack?" Though he himself is suffering so much and cannot talk comfortably, he asks him again and again.

And then he asks Latu, "Did you eat the same rice?"

Thakur cannot keep his dhoti on his body. He remains almost naked like a child. Hirananda is accompanied by two Brahmo devotees so Thakur pulls the dhoti over his waist again and again.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hirananda) — Do you people consider me uncivilized when my dhoti falls off?

Hirananda — This is not your concern. You are a child.

Sri Ramakrishna (pointing with his finger at Priyanath, a Brahmo devotee) — He says otherwise.

Hirananda will take his leave to depart. After a stay of one or two days in Calcutta, Hirananda is preparing to return to his place of work in Sindh. He has worked as the editor of two newspapers, the Sindh Times and the Sindh Sudhar, for four years, since 1884. A native of Sindh, he completed his B.A. in 1883. He was in Calcutta for his education. While in Calcutta, he visited Keshab Sen regularly and talked with him. From time to time he used to visit Sri Ramakrishna and stay with him at the Kali Temple.

Hirananda is tested – worldliness or non-worldliness

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hirananda) — Suppose you don't go back?

Hirananda (smiling) — Oh no, there is nobody there to do my work! I have taken service there.

Sri Ramakrishna — What is your salary per month?

Hirananda (smiling) — There is not much money in these jobs.

Sri Ramakrishna — But how much?

Hirananda laughs but Thakur insists.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do stay on here.

Hirananda doesn't reply.

Sri Ramakrishna — What use is work?

Hirananda keeps silent.

After talking awhile longer, Hirananda prepares to leave.

Sri Ramakrishna — When will you return?

Hirananda — I will return home day after tomorrow, on Monday. I shall come to see you on Monday morning.

Chapter VI

M., Narendra, Sarat and others

M. is seated close to Thakur. Hirananda has just left.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — A very fine man, isn't he?

M. — Yes, sir. He has a sweet nature.

Sri Ramakrishna — He says that he lives about twenty-two hundred miles from here. He has come to see me from so very far away!

M. — Yes, sir. Unless one has real love, one doesn't do that.

Sri Ramakrishna — He wants very much to take me there.

M. — The journey is very tiring. The train takes four or five days.

Sri Ramakrishna — He has three university degrees!

M. — Yes, sir.

Thakur is rather tired. He wishes to rest now.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Please open the window blinds and spread the mat.

Since it is so very hot, Thakur has asked M. to open the window blinds. He has also asked him to spread a thin mat over the bedding.

M. is fanning him. Thakur dozes off.

Sri Ramakrishna (after a short sleep, to M.) — Did I sleep?

M. — Yes, for awhile.

Narendra, Sarat and M. are talking with each other. They are seated toward the east of the hall below.

Narendra — It is amazing that one learns so little, even after studying for so many years! But people complain that they have not attained Bhagavan after practicing spiritual disciples for just a few days! Is attaining Bhagavan so easy? (To Sarat) You have attained peace and so has Master Mahashay [M.], but I have attained nothing.

M. — You may then prepare the cattle feed and I will go to the palace. Or, I go to the palace and you may prepare the cattle feed. (They all laugh.)

Narendra (smiling) — He [the Paramahamsa Deva] heard this story[1] and laughed when he heard it.

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna in the assembly of Narendra and other devotees

It is dusk. A number of devotees assemble in the hall upstairs: Narendra, Sarat, Sashi, Latu, Nityagopal, Kedar, Ram, M., Suresh and others.

Nityagopal is first to arrive. As soon as he sees Thakur, he bows his head to touch his feet as a mark

[1] This story is taken from the life of Prahlada. Prahlada's father had invited two gurus, Shanda and Amarka, to come see him. The king wished to ask them why they taught Prahlada to repeat the name of Hari. The two gurus were afraid of going in the presence of the king. It is then that Shanda had said these words to Amarka, "I prepare the feed of cattle and you go to the palace, or you go to the palace and I prepare the feed of cattle."

of adoration. Having taken a seat, Nityagopal says in a childlike manner, "Kedar Babu has arrived."

Kedar has come to see Thakur after a long time. He had gone to Dhaka on official work. Hearing of Thakur's illness, he has come to see him. As soon as Kedar enters, he sees Thakur greeting the devotees.

Kedar takes the dust of Thakur's feet, brings it to touch his forehead and distributes it joyfully among all the others. The devotees bow as they accept the dust.

He is going to give it to Sarat when the latter rises and takes the dust of Thakur's feet himself. M. smiles. Thakur also smiles as he looks at M. The devotees sit silent. They see Thakur in a divine mood. At times he exhales, as if to control his bhava. At last he says to Kedar by a sign, "You must hold a discussion with Girish Ghosh." Girish rubs his nose and ears and says, "Sir, I rub my nose and ears. When I didn't know who you were, I used to argue with them. But now it is quite different." (Thakur smiles.)

Pointing his finger at Narendra, Sri Ramakrishna draws Kedar's attention to him and says, "He has renounced everything!" (To the devotees) Kedar once said to Narendra, "You may argue and reason now, but in the end you will roll on the ground chanting the name of Lord Hari." (To Narendra) "Take the dust of Kedar's feet."

Kedar (to Narendra) — Take the dust of his [Sri Ramakrishna's] feet. That will do.

Surendra is seated behind the devotees. Sri Ramakrishna smiles a little as he looks at him. He says to Kedar, "Oh, what a fine nature he has!" Kedar, understanding what Thakur means, moves toward Surendra and sits beside him.

Surendra is a somewhat proud man. Some of the devotees have been trying to collect donations from the less intimate devotees to meet the expenses of the garden house. Surendra's pride is hurt at this. He bears most of the expenses of the garden house.

Surendra (to Kedar) — Can I sit near so many holy men? One of them [referring to Narendra] went to Bodh Gaya for a few days in the garb of a monk to meet great sadhus.

Sri Ramakrishna tries to pacify Surendra, "Yes, yes. They are mere children. They can't understand what is good."

Surendra (to Kedar) — Doesn't Gurudeva [referring to Sri Ramakrishna] know the inner feeling of all of us? He is not pleased with money, he is satisfied only with right feeling.

Thakur nods to indicate his agreement with Surendra. Hearing that Sri Ramakrishna only cares for right feeling, Kedar also expresses his happiness.

The devotees bring food and place it before Thakur. Thakur tastes it lightly with his tongue and asks for the prasad to be given to Surendra in the palm of his hand and then to others.

Surendra goes downstairs. The prasad will be distributed there.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Kedar) — Go downstairs and make him [Surendra] understand. Go immediately and ask them not to argue.

Mani is fanning Thakur. Thakur says, "Won't you eat prasad?" He sends Mani downstairs to take prasad.

It is nearing dusk. Girish and M. stroll on the bank of the reservoir.

Girish — Are you writing something about Thakur?

M. — Who told you?

Girish — I heard it. Will you let me read it?

M. — No, I won't give it to anybody until I have understood it myself. I have written it for myself, not for others.

Girish — What do you mean?

M. — You may have it after my death.

Thakur is ocean of motiveless grace – Amrita, a Brahmo devotee

A light is lit in Thakur's room after dusk. Amrita Basu, a Brahmo devotee, has come to meet him. Thakur is very eager to see him. M. and a few devotees are there. There is a garland of bel[1] and jasmine flowers placed over a plantain leaf in front of Thakur. It is silence in the room, as though a great yogi is sitting absorbed in communion with God. Thakur lifts the garland again and again, as if he wants to wear it.

Amrita (affectionately) — Shall I put it around your neck?

Thakur now has the garland around his neck. He has a long conversation with Amrita. Amrita is about to leave.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do come again.

[1] A tree whose flowers are sacred to Shiva

Amrita — Sir, I wish very much to visit you, but I have to come a long distance. I can't make it often.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do come. The carriage fare can be given from here.

Everybody is speechless to see Thakur's motiveless grace for Amrita.

Sri Ramakrishna and a devotee's wife and son

The next day, Saturday, 24 April. A devotee has arrived with his wife and seven-year-old son. A year ago he had lost an eight-year-old child. His wife had almost gone insane from grief, so Sri Ramakrishna had asked her to visit him now and then.

In the evening the Holy Mother comes to the hall upstairs with Thakur's dinner. The devotee's wife has accompanied her with a light.

While eating his dinner, Thakur enquires about her family affairs and asks her to come to the garden house and stay with the Holy Mother for a few days. This will alleviate her sorrow, he says. She also has an infant daughter, whom the Holy Mother later called Manmayi. Thakur asks her by a sign to bring the infant with her.

After dinner, the devotee's wife cleans the place where Thakur has eaten. After the Holy Mother goes downstairs, she speaks a few words with him, then salutes him and follows the Holy Mother. It is about 9:00 p.m. Thakur is seated in the same room with the devotee. He has a garland around his neck. Mani is fanning him.

Thakur takes the garland off and holds it in his hand. He mutters a few words to himself and joyfully gives the garland to Mani.

Thakur has asked the sorrow-stricken devotee's wife [M.'s wife] to come and stay for a few days with

the Holy Mother in the garden house. Mani has heard him say this.

APPENDIX

Sri Ramakrishna in the Hearts of Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna's first monastery – spiritual disciplines and deep dispassion of Narendra and others

It is 7 May, 1887, the full moon day of the month of Vaishakh, Saturday afternoon. Narendra and M. are talking, seated on a bedstead on the ground floor of a house in Guruprasad Chaudhury Lane in Calcutta.

This room is Mani's study. These days he is reading the *Merchant of Venice*, *Comus*, and *Blackies' Self-culture*. He is preparing a lesson to teach students in the school.

Many months ago Sri Ramakrishna left behind devotees drowning in the shoreless sea of the world; he returned home. The affectionate ties that had bound the married and unmarried devotees together during their months of service to Sri Ramakrishna could not, however, be snapped. Though the sudden disappearance of the pilot of the boat had left its passengers in fear, they now constitute but one soul, looking on one another as their own. They cannot survive without mutual company. They find conversation with other people distasteful; they only like to talk of him. They all wonder whether or not they will ever be able to see him again. He has said: If you call on God with a yearning heart, He will hear your sincere cry and reveal Himself. He has assured them that God is bound to hear the sincere cry of their hearts. Whenever in solitude, they see the joyful image of Thakur. When they walk down a road, they weep, feeling alone and aimless. That is why Thakur

said to Mani, "I feel pain in giving up the body, knowing that you people will wander around weeping on the way." A devotee says to himself, "He has left, but I am still here. I still have the desire to live in this perishable world. I could give up the body if I wanted. But I don't do it."

The young devotees had stayed at the Cossipore garden house and served Sri Ramakrishna night and day. As soon as Thakur had gone, despite their unwillingness, they returned home automatically, like mechanical dolls. Thakur never asked any of them to put on the external signs of sannyasa (of ochre cloth). Nor did he ask them to renounce their family names. They kept them for awhile after his passing away: Dutta, Ghosh, Chakravarti, Ghosal, etc. But Thakur had made them renounce the world within.

Two or three of them had no home to return to. Surendra said to them, "Brothers, where will you go? Let's rent a residence for you where you can live. Besides, we also want some place we can go to attain peace. Without it, how can we continue day and night in our family lives? You will stay there. I used to pay, howsoever little, for the service of Thakur in the Cossipore garden house. Now that can be spent for your room and board." For one or two months Surendra had paid thirty rupees a month. Gradually, when the other brothers joined the Math, he paid fifty or sixty rupees, still later one hundred rupees a month. The house that was hired in Baranagore cost eleven rupees a month for rent and tax. A brahmin cook had to be paid six rupees a month. Remaining expenses incurred were for rice and lentils. The Elder Gopal, Latu and Tarak had no home to return to. The Younger Gopal was first to go to the Baranagore house, carrying Thakur's mattress (seat) and other goods from the Cossipore garden house. He was accompanied by a brahmin cook and Sashi. Sarat also stayed there the first night. Tarak was away in Vrindavan. After a few days, he returned and joined

them. Narendra, Sarat, Sashi, Baburam, Niranjan and Kali used to visit it from time to time. Rakhal, Latu, Jogen and Kali were still away in Vrindavan. Kali returned after a month, Rakhal after many months, and Jogen after a year.

Before long Narendra, Rakhal, Niranjan, Sarat, Sashi, Baburam, Jogen, Kali and Latu lived at the Math. They did not return home. Then Prasanna and Subodh came to stay. They were joined later by Gangadhar and Hari.

Blessed you are, Surendra! This first Math is your handy work – it is because of your ascetic will that this ashram has come into being. Making you his instrument, Sri Ramakrishna has given physical shape to his fundamental mantra, viz. 'renunciation of lust and greed.' It is through such young, pure and all-renouncing souls as Narendra and the other young men that he has resuscitated the Sanatana Dharma (Eternal religion) for the good of humanity. Brother Surendra, who can forget the debt one owes you? The brothers of the Math live like motherless children waiting for you to come. Today they have paid the rent of the house and are left with nothing. They have nothing to eat. When will you come and supply their food? Who can restrain his tears when remembering your sincere love and affection?

Narendra and his companions yearn for God – their resolve to fast unto death

Narendra is talking with Mani in the same ground floor room in Calcutta. He is now the leader of the devotees. Every inmate of the Math has deep dispassion within. They are all restless to have the vision of Bhagavan.

Narendra (to Mani) — I am interested in nothing at all. Here I am talking to you, but I feel like leaving.

Narendra is silent for awhile. Then he says, "Shall I fast unto death?'

Mani — Yes, good! One does anything for Bhagavan.

Narendra — But if I am not able to control my hunger?

Mani — Then eat something and start again.

Again Narendra is silent for a few minutes.

Narendra — It seems that Bhagavan doesn't even exist. However much I have prayed, I have gotten no response.

"I saw so many mantras whose letters were glittering like gold.

"How many times have I seen Kali's form and so many other forms! Yet I feel no peace within.

"Will you give me six pice?"

Narendra intends to go to the Baranagore Math by carriage at Sobhabazar. He needs six pice for his fare.

In the meantime, Satu (Satkari) arrives by carriage. Satu is the same age as Narendra. He is very fond of the boys of the Math and often visits them. His home is in the vicinity of the Baranagore Math and he works in a Calcutta office. He owns a personal carriage. It is by this carriage that he has come from his office.

Narendra returns the money to Mani, saying, "Now I can go with Satu. Please give me something to eat." Mani treats him to some snacks.

Mani gets into the same carriage with them to go to the Math. They arrive there at dusk. Mani sees how the brothers of the Math spend their days and what spiritual disciplines they practice. He visits the

Math now and then to see how Sri Ramakrishna is revealing himself in the hearts of his disciples. He doesn't find Niranjan there. The latter has only his mother alive; it is to see her that he has gone home. Baburam, Sarat and Kali are away in holy Puri. They intend to stay there for some more days and witness the Rathayatra (car festival).

Sri Ramakrishna's world of spirituality and Narendra's guardianship

Narendra is looking after the brothers of the Math while, for many days, Prasanna[1] has been carrying out spiritual practices. Narendra raised the question of fasting to him too. Narendra had gone to Calcutta. Taking advantage of it, Prasanna left for some unknown destination. When he returns, Narendra hears about it. Why did Raja let him go, he wants to know. The fact is that Rakhal was not there. He had gone for a stroll from the Math to a garden in Dakshineswar. Everybody calls him Rakhal Raja, Rakhal Raja (king of cowherd boys) being another name of Sri Krishna.

Narendra — When Raja returns, I shall take him to task. Why did he let Prasanna leave? (To Harish) You were lecturing standing with your feet apart; but you could not stop him.

Harish (in a very gentle voice) — Brother Tarak asked him not to go, but he did.

Narendra (to M.) — See how very difficult it is for me? Here, again, I have fallen into the world of maya. Where has that boy gone?

[1] Sarada Prasanna

Rakhal has returned from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. He had gone there with Bhavanath.

Rakhal tells Narendra that Prasanna has left a note for him. It is being read now: I am going to Vrindavan on foot. It is very difficult for me to stay here. My bhava (mood) is undergoing a change. I used to dream about my father, mother and other members of the family. Then I saw the very form of maya [of woman]. I suffered a great deal, twice. That is why I went home. And it is also the reason I am going away from home. The Paramahamsa Deva said to me, "The members of your family may say anything to you, but don't trust them."

Rakhal says, "Prasanna has left for these reasons. And he also said, 'Narendra often goes home to enquire about his mother, brothers and sisters, and to fight his lawsuit. I fear that I may also wish to go home later, to follow his example.' "

Narendra remains silent.

Rakhal talks about going on pilgrimage. He says, "We have achieved nothing here. He [Thakur] talked to us about having the vision of Bhagavan. Have we succeeded?" Rakhal is lying down. Some of the devotees are sitting beside him, others are lying down.

Rakhal — Let's go to the Narmada.

Narendra — How will it help to wander around? Do you think we will attain jnana by doing that?

A Devotee — Then why have we renounced the world?

Narendra — Since I haven't been able to attain Rama, shall I establish a household with Shyam, and beget boys and girls? What are you talking about!

Saying this, Narendra gets up and leaves. Rakhal remains lying there.

After awhile Narendra returns and sits down.

One of the brothers is having a lot of fun pretending to be afflicted at not seeing the Lord. He says, "Oh, brother! Do please bring me a dagger. There's no sense in living any longer! I can't bear the pain!"

Narendra (in a grave mood) — Here it is. Stretch your hand and take it. (All laugh.)

They again talk about Prasanna.

Narendra — Even here, we are involved in maya! Why, then, embrace sannyasa?

Rakhal — A book titled, '*Liberation and How to Attain it*,' says that it is not right for monks to live together. It talks about a city of monks.

Sashi — I don't believe in sannyasa. There's no place inaccessible to me. There's no place I can't live.

Now they talk about Bhavanath. Bhavanath's wife has been critically ill.

Narendra (to Rakhal) – It appears that Bhavanath's wife has survived. That is why he came so quickly to Dakshineswar for a stroll.

Now they talk about the Kankurgachi garden. Ram is going to build a temple there.

Narendra (to Rakhal) — Ram Babu has made M. one of the trustees of the garden.

M. (to Rakhal) — But I don't know anything about it.

It is dusk. Sashi burns incense in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Next he burns incense before the deities in the other rooms, repeats the Name in a sweet voice and bows before the deities.

The arati is being performed. The brothers of the Math and other devotees stand with folded hands and witness the arati. Bells are rung. The devotees sing together the song of the arati –

Victory to Shiva Omkar, worship Shiva Omkar,

Brahma Vishnu Sadashiva,

Hara Hara Hara Mahadeva!

Narendra has introduced this song in the arati. The same song is sung to Viswanath (Shiva) in the holy city of Kashi.

Mani feels great joy seeing the devotees in the Math.

It is eleven at night when the meal is over. Everybody lies down to sleep. They very affectionately ask Mani to lie down with them.

It is past twelve. Mani has not been able to sleep. He is saying to himself, "Everything is here – it is the same Ayodhya, only Rama is missing." Mani rises quietly. It is full moon in the month of Vaishakh. Mani strolls alone on the bank of the Ganges. He is thinking of Sri Ramakrishna.

Narendra and other brothers of the Math in dispassion – readings from *Yogavashishtha* – joy of kirtan and dance

M. arrived at the Math on Saturday with the intention of staying until the following Wednesday. Today is Sunday, when the householder devotees generally visit the Math. The *Yogavashishtha* is

> normally read these days. M. has heard some text of the *Yogavashishtha* from Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna had prohibited taking up the attitude of Soham (as taught in the *Yogavashishtha*) as long as one retains body-consciousness. He had added that the right mood was to consider oneself the servant of God. M. wants to check whether or not it tallies with the thinking of the brothers of the Math. He begins to talk about the *Yogavashishtha*.

M. — Well, what does Yogavashishtha say about Brahmajnana?

Rakhal — Hunger and thirst, sorrow and happiness are all maya. The way out is to annihilate the mind completely.

M. — After the mind is annihilated, what remains is Brahman. Am I right?

Rakhal — Yes.

M. — Thakur said the same thing. Nangta (Totapuri) taught him this. Well, did you read that Vashishtha asked Rama not to renounce the householder's life?

Rakhal — Where is that? We haven't found it yet. He didn't accept Rama as an avatara.

> The conversation goes on. Narendra, Tarak, and a devotee return from the bank of the Ganges. They wanted to go on a pleasure trip to Konnagar, but could not get a boat. They sit down. The conversation on the *Yogavashishtha* continues.

Narendra (to M.) — It says very nice things. Do you know about Lila?

M. — Yes, that story is in the *Yogavashishtha*. I have read a little of it. Lila attained Brahmajnana. Didn't she?

Narendra — Yes, and the dialogue between Indra and Ahalya? The story of king Viduratha turning into a chandala (a pariah; one of the lowest classes of Hindu untouchables.)

M. — Yes, I remember them.

Narendra — How nice the description of the forest is[1]!

[1] There was a king Padma by name whose queen was Lila. Lila, seeking immortality for her husband, worshipped Saraswati, the Goddess of learning. Lila received a boon from Her that the soul of her husband would remain confined in the void above in the room after his death. After the demise of her husband, Lila recalled Devi Saraswati to her mind. She manifested Herself and made Lila realize very well that the world is an illusion and that Brahman alone is the Reality. Saraswati Devi said, "Your husband, now known as Padma, was a brahmin, Vashishtha by name, in his earlier life. Only eight days ago he died. His soul is still hovering round here. At another place, he ruled a region for years as King Viduratha. All this is possible by the power of maya. In fact there is nothing like time or place. After this the queen accompanied Devi Saraswati and visited the aforesaid kingdoms of brahmin Vashishtha and king Viduratha, through the subtle body, in samadhi. By the grace of Devi Saraswati the knowledge of his previous birth came to the mind of Viduratha. Thereafter he died in battle and his soul entered the body of king Padma.

King Viduratha did not turn into a chandala. King Lavan, on the other hand, became a chandala. As a result of the magic of a magician he experienced the whole life of the chandala in a moment. The chief queen of a king, Ahalya by name, had fallen in love with a young man, Indra.

Brothers of monastery take daily dip in the Ganges and perform worship of Guru

Narendra and other devotees are going for a dip in the Ganges. M. will accompany them. Since the midday sun is overhead, M. takes an umbrella with him. Saratchandra of Baranagore is also with them. He is a young householder brahmin with firm faith in religious conduct. He frequently visits the monastery. A few days ago in a mood of dispassion he had visited places of pilgrimage.

M. (to Sarat) — The sun is hot.

Narendra — This is an excuse for your umbrella. (M. laughs.)

The devotees go along the path of the monastery with thin towels on their shoulders. They take their bath at the ghat to the north of Pramanik ghat. They are all dressed in gerua[1]. It is the twenty-sixth of Vaishakh. The sun is very hot.

M. (to Narendra) — Ready for a sunstroke!

Narendra — Your body is an obstacle to developing renunciation, isn't it? You and Deven Babu…

M. laughs and says to himself, "Is it the body alone that is an obstacle?" The devotees return to the monastery after taking their bath and, washing their feet, enter Sri Ramakrishna's room. With great reverence they make offerings of flowers one by one at his lotus feet.

Narendra takes a little longer to enter the shrine. After bowing down to Guru Maharaj, when he tries to take some flowers in his hands, he finds the

[1] Ochre cloth worn by a monk

flower container empty. He exclaims, "No flowers!" There are a couple of vilwa leaves in the container. He smears the leaves with sandalwood paste and offers them to Thakur. Ringing the bell once and offering his obeisance again, he goes back to the 'room of the danas[1].'

The room of the danas, the shrine and the room of Kali Tapasvi

The brothers of the monastery call themselves *danas* and *daityas* (ghosts and demons) and the room where they meet they call 'the room of the danas'. They who practice meditation, or study religious texts in solitude live in a room to the south. Shutting the door from within, Kali stays in this room most of the time, so it is called the room of Kali Tapasvi by the brothers of the monastery. To the north of Kali Tapasvi's room is Thakur's shrine. To the north of it is the room where offerings are prepared for the gods and goddesses. Standing in the 'offering room' one can witness the arati. The devotees also have to pass through this room to offer obeisance to Thakur. To the north of the 'offering room' is the 'danas' room'. It is quite a long room. The devotees visiting the monastery are received here. To the north of the 'danas' room' is a small cell. The brothers call it their dining room. The devotees eat here.

Toward the eastern corner of the 'danas' room' is a courtyard where they eat during festivals. Exactly to the north of the courtyard is the kitchen.

There is a verandah to the east of Kali Tapasvi's room and the shrine. Toward the southwestern corner of the verandah is a library of an Association of Baranagore. All these rooms are on the first level. Between Kali Tapasvi's room and the library is a staircase to the second level. Narendra and the brothers of the monastery sometimes use it to

[1] Room of the ghosts, or demons

get to the roof in the evening. They sit there together and talk about spiritual matters. Sometimes they talk about Sri Ramakrishna, sometimes about Shankaracharya, Ramanuja or Christ and other times about Indian and European philosophy, the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras*.

In the 'danas' room' Narendra sings the name and glories of Bhagavan in his sweet voice, rare even among gods. He gives music lessons to Sarat and his other companions. Kali takes lessons on playing the musical instruments. In this very room, filled with joy, Narendra sings kirtan with the brothers and they dance joyfully.

Narendra and propagation of religion – Dhyana Yoga and Karma Yoga

Narendra is seated in the 'danas' room'. Chunilal, M. and the brothers of the monastery are also there. They discuss the propagation of religion.

M. (to Narendra) — Vidyasagar says that he doesn't talk about the Lord to anyone for fear of being caned.

Narendra — For fear of being caned?

M. — Vidyasagar says: Imagine that we are in the presence of the Lord after death. Imagine that Keshab Sen is taken into His presence by Yama (the messenger of Death). Keshab Sen has certainly committed some sin in the world. When this is proved, the Lord perhaps sentences him to twenty-five cane strokes! Then imagine that I am also taken to the Lord. I have been visiting Keshab's Samaj. I, too, have been guilty of a number of misdeeds. So I am also sentenced to a caning. I would probably say that I have done only what Keshab Sen instructed me to do. The Lord then asks the messengers to bring Keshab Sen again to his presence.

Maybe when he comes before the Lord, He asks Keshab, 'Did you preach to him? You know nothing about the Lord yourself and you preach to others. Come up, messengers, and give him twenty-five more cane lashes.' (They all laugh.)

"So Vidyasagar says, 'I cannot take care of myself. And on the top of it to receive lashes for others! (All laugh.) I understand nothing about the Lord, how can I lecture to others?' "

Narendra — How can he who has not understood this, understand other things?

M. — What other things?

Narendra — How could he who has not understood this, understand what compassion, what doing good to others, and so on, is? How has he understood school work? How did he understand that he has to establish schools for the education of boys, enter family life, marry and beget sons and daughters? How has he understood that all this is right?

"If you understand one thing rightly, you understand everything."

M. (to himself) — True indeed. Thakur said that he who knows the Lord understands everything. He said to Vidyasagar that leading a family life, managing schools and all those things were the activities of rajas. Since Vidyasagar had compassion, Thakur told him, 'It is the sattva of rajas. There is no harm in this rajas.'

The brothers of the monastery are relaxing after their meal. Mani and Chunilal talk to each other, sitting on the landing of the inner steps to the east of the 'offering room'. Chunilal relates how he met Thakur for the first time in Dakshineswar. He also tells M.

that, disgusted with family life, he left home once and visited places of pilgrimage. After a short time, Narendra comes and sits beside them. Now they talk about the *Yogavashishtha*.

Narendra (to Mani) — What about Viduratha turning into a chandala?

Mani — Are you talking of Lavan?

Narendra — Did you read it?

Mani — Yes, I read a little.

Narendra — Did you read the book here?

Mani — No, I read a little at home.

Narendra asks the Younger Gopal to bring a smoke [hubble-bubble]. The Younger Gopal is meditating.

Narendra (to the Younger Gopal) — I say, prepare a smoke. What do you mean by all this meditation? First of all karma, then meditation. (All laugh.)

To the west of the monastery building and just adjacent to it is a big plot with many plants and trees. M. is sitting alone under a tree when Prasanna appears. It is about three o'clock.

M — Where have you been all this time? We have all been worrying about you. Have you seen them? When did you come?

Prasanna — I just arrived and saw them.

M — You left a note saying, 'I am going to Vrindavan.' We were very worried about you. How far did you go?

Prasanna — As far as Konnagar. (Both of them laugh.)

M. — Please sit down and tell me. Where did you go first?

Prasanna — To the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. I stayed there for a night.

M (laughing) — What mood is Hazra Mahashay in these days?

Prasanna — Hazra was saying, 'What do you think of me?' (Both laugh.)

M. (laughing) — And what did you say?

Prasanna — I kept quiet.

M. — And then?

Prasanna — Then he asked me whether I had brought tobacco for him. (Both laugh.) He wanted me to do some work for him! (Laughter.)

M. — And where did you go next?

Prasanna — I finally went to Konnagar. I spent the night there, thinking that I would go further the next day. I asked some gentlemen if they would give me railway fare for Vrindavan.

M. — What did they say?

Prasanna — They said, 'We can give you four annas or a rupee. But who can give you that much fare?' (Both of them laugh.)

M. — What did you take with you?

Prasanna — A piece of dhoti and a picture of the Paramahamsa Deva. I didn't show his picture to anybody.

Conversation between father and son – who comes first: parents or the Lord

Sashi's father has come. He wants to take his son away from the monastery. During the illness of Sri Ramakrishna, Sashi had nursed him single-mindedly for about nine months. He had received his B.A. degree from college and won a scholarship on an entrance examination. His father is a poor brahmin, but a devout and religious man. Sashi is the eldest son of his parents and they have pinned great hopes on his earnings to alleviate their sufferings. Sashi, however, has renounced everything to attain Bhagavan. He weeps and says to his friends, "What can I do? I don't understand anything. Alas! I have not been able to serve my parents in the least. What great hopes they had pinned on me! My mother didn't have a single piece of jewelry to wear. How I wished I could buy jewelry for her! But I have done nothing. I feel such a great responsibility to return home, but Guru Maharaj has asked us to renounce 'lust and greed'. So I can't go that way."

After Sri Ramakrishna left his mortal body, Sashi's father thought that he would probably return home. But after staying home for a few days, he began visiting the monastery soon after it was established. And then he never returned home again. So his father visits it sometimes to bring him back, but it is impossible for him to return. Hearing that

his father has come, Sashi escapes in another direction to avoid meeting him.

The father knows M. He talks to him as they stroll on the upper verandah.

The Father — Who is the leader here? It is Narendra who is at the root of all this trouble. These boys had all returned home and resumed their studies.

M. — There is no leader here. They are all equal. What could Narendra have done? Who would come here unless he, himself, wanted to? Have we been able to completely renounce our homes?

The Father — You have done the right thing, brother. You have kept both sides [meaning spiritual and family life]. Can't one practice religion the way you are doing? We want Sashi to do what you are doing. Let him be here, as well as there. See how his mother is crying for him.

M. feels sad about it but does not say anything.

The Father — And why should he wander around looking for a sadhu? I can take him to a good sadhu. A sadhu visits Inder Narayana. He is a wonderful man. Let Sashi meet him.

Rakhal's dispassion[1] – sannyasi and woman

Rakhal and M. are pacing the verandah to the east of Kali Tapasvi's room. They are talking of Thakur and the devotees.

Rakhal (very keenly) — Master Mahashay, come. Let's practice sadhana.

[1] Vairagya

"It is for this reason that I didn't return home. If somebody says, 'You have not realized the Lord, so why continue to stay?' Narendra has a good reply to this. He says, 'If I have not attained Rama, shall I have to establish a household with Shyam and beget children?' Ah! Everything that Narendra says is so beautiful. You should ask him.

M. — Quite right. I see, Rakhal, that you, too, have developed great yearning for God.

Rakhal — What shall I say, Master Mahashay? At midday I felt such great longing to go to Narmada. Master Mahashay, let's practice sadhana. We are achieving nothing without it. Look, even Shukadeva was afraid of worldly life. He fled as soon as he took birth. Vyasa Deva [his father] asked him to stay, but he wouldn't.

M. — The *Yoga Upanishad* says that Shukadeva was running away from the realm of maya. Yes, the conversation between Vyasa and Shukadeva is very nice. Vyasa asked him to stay in the family and practice dharma. Shukadeva replied that the ultimate goal was the lotus of Hari's feet. He was expressing his repulsion for family men marrying and living with a wife.

Rakhal — Many people think it's enough not to look at a woman. What is the use of lowering your eyes when you see a woman? Last evening Narendra said beautifully, 'As long as I have the feeling of lust, there is a woman there. When one is rid of lust, one sees no difference between a man and a woman.'

M. — Very right. Children are not conscious of the difference between a boy and a girl.

Rakhal — That is why I say that we must practice sadhana. How can one attain jnana without going beyond maya? Come on, let's go to the hall. So many gentlemen have come from Baranagore. Let's go and hear what Narendra is telling them.

Narendra and resignation

Narendra is in conversation. M. does not enter the room. He listens to the bits of conversation while pacing the courtyard near the hall.

Narendra is saying, "There is no place or time for performing sandhya and other ritualistic worship."

A Gentleman — Well sir! Can one attain Him through sadhana?

Narendra — His grace is needed. The *Gita* says –

Ishvarah sarva bhutanam hriddese arjuna tishthati,

Bhramayan sarva bhutani yantra arudhani mayaya.

Tam eva saranam gaccha sarva bhavena bharata,

Tatprasadat param santim sthanam prapsyasi sashvatam.

(Gita 18:61, 62)

[The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, Oh Arjuna, and by His maya causes all beings to revolve as though mounted on a machine.

Seek refuge in Him alone with all your heart, Oh Bharata. By His grace you will gain Supreme Peace and the Eternal Abode.]

"Without His grace, sadhana and bhajan are of no avail. Therefore, resign yourself to Him."

The Gentleman — We will sometimes come and bother you.

Narendra — You may come whenever you feel like it.

"We go to the ghat in your neighbourhood for a dip in the Ganges."

The Gentleman — We have no objection, but no one else should go there.

Narendra — If you wish, we won't go.

Gentleman — I didn't mean that – but if you see too many people going there, please stop going anymore.

Arati and Narendra reads from *Guru Gita*

The arati is being performed after dusk. The devotees fold their hands and together sing the hymn to Bhagavan, singing together, "Victory to Shiva Omkar." After the arati the devotees go into the 'danas' room'. M. is seated there. Prasanna reads from the *Guru Gita*. Narendra enters and recites the text melodiously. He sings –

I salute the Sadguru[1] who is the very image of the Bliss of Brahman, who is the giver of Supreme Joy and the embodiment of jnana,

He is beyond the dualities of happiness and sorrow, is like the sky, is the symbol of the dicta of the Upanishads such as Tattvamasi (You are that Brahman).

Who is one, eternal, pure, immovable, who is present in every intellect as the witness, who is beyond all moods and devoid of the three gunas.

[1] Real preceptor

Then he sings –

Shiva has proclaimed that there is none greater than the Guru, none better than the Guru.

Therefore, I shall only talk of the Guru, the image of Brahman.

I shall only sing His praises. I shall only meditate upon Him and offer Him my salutations again and again.

Narendra chants the *Guru Gita* melodiously. The minds of the devotees have settled motionless, like the flame of a lamp at a windless moment. How right Thakur was when he said, "The way the snake lies motionless, raising its hood when it hears the sweet sound of the flute, exactly like this, does He who dwells within the heart listens to Narendra." Oh, what bhakti for the Guru of the brothers of the monastery!

Sri Ramakrishna's love and Rakhal

Rakhal is seated in Kali Tapasvi's room. Prasanna sits close to him. M. is also there.

Rakhal has left home, renouncing his wife and child. He has deep dispassion (*vairagya*) within. His only thought is to go alone to the bank of the Narmada or to some other such place. Nevertheless, he advises Prasanna.

Rakhal (to Prasanna) — Why do you run from place to place? Here you have the company of sadhus. To leave it and go elsewhere! Besides, here you have the company of a man like Narendra. Where will you go from this place?

Prasanna — My parents live in Calcutta. I fear I might later be attracted by their affection. That's why I want to flee.

Rakhal — Do our parents love us the way Guru Maharaj [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] did? What have we done for him, that we deserve such love? Why was he so anxious for the good of our body, mind and soul? What have we done for him?

M. (to himself) — Ah, how right Rakhal is! That is why he [Sri Ramakrishna] is called the ocean of motiveless grace.

Prasanna — Do you not sometimes feel like going on pilgrimage?

Rakhal — I do feel at times that I should go to the bank of the Narmada for a few days. And sometimes I think that I should go and stay in a garden somewhere and practice sadhana. I also feel a desire to perform *panchatapa*[1] for three days. But I don't want to go to a garden owned by worldly people.

Does the Lord exist?

Tarak and Prasanna are talking in the 'danas' room'. Tarak has lost his mother. Like Rakhal's father, his father has married a second time. Tarak was also married, but his wife is no more. Now the monastery is Tarak's home. Tarak, too, explains to Prasanna.

Prasanna — I have attained neither jnana nor prema. What can I hold onto?

Tarak — It may be difficult to attain jnana, but how can you say that you have not attained prema?

[1] Practicing japa and meditation seated within five fires

Prasanna — How can it be called prema if I am not able to weep for Him? Besides, what have I realized in all these days?

Tarak — Why, you have seen the Paramahamsa! How are you not going to have jnana?

Prasanna — What jnana shall I have? Jnana means to know. What shall I know? I am not even certain that God exists!

Tarak — Well, that is true. In the jnani's view, there is no God.

M (to himself) — Oh, what a state Prasanna is in! Thakur used to say that they who want Bhagavan fall into this state. Sometimes they feel that God exists and sometimes that He does not. I understand that Tarak is reading Buddhist philosophy these days. That is why he is saying that there is no God according to the jnani. But Thakur used to say that both the jnani and the devotee will reach the same destination.

Chapter II

Narendra with his brother disciple – Narendra's innermost thoughts

The meditation room, i.e. the room of Kali Tapasvi. Narendra and Prasanna are talking to each other. Rakhal, Harish and the Younger Gopal are seated on one side of the room. The Elder Gopal is the last to arrive.

Narendra is reading the Gita and explaining the verses to Prasanna.

Ishvarah sarvabhutanam hriddese arjuna tishthati,

Bhramayan sarvabhutani yantrarudhani mayaye.

Tam eva sharanam gaccha sarva bhavena bharata,

Tatprasadat param santim sthanam prapsyasi sashvatam.

Sarvadharman parityajya mam ekam sharanam vraja,

Aham tva sarvapapebhyo mokshayishyami ma shucah.

(Gita 18:61, 62 and 66)

[The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, oh Arjuna; and by his maya causes all beings to revolve as though mounted on a machine.

Seek refuge in Him alone with all your heart, oh Bharata. By His grace you will gain supreme peace and the eternal abode.

Renounce all dharmas and take refuge in Me alone. I shall liberate you from all sins; grieve not.]

Narendra — Note the words, 'mounted on a machine.' 'By His maya, He causes all beings to revolve as though mounted on a machine.' You want to know God. You are a mere insect, what can you know of Him? Just reflect, what is a man? It is said that the numberless stars you see are each a solar system. We are part of one solar system and even that is too big for us. This earth is just a very ordinary ball compared to the sun. And on this earth man wanders like an insect.

Narendra sings –

'You are our Father, we Your little children'

O God, we are born in the dust of this earth and this very dust has blinded our eyes.

O Lord, we are born as infants to play in the dust. Pray, grant us fearlessness, You refuge of the weak!

If we once make a mistake, will You not lift us in your arms? Or will You go away and leave us?

O Lord, shall we lie unconscious on the earth, never to be raised? We are but little infants, a very small mind we have.

At every step, Father, we slip! Alas, why do You show us such an angry face? Why do we see such a deep frown on it?

Father, pray don't be angry with us, such small beings. Tell us lovingly what we do wrong.

If, due to our mistake, we fall a hundred times, pray lift us each time, for we are but weaklings. What can we do?

Then he says to Prasanna, "Take refuge in Him! Resign yourself to His will and be at peace."

Surcharged with emotion, Narendra sings this song –

Self-surrender, the way

O Lord, I am Your servant, I am Your servant! Your servant, am I!

You are the compassionate one, my compassionate one! The only compassionate one indeed.

From You I have received two pieces of bread and a loincloth.

Now grant me love and devotion (bhakti) and divine fervour so that I may sing Your name.

You are the compassionate one, showering grace, the Master You are.

This time grant Your vision to me, the fakir, by Your grace.

You are the compassionate one, showering grace; I have accepted Your name.

Kabir, your slave, has taken refuge in You, who takes across whoever takes refuge at Your feet.

"Don't you remember what he [Sri Ramakrishna] said? 'The Lord is a mound of sugar and you an ant. You get filled with just one grain of sugar, but you think of carrying away the whole mound to your home!' And he said, don't you remember, 'Shukadeva was at the most a big black ant.' So I tell Kali, 'You fool! Do you want to measure the Lord with your inch-tape?'

"God is the ocean of compassion. Take refuge in Him. He will shower His grace on you. Pray to Him thus:

O Rudra, pray preserve me ever in your benevolent aspect.

Take me from illusion to reality.

Take me from the darkness of ignorance to the light of spiritual wisdom. Take me from death to Immorality.

Prasanna — What spiritual disciplines shall I practice?

Narendra — Just recite His name. Don't you remember Thakur's song?

God's name, the way

(1) O Mother Shyama, Your name is my only haven.

Am I to worship you ritually with *koshakushi*[1]? Or to lecture, showing my teeth?

Your name cuts asunder the bonds of Death. Shiva with matted hair has only propagated this.

[1] A kosha is small water container, kushi a small spoon for taking out water from it. Both are usually made of copper and are used in worship.

I am just a slave to that matted-haired one. What other service may I accept now?

Your name alone will bring that which is to be. Why should I worry unnecessarily?

I have made Shiva and His words the basis of my life.

(2) We are but little infants with a very small mind.

At every step, O Father, we slip!

What is God? Is He compassionate?

Prasanna — You say that God exists. And then you also say: Charvaka[1] and many other religions have said that the world has come into existence by itself.

Narendra — Haven't you read chemistry? What will a mere combination do? It is like the human hand bringing oxygen, hydrogen and electricity together to form water.

"Everybody accepts the intelligent force. There is one supreme source of knowledge that runs everything."

Prasanna — How do you conclude that there is compassion in Him?

Narendra — The *Vedas* say, 'That which is Your compassionate face.'

"John Stuart Mill also says the same thing. How much more compassion must He have, who has given compassion to the human being! Thakur said, 'Faith is the basic thing.' He dwells so close to us. Your faith will take you across."

Saying so, Narendra sings in a sweet voice –

[1] The materialistic philosophy which holds that matter is the only reality; hence, denying the existence of God and soul

Faith, the way

Where are you looking for Me, O man? Here, I am so close to you.

I am not in quarrels and mishaps, nor in the knife and chopper.

Nor am I in skin nor in hair, nor in bone nor in flesh.

Nor am I in the temple or mosque, in Kashi or Kailas.

Nor am I in Ayodhya or in Dwaraka. I am only in your faith.

Nor am I in rituals or in yoga, nonattachment (vairagya) or sannyasa.

If you look for Me, I shall be with you in no time.

I have my residence outside the town, my hut is in the Lord's shelter,

Says Kabir, 'Listen O brother, I am in all holy men.'

As long as you have desires, you disbelieve in God

Prasanna – You sometimes say that there is no God. Then how can you say all this now? You are not consistent. You keep changing your opinion! (Everyone laughs.)

Narendra — But this one thing I will never change, that as long as you have desires, you do not believe in God. Some desire or the other always persists in man. Maybe you have the desire to study, to pass examinations, to become a learned man. A man cherishes one desire or the other.

Filled with devotion Narendra begins to sing –

I take refuge in the loving One, the supreme Father and Mother.

Victory to You, my God, victory to You, the bestower of all good.

Victory to my God, the dispeller of all calamity and sorrow, the support of the three worlds.

O Lord, You are beyond thought, infinite and immeasurable. You are beyond comparison.

O Lord, the God of the universe, omnipresent, all-pervading, the personification of true knowledge, the supreme soul; victory to You.

Victory to You, O adorable one, the compassionate one. I bow at Your feet, at Your feet I bow.

Victory to You, my God, You are the only refuge in life and death.

What shall we ask Thee in humble submission?

Pray, grant us the right thoughts in this world and the right ones in the next. Victory, Victory to You.

Narendra sings again, exhorting his brother disciples to drink from the cup of the Bliss of the Lord. God is very near to us, like musk to the deer.

Drink from the cup, O Avadhuta[1], the sweet prema of the Lord. Let it intoxicate you.

You have spent your childhood in play and your youth under the control of your wife.

In old age, you fell prey to phlegm and flatulence – and you kept to bed, unable to move.

The musk lies in the lotus of the musk-deer's navel. How to make the animal understand this?

Without a real Guru, man roams about in vain like a deer in the forest.

M. hears all these songs from the verandah.

[1] A hermit who worships Lord Shiva

Narendra rises. As he leaves the room, he says, "My brain is heated from talking so long." Seeing M. on the verandah, he says, "Master Mahashay! Please take some refreshments."

A brother of the monastery says to Narendra, "But you do say that there is no Bhagavan!" Narendra laughs.

Narendra in deep dispassion – he runs down household life

The next morning, 9 May, M. is sitting under a tree in the garden of the monastery. He is thinking: Thakur has made the brothers of the monastery renounce 'lust and greed'. Ah, what yearning they have for the Lord! This place has become a veritable Vaikuntha (the abode of Vishnu) and the brothers of monastery are, as it were, Narayana. Thakur left not long ago, that is why his divine mood is almost intact.

"It is the same Ayodhya, only Rama is not here.

"Thakur has made them renounce their homes, and he has kept others in family life. Why? Is there no way out for them?"

Narendra is looking down from the upper room. He sees M. seated alone under a tree. He comes downstairs laughing and says, "Hello, M.! What are you doing?" After a short conversation, M. says to Narendra, "What a sweet voice you have! Please sing a hymn."

Narendra hums and sings a hymn in which a devotee prays for forgiveness for his sins. The householders have forgotten the Lord. How much sin they commit during their childhood, youth and middle age! Why don't they serve Bhagavan and meditate on Him with body, mind and speech?

I suffered immensely during my childhood. My body remained soiled with excreta and urine.

I was always longing to suck at my mother's breast. My limbs were incapable of work.

So many insects created by Your maya stung me. I would cry day and night because of disease, forgetting You, O Shankara!

Therefore, O Shiva! Mahadeva! O Shambhu! pardon my transgressions.

Beyond youth, when I became an adult, the five poisonous snakes of sound, sight, smell, taste and touch stung me at vital points.

They destroyed my sense of discrimination and I became engaged in the sensuous pleasures of wealth, wife and off-spring.

Forgetting again to meditate on You, my heart was filled with vanity and pride.

Therefore, O Shiva! Mahadeva! O Shambhu! pardon my transgressions, do pardon me.

Now in old age my senses have lost the power of perception, the intellect its sharpness,

Afflictions, sins, diseases and bereavements have broken my body.

My mind wanders, enfeebled by illusions, infatuations and desires. It is bereft of meditation on Sri Mahadeva.

Therefore, O Shiva! Mahadeva! O Shambhu! pardon my transgressions, do pardon me.

In the morning after my bath, I never brought Ganges water to wash Your image.

I never brought vilwa leaves from the forest to worship You.

Nor did I make garlands of blooming lotuses from the pond for You, nor did I offer you incense and flowers.

Therefore, O Shiva! Mahadeva! O Shambhu! pardon my transgressions, do pardon me.

O Lord Shankara! White is Your body covered with ashes, white shine Your teeth when you smile.

A white garland of human skulls in your hand, with a white club.

White is the bull on which You ride, white earrings dangle from Your ears.

Your matted locks appear white with the foam of the Ganges and the white moon shines on Your forehead.

You who are all white, all purity, forgive me and bestow prosperity.

The recitation of the hymn is over and the conversation resumes.

Narendra — You may talk of leading an unattached life of a householder and all that, but nothing can be achieved without renouncing 'lust and greed'. Do you abhor carnal relations with your wife? Contacting parts of her body so full of worms, phlegm, fat and foul smell?

Fools find pleasure in a body filled with filth, the home of worms, naturally smelling foul, made of flesh, blood, bone and marrow. But the wise avoid it.

"He who does not relish the teachings of Vedanta, he who doesn't drink the wine of the story of Hari, lives his life in vain.

"Listen to this song –

Give up infatuation, give up thinking perversely, know Him and then alone you will be rid of your pain.

For the sensory pleasures of four days, you have forgotten the friend of your soul. What irony!

"There is no way but to put on the loincloth and renounce the world."

Saying so, Narendra hums the tune and sings the five stanzas of *kaupin*[1].

He who is always engaged in the words of Vedanta, he who is content with the grains of holy begging, he who roams about with a griefless conscience; such a person, clad in a loincloth, is the only blessed one…

Continuing, Narendra says, "Why should a man become bound to worldly life? Why should he be ensnared by maya? What is the true nature of man? He is that very Sachchidananda, pure Knowledge and Bliss, the image of Shiva.

Then he chants Shankaracharya's hymn –

Om, I am not the mind, the intellect, the ego, or the chitta. Nor I am the ear, the tongue, the nostrils, nor the eyes. I am not the sky, nor land, nor light, nor air. I am pure Knowledge and Bliss, the image of Shiva, the all-good.

Narendra chants another hymn, the eight stanzas on the glory of Sri Krishna.

O Madhusudana! I have taken refuge in you. Bestow your grace and redeem me from lust, sleep, sin, infatuation, the bondage of affection for wife and son, and the thirst for sense desires. Grant me devotion for your lotus feet.

Song –

Om, from the viewpoint of jnana, the attachment of a sickly man to the things of the world becomes feeble because of old age. But I am overwhelmed by the deep sleep of lust. Therefore, O Madhusudana, save me.

O Lord, you are my only refuge. There is no other way for me. I am stuck in the mire of sin. Therefore, O Madhusudana, save me.

[1] The loincloth of a sannyasin

I am ensnared by infatuation with wife, son and home. My desires give me no end of trouble. O Madhusudana, save this lowly man who has no shelter, who suffers trials and tribulations, who is a man without devotion.

I am tired of taking birth again and again on the long passage of this world. I don't wish to return again to this world. Therefore, O Madhusudana, save me.

Having been born again and again, I have seen the door of the feminine genital and suffered so much in the womb. Therefore, my Lord Narayana, I take refuge in you. Liberate me from the world and save me.

I pay my obeisance to you in fear of disease and death. I have performed no good deeds. I am only guilty of evil deeds. Therefore, I am stuck in the mire of sin. O Madhusudana, save me.

Though born a thousand times, I have not fulfilled the duties of a human being. Though I made so many promises, I have not acted on them. Therefore, O Lord, I am depraved. Pray save me.

If I am born again as man or woman, grant that I may have unswerving devotion[1] for your lotus feet. O Madhusudana save me.

M. (to himself) — What intense dispassion Narendra has! That is why all the brothers of the monastery are in this state of dispassion. Seeing them, the disciples of Thakur who are still leading a family life are inspired by the precept of renunciation of 'lust and greed'. Ah, what a state they are in! Why has he kept some of them in worldly life? Will he find a way out for them? Will he grant them intense dispassion – or keep them in the state of forgetfulness in the world?

[1] *Achala* bhakti

After their meal, Narendra and a few brother disciples have gone to Calcutta. Narendra is to return after dusk. The lawsuit about his ancestral home has not been settled yet. The brothers of the monastery cannot bear separation from him. They all await his return.

Section I

Sri Ramakrishna's meeting with Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in Calcutta

Chapter I

Vidyasagar's residence

It is Saturday, 5 August 1882, the sixth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Shravana. It is about four o'clock in the afternoon.

Sri Ramakrishna is going to Badurbagan by carriage on the main road in Calcutta to visit Vidyasagar at his house. Bhavanath, Hazra and M. accompany him.

Sri Ramakrishna was born in Kamarpukur, a village in the Hooghly district situated near Beersingh, Vidyasagar's the native village. Since childhood, Sri Ramakrishna has heard of Vidyasagar's acts of charity. In the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, he learned of his scholarship and compassionate nature. M. is a teacher in Vidyasagar's school. Learning this, Thakur asked him, "Will you take me to see Vidyasagar? I would like very much to meet him." M. spoke to Vidyasagar, who was delighted and asked M. to come on Saturday at four o'clock. Vidyasagar had asked him, "What kind of a paramahamsa is he? Does he wear gerua[1]?" M. had replied, "No sir, he is a unique person. He wears a red-bordered dhoti and a short coat, a shirt and varnished slippers. He lives in a room in Rasmani's

[1] Ochre-colored cloth of a sannyasin

Kali Temple. He sleeps on a wooden cot with only a bedspread and a mosquito net. Outwardly there is no sign of holiness, but inwardly he knows nothing but the Lord. Day and night he meditates on Him."

The carriage starts from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Having crossed the bridge, it soon reaches Amherst Street through Shyambazar. When the devotees tell Thakur that the carriage is nearing Badurbagan, Thakur begins to talk like a child full of joy. However, there is a sudden change in his mood as the carriage reaches Amherst Street. It seems to be a prelude to his going into divine ecstasy.

As the carriage approaches Rammohan Roy's garden house, M. hasn't noticed the change in Thakur's mood. Hurriedly he exclaims, "This is Rammohan Roy's house." Thakur is annoyed and says, "Such things don't appeal to me now. I don't care about them." He is passing into divine ecstasy.

The carriage stops at the gate to Vidyasagar's house. It is a two-story building of British taste. The building sits in the middle of the plot and has a wall on all four sides. The gate and the front door are on the western side of the house, the gate to the south of the door. Between the western wall and the two-storied building are flowering trees and plants. One climbs upstairs after passing through the western ground floor room. Vidyasagar is on the upper floor. At the top of the staircase is a room on the north, to its east a hall. Vidyasagar's bedroom is to the southeast of the hall. There is another room on the south. All the rooms are full of precious books. Most of the books are beautifully bound and artistically arranged in bookshelves that line the wall. On the eastern side of the hall are a few chairs and a table. Vidyasagar sits there facing west when he works. When he has visitors, they also sit around the table. There is stationery visible – paper, pen, inkpot, blotting paper, several letters, a bound cashbook, files, and a few books Vidyasagar is reading. Exactly

to the south of the wooden divan is a bedstead where he sleeps.

What is written on the letters lying on the table under the paperweight? Perhaps a widow has written, "My minor child is without a father. There is nobody to take care of him. You will have to look after him." Someone else might have written, "You went to Kharmata, so we didn't get our monthly allowance. This caused us great distress." Another poor person may have written, "I have been admitted to your school on a full scholarship, but I have no means to buy books." Yet another person might write, "My family hasn't the means to feed itself. Kindly arrange a job for me." A teacher from the school perhaps has written, "My sister has lost her husband and her whole burden has fallen on my shoulders. My salary is too meagre to meet expenses." Yet another has perhaps written from a foreign country, "I am in trouble here. You are a friend of the poor. Kindly send me some money and save me from impending distress." And yet another has written, "Settlement must be made on such-and-such date. Kindly come on this day and settle the dispute."

Thakur descends from the carriage. M. leads him to the house. Walking through flowering trees on the way to the house, Thakur touches the buttons of his shirt and asks M. in a childlike manner, "My shirt is unbuttoned. Is there any harm in it?" He is dressed in a broadcloth shirt and a red-bordered dhoti with one end over his shoulder. He has varnished slippers on his feet. M. says, "Please don't worry about it. You will not offend anyone. You needn't button your shirt." Just as a child feels reassured after an explanation, Thakur's mind is at peace.

Chapter II

Vidyasagar

Having climbed the staircase, Thakur enters the first room with the devotees (the room just to the north). Vidyasagar is seated at the north end of the room facing south. In front of him is a long rectangular polished table. On the east side of the table is a bench with a back. A number of chairs have been placed to the south and west of the table. Vidyasagar is talking to some of his friends.

As Thakur enters, Vidyasagar stands up to greet him. Thakur stands near the eastern edge of the table facing west with his right hand on the table. Behind him is the bench. He looks at Vidyasagar as though he were a former acquaintance. He laughs in ecstasy.

Vidyasagar must be sixty-two or sixty-three years old. He is sixteen or seventeen years older than Sri Ramakrishna. He is clad in a white-bordered dhoti, a short-sleeved flannel shirt, and is wearing slippers. He has an Orissa-cut[1] hairstyle. His gleaming white false teeth show when he talks. Short in stature, Vidyasagar has a very large head and a broad forehead. He is a brahmin, so he wears a holy thread around his neck.

Vidyasagar is a man of many facets. One of his great loves is of learning. One day he actually began to weep when he said to M, "How much I wanted to continue my studies! But it was not to be. I was so entangled in worldly affairs, I didn't have time.'

A second love is for all beings. Vidyasagar is an ocean of compassion. Seeing a calf deprived of its mother's milk, he could not drink milk for many years – not until his health declined considerably. He does not travel in a carriage, because the horse

[1] The lower part of the head is shaved

pulling it cannot speak of its burden. One day he saw a workman lying on the road struck by cholera, his basket lying near. He picked the man up, brought him home, and nursed him.

A third love is independence. Because of a disagreement with his proprietors, Vidyasagar resigned from the post of Principal of the Sanskrit College.

His fourth characteristic is that he does not care for social decorum. He loved a teacher. At the time of his daughter's marriage, Vidyasagar went to the feast[1] with a gift of cloth under his arm.

A fifth love is devotion to his mother. She had said to him, "Iswar, if you don't come to the marriage of your brother, I will feel very bad." On strength of will, Vidyasagar walked on foot all the way from Calcutta to his village of Beersingh. On the way he had to cross the Damodar river and there was no boat available, so he swam across. He presented himself before his mother, dripping wet, the very night of the marriage. He said, "Mother, here I am!"

Vidyasagar's adoration of Sri Ramakrishna – their conversation

Entering into an ecstatic mood, Thakur stands quiet for quite some time. To control his ecstasy, he now and then says, "I want a drink of water." The boys of the household, relatives and friends of Vidyasagar, quickly gather around.

Thakur is about to sit on the bench, still absorbed in ecstasy. A boy of seventeen or eighteen is already sitting there. He has come to Vidyasagar to ask help with his studies. In such a spiritual mood, with the insight of a rishi, Thakur is able to understand what the boy is thinking. He moves away

[1] On the ceremony of taking the last meal by a Hindu bride on the night immediately preceding the wedding day

a little and says, in ecstasy, "Mother, this boy has great attachment to worldly life, your world of ignorance. This boy belongs to the world of ignorance."

Does Thakur mean that it is ironic for the boy to study to make money instead of to acquire the knowledge of Brahman?

Vidyasagar anxiously asks somebody to bring water. He asks M., "Will he take some refreshments?" M. replies, "Yes sir, please bring something." Vidyasagar leaves hurriedly and returns with numerous sweets. He says, "These are from Burdwan." Some of them are offered to Thakur. Hazra and Bhavanath also take some. When M. is offered them, Vidyasagar says, "He is a child of this house. There is no formality with him." Thakur speaks of a particular young man who has been sitting in front of him. He says, "This boy possesses good sattvic qualities. Inwardly he is full of pith and marrow[1]. He is like the Phalgu river with a bed which appears dried up – but dig a little and you find an active current of water underneath."

After taking some sweets, Thakur talks with Vidyasagar, a smile playing on his face. Soon the whole room is full of people. Some are seated, others stand.

Sri Ramakrishna — Today I have come to the ocean[2]. Until now I have come across canals, lakes, and rivers. Now I see the ocean. (All laugh.) [Thakur is referring to the literal meaning of Vidyasagar, which is the 'ocean of knowledge'.]

Vidyasagar (laughing) — Then, sir, you are welcome to take some salt water. (Laughter.)

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[1] *Antasarra*
[2] Sagar

Sri Ramakrishna — No, my dear sir, you are surely not the salt ocean. You are not the ocean of avidya[1]. You are the ocean of vidya[2], the ocean of milk! (All laugh.)

Vidyasagar — Sir, you may say so if you like.

Thakur speaks while Vidyasagar remains silent.

Sattvic actions of Vidyasagar – "You, too, are a perfected man"

"Your actions are sattvic by nature. It is the rajas of sattva. Sattva makes one do works of compassion. When a work is done out of compassion, though it is rajasic, it is the rajas of sattva. There is no harm in it. Shukadeva and others were compassionate in order to teach humanity – to teach about God to humanity. It is good that you are giving food and education. These charitable acts lead to God-realization if undertaken selflessly. They who act to earn a name or religious merit are not selfless in their actions. But you deserve to be called a perfect man."

Vidyasagar — How is that, sir?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Potatoes and rice aren't tender until they're siddha (well-boiled). Your kindness for others has made you soft and tender of heart[3]. (Laughter.)

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[1] Ignorance which leads one away from God
[2] True knowledge leading Godward
[3] The word siddha either means 'well-boiled' or a 'perfect man'; hence, Thakur's pun

Vidyasagar (laughing) — But kalai pulse when siddha (well-boiled), gets harder! Is that not so? (Everybody laughs.)

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, you are no such thing. You are not a mere pundit – dry and hard and good for nothing. A vulture soars high in the sky, but its eyes are fixed on the charnel-pits where the carcasses of animals are burned. They who are pundits due to learning are scholars in name – but they are attached to 'lust and gold' – they look for decomposed corpses, just like a vulture. Fondness for the world is avidya; compassion, devotion, love of God, non-attachment[1], are the wealth of vidya.

Vidyasagar listens to Thakur silently. Everyone gazes fixedly at the blissful personage and drinks the nectar of his words.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna – jnana yoga and Vedanta

Vidyasagar is a very learned man. When he was a student in the Sanskrit College, he was at the top of his class. He secured first position and won a gold medal and a scholarship. Gradually he reached the position of Principal of the Sanskrit College. He was a specialist in Sanskrit grammar and poetic literature. He learned English by resolute self-effort.

Vidyasagar did not instruct anyone in religion. He had studied philosophy but when M. once asked him what he thought of Hindu philosophy, he replied, "I think that what they wanted to explain, they were unable to explain." However, he would perform all

[1] Vairagya

> Hindu rituals, such as funeral ceremonies. He wore the sacred thread around his neck and whenever he wrote a letter in Bengali, he wrote as a letterhead: "Sri Sri Hari Sharanam" (Lord, I take refuge in You).
>
> Another day Vidyasagar had told M. his idea about God. He said, "He cannot be known. So what is our duty? In my opinion it is to conduct ourselves in such a way that if others followed us, the earth would become heaven. Everyone must try to do good to the world."
>
> While talking of vidya and avidya, Thakur speaks of the knowledge of Brahman. Vidyasagar, a very learned man who has studied the six Hindu systems of philosophy, has perhaps concluded that it is impossible to know anything about God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Brahman is beyond vidya and avidya. He transcends maya.

Problem of evil – Brahman is unattached[1] – pain and sorrow only relevant to the embodied soul

"There are both vidya maya and avidya maya in the world. There are jnana and bhakti – as well as 'lust and greed'. There is righteousness, and there is unrighteousness; there is good as well as evil. But Brahman is not concerned with all these. Good and bad belong to embodied beings, as does righteousness and unrighteousness. God is not affected by them.

"It is like the light of a lamp. You may read the *Bhagavata* with the help of that light. You can also forge a document with criminal intent in the

[1] *Nirlipta*

same light. In both cases the lamp remains unaffected.

"The sun sheds light on the good as well as on the wicked.

"You may then ask, how do you explain sorrow, sin, restlessness and the like? The answer is that they only concern embodied beings. Brahman is above and beyond them. There is poison in the fangs of a snake, but the poison doesn't affect it – though when the snake bites a creature, it dies."

Brahman is indescribable and impossible to verbalize[1]
(the unknown and the unknowable)

"What Brahman is cannot be described. Everything – the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, the *Tantras* and the six systems of philosophy – has been defiled, like the leavings of food. For when one reads the scriptures, one must use the vocal organs and this causes them to be in touch with the mouth, so to speak. Thus they have all been defiled, like the leavings of food. The one exception is Brahman. No one in this world has yet been able to give proper and adequate expression to God the Absolute."

Vidyasagar (to his friends) — Oh, this is beautiful. I must say I have learned something today.

Sri Ramakrishna — A man had two sons. He placed both of them under the care of a preceptor to acquire the knowledge of Brahman. After many

[1] *Avyapadesyam*

years both of them returned from the guru's house and saluted their father. The father wished to see how deeply they had understood the knowledge of Brahman (jnana). He asked the elder son, 'Son, you have studied the scriptures. Tell me what God the Absolute is.' The elder son quoted several verses from the *Vedas* to explain the nature of Brahman. His father remained silent. When the father put the question to his younger son, the boy hung his head and sat quite mute. He uttered not a word. The father said happily, 'Son, you indeed have understood a little about God the Absolute. What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words.'

"Man thinks that he has known God. An ant came to a mountain of sugar. It ate one particle of sugar and was filled. It took another particle and, as it went its way, it thought that the next time it would take the whole mountain home. Such, alas, is the condition of insignificant man. Men don't know that Brahman is beyond mind and speech.

"Who can know God, however great that man may be? Shukadeva and other holy sages were at best ants of the larger sort (big black ants). They might have been able to carry eight or ten grains of sugar in their mouths."

Brahman is indeed Sat-chit-ananda[1] – Nirvikalpa Samadhi and Brahmajnana

"Do you know how the *Vedas* and the *Puranas* have expressed God? If a person asks a man what he has seen after he has been to the ocean, he exclaims,

[1] Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute

'Ha! Oh, what I saw! What a disturbance! What waves!' It is the same in the case of Brahman. The *Vedas* say, 'He is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, the image of Bliss.' Shukadeva and other rishis, standing on the shore of the ocean of Brahman, saw and touched Him. According to some, these people did not go into the ocean, for no one can return after going into it.

"One attains Brahmajnana in the state of samadhi – one has the vision of Brahman. In that state the process of thinking completely stops; one is struck dumb. Nobody has the power to explain Brahman in words.

"A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. (All laugh). But it could provide no information. As soon as it went into the ocean, it dissolved. Who could give the report?"

A person asks, "Does a man who has attained Brahmajnana, having become established in samadhi, remain ever-silent?"

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vidyasagar) — Shankaracharya retained his 'I of knowledge' to impart instruction to mankind. The man who has the vision of Brahman becomes silent. One reasons only as long as one has not seen Him. Clarified butter in a pan set over fire makes a sizzling sound as long as the water in it has not dried up. When it is well heated, it produces no sound. However, when you throw unbaked flour cake[1] in it, it again begins to make a sizzling sound. When the cake is

[1] *Luchi*

sufficiently cooked, the butter no longer makes a sound. In the same way a man comes down from samadhi to impart instruction to mankind, and then he talks.

"A bee buzzes as long as it doesn't sit on a flower. But when it settles down on the flower and begins to drink honey, it becomes silent. Intoxicated by drinking honey, it may again buzz.

"When you lower a pitcher into a pool of water, it produces a gurgling sound. But when the pitcher is full, there is no sound. (All laugh.) When water is poured from this pitcher again into another, one again hears a gurgling sound." (Laughter.)

Chapter IV

Jnana and vijnana – reconciliation of Non-dualism[1], Qualified non-dualism[2] and Dualism[3]

Sri Ramakrishna — The rishis attained Brahmajnana[4]. But if you have the slightest desire for worldly things, you cannot attain the knowledge of Brahman. What an effort the rishis made! They would leave their ashram in the morning to meditate and contemplate on God alone throughout the day. And then they ate only roots and fruit at night when they returned to their ashram. They would guard themselves from seeing, hearing, and

[1] Advaitavada
[2] Vishishtadvaita
[3] Dvaitavada
[4] Transcendental knowledge of God

touching other worldly things. Only then did they realize Brahman as their own inner Self[1].

"In the age of Kali, life is dependent on food and one cannot rid oneself of body-consciousness. It's not right in this state of mind to say, 'Soham[2].' One attends to worldly affairs and then says, 'I am Brahman' – this is not right. They who cannot rid themselves of worldly matters, they who cannot free themselves from the idea of 'I-ness', should keep the I-ness of the 'servant I,' or the 'devotee I'. One can also attain Him by the path of love and devotion for God.

"The jnani gets rid of his worldly identity by saying, 'Not this, not this,' and thus attains the knowledge of Brahman. It is like one who reaches the roof by leaving one step after another behind. But the vijnani has a special contact with Him and sees more than the jnani. He sees that the steps are made of the same material as the roof – bricks, brick dust and lime. He sees that He who has realized Brahman by saying, 'Not this, not this', has Himself become the living beings and the universe. The vijnani sees that He who is attributeless is also with attributes.

"A man cannot stay on the roof a long time. He comes down from the roof. They who have attained samadhi and had the vision of Brahman see when they come down that He Himself has become all living beings and the universe. Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti – one cannot stay long at ti [the highest note]. One cannot rid one's self of I-ness. On

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[1] *Bodhebodha*
[2] I am He

coming down from samadhi, one sees that He is me, and that He has become the entire universe and its living beings. This is vijnana.

"The path of the jnani[1] is one way to attain God. The path of knowledge combined with devotion is another way. So also is there the path of devotion (bhakti). The path of Jnana Yoga is as true as the path of Bhakti Yoga. One can reach God through various paths. But as long as one retains the ego, it is easier and more straightforward to follow the path of love and devotion.

"The vijnani sees that Brahman is immovable and actionless, like Mount Sumeru. The entire universe is made of His three gunas – of sattva, rajas and tamas – but He is unattached to them.

"The vijnani sees that He who is Brahman[2] is also Bhagavan[3]. He who is beyond attributes is also the Lord of six supernatural powers. His powers are the world and its living beings, the mind and intellect, love[4], dispassion[5] and divine knowledge. (Laughing) What kind of gentleman has no hearth and home, who might even have been forced to sell it? (Laughter.) The Lord possesses the six supernatural powers. Had God no dispassion, who would accept Him?" (General laughter.)

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[1] Man of knowledge
[2] God the Absolute
[3] The Personal God
[4] Bhakti
[5] Vairagya

God is present in all as all-pervading power[1] – but there is special manifestation of His power in some

"See how wonderful the world is! How many different things there are in this universe: the sun, the moon and the planets! How many kinds of creatures there are: big, small, good and bad! Some have more power, others less."

Vidyasagar — Has God given more power to some and less to others?

Sri Ramakrishna — He dwells in all beings as the all-pervading Power. He is present even in an ant. But there is a special manifestation of His power in some. If that were not true, how could one man defeat ten, while another person tries to run away from even one? Why do people have regard for you? Have you grown two horns? (Laughter.) Compared to others, you have more compassion and learning. This is why they have regard for you and come to see you. Don't you agree?

Vidyasagar smiles.

Mere learning and book learning are in vain – love and devotion for God is the one thing needful

Sri Ramakrishna — Mere learning is of no avail. It is for finding the means for attaining Him and knowing Him that one reads books. A sadhu had a book with him. Somebody asked him what it was about. The sadhu opened it and on every page was written, 'Om, Rama'. Nothing else.

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[1] *Vibhu*

"What is the message of the *Gita*? What you hear when you say the word ten times. By repeating it ten times, Gita becomes '*tyagi*'[1]. And this is what the *Gita* teaches: Oh man, giving up everything, strive to realize God. Whether one is a sadhu or a householder, one must get rid of all attachments in the mind.

"Chaitanyadeva, in the course of his pilgrimage through South India, came across a person reading the *Gita*. Another man sat a little away from him, listening and shedding tears. How bitterly he was weeping! Chaitanyadeva asked him, 'Do you understand all this?' He replied, 'No, Master, I do not understand these verses.' The former then asked why he was in tears. The devotee said, 'I see Arjuna's chariot; in it the Lord and Arjuna are talking. This is what fills my eyes with tears of joy and love.'

Chapter V

The secret of dualism

Sri Ramakrishna — Why does the vijnani practice love and devotion to God? The answer is that one cannot get rid of I-ness. Though one's ego disappears in the state of samadhi, it reappears. The ego of an ordinary man does not leave him. Cut the Ashwattha plant and the next day you will see it sprout again. (All laugh.)

[1] One who has given up the world for the sake of God – riches, honours, work with attachment, sensual pleasures etc.

"Even after attaining knowledge, I-ness reappears, nobody knows from where. You see a tiger in a dream. Even when you wake up, you find your heart still racing. All of man's trouble is due to this I-ness. The bullock bellows, '*Hamba*, *hamba*' (I, I). That is why it undergoes such tribulation. It is yoked to the plough, its body is exposed to the sun and rain, and then a butcher slaughters it. After that, shoes are made with its skin. Moreover, it is used to make drums and it is beaten mercilessly. (Laughter.)

"Even then, it is not spared. Last of all, strings are made with its intestines and the carder makes bows to card cotton. Then it no longer says, 'I, I.' Instead it says *'Tuhu Tuhu'* (you, you). It is only when it says 'You, you' that it is spared. 'Oh Lord, I am Your servant, You are my Master. I am your son, you are my Mother.'

"Rama asked Hanuman, 'With what attitude do you look on me?' Hanuman replied, 'Rama, when I have the feeling of 'I', I look upon you as the whole and myself as your part; you are the Master and I your servant. And Rama, when I attain the knowledge of the Absolute, I see that You are I and I am You.'

"The idea of Master and servant is good. The ego won't vanish, so let the rascal remain a 'servant I'."

Instruction to Vidyasagar: I and mine are ignorance

"I and mine: these are both born of ignorance. My house, my money, my learning, all these are my

riches – this feeling is a result of ignorance. Oh Lord, You are the doer and all these belong to You – house, family, sons, children, acquaintances, and friends. Such a feeling arises from knowledge.

"One must always remember death. Death will be the end of everything. You have come here to perform some actions, the way villagers come to Calcutta from their village to work. If a visitor comes to a rich man's garden, the keeper of the garden says, 'This is our garden and this our pond.' But if the proprietor dismisses the keeper because of some error he has committed, he is not entitled to take away even his mango-wood box – it is sent to him through the gatekeeper. (Laughter.)

"God laughs on two occasions. One, when a physician says to the mother of his patient, 'Mother, you needn't fear. I will cure your son.' The Lord says to Himself, 'I am taking his life and this fellow says that he is going to save him.' The physician thinks that he is the doer. He doesn't know that it is God alone who is the doer. The Lord also laughs when two brothers divide land between themselves, measuring it with a cord and saying 'This side is mine and that yours.' God laughs, saying to Himself, 'This world, the whole universe, is Mine, but these fellows say: this plot of land is mine and that is yours.' "

The way: faith, love and devotion[1] for God

"Can He be known by reasoning? Be His servant, take refuge in Him and call upon Him.

[1] Bhakti

(Smiling, to Vidyasagar) "Well, what is your attitude?"

Vidyasagar smiles gently. He says, "I will tell you one day when we are alone." (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — He cannot be known by learning and reasoning.

Saying this, Thakur begins to sing, intoxicated with divine love.

God is unknowable and limitless

Is there anybody who knows Kali, She who is the consort of *Kala*[1]? Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her.

A yogi meditates on Her at the Muladhara[2] and Sahasrara[3].

A goose and a gander go around in this wilderness of lotuses and sport with each other. They are *Kala* and His consort.

My Divine Mother is the most beloved of Shiva, even as Sita is the most beloved of Rama.

She appears in Her majesty in each ghat[4] as an individual, just as She pleases. She is Ichhamai[5].

It is Mahakala that knows the greatness of my Divine Mother – greatness, which is hidden from the view of ordinary beings. Who else can know Her?

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[1] Spirit of Eternity

[2] Muladhara is the first lotus with four petals and is the root of the Sushumna in the spine. The Kundalini is coiled up at the Muladhara lotus.

[3] Sahasrara is the lotus of a thousand petals which is the goal of the spiritual energy (Shakti) awakened by the yogi at the Muladhara. When the Shakti reaches the Sahasrara and becomes united with Shiva or Brahman, the result is samadhi, Brahmajnana.

[4] Finite being

[5] She has Her own way in everything

> My Divine Mother gives birth to the Universe – now think of Her greatness!
>
> Says Prasad [the psalmist]: 'To think that one can know Her is to think that one can swim across the mighty ocean. People can only laugh at the idea.'
>
> I understand this well enough with my mind; alas, my heart does not. It is a dwarf aspiring to reach the moon.

"See, Mother Kali's womb contains the entire universe. How can you know Her greatness? And then it says, 'Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her.' You cannot attain Her by scholarship."

The omnipotence of faith – faith in the Lord and the vilest sin

"You need to have faith, love and devotion for the Lord. Listen to this – how powerful is faith! A person wanted to go across the sea from Ceylon [now Sri Lanka]. Bibhishana said, 'Take this and take care that it is tied to the end of your cloth. This will enable you to walk across the ocean in safety. But mind, never try to open it to look at it, for you will go under the water the moment you open it.' This fellow walked the ocean for some time in perfect safety. Such is the omnipotence of faith. However, after crossing a part of the way, he began to wonder what precious thing Bibhishana had tied to the end of his cloth that could take him across the water. Thinking this, he opened the knot of cloth and found only the name of 'Rama' written on a leaf. He said to himself: Oh, just this! Thinking this, he sank into the water.

"They say that Hanuman had so much faith in the name of Rama that he was able to leap over the sea by virtue of his faith. On the other hand, Rama had to build a bridge to cross it [from the Indian mainland to Sri Lanka].

"If you have faith in Him, even if you commit a sin or the vilest crime, there is no danger."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna assumes the attitude of a devotee and, intoxicated with divine fervour, begins to sing of the great importance of faith –

O Divine Mother, if I die with the name of Durga on my lips,

I shall see, O Shankari[1], how could You not redeem me?

If I kill a cow, or a brahmin, or destroy a child in the womb;

If I indulge in drinking wine and the like, or kill a woman,

For all these sins I care not the least,

As I can raise myself to the exalted position of Brahman.

End of life is to love the Lord

Sri Ramakrishna — Faith and bhakti[2]! One can attain Him easily through love and devotion. He can be grasped through the ecstasy of love[3].

[1] Giver of all good
[2] Love, devotion, prayerfulness and self-surrender
[3] Bhava

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing another song –

O my mind! What are you doing to realize that Being? You are groping about like a mad man in a dark room!

He can be grasped only through ecstatic love; it is impossible to grasp Him otherwise.

Do try your best to bring under your control the moon, which is the doorkeeper at the house (the Microcosm).

In a house are various rooms, among them a vault where the Divine treasure is kept hidden.

Once the moon is under your control, you may, secretly like a thief, work your way to the treasure in the vault and make it your own.

But when the moon is beyond your control and it is daybreak, the treasure in the vault is hidden from you.

Go to the six schools of philosophy. You will not find that Being there! Nor in the *Tantras*[1] or the *Vedas*!

That Being is fond of the sweet syrup of love and dwells within as everlasting joy.

With a view to that love a great yogi practices, one decade after another, meditation for reunion with the Universal Soul.

Once this love springs up in his [the yogi's] heart, he draws the Supreme Being near, much as the loadstone draws the iron.

Says Prasad: 'The Being whom I call my Mother and try to realize, shall I tell Her real name[2]?

Would that not be breaking my (sacred) cooking-pot in the courtyard of the house (or in the market-place) before the eyes of an unfeeling multitude? Guess, O

[1] Religious philosophy identified with the worship of Shakti for the attainment of the Godhead

[2] Brahman of the Vedanta both *Saguna* and *Nirguna*, Personal-Impersonal

my mind, who that Being is, by the hints I have given.'

Thakur in the state of samadhi

As he is singing, Thakur goes into samadhi. His hands are folded, his body is erect and motionless, his eyes unblinking. He sits on the same bench facing west, his legs stretched out. Full of curiosity, everyone watches his wondrous state.

Thakur now returns to normal consciousness. Heaving a deep sigh, he smiles and says, "Feeling and devotion mean to love Him. He who is Brahman I call the Mother."

"Ramprasad asks the mind to guess by a hint. He asks you to understand that He who is called Brahman in the *Vedas* is addressed by him as the Mother. He who is without attributes[1] also has attributes[2]. He who is Brahman is indeed Shakti. When I see Him inactive, I call Him Brahman; and when I think of Him creating, preserving and destroying, I call Him the Primal Power, or Kali.

"Brahman and His Power are inseparable. Example, fire and its burning power. Mention fire, and its power to burn comes to mind. Mention the power to burn, and fire comes to mind. When you accept one, you have accepted the other as well.

"That Being is addressed as the Mother – isn't the Mother a great object of love? If you are able to love the Lord, you will attain Him. Divine feeling, faith, love and devotion are needed! Listen to this song –

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[1] Nirguna
[2] Saguna

The way: faith in the beginning followed by love and devotion

> By meditating on Him, you attain the state of divine feeling.
>
> One gains according to one's feeling – this is the fundamental truth.
>
> If the mind can dip into the reservoir of the nectar of Kali's feet,
>
> Worship, oblations[1], sacrifices and other Vedic rites are of no avail.

" 'The mind can dip' means to love Him intensely. 'The reservoir of nectar' is the lake of immortality. Man does not die when he drowns there. He becomes immortal. Some think that by thinking of God too much, one loses one's sanity. That is not so. He is the lake of immortality. The *Vedas* have declared Him to be 'immortal'. When one plunges into this lake, one does not die but instead becomes immortal."

Karma Yoga and selfless work[2] – helping the world

Sri Ramakrishna and the European ideal of work

"Worship, oblations, sacrifices and such Vedic rites are of no use whatever. When you develop love for Him, all these actions of worship are mostly unnecessary. As long as there is a lack of breeze, there is the need of a fan. But if the southern wind blows, the fan may be put aside. What need is a fan then?

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[1] Homa
[2] *Nishkama* karma

"All the activities you are performing are good. But if you can give up the idea that you are the doer, if you can perform these actions in a selfless way, it would be very good. By performing work in a selfless manner, one gradually develops love and devotion for God. And by continuing to do work without expectation of any reward, one realizes Him.

"However, the more you develop love and devotion for Him, the less work you will have to perform. When the daughter-in-law of the household is in the family way, her mother-in-law reduces her duties. The nearer she approaches her delivery, the less are the duties she is given by her mother-in-law. In the last month of pregnancy, she is given no work lest the childbirth be in jeopardy. (Laughter.) All the work you have undertaken is good. Performing work without any expectation of reward purifies the mind and increases your love for God. It is only by loving Him that you can realize Him. It is not man who does good to the world, it is God Himself who does it. He has created the sun and the moon; He has given affection to the hearts of parents; He has given compassion to the great; He has given devotion to sadhus and devotees. He who works without any selfish desire does good to himself."

The aim of selfless work is God-realization

"There is gold buried within your heart, but you do not yet know it. It is covered by a little mud. Once you discover it, all other activities will be lessened. When the daughter-in-law has given birth to a

child, she is busy with it; she busies herself with the baby alone. Her mother-in-law doesn't let her do household chores. (All laugh.)

"Go forward. A woodcutter went to cut wood. A brahmachari said to him, 'Go forward.' And he saw sandalwood trees when he did. After a few days he remembered that the brahmachari had asked him to go forward, he didn't say to stop at the sandalwood trees. As he went on, he came across a silver mine. And after a few days, when he went still further, he came across a gold mine. Still further, he found diamonds and gems. Gaining all these, he became very wealthy.

"Work without expectation of any reward[1] develops love for God within. Then one attains Him by His grace. One can see the Lord, one can talk to Him the way I am talking to you." (All laugh.)

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of motiveless grace

Everybody is listening to Sri Ramakrishna, still and silent, as though the Goddess Saraswati[2] herself were seated on his tongue and addressing Vidyasagar for the good of humanity. It is 9:00 p.m. Thakur will leave now.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing to Vidyasagar) — I needn't have said all this, for you know it. It is only that you are not aware of it. (Laughter.) In the

[1] *Nishkama* karma
[2] Goddess of knowledge and learning

treasure of the Lord of the ocean[1] are many jewels. But the presiding God of the sea is not aware of them.

Vidyasagar (laughing) — You may say so.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Again you will find that some gentlemen do not even know the names of their domestic servants. (Everybody laughs.) These gentlemen are too important to be on terms of familiarity with the valuables of the house.

Hearing this conversation, everyone is very happy. They are all silent for some time. Addressing Vidyasagar, he speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Come to the garden once, Rasmani's garden. It's a charming place. So grand! So beautiful!

Vidyasagar — Certainly. You have been so kind to come. Is it not my duty, too, to pay you a visit?

Sri Ramakrishna — Visit to me! Oh, for shame, for shame!

Vidyasagar — But why? Please explain to me.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — We are but fishing boats, small and light and able to travel canals and marshes and also big rivers. But you are a big ship! Who knows but that you may run against a sandbank if you venture there! (All laugh.)

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[1] Varuna

Vidyasagar smiles but says nothing. Thakur laughs.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — But even ships can navigate there at this time.

Vidyasagar (smiling) — Yes, it is the rainy season. (All laugh.)

M. (to himself) — It is the season of the rains of new love. During a new love affair, one does not distinguish between honour and disgrace.

Thakur rises to leave, along with his devotees. Vidyasagar also stands with his relatives and friends. He will see Thakur off in the carriage.

Why does Sri Ramakrishna stand there? He is repeating the seed mantra[1] on his fingers. While doing this, he becomes absorbed in ecstasy – the ocean of motiveless grace as he is. Perhaps he is praying to the Mother for the spiritual welfare of the saintly Vidyasagar before leaving him.

Thakur and the devotees now go downstairs, one of them holding his hand. Vidyasagar leads with his group of friends. He has a lamp in his hand and shows the way. It is the sixth day of the dark fortnight in the lunar month of Shravana. The moon is not yet in the sky. All walk toward the gate through the dark garden in the dim light of the lamp.

Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees reach the gate, where they are struck by a beautiful sight. They see before them a bearded man of fair complexion, 36 or 37 years old, in Bengali dress, a white turban that Sikhs wear, clad in a dhoti, long shirt and socks, but no shoulder cloth. They see that as he comes into the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, he lies prostrate before

[1] Mula mantra

him with his turban on his head. When he rises, Thakur says, "Oh it's you, Balaram! So late at night?"

Balaram (smiling) — I came a long time ago and have been waiting here.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why didn't you come in?

Balaram — Sir, everybody was listening to you. I didn't want to disturb you by going inside. (Saying this, Balaram laughs.)

Thakur gets into the carriage, along with the devotees.

Vidyasagar (sweetly to M.) — Shall I pay the carriage fare?

M. — You needn't worry. It has already been taken care of.

Vidyasagar and the others salute Thakur.

The carriage begins to roll north. Its destination is the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Those he leaves stand gazing at the carriage even now. They seem to be wondering who this saintly man is who has such an intense love for God and who visits the homes of ordinary beings, telling them that the aim of life is to love God.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna with the Devotees at Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

'Lust and greed' are indeed obstacles in the path of yoga[1] – practicing spiritual disciplines and the secret of yoga

Sri Ramakrishna is living with devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple. It is Thursday, 24 August 1882, the 10th day of the bright fortnight of Shravana.

These days Hazra, Ramlal, Rakhal and other devotees are staying with Thakur. Ramlal is Thakur's nephew and works as a priest at the Kali Temple. When he arrives, M. sees that Thakur and Hazra are standing on the long northeastern verandah talking. M. prostrates before Thakur and takes the dust of his feet.

Thakur is smiling. He says to M., "I would like to visit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar again. A painter first draws a rough sketch [for the Durga Puja] and later fills in the colours. The image is first made with clay, and then is given a second coat. After that it is plastered and, at last, it is painted with a brush. This is done one step at a time. Iswar Vidyasagar is ready in every aspect, but it is hidden. He has done so much humanitarian work, but he doesn't know what is within himself. Gold lies hidden inside him. When he knows that the Lord resides within, he will give up all his activities and call upon Him with a yearning heart."

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[1] Communion with God

Thakur stands talking to M., sometimes pacing the verandah back and forth.

Spiritual practice – to quell the storm and tempest of 'lust and greed'

Sri Ramakrishna —To know what is inside, a little spiritual practice is needed.

M. — Will one always have to perform spiritual practices?

Sri Ramakrishna — No, in the beginning you must be up and doing, but you don't have to work so hard later on. As long as there are storms, tempests and rough water, the boat has to be steered along zigzag routes; so long does the boatman stand and hold the rudder – but he no longer does so when he is past them. When the boat rounds a bend and a favourable wind blows, he can sit down and relax and just touch the rudder. Then he prepares to hoist the sail and sits down for a smoke. There is peace when the storm and tempest of 'lust and greed' pass.

Sri Ramakrishna and essence of yoga – fall from yoga – state of yoga – steady and unwavering like the flame of a lamp in a windless place – obstacle in yoga

"Some people show signs of yoga. But even they have to be careful. 'Lust and greed' are the obstacles to yoga. They make one deviate from yoga and fall into worldliness – if there is still any desire for sense enjoyment. When this desire is fulfilled, the person will again turn toward the Lord – he

will again attain the state of yoga. Do you know what a '*satka kal*' is, the spring trap for fish?"

M. — No sir, I haven't seen one.

Sri Ramakrishna — You can see it in the countryside. A string with a hook is attached to a bent bamboo pole. Bait is tied to the hook. When a fish swallows the bait, the bamboo stick suddenly springs up. It regains its upright position.

"If you place a weight in one of the pans of a small scale, the lower needle moves away from the upper needle. Man's mind is the lower needle, the Lord is the upper needle. When the lower needle aligns with the upper needle, there is yoga.

"If the mind is restless, yoga is not possible. The wind of the world always distracts the flame of the mind. When the flame does not waver, one attains a perfect state of yoga.

" 'Lust and greed' are obstacles to yoga. You must discriminate: what is there in a woman's body but blood, flesh, fat, intestines, worms, urine, faeces and so on. Why love such a body?

"I used to assume a rajasic attitude in order to renounce worldly things. I developed a craving to put on pure gold-embroidered robes[1], to wear a ring and to smoke the hubble-bubble through a long pipe. I dressed myself in a robe embroidered with pure gold. He (Mathur Babu) bought it for me. After some time I said to my mind, 'Oh mind, so this is a pure gold-embroidered robe!' Then I took it

[1] Sari

off and threw it away – I didn't like it any more. In the same way, I said to myself, 'Oh mind, this is what is known as a shawl and a ring. And this is what is called smoking a hubble-bubble through a long pipe.' When I threw them away, I didn't want to have anything to do with them again.

It is almost dusk. Thakur is talking with Mani alone on the southeastern verandah near the door to his room.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — The mind of a yogi is always fixed on the Lord, ever absorbed in the Atman. You know it as soon as you see his eyes; they gaze in wonder. They look like the eyes of a bird hatching her eggs. Her entire mind is centered on the eggs. She sees outwardly only in name. Can you show me such a picture of a bird?

Mani — I will try to find one, sir.

Chapter II

Conversation between the Guru and the disciple – secret talk

It is already dusk. The lamps in the Kali Temple, the Radhakanta Temple, and all other rooms have been lit by the lamplighter[1]. Thakur is sitting on his smaller cot as he meditates on the Mother of the Universe. Afterwards he repeats the name of the Lord. Incense has been burnt in his room. On one side a light burns on a lamp stand. After awhile, conch shells and bells sound. Arati is being performed

[1] *Faras*

in the Kali Temple. It is the tenth day of the bright fortnight. The moon shines brightly.

A short time after the arati, Sri Ramakrishna, still seated on the smaller cot, talks privately to Mani about different things. Mani sits on the floor.

You have the right to work, but not to its fruit[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — You must work without the expectation of any reward. The work that Iswar Vidyasagar is doing is good. He is trying to perform work selflessly.

Mani — Yes sir. Can one attain the Lord while performing work? Can Rama[2] and kama[3] coexist? The other day I read this Hindi saying:

'Where there is Rama there is no desire, and where there is desire, there is no Rama.'

Sri Ramakrishna — Everybody performs karma. Repeating His name and singing His glories are also work. Even the non-dualists' meditation on 'I am He' is also work. It is work to exhale. There is no way to give up action. So work, but surrender its result to the Lord.

Mani — Sir, is it all right to try to earn more money?

Sri Ramakrishna — You can, if you spend it in spiritual pursuit. You may earn more – but you must make the right use of it. Earning cannot be

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[1] Karmaṇyevādhikāraste mā phaleṣu kadācana. (Gita 2:47)
[2] One of the incarnations of God
[3] Desire

the ideal – the ideal is to serve the Lord. If money is used in the service of the Lord, there is no harm in it.

Mani — Well sir, how long does one have duties toward one's family?

Sri Ramakrishna — Make sure that they are not in want of food and clothing. But there is no need to take your children's burden when they can stand on their own feet. When a young bird learns to find grain for itself, it is pecked away by its mother when it approaches her for food.

Mani — How long must one work?

Sri Ramakrishna — The blossom falls off when the fruit is ripe. When you have attained the Lord, you don't have to work any longer. You won't even want to.

"When a drunkard drinks too much liquor, he loses his senses – but if he has taken two or three drinks, he can carry on with his work. The nearer one advances toward the Lord, the more He lessens one's duties. There is no danger in this. When the daughter-in-law in the family conceives, her mother-in-law gradually reduces her work. In the last month of her pregnancy, the mother-in-law doesn't let her work at all. After the birth of the baby, she remains busy with it all the time.

"One has peace only when one has finished all karma at hand. When a housewife has finished her cooking, the serving of meals and other household

chores, and goes to take her bath, she doesn't return, even if you call for her."

What is meant by attaining the Lord and having His vision? What is the way?

Mani — Sir, what is meant by attaining the Lord? What is a vision of the Lord? What are the means?

Sri Ramakrishna — The Vaishnavas say there are stages on the path to the realization of the Lord. There are beginners[1], aspirants[2], perfected ones[3] and the most perfect of the perfected[4]. He who has just begun to walk the path is a beginner. He who practices spiritual disciplines – worship, japa, meditation and chanting His name – is an aspirant. He who has had the inner experience of God[5] is perfected. The Vedanta illustrates it this way: A gentleman is lying in a dark room. Somebody gropes in the dark to reach him. His hand touches a couch and he says, 'No, this is not he.' Then he touches the window. This is not he. Then he touches the door and again says to himself, 'No, not he.' 'Not this, not this, not this.' At last his hand touches the gentleman. Then he says, 'That's it! Here is the gentleman.' It means that he is now conscious of the gentleman's actual 'existence'. He has reached the gentleman – but he hasn't known him intimately.

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[1] *Pravartaka*
[2] Sadhaka
[3] Siddha
[4] Siddha of the siddhas
[5] *Bodhebodhe*

"There is yet another class, that of the most perfect of the perfect. It is another state to have an intimate acquaintance with the gentleman – to become intimately acquainted with the Lord through love and devotion. The perfect has no doubt attained the Lord, but the most perfect of the perfect has become intimately acquainted with Him.

"You have to establish a specific kind of relationship with the Lord to attain Him: of *shanta*[1], *dasya*[2], *sakhya*[3], *vatsalya*[4] or *madhura*[5].

"*Shanta* – the rishis had this calm attitude. They didn't desire worldly enjoyment. It is also the single-minded devotion[6] of a wife toward her husband. She feels that her husband is the embodiment of beauty and love.

"*Dasya* – this was Hanuman's attitude. He served Rama with the strength of a lion. A wife also has this attitude: she serves her husband from the bottom of her heart. A mother has this attitude to some extent. Yashoda had it.

"*Sakhya* – the attitude of a friend. 'Come, sit beside me.' Sridama and others sometimes gave Sri Krishna a bite from the fruit they were eating and at other times they rode on his shoulders.

"*Vatsalya* – this was Yashoda's attitude. To some extent a wife also has it toward her husband.

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[1] Serene attitude
[2] A servant toward his master
[3] Attitude of a friend
[4] Attitude of a mother toward her child
[5] Attitude of a sweetheart
[6] Nishtha

She feeds him from the bottom of her heart. And she is only satisfied when her son has eaten his fill. Yashoda would wander around with butter in her hand to feed Krishna.

"*Madhura* – as that of Radha. The wife also has this attitude. It includes all other attitudes – *shanta*, *dasya*, *sakhya* and *vatsalya*."

Mani — Does one have the vision of the Lord with these very eyes?

Sri Ramakrishna — He can't be seen by these physical eyes. By practicing spiritual disciplines, one develops a special body of love[1] which has eyes and ears of ecstatic love. One sees Him with these eyes and listens to Him with these ears. Then one even develops a sexual organ of ecstatic love.

Hearing this, Mani laughs boisterously. Thakur is not irritated and continues –

Sri Ramakrishna — One enjoys communion[2] with the Atman by this body of ecstatic love.

Mani again becomes grave.

Sri Ramakrishna — This does not happen without having intense love for God. When one develops intense love, one sees everything filled with God. Just like in severe jaundice everything appears yellow.

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[1] *Prema*: ecstatic love
[2] *Ramana*: romance, lit. intercourse

"It is then that one has the special feeling, 'I am indeed He.' A fellow who is drunk says, 'I am indeed Kali.'

"Intoxicated with ecstatic love, the gopis said, 'I am Krishna.'

"By meditating on God night and day, one sees Him everywhere. Just as after you concentrate on the flame of a lamp, you begin to see flames everywhere."

Is God-realization some mistake of the mind? A doubtful person is ruined[1]

Mani thinks to himself that this flame is not the real flame.

Thakur, who could read a man's mind[2], says, "Nobody can become unconscious by meditating on Consciousness." Shivanath said that the head begins to reel if one meditates on the Lord too much. I said to him, "Can one become unconscious by meditating on Consciousness?"

Mani — Sir, I now understand that. It's not meditation on a transitory object. How can a man become unconscious by meditating on the real Self of eternal Consciousness?

Sri Ramakrishna (happily) — That's His grace. Without His grace, one's doubts do not vanish.

"Without the vision of the Atman, doubts are not dispelled.

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[1] Saṁśayātmā vinaśyati (Gita 4:40)

[2] *Antaryami*

"There is no fear when His grace dawns. A son holding his father's hand can fall down. But if the father holds the son's hand, there is no fear. All difficulties are resolved if, out of His grace, He dispels one's doubts and grants His vision. And if one continues to call upon Him with a heart full of yearning, and continues to practice spiritual disciplines to attain Him, His grace dawns. When a mother sees her child running around restlessly [seeking her], she feels compassion for it. She who was hiding herself, now comes and reveals herself."

Mani is wondering why God makes one run around restlessly. Thakur immediately says, "It is Her will that there should be some running around. Only then is there fun. He has created this universe in sport. That is what Mahamaya is. One must, therefore, take refuge in that Mother, the embodiment of Shakti (Power). One has been bound in the meshes of maya. By tearing its net, one can have the vision of the Lord."

Primal Energy[1], Mahamaya and worship of Shakti

Sri Ramakrishna — To obtain His grace, one must keep the Primal Energy, Shakti, pleased. She Herself is indeed Mahamaya. By enchanting the world, She creates, preserves and dissolves. It is She who has deluded our spiritual awareness. One can enter the door only when She allows us through. When one is outside, one can see only outer objects – one cannot know the Supreme Eternal Person, Sat-chit-ananda[2]. Therefore the *Puranas* state: Brahma and other gods sang hymns

[1] Adyashakti
[2] Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute

of praise to Mahamaya at the time of the assassination of demons Madhu and Kaitabha[1].

"Shakti is at the root of the universe. She includes both knowledge[2] and ignorance[3]. Ignorance deludes and enchants – it leads to 'lust and greed'. On the other hand, love and devotion, compassion, jnana and prema[4], which take one to the Lord, come from knowledge (vidya).

"You have to placate avidya. That is the purpose of the worship of Shakti.

"In order to please Her, there are different attitudes with which to worship Her – the attitude of a handmaid, the heroic attitude, and the attitude of a child.

"The heroic attitude is romantic, having intercourse[5] with Her to please Her.

"'The discipline of the worship of Shakti is very difficult to practice. One cannot deceive or cheat Her.

"I lived for two years in the attitude of a handmaid and companion of the Divine Mother. But my attitude is that of a child to its mother. I look at women's breasts as though they were my mother's.

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[1] Mother, You are the mystic words 'Svaha' and 'Vashat' uttered while performing *homa* and *yajna*. You are Svadha, the mystic word, uttered during observance of *shraddha*.
You are the inmost Self of the mantra. You are the nectar of immortality. O Everlasting One, You are the three lengths of time for pronouncing a vowel sound. (For complete song, see Volume II, Section XIX, Chapter VI)
[2] Vidya
[3] Avidya
[4] Ecstatic love
[5] Ramana

"Every woman is a form of Shakti. In the west [northwest India], a bridegroom holds a knife in his hand at the time of marriage; in Bengal he holds a nutcracker. It means that, with the help of his bride, the embodiment of Shakti, the bridegroom is going to cut the bonds of illusion[1]. This is the heroic attitude. I have never worshipped in this attitude. I have the attitude of a child.

"A bride is the embodiment of Shakti. Haven't you noticed, at a marriage ritual that the bridegroom sits behind like a fool? While the bride sits undaunted!"

One forgets worldly wealth on having God's vision – several branches of knowledge and worldly education – religion and science – sattvic jnana and rajasic jnana

Sri Ramakrishna — After God-realization one forgets His external riches, the glories of His world. On seeing Him, one no longer remembers His riches. When a devotee has lost himself in the Bliss of the Lord, he is rid of all calculation. When one sees Narendra, one doesn't bother to ask, 'What is your name? Where do you live?' Where is the time to ask him such questions? Someone asked Hanuman the date of a particular day. Hanuman replied, 'Brother, I neither know the day of the week, nor the date, nor the constellation of stars. I only meditate on Rama.' "

[1] Maya

Section III

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar Temple on the Vijaya Festival Day

Chapter I

Meditation on the image made of Spirit, and on one's mother

Sri Ramakrishna is staying at the Dakshineswar Temple. It is about 9:00 o'clock. He is resting on the smaller cot and Mani is sitting on the floor talking to him.

It is Sunday, 22 October 1882, the 10th day of the bright fortnight of Aswin – Vijaya day. Rakhal is staying with Thakur these days; Narendra and Bhavanath visit him from time to time. Ramlal, Thakur's nephew, and Hazra are also staying with him. Ram, Manomohan, Suresh, M. and Balaram visit him almost every week. Baburam has visited him only once or twice.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you have [Durga] puja holidays?

Mani — Yes sir. I went to Keshab Sen's house all three days – the seventh, the eighth and the puja day of the ninth.

Sri Ramakrishna — You did indeed!

Mani — I heard a beautiful explanation of Durga Puja from him.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did you hear? Tell me.

Mani — Service was being performed daily at Keshab's house – till ten or eleven. During a service, he gave this explanation of Durga Puja. He said, 'If you attain the Mother, if you can install Mother Durga in the temple of your heart, Goddess Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartika and Ganesha follow. Lakshmi is wealth; Saraswati is knowledge; Kartika is courage; and Ganesha represents success. All these gods and goddesses arrive of their own accord if the Mother comes.'

Narendra and other intimate disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna heard a description of Keshab Sen's entire service from Mani; intermittently he asked a few questions. Then he said, "Don't go here and there. Come only here."

"They who are intimately connected with me must only come here. Narendra, Bhavanath and Rakhal are my intimate disciples. They are not ordinary people. Serve them a meal one day. What do you think of Narendra?"

Mani — Very highly, Sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Just see what qualities Narendra has! He sings well, he can play musical instruments, and he is well-educated. He has also conquered his senses. He says he won't marry. His mind has been turned towards God since childhood.

Sri Ramakrishna talks with Mani about other things.

God with form or without form – meditation on image made of spirit, and on one's mother

Sri Ramakrishna — How are you faring in your meditation these days? Do you like God with form or God without form?

Mani — Sir, at present my mind is not drawn to God with form. But, then, I can't concentrate on the formless God either!

Sri Ramakrishna — So, you see? The mind doesn't become concentrated on the formless God in the beginning. At this stage, meditation on God with form is good.

Mani — Is it right to meditate on clay images?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why clay? They are images made of spirit.

Mani — But sir, one still has to think of the hands and feet and so on. On the other hand I say to myself that in the beginning, the mind won't concentrate except on a form – you said so – but He can assume various forms. May one meditate on the form of one's own mother?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, she is the guru[1]. She is the embodiment of the All-Blissful Mother.

Mani is silent, but after awhile he asks Thakur –

[1] Sri Ramakrishna means that the mother should be adored and highly respected

Mani — What do you see when you meditate on the formless God? Can it be described?

Sri Ramakrishna (after a short reflection) — You know what it's like?

Saying this, Thakur is silent. Then he gives a special description of what one experiences when having a vision of God with form as well as the formless God. He pauses again.

Sri Ramakrishna — The fact is that you need to practice spiritual disciplines to understand. If you want to take jewels from a locked room, you have to make some effort to find the key to open the lock. Then you can remove the jewels from it. If you just stand before a locked room thinking, 'I have now opened the door, now broken the strong-box and now taken the jewels out' – such reflection is of no avail. One must practice spiritual disciplines.

Chapter II

God is infinite and so is Thakur – all are paths – visit to Vrindavan

The jnani believes in infinite incarnations of God – aspirant who doesn't desire to move around[1] – why pilgrimages?

Sri Ramakrishna — Jnanis meditate on the formless God. They don't believe in the incarnation of God. Arjuna sang a hymn of praise to Sri Krishna, 'You are Brahman Absolute.' Krishna said

[1] Kutichaka: an aspirant who settles down peacefully at one place on an *asana*

to him, 'Would you like to see whether or not I am the Absolute Brahman? Come with me.' Saying this, he took Arjuna to a particular place and said, 'What do you see?' Arjuna said, 'I see a big tree with clusters of fruit similar to black berries.' Krishna said, 'Come closer and you will see that these are not clusters of black fruit. Innumerable clusters of Krishnas, like me, are hanging there. That is to say, the same tree of the Absolute Brahman yields numberless incarnations of God.'

"Kavirdas was inclined to believe in the formless God. Referring to Krishna, he would remark, 'How can I meditate on him? The milkmaids used to clap while he danced like a monkey.' (Smiling) I am a believer in God with form when I am with those who believe in God with form. And I am a believer in the formless God when I am with those who hold this belief."

Mani (smiling) — You, too, are infinite, like Him of whom we are talking. It is impossible to limit you.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — You have understood! Do you know what one should do? One should practice the disciplines of all religions. One should tread each of their paths. Does a piece in Indian chess reach home unless it moves to all the squares? When it reaches home, no other piece can overtake it.

Mani — That is true.

Sri Ramakrishna — There are two classes of yogis: the *vahudakas* and the *kutichakas*. The sadhu who

visits many places of pilgrimage and hasn't yet attained peace of mind is a *vahudaka*. But the yogi who has stilled his mind after visiting several places, who has found peace of mind, fixes an asana[1] for himself and doesn't move from it. He feels joy only when he sits at that same place. He doesn't feel the need to go on pilgrimage. If he goes to holy places at all, it is to get inspiration.

"I had to practice disciplines of all the religions: Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. I also followed the paths of the Shaktas, Vaishnavas, Vedantists and other sects. I saw that it was the same Lord toward whom everybody was moving. Only their paths were different.

"I have gone on pilgrimages, but one time I suffered a great deal. I went with Mathur's family to Kashi and was sitting in Raja Babu's drawing room. They were all talking about worldly affairs – about money, land, and what not. Hearing them, I began to weep. I said, 'Divine Mother, where have you brought me? I was much better off at Dakshineswar.' In Prayag I saw that the pond, the durva grass, plants, and the tamarind leaves were all the same as here! The only difference was that the excreta of the people of the west [Uttar Pradesh, west of Bengal] appeared like husk[2]. (Thakur and Mani laugh.)

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[1] Meditation seat

[2] Kashi and Allahabad are both in Uttar Pradesh, which is west of Bengal (Dakshineswar). Thakur is saying that there is no difference in locality, there is only difference in regard to worldly people (such as he saw in Raja Babu's drawing room) and those interested in God; i.e. what one takes in, one gives out: if one is only concerned with coarse, worldly things, one expresses what is coarse.

"Undoubtedly one gets inspiration in a place of pilgrimage. I went to Vrindavan with Mathur Babu. In the party were ladies of Mathur Babu's family and also Hriday. Just seeing the Kaliyadaman ghat, I felt inspired and was overwhelmed with divine emotion. Hriday used to bathe me at this ghat of the Jamuna as one bathes a child.

"In the evening I would go for a stroll on the bank of the Jamuna. Cows would be returning from pasture, coming across the sandbank of the Jamuna. Just seeing them, I was inspired with Krishna. I began to run around like an intoxicated person, crying, 'Where are you Krishna, where …'

"I went to Shyamkunda and Radhakunda in a palanquin. I got down from it to see Mount Govardhan. No sooner did I see it than I was overwhelmed with divine emotion. I ran to the top of it and lost external consciousness. Then the residents of Vraja carried me down. I was overwhelmed with divine emotion to see the plains, the plants, trees and deer on the way to Shyamkunda and Radhakunda. My clothes became wet with tears. I said to myself, 'Oh Krishna! Everything is here – but I am not able to find you!' I sat in the palanquin without the strength to utter a word. I sat quietly. Hriday, following the palanquin, told the palanquin bearers to be very careful.

"Gangama was leading a highly spiritual life. She was very old and lived alone in a hut near Nidhuvan. Seeing my spiritual state and ecstasy, she said, 'He is the very embodiment of Radha.' She

called me 'dulali[1]'. Being with her, I forgot everything – to eat, or to return home. Hriday sometimes brought food from home to feed me. Gangama also prepared some food for me.

"Gangama used to go into ecstasy. People would gather to watch her in her ecstatic state. Once she climbed up on Hriday's shoulders in a state of ecstasy.

"I didn't feel like leaving Gangama and returning to Calcutta. Arrangements were made for me to stay with her. I was to eat double-boiled rice. Gangama would have her bedding on one side of the room and I on the other. All this was arranged. Hriday then said, 'You are suffering badly from indigestion. Who will look after you?' Gangama said, 'Why, I will look after him! I will nurse him.' Hriday pulled me toward him by one hand and Gangama dragged me toward her by the other. Just then I was reminded of my mother. She was staying all alone in the Nahabat at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. Thus I could not stay. I said, 'No, I shall have to return.'

"There is such a nice spiritual atmosphere in Vrindavan. When new pilgrims arrive, the boys of Vraja say, 'Repeat the name of the Lord and open your purse!' "

About eleven o'clock Sri Ramakrishna takes the prasad[2] of Mother Kali. After relaxing for awhile at midday, he spends the afternoon in conversation with the devotees. Now and then he utters, "Om," or "Ha, Chaitanya!"

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[1] A dear little girl
[2] Sacramental food

Evening arati[1] has been performed in the shrine. It is Vijaya Day – Sri Ramakrishna comes to the Kali Temple. After he has paid his obeisance to the Mother, the devotees take the dust of his feet. Ramlal has performed the arati of Mother Kali. Sri Ramakrishna calls out to him, "Hey, Ramlal. Where is it?"

An offering of Indian hemp[2] has been made to Mother Kali. Sri Ramakrishna calls Ramlal because he wishes to touch the consecrated hemp with his hand. He asks him to distribute a little to every devotee.

Chapter III

At the Dakshineswar Kali Temple with Balaram and other devotees – instructions to Balaram

Physical signs – speaking the truth – harmony of religions – 'lust and greed' constitute maya[3]

It is Tuesday afternoon, 24 October, the time about 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock. Thakur is standing close to the food-shelf. Balaram and M. have arrived from Calcutta in a carriage and have made obeisance to him. When they sit down after saluting him, Thakur says with a smile, "I came to take some food from the shelf. No sooner did I touch the food with my hand than a lizard fell on my body[4]! I immediately pulled my hand back." (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, yes! You must believe in all these things. Just see, Rakhal is suffering, and

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[1] Singing devotional songs together with the waving of lights before the sacred images
[2] Siddhi
[3] Nescience
[4] The dropping of a lizard is believed to be a bad omen

I, too, feel pain in my limbs. Do you know what's the matter? When I was leaving my bed, I saw[1] a certain person's face and thought that Rakhal was coming! (All laugh.) Oh, yes! You must notice all these physical signs. Narendra brought a friend who was blind in one eye – not totally blind. However, I said to myself, 'Just by chance Narendra has brought such trouble with him!'

"There is a certain person who visits here, but I can't eat any of the food he brings. He works in an office on a salary of twenty rupees a month – and earns an extra twenty rupees by submitting fraudulent bills. He tells lies. I don't talk to him very long. Sometimes he doesn't go to his office for three or four days and stays here. Do you know why? He wants to get another job through my recommendation."

Balaram belongs to a family of devout Vaishnavas. His father, an old man, is a pious devotee. He has a tuft of hair on his head and wears a string of tulsi beads around his neck; he constantly repeats the name of the Lord on his rosary. The family has a big estate in Orissa. Besides, they have built shrines to Radha-Krishna in Kothar, Vrindavan and many other places, where worship and service of the deities is performed. They have built [free] guesthouses there as well. Balaram is a recent visitor to Sri Ramakrishna, who imparts instructions to him during the course of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — A certain person visited me the other day. I hear that he may be a slave to his hag of a wife. Why doesn't one see God? The reason is

[1] Orthodox Hindus believe that the first face in the morning indicates whether the day will be good or bad

that 'lust and greed' form a veil. How could he say in your presence, 'A paramahamsa[1] visited my father and my father cooked a chicken for him!' (Balaram laughs.) I am in such a spiritual state that I can only eat a little fish gravy if it is first offered to the Divine Mother. But I can't eat meat offered to the Mother. I only taste it with the tip of my finger, lest the Mother should be cross with me. (All laugh.)

His earlier story – on the way to Burdwan – journeys through his native countryside – he hears Nakur Acharya's songs

"Well, can you explain the state of my mind? I was going to my village [Kamarpukur] by bullock cart from Burdwan. Suddenly a storm arose and it began to rain heavily. A group of people came and gathered around the cart. My companions told me they were dacoits. So I began to repeat the Lord's name. Sometimes I repeated Rama's name, sometimes Kali's, and then Hanuman's. I repeated all these names. What do you think of this?"

> Is Sri Ramakrishna hinting that there is but one God with numberless names; that followers of different religions and sects quarrel with each other in vain?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Balaram) — Maya is only 'lust and greed'. By living in the midst of them for a few days, one loses spiritual awareness but feels that all is well. A scavenger carries a pot of excreta and in course of time, doesn't feel any repulsion for it. One gradually acquires love and devotion for God

[1] Orthodox Hindus are forbidden to eat chicken, or meat

by practicing the chanting of the Lord's name and glories.

(To M.) — One should not be ashamed of repeating the Lord's name. One does not succeed as long as one has these three: shame, hatred and fear.

"They sing very nice kirtans in that part of the country. They sing them to the accompaniment of a drum. The song of Nakur Acharya is wonderful indeed. (To Balaram) Don't you have a temple in Vrindavan where worship and service to the deity is performed?"

Balaram — Yes, sir. We have a grove where Krishna[1] is worshipped.

Sri Ramakrishna — I have been to Vrindavan. Nidhu grove is a very nice place.

[1] Shyam Sunder

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna on the Main Road to Calcutta with his Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna leaves the Dakshineswar Kali Temple by carriage. He is on his way to Calcutta, accompanied by Ramlal and a couple of devotees. As soon as he is out of the gate, he sees M. approaching on foot with four *fazli*[1] mangoes in his hand. He asks for the carriage to stop. Mani salutes him, placing his head on the carriage.

Saturday, 21 July 1883, the first day of the dark fortnight of Ashada. It is about four o'clock. Thakur is going to Adhar's home, then to Jadu Mallick's and, last of all, to Khelat Ghosh's.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to Mani) — Why don't you come with us? We're going to Adhar Sen's home.

Saying, "As you wish," M. gets into the carriage.

Mani is English-educated and did not formerly believe in samskaras, but a few days ago he admitted to Thakur that the reason Adhar had so much love and devotion[2] for him was because of his samskaras[3]. However, when he returned home and thought about it, he decided that he still did not have full faith in the idea of inherited tendencies of past lives. It is to

[1] A species of mango grown in Malda
[2] Bhakti
[3] Tendencies inherited from one's past births

tell Thakur this that he has come to see him today. Thakur speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, what do you think of Adhar?

Mani — Sir, he has great love for you.

Sri Ramakrishna — Adhar thinks very highly of you.

Mani is silent for awhile. Then he raises the subject of past life samskaras.

One understands nothing of God – very secret talk

Mani — I don't have much faith in the idea of previous life samskaras. Will it retard my love and devotion to God in any way?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is enough to have the faith that everything is possible in His creation. Don't allow the idea to come to your mind that what you think is the only truth and that what everyone else thinks is false. Then God Himself will make you understand.

"How can a man understand His activities? They are limitless. Don't even try to understand them. I have heard that anything is possible in His creation. So instead of worrying about these things, I only meditate on God. One day Hanuman was asked the date. He said, 'I don't know either the day or the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rama.'

"Can one ever understand His works? God is so near to us – yet we don't know Him. Balaram did not recognize Krishna as the Lord."

Mani — Yes, sir. You said the same thing about Bhishma Deva.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, yes. Please tell me what I said about him.

Mani — Bhishma Deva wept as he lay on a bed of arrows. The Pandavas said to Sri Krishna, 'Brother, how strange this is! So spiritually wise is our grandfather[1] and yet he weeps at the thought of death.' Sri Krishna replied, 'Please ask him why he is crying.' Bhishma said, 'I am crying because I fail to understand anything of God doings. Krishna, you accompany the Pandavas wherever they go, protecting them at every step. Even then, there is no end to their troubles.'

Sri Ramakrishna — God has hidden everything with His maya. He doesn't let you understand anything. 'Lust and greed' constitute maya. Only he who removes the veil of maya can behold His vision. I was explaining to somebody that God is truly amazing, when He suddenly showed me a pond in the countryside (Kamarpukur). A person pushed aside the green scum covering the surface and drank the water below. The water was as clear as crystal. This showed that Sat-chit-ananda is covered by the maya of 'green scum'. Only he who can remove the scum can have His vision.

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[1] *Pitamah*

"Listen – I'll tell you a great secret. While I was answering the call of nature in the Jhautala (willow grove), I saw in front of me something that looked like the door of a secret chamber. I couldn't see what was inside it. I tried to make a hole with a nail knife, but I couldn't. The moment I would make a hole, the earth would fall back and fill it up. At long last I was able to make a big opening."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna paused. After awhile, he says, "These are lofty spiritual matters. Look, somebody is pressing my mouth to stop me from divulging them."

"I saw with my own eyes God's presence in the female genital organ. I saw Him once in the mating of a dog and a bitch."

"The universe is conscious on account of God's Consciousness. At times I see His Consciousness flashing in small fish."

The carriage reaches the Darmahata crossing at Shovabazar. Thakur adds –

"Sometimes I see the universe permeated with Consciousness just as the earth is soaked with rain water.

"Though I have seen so much, I am not puffed up with pride."

Mani (with a smile) — For you to speak of pride!

Sri Ramakrishna — Truly, I swear to you that I never feel the least pride.

Mani — There was a man in Greece by the name of Socrates. A voice from heaven announced that he was the wisest of all men. Socrates was amazed. He reflected on it a long time in solitude before he understood. Then he told his friends, 'Now I have understood that I know nothing.' People think they have gained so much knowledge. The fact is that all men are ignorant.

Sri Ramakrishna — Now and then I say to myself, 'What do I know that so many people visit me?' Vaishnavcharan was a great pundit. He used to say, 'Whatever you say tallies with the scriptures. Then why do I visit you? I want to hear it from your lips.'

Mani — All your words tally with the scriptures. Navadvip Goswami in Panihati also said that the other day. You said, 'By repeating the words 'Gita' a number of times, it becomes '*tyagi*[1]'. Actually it gets reversed to '*tagi*', but Navadvip Goswami said that '*tagi*' and '*tyagi*' convey the same meaning. They are both derived from the root 'tag'.

Sri Ramakrishna — Does anyone resemble me – any pundit or sadhu?

Mani — God has made you with His own hands, but He has made others by machine – according to the law of creation.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing, to Ramlal and others) — Hello! See what he says!

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[1] Man of renunciation

Thakur's laughter continues. At last he says, "Truly, I swear, I don't feel the least pride."

Mani — Education does one good thing in that one realizes: I know nothing and I am nothing.

Sri Ramakrishna — True, very true. I am nothing, I am nothing indeed. Well, do you believe in Western astronomy?

Mani — According to it, new discoveries can be made. Noting the irregular movement of Uranus, with the help of a telescope, the brightly shining new planet Neptune has been discovered. And a new calculation can be made about the eclipse.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, it is possible.

The carriage is rolling on and has almost reached Adhar's house. Thakur says to Mani –

"Stick to truth. It will lead to God-realization."

Mani — And you said yet another thing to Navadvip Goswami, 'O Lord, I want You! See that You do not enchant me by the splendour of Your world-bewitching maya. I want You!'

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes. This is what one must say sincerely.

Chapter II

In the joy of devotional songs[1] at Adhar Sen's house

Sri Ramakrishna has come to Adhar Sen's house. Ramlal, M., Adhar and many other devotees are seated near him in the parlour. Three or four people of the neighbourhood have come to see Thakur. Rakhal lives with his father in Calcutta.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Adhar) — Have you not informed Rakhal that I was coming?

Adhar — Yes sir, I told him.

Noticing Thakur's eagerness to see Rakhal, Adhar sends a man in his carriage to fetch him, though he does not mention it.

Adhar sits close to Thakur. He was very eager to see Thakur today, but such a visit was not planned. He has arrived by the Lord's will.

Adhar — You haven't been here for such a long time! I cried for you today, shedding tears.

Sri Ramakrishna (happily, smiling) — Did you really?

It is already dusk. The parlour has been lit. Thakur folds his hands and pays his obeisance to the Mother of the Universe; perhaps he mentally repeats the *mulamantra*[2]. Now he chants the Name in a sweet voice: Govinda, Govinda, Sat-chit-ananda, Haribol! Haribol! Repeating the holy Name, he showers nectar

[1] Kirtan

[2] An esoteric word or words of great power repeated during prayer and meditation

all around. The devotees drink the nectar of the Name, speechless with wonder. Ramlal now sings –

You have enchanted the whole world, O Mother. You, the enchantress of Shiva Himself.

O Mother, sitting on the great lotus in the Muladhara, You enjoy Yourself, playing the vina[1].

In the machine of the human body, You manifest Yourself. With Your great mantra, You pierce the three gunas which reside in the three nadis, or nerves, of the Sushumna, Ida and Pingala.

You provide energy to the three musical scales.

You abide in the six-petalled lotus of Svadhisthana as Bhairava musical mode[2].

You illuminate as Mallhar[3] raga in the Manipura and as the Vasanta[4] raga in the lotus of the heart.

You reside as Hindola musical mode in the Vishuddha chakra, and in the Ajna lotus as eardrum. You pierce the seventy-three melodies with the three octaves: keynote, metre and tempo.

O Mahamaya, you easily bind all creatures with the net of infatuation.

You become absorbed in the Supreme Consciousness and establish there as lightning.

Nanda Kumar says: who knows for certain what Your quintessence is? But you sing like the cuckoo and Your essence is the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas.

Ramlal sings another song –

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[1] A stringed musical instrument
[2] Raga
[3] Indian musical mode of rainy season
[4] An Indian musical mode

O Bhavani, I have heard Your fear-dispelling Name, so I have placed my burden on You this time. Redeem me or not, as You wish.

You, O Mother, hold the entire universe, and You are immanent in it. Who knows whether you are Kali or Radha?

O Mother, You dwell in all beings. As Kundalini, You abide in the Muladhara lotus of four petals.

You rise through the Sushumna and reach the Vajrasana[1] of the six-petalled lotus of Svadhisthana.

Then O Divine Mother, You go upward to the ten-petalled blue lotus of the Manipura centre at the navel.

O Mother, the begetter, You live among the lotuses on the path of the Sushumna. O Lady of lotuses!

Above it, there is the charming red lotus with twelve petals in the reservoir of nectar. If you open it with Your lotus feet, all darkness of the heart is dispelled.

Above that, in the region of the throat is the smoke-hued sixteen-petalled lotus of the void, the source of water.

When this void is experienced, the universe is dissolved in the Void.

Above it, at the forehead, is the two-petalled lotus. When the mind remains ever lodged there, staying on the two petals, it wants to witness the sport of existence.

Above this centre, at the top of the head at a most charming spot, is the thousand-petalled lotus. There the Supreme Shiva Himself dwells.

O Mother, You abide there near Shiva as Primeval Energy, a woman who has conquered the senses. The great yogis and munis meditate on You as the daughter of the Lord of the mountains.

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[1] A centre in the Sushumna

You are the Shakti of Shiva. Pray destroy my cravings so that I am not born again in this world.

O Mother, You are Primordial Power. You are the five elements[1], and You are also beyond the five elements.

You take a form for the sake of the devotees in the creation, and You are indeed formless even when the five elements are dissolved.

Vision of Formless Sat-chit-ananda[2] – piercing the six spiritual centres and attainment of samadhi

Ramlal sings –

Above it in the region of the throat is the smoke-hued sixteen-petalled lotus of a void, the source of water.

When this void is experienced, the universe is dissolved in the Void.

Sri Ramakrishna then says to M., "Listen, this is known as the vision of the formless Sat-chit-ananda. When the Vishuddha centre is pierced, one sees all as *akasa*[3]."

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — After crossing over the maya of the universe and created beings, one reaches the Nitya[4]. Passing beyond the sound *nada*[5], one attains samadhi. While practicing the spiritual discipline of repeating 'Om,' one goes beyond the *nada* sound and attains samadhi.

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[1] Earth, water, fire, air and ether
[2] Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute
[3] Ether, the subtlest of the five elements, the vehicle of life and sound
[4] The Absolute
[5] This sound rises from the navel and originates in the Supreme Brahman

Chapter III

Jadu Mallick's house – before Goddess Simhavahini – in samadhi

Adhar treats Thakur to fruits and sweets in his house. Thakur says, "I have to go to Jadu Mallick's house today."

Thakur arrives at Jadu Mallick's house. It is the first lunar day of the dark fortnight in the month of Ashada. The night is bathed in moonlight. Thakur comes with the devotees to the room in which Goddess Simhavahini is daily worshipped. Having been adorned with sandal paste, garlands and flowers, the Mother looks supremely graceful. A priest is sitting in front of Her. A lamp is lighted in front of the image. Thakur asks one of his intimate companions to offer a rupee to the Goddess and salute Her; it is a Hindu custom to make an offering when one visits a deity.

Thakur stands before the Goddess Simhavahini with folded hands. Behind him the devotees also stand with folded hands.

Thakur looks a long time at the Goddess.

How wonderful! While looking at Her, he suddenly passes into samadhi. He stands there motionless, like an image of stone, without blinking.

After a long time he exhales a long breath. His samadhi breaks. He says, as if drunk, "Mother, I am bidding good-bye." But he cannot move. He stands there in the same mood.

Next he says to Ramlal, "Sing that song. Then I will be restored to normal." Ramlal sings, "You have enchanted the whole world, O Mother. You, the enchantress of Shiva Himself."

The song comes to an end.

Now, accompanied by the devotees, Thakur walks toward the parlour. On his way, he says, "Mother, please dwell in my heart!"

Jadu Mallick is seated with his friends in the parlour. Thakur is still in a divine mood. As he enters, he sings –

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,

Do not deprive me of bliss[1].

As the song ends, he says to Jadu, still intoxicated in the same spiritual mood, "Tell me, sir, what shall I sing?" Shall I sing this song, "Am I a weakling, delivered in the eighth month of conception?" Saying this, Thakur sings –

Song –

Mother, am I your eight-month[2] old son?

I am not afraid of Your eyes shot red with anger.

Your red feet are my wealth – the same feet Shiva keeps on His breast.

Whenever I ask for Your wealth, I am put off by deceit.

I have put away in my heart Shiva's hand-written deed.

This time I am going to take my case to the Lord's court and win it by just one submission.

I'll make You see how a son can fight a case.

Says Ramprasad, 'When a son goes to court against his mother, it is so exciting!'

I will be pacified only when You take me in Your arms to quiet me.

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[1] For complete song, refer Volume I, Section XIV, Chapter Three

[2] A premature child delivered in eighth month of conception who is generally weak

The lawsuit between the Mother and son shall gain great momentum, says Ramprasad.

I shall only rest when the Mother, having pardoned me, raises me in Her arms.

When his mood comes down a little, he says, "I will eat the Divine Mother's prasad."

Mother Simhavahini's prasad is given to Thakur.

Jadu Mallick is sitting with a number of his friends and relatives on chairs close to Thakur. Some of them are flatterers.

Thakur sits on a chair facing Jadu Mallick and talks with him in a happy mood. Some of Thakur's devotees are in an adjacent room. M. and a couple of devotees sit near him.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Well, why do you keep court jesters with you?

Jadu (smiling) — Won't you redeem them even if they are?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — The Ganges doesn't purify wine casks that float in it!

Sticking to truth and Sri Ramakrishna – a man must keep his word

Jadu had promised Thakur that he would arrange for a recital of the Chandi in his house. Many days have elapsed, but the recital has not taken place.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, what about the recital of the Chandi?

Jadu — I was busy with so many engagements, I couldn't arrange for it.

Sri Ramakrishna — What! A man has to keep his word!

"The words of a man and an elephant's tusks do not go back.

"A man must keep his word. What do you say?"

Jadu (smiling) — That is so.

Sri Ramakrishna — You are a calculating man. You calculate profit and loss before you start a work. A brahmin's cow must eat little, produce a lot of cow dung, and yield pails of milk. (All laugh.)

Thakur says to Jadu after awhile, "I now understand your nature. You are like the stone of Ramjiwanpur, half of which is hot and the other half cold. You have your mind on the Lord and also in the world."

Thakur eats the prasad of the Divine Mother – fruits and sweets – along with the devotees. Now he leaves to go to Khelat Ghosh's house.

Chapter IV

Auspicious visit at Khelat Ghosh's house – instruction to a Vaishnava

Sri Ramakrishna enters Khelat Ghosh's house about ten at night. The house and its big courtyard are bathed in moonlight. As he enters the house, Thakur passes into a spiritual mood. Ramlal, M. and a couple of devotees are with him. There are rooms on all four sides of the big courtyard. The inner apartments are

reached by climbing two flights of stairs and walking some distance through a verandah to the south, then turning east, and again some distance to the west.

It looked like there was nobody in the house, in the big rooms, or the long verandah in front.

Thakur is taken to the northeastern room and given a seat. He is still in ecstasy. The devotee who lives in the house and who had invited Thakur comes in to greet him. He is a Vaishnava; his body is marked with sandal paste, and he carries a small rosary bag. He is old. He is a relative of Khelat Ghosh. He sometimes visits Dakshineswar to see Thakur, though some Vaishnavas are very narrow-minded and disparage Shaktas and jnanis. Thakur now talks.

Sri Ramakrishna's harmony of religions – the Religion of Love

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Vaishnava devotee and others) — It's not right to think that only my religion is right and all others are wrong. There is but one God, one without a second. Different people call Him by various names. Some call Him God, others Allah, some call Him Krishna, some Shiva, and some Brahman. Say there is a reservoir containing water. At one of its bathing ghats people call it *jal*, at another water, and at yet another *pani*. Hindus call it *jal*, Christians call it water, and Muslims call it *pani*. Yet there is only one substance. As many religions, so many paths – every religion is a path which leads to the Lord. It is like rivers coming from different directions but uniting in the same ocean.

"Sat-chit-ananda is the only truth established in the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras*. In the

Vedas, He is Sat-chit-ananda Brahman; in the *Puranas* Sat-chit-ananda Krishna, Ram and so on; and in the Tantra, He is Sat-chit-ananda Shiva. Sat-chit-ananda Brahman, Sat-chit-ananda Krishna and Sat-chit-ananda Shiva are one and the same."

They all sit silent.

The Vaishnava Devotee — Sir, why should I meditate on God?

Instructions to the Vaishnava – who is a *jivanmukta*[1]? Who is a superior devotee? Signs of one who has had His vision

Sri Ramakrishna — If one truly has this understanding, one is already liberated in his lifetime. But not everybody has such faith. They only talk. Worldly people have heard that God exists and everything happens by His will. But they don't have faith in it.

"Do you know what the God of worldly people is like? Like children who swear by God while quarrelling. They have heard the word from their elderly aunts who are quarrelling.

"Can everybody understand Him? He has created good people as well as bad, devotees as well as non-devotees. He has created believers in God and non-believers. There is such variety in His sport! There is a greater manifestation of His Power at one place than another. There is a greater reflection of the light of the sun on water than on

[1] One liberated in this very life

the earth, and again there is more of its reflection in a mirror than on water.

"Besides, there are classes of devotees: superior devotees, mediocre devotees and inferior devotees. The *Gita* speaks of all this."

The Vaishnava — True, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — The inferior devotee says, 'God exists up there in the sky very far away.' The mediocre devotee says, 'God is present in all beings as Consciousness, as life.' The superior devotee says, 'God Himself has become everything. All that I see are the different forms of God. He Himself has become maya[1], the universe and living beings – nothing exists apart from Him.'

Sri Ramakrishna — One does not attain this state unless one has seen God. But there are signs of whether a man has attained His vision. Sometimes he laughs, weeps, dances, or sings like a mad man. Sometimes he behaves like a child – like a five-year old child: guileless, generous, without vanity, not attached to anything, not subject to any of the gunas and always blissful. At other times he behaves like a ghoul: he does not discriminate between purity and impurity; he sees no difference between right conduct and wrong. Or at times he becomes inert, as if he had the glimpse of something unique. So he cannot do any work; he is not able to strive for anything.

[1] Nescience

Is Sri Ramakrishna referring to all the states he has gone through?

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Vaishnava devotee) — 'You and Yours' comes from spiritual knowledge[1]; the feeling of 'I and mine' is ignorance.

"Oh Lord, You are the doer, I am a non-doer – this is Knowledge. Oh Lord, all belongs to You – body, mind, home, family, the universe and its living beings – they are all Yours, nothing belongs to me. This feeling is Knowledge.

"An ignorant man says, 'The Lord exists there, very far away.' The man of Knowledge[2], on the other hand, knows that the Lord exists 'here, here indeed,' so very near, within the heart, as the *antaryami*[3]. And that He has assumed each of the various forms that are."

[1] Jnana
[2] Jnani
[3] The Inner Controller

Section V

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar Temple with Devotees

Chapter I

Instructions to Manimohan[1] – signs of the vision of Brahman – yoga of meditation[2]

Sri Ramakrishna, seated on the smaller cot, is meditating inside the mosquito net. It is seven or eight o'clock at night. M. is seated on the floor. Hari Babu, one of his friends, has come with him. It is Monday, 20 August 1883, the second day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana.

Hazra is living at Dakshineswar these days. Rakhal is often there too, though he sometimes stays with Adhar Sen. Narendra, Bhavanath, Adhar, Balaram, Ram, Manomohan, M. and others visit overnight almost every week.

Hriday, who had been of great service to Thakur, is now ill at his village home. Thakur is very anxious to hear about him. A devotee gave ten rupees to Ram Chatterji to send to Hriday, but Thakur was not present and does not know about it. This devotee has brought a tumbler, having been asked by Thakur, "Bring a tumbler for drinking water for the devotees' use."

Hari Babu, M.'s friend, lost his wife some eleven years ago; he has not remarried. He serves his father, mother, brother and sister, for whom he has great love and affection. He is twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old. Thakur comes out of his

[1] Referring to M.
[2] Dhyana Yoga, or communion with God by meditation

mosquito net when the devotees arrive and take their seats. M. and the other devotees prostrate to salute him. The mosquito net is now removed from the cot. Sitting on the smaller cot, Thakur talks to them.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I was meditating inside the mosquito net. I thought to myself that God is only a form one imagines during meditation, so I didn't enjoy it. One is successful when God reveals Himself all of a sudden – in a flash. So then I said to myself, 'Who is it that meditates, and on whom does he meditate?'

M. — Yes, sir. You said that He Himself has become everything – the universe and its living beings. That even he who meditates is also God.

Sri Ramakrishna — And one cannot do anything unless He makes one do it. One meditates only when God makes it possible for one to meditate. What is your opinion?

M. — Sir, there is no 'I-consciousness' in you, that is why you feel this way. Only he who has no ego has this understanding.

Sri Ramakrishna — But it is good to retain this much ego: 'I am His servant.' As long as one thinks that one does anything, the attitude 'I am your servant and you are my Master' is good. It is good to cherish the relationship of servant and Master when one feels that one is performing activities.

Manimohan [M.] continually reflects on the nature of the Supreme Brahman. Thakur talks to him about it.

Sri Ramakrishna — Brahman[1] is like *akasa*[2], without any modification. It is like fire, which has no colour. Only by His Power has He taken up various forms. Sattva, rajas and tamas are the three qualities of God's Power. If you put something white in fire, it appears white; if you put something red, it appears red; if black, the fire appears black. Brahman is beyond the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. What He is cannot be expressed in words – He is beyond speech. What remains when you continue the practice of saying, 'Not this, not this[3]' is the essence of Bliss, is Brahman.

"The husband of a young girl has arrived and is sitting with other young men of his age in the outer room. The girl and her companions of the same age are peeping through the grill of a window. The companions don't know her husband, so they ask her, 'Is that your husband?' The girl smiles a little and says, 'No.' Pointing to another person, the girls ask, 'Is that one your husband?' She again says, 'No.' Again they point at a third person and ask her, 'Is that your husband?' She again says, 'No.' At last they point to her husband and ask, 'Is that your husband?' Then the girl says neither 'yes' nor 'no' – she only smiles suddenly with a short catch of her breath; she remains silent. Her companions then know that he is her husband. When one attains the knowledge of Brahman, one becomes silent."

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[1] The Absolute
[2] Ether
[3] Neti, neti

Company of the holy – duties of a householder

(To Mani) "Well, why do I talk so much?"

Mani — You talk to awaken the spiritual consciousness of the devotees. You yourself say that if one puts unbaked *luchi*[1] in boiling ghee, it makes a sizzling sound.

Thakur talks about Hazra to M.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you know what the nature of a saintly person is? He doesn't hurt anybody, he doesn't harass anybody. Some people have such a nature that, when invited to a feast, they say they would like a special seat. If one has genuine love and devotion for the Lord, one does not take a false step, does not give trouble to others for nothing.

"It is not right to keep the company of bad people. You must keep some distance from them. You must save yourself from them. (To Mani) What do you say?"

Mani — Sir, the company of wicked people brings the mind way down. But, as you say, it is different with heroes.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is that?

Mani — If you throw a stick into a fire burning feebly, it goes out. But when the fire is blazing, you may throw a plantain tree into it and nothing

[1] Fried bread

happens to the fire – though the tree is burnt to ashes.

Sri Ramakrishna asks M. about his friend Hari Babu.

M. — He has come to see you. His wife died a long time ago.

Sri Ramakrishna [to Hari Babu] — What are you doing these days?

M. — Nothing in particular. But at home he serves his brother and sister and parents with great care.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What is this! You have become a 'pumpkin-cutting elder uncle'. You are neither a man of the world nor a devotee of God[1]. This is not right. In some homes an old man is busy day and night only with the children of the family. Sitting in the parlour, he smokes his hubble-bubble and does no work – except that sometimes he goes inside the house and cuts a pumpkin for the family. The ladies of the family don't cut pumpkin; they send him word through the boys to come in and cut it for them. The old man cuts the pumpkin into two. It is the only work this man has to do. That's why he is called a 'pumpkin-cutting elder uncle'.

"Please do 'this' as well as 'that'. Attend to worldly duties, but keep your mind at the lotus feet of the Lord. And when you are alone, read

[1] Hari

devotional scriptures like *Srimad Bhagavata*, or *Chaitanya Charitamrita*."

It is almost ten at night. The Kali Temple has not yet been closed. M. walks through the courtyard, talking with Ram Chatterji. First he pays obeisance in the Radhakanta Temple and then in Mother Kali's shrine. The moon appears in the sky. It is the second day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana. The courtyard and the temple spire look beautiful.

M. returns to Thakur's room where he sees him seated for dinner. He is facing south. His meal consists of some farina pudding and one or two *luchis*. After some time, M. and his friend salute Thakur and take their leave. They will return to Calcutta tonight.

Chapter II

Dialogue between Guru and disciple – secret talk

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot in his room talking alone with Mani. Mani is sitting on the floor. It is Friday, 7 September 1883, the sixth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Bhadra. It is about 7:30 in the evening.

Sri Ramakrishna — I went to Calcutta the other day. While going along in the carriage, I saw that everyone's attention was on lower things. They were all worried for their stomachs – they were running around to earn a living. They all had their minds on 'lust and greed'. Only one or two people had fixed their sight on higher things, had their minds turned toward God.

Mani — The present times add to our worry about the upkeep of the stomach. Imitating the English, people are drawn more and more to creature comforts. Thus their wants have increased.

Sri Ramakrishna — What do the English think about God?

Mani — They believe in the formless God.

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna sees no difference in the state of Brahmajnana[1] – he sees the same Consciousness pervading all: the English, Hindus, depressed classes, in animals, in insects, excreta, urine, and in all elements

Sri Ramakrishna — We, too, have the same belief.

Both of them are silent for awhile. Thakur now describes his state of Brahmajnana.

Sri Ramakrishna — One day I saw that it was all one Consciousness that pervades everything – without any distinction. At first I was shown several men and some animals and other creatures – among them were the educated rich, Englishmen, Muslims, myself, a *chandala*[2], a dog and a Muslim with a long beard holding a porcelain plate of rice in his hand. He put the rice from the plate into everybody's mouth. I tasted a little too.

"Another day I was shown excreta, urine, cereal and all kinds of foodstuff. Suddenly the soul emerged from within [my body] and tasted all of

[1] Knowledge of the Absolute
[2] A man who cremates; a scavenger

them – like the flame of a fire. It was just like a tongue licking each article one by one. It tasted everything, including the excreta and urine. I was thus shown that it is all one, without any difference."

His earlier story – vision of his intimate disciples – is Thakur an avatar?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Another day the devotees who visit me here – my intimate disciples, my very own – were revealed to me. Thereafter, as soon as the conch shell and the bells of the evening worship sounded, I would climb to the roof of the Kuthi and cry aloud with yearning, 'I say, where are you people? Please, come here! I am dying to see you!'

"Well, what do you feel about all these visions of mine?"

Mani — God is playing His sport in your body. I have understood that you are the instrument and He the Being who uses the instrument. He has created every other creature as if with a machine, but He has created you with His own hands.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, Hazra says that one acquires the six divine powers after God-realization.

Mani — They who want pure love and devotion for God do not care for these powers.

Sri Ramakrishna — Perhaps Hazra was a poor man in his previous birth and that is why he is so very

keen to have riches. He asks me what I talk about with the cook. He says, 'By talking to the treasurer of the temple, I can get you whatever you want!' (Mani laughs loudly).

(Laughing) "That is how he talks about these things. I listen to him silently."

A devotee can easily comprehend that God incarnated as a man – powers and sweetness

Mani — You have said several times that the pure devotee does not want to see His grandeur. The pure devotee likes to see God as Gopala[1]. First, God becomes the magnet and the devotee the needle. In the end the devotee becomes the magnet and God the needle. In other words, God becomes small to the devotee.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is like the sun at dawn. One can look at it easily – it doesn't dazzle the eyes. Instead, the eyes are satisfied. God becomes tender for the sake of His devotees. He appears before them, leaving His powers behind.

Both of them are silent.

Mani — Why should your visions not be real? If they are not real, then the whole world is all the more unreal – for it is the same mind that is the instrument of perception. All these visions come to your pure mind, and our minds see worldly things.

[1] Baby Krishna

Sri Ramakrishna — Now I see you understand well that the world is ephemeral. Well, tell me, what do you think of Hazra?

Mani — Oh, he is a man of a particular type. (Thakur laughs.)

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, do you know anybody similar to me?

Mani — No, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Any paramahamsa[1] similar to me?

Mani — No, sir. You are incomparable.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Have you heard of the 'achina tree'?

Mani — No, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is a special kind of tree, but nobody can recognize it.

Mani — Sir, you cannot be recognized either. The more one understands you, the more he will progress.

> Mani is silent and says to himself, "Thakur has talked of the 'sun at dawn' and the 'achina tree'. Do these indicate an incarnation of God? Is it God's sport as a human being? Is Thakur himself an incarnation? Is that why he used to stand on the roof of the Kuthi and call out with yearning to his intimate disciples, 'I say, where are you all? Please come!' "

[1] Highest class of saints who have attained supreme knowledge and sanctity

Section VI

At the Dakshineswar Temple with Ratan and other Devotees

Sri Ramakrishna has but one thought and one word – that trick is the best trick

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot in his room at the Kali Temple. He is smiling and talking with the devotees. They have all eaten. It must be one or two o'clock.

It is Sunday, 9 September 1883, the 7th day of the bright fortnight in the month of Bhadra. Rakhal, M. and Ratan are sitting on the floor. Now and then Ramlal, Ram Chatterji and Hazra enter the room, sit for awhile and then leave. Ratan manages Jadu Mallick's garden estate. He is devoted to Thakur and occasionally visits him. Thakur is talking to him now. Ratan says, "A theatrical performance by Nilkantha will be staged at Jadu Mallick's Calcutta house."

Ratan — You must come and see it. He has sent you word that a theatrical performance will be staged.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is good. I want to go. Oh, how full of love and devotion Nilkantha's songs are!

A Devotee — Right, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — When he sings, he is bathed in tears. (To Ratan) I wonder if I might stay the night there.

Ratan — That would be very nice.

Ram Chatterji and the other devotees ask about the incident of a theft of sandals at Jadu Mallick's house.

Ratan — The golden sandals of the Deity were stolen from Jadu Mallick's house. There is a great uproar in the house. They will use a charmed plate to detect the thief. Everybody will sit and the plate will move in the direction of the thief.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — How does the plate move? Does it move by itself?

Ratan — No. A person presses it with his hand.

A Devotee — It is a kind of 'sleight of hand' – it's a trick.

Sri Ramakrishna — Only that cleverness by which God is realized is real cleverness – that trick is the best trick[1].

[1] Sā cāturī cāturī

Chapter II

Tantrik spiritual discipline and Sri Ramakrishna's filial attitude

The conversation goes on. In the meantime some Bengali gentlemen enter Thakur's room, salute him and sit down. One of them is already acquainted with Thakur. These gentlemen practice the Tantrik disciplines of five ingredients[1]. Thakur can tell what is in another's mind[2], he knows what attitude one holds. He has also heard that one of them performs a sinful act in the name of religion: he is having an illicit affair with the widow of the brother of a big man. In the name of religion he practices the disciplines of the five ingredients with her.

Sri Ramakrishna practices the filial attitude. He considers every woman his mother; he even sees the form of the Mother of the Universe in a prostitute.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Where is Achalananda? Kalikinkar came here the other day and also someone called Singhi. (To M. and others) Achalananda and his disciples have a different attitude from mine. I have the attitude of a child.

The visiting gentlemen remain silent.

His earlier story – Tantrik disciplines practiced by Achalananda

Sri Ramakrishna — I have the attitude of a child. Achalananda used to stay here at times. He would drink a lot of consecrated wine. Hearing that I had

[1] The use of meat, fish, wine, money and sexual intercourse
[2] *Antaryami*

the attitude of a child, he insisted, 'Why don't you practice heroic disciplines with a woman? Don't you believe in Shiva's school of thought? Shiva authored the Tantra – it includes spiritual disciplines in all the different attitudes. The disciplines of the attitude of a 'hero' is also prescribed.'

"I replied, 'I don't know, my dear sir. I don't like such things at all. I have the attitude of a child.' "

Duties of a father – Sri Ramakrishna denigrates occult powers and the five ingredients – the right use of money

"Achalananda didn't support his children. He used to say to me, 'God will look after the children, for such is His will.' I would remain silent. But I say, who will bring up the children? By giving up his wife and children, perhaps he has found a way to earn money. People might think that he has renounced everything. In this way a lot of money might come his way.

"To practice spiritual disciplines to win a lawsuit, or to earn a lot of money – or to help somebody win a lawsuit, or to procure property! These are matters of very low intelligence!

"Money should be utilized to buy food and a home to live in; in the service of deities, sadhus and devotees; and to help a poor man one may meet. This is making the right use of money. Money is not meant to be used for enjoying luxuries, or to provide bodily comforts, or to earn name and fame.

"People practice the disciplines of the five ingredients of the Tantrik school to attain occult powers. But it is an act of very low intelligence! Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Friend, even if you attain one of the eight occult powers, you will add to your power – but you will not attain Me by it.' Occult powers don't free you from maya. Maya begets egotism. What low intelligence! What use is it to take three glasses of wine from a contemptible place, or to win a lawsuit [with the use of occult powers]?"

What use is it to practice hatha yoga to increase the span of life?

"The body, money and so on are all ephemeral. Why worry so much about them? Look at the hatha yogis. Their only concern is how to add years to their lives. They don't aim at realizing God. They practice hatha yoga exercises like neti[1] and dhoti[2] – they merely take milk through a tube and clean their stomachs.

"There was a goldsmith whose tongue turned up and stuck to his palate. He looked like the picture of a man in *Jada* samadhi. He became motionless. He remained like this for many days. People began to visit and worship him. After a number of years his tongue suddenly relaxed and he regained normal consciousness. Then he even resumed his goldsmith profession. (All laugh.)

"All these things concern the body. They almost never relate one to the Lord. The brother of

[1] Cleaning of nose with water
[2] A method of cleaning entrails with water

Shalagram (a dealer in tabasheer[1]) knew eighty-two yoga postures. He would talk about his yoga samadhi, but in his mind he would secretly yearn for 'lust and gold'. He saw a bank note worth many thousands of rupees belonging to Diwan Madan Bhatt lying somewhere. Tempted by greed, he swallowed it in the hope that he could take it out later [by some yogic procedure]. That note was recovered from him – and he was jailed for three years. In my guilelessness I had thought that he had made a lot of spiritual progress! I swear it!"

His earlier story – Mahendra Pal is returned his money – Bhagavati, the oil woman – his contempt for the Kartabhaja sect's practicing sadhana with women as partners

"Mahendra Pal of Sinthi gave five rupees to Ramlal. When he left, Ramlal told me. I asked him why he had given the money. Ramlal replied, 'It is meant to be used here.' It occurred to me, 'We owe the milkman. Good, we can pay off some of what we owe.' My Divine Mother! I was lying on the bed that night and suddenly I got up. It felt like a cat was scratching inside my chest. I immediately went to Ramlal and asked him, 'For whom did he give the money? Is it for your aunt[2]?' Ramlal replied, 'No, it is meant for you.' Then I said to him. 'No, go and return the money immediately. If you don't, I will have no peace.'

"Rising early in the morning, Ramlal went and returned the money. Then I was at peace.

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[1] Hard substance extracted from bamboo joints and used medicinally; sugar of bamboo

[2] Referring to Holy Mother

"There was Bhagavati, the oil woman of the Kartabhaja sect, in the village (Kamarpukur). The men of the sect practice spiritual disciplines with women as their partners. The women cannot practice sadhana and bhajan without a man. This man is called 'Ragakrishna[1]'. The man asks thrice, 'Have you attained Krishna?' Each of the three times the woman says, 'Yes, I have.'

"Bhagavati belonged to the *shudra* caste [a low caste], she was an oil woman. Everybody would take the dust of her feet and salute her. This enraged the landlord. I once saw him. He sent a wicked man to her. Seduced by him, she gave birth to a boy.

"Once a big man came to me. He said, 'Sir, do something so that I may somehow win my lawsuit. I have come here because I have heard a lot about you.' I said, 'My dear sir, I am not that kind of person. You have made a mistake. You must go to Achalananda for this purpose.'

"He who has genuine love and devotion to God does not care for wealth, health and such things. He reflects that the austerities and repetition of God's name are not for creature comforts, for name and fame, or for wealth. All these are ephemeral – just a matter of two days."

The visiting gentlemen now rise, salute, and say, "May we leave?" They depart. Sri Ramakrishna smiles a little and says to M., "A thief never listens to religion." (All laugh.)

[1] Ideal of love

Chapter III

Faith in oneself has its basis in one's belief in God

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, says to Mani) — Well, what do you think of Narendra?

Mani — Sir, he is fine.

Sri Ramakrishna — You see, his understanding matches his learning. And then he is good at singing and playing musical instruments. Besides that, he has perfect control over his senses. He says that he will not marry.

Mani — You said that he who thinks too much of sin becomes a sinner and can't lift himself up. That I am the son of God – with this faith one makes quick progress in spiritual life.

His earlier story – faith of Krishnakishore – faith of Haladhari's father

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, faith indeed!

"What faith Krishnakishore has! He used to say, 'I have taken His name once, how can sin touch me? I have become pure and sinless.' Haladhari said, 'Ajamila went out to practice austerities to attain Narayana[1]. Can one obtain His grace without austerity? What use is it just to say "Narayana" once?' How angry Krishnakishore was to hear him say that! Krishnakishore had come to

[1] A name of Vishnu

the garden to pick flowers. He didn't even look at Haladhari's face.

"Haladhari's father was a great devotee. Taking his bath in waist deep water, he would recite a mantra 'red-hued and four-faced' and meditate on it. Then he would shed tears of ecstatic love[1].

"Once a sadhu came to the Ariadaha bathing ghat. We talked of going to see him. Haladhari said, 'What use is it to see the cage made of the five gross elements?' Later, when Krishnakishore heard this, he said, 'What did he say? That it would be of no use to see a sadhu? He who repeats the name of Krishna, or he who repeats the name of Rama, develops a body made of Spirit. He sees everything permeated with divine consciousness. Krishna is the embodiment of Spirit and so is His Abode.' He said, 'If you take the name of Krishna or of Rama only once, you gain the fruit of a hundred evening services.' While dying, one of his sons uttered the name of Rama. Krishnakishore said, 'He uttered the name of Rama, so he has nothing to worry about.' But sometimes he wept in grief for the loss of his son.

"When Krishnakishore felt thirsty in Vrindavan, he said to a cobbler, 'Say the name of Shiva.' Uttering 'Shiva,' he drew water for Krishnakishore. Such an orthodox brahmin and he took that water. What faith!

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[1] Prema

"One may perform worship, repetition of the Name, sandhya[1] and other ritual practices, but they yield nothing unless one has faith in God. What do you say?"

Mani — True, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — I have seen people coming to the Ganges ghat to take a bath and talking about nothing but worldly matters. A widowed aunt says, 'Mother, they can't celebrate Durga Puja without me. I even have to mould the image. I have to organize everything whenever there is a marriage in the family. Only then is it conducted properly. I have to arrange the flowerbed for the bride and the groom, and even supervise the catechu garden.'

Mani — How can we blame them for it? How else will they pass the time?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) —People have a shrine on the roof of the house where they worship Narayana. Women prepare flower offerings and grind sandal paste in the shrine, but they don't talk a word about God. They talk about such things as what is to be cooked today, whether they could get the right stuff in the market, such-and-such a dish was tasty yesterday, that boy is a cousin, what job one has, and 'Don't ask how I am doing. My Hari is not here.'

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[1] Worship and meditation performed at dawn, noon, and sunset by orthodox Hindus

"Imagine, they talk of all these worldly things in the shrine even at the time of worship!"

Mani — Sir, generally speaking, that is so. As you say, he who has love for God doesn't have to perform worship and sandhya[1] for long.

Chapter IV

What is God's Spirit Form? After Brahmajnana comes vijnana – God alone is the substance

Thakur is talking alone with Mani.

Mani — Sir, if it is God Himself who has become everything, then why are there so many different feelings?

Sri Ramakrishna — He dwells in all beings as the All-pervasive Being[2]. But there is a special manifestation of His power in some. In some, there is more power of knowledge[3]; in others, more power of ignorance[4]. Moreover, some have more of His Power than others. Haven't you noticed that there are gamblers and swindlers? And there are also people as ferocious as tigers. I say that the swindler is Narayana, and so is the tiger.

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[1] Worship and meditation performed at dawn, noon, and sunset by orthodox Hindus
[2] *Vibhu*
[3] *Vidya Shakti*
[4] *Avidya Shakti*

Mani (smiling) — Yes, sir. We must salute them from a distance. If you were to come near the tiger Narayana and embrace it, it would devour you.

Sri Ramakrishna — God and His Power – nothing else exists except Brahman and His Power. While singing a hymn of praise to Ramachandra, Narada said, 'Oh Rama, you yourself are Shiva and Sita is Bhagavati; You are Brahma and Sita is Brahmani; you are Indra and Sita is Indrani. You are Narayana [Vishnu] and Sita is Lakshmi. You are the symbol of all that is masculine, and Sita of all that is feminine.'

Mani — And what is God's Spirit form like?

> Sri Ramakrishna reflects for awhile and then says in a whisper, "Do you know what it's like? It's like water. You can know it only if you practice spiritual disciplines."

"You must believe in God's form. When you attain the knowledge of the Absolute[1], you realize that there is nothing separate – Brahman and His Power are one, like fire and its power to burn. The moment you think of fire, its burning power comes to mind. And the moment you think of the burning power, you think of the fire. It is like milk and its whiteness, water and its wetness.

"But there is something beyond knowledge of the Absolute. After jnana, comes vijnana. He who is aware of knowledge is also aware of ignorance. Vaishishtha was smitten with grief at the death of

[1] Brahmajnana

his hundred sons. When Lakshmana asked Rama about it, Rama said, 'Brother, go beyond knowledge and ignorance.' He who has knowledge also has ignorance. If a thorn pricks your foot, you have to use another thorn to take out the first. Having done that, you throw both thorns away."

Mani — Should one throw away both knowledge and ignorance?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, that is why vijnana is necessary.

"Just see, he who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. He who knows happiness also knows sorrow. He who is aware of virtue is also aware of vice. He who knows good also knows bad. He who knows what purity is, also knows impurity. He who is conscious of 'I' is also conscious of 'you'.

"Vijnana means knowing God in a special way. The awareness, the belief, that there is fire in wood is knowledge. To cook rice on the fire, eat it and be strong is called vijnana. To have the inner experience of the real nature of Atman[1] is knowledge. To talk with Him, to enjoy yourself with Him – in the attitude of a son, a friend, a servant, or a lover – this is vijnana. Being able to see that God has become the universe and its creatures is known as vijnana.

"According to one school of thought, God cannot be seen. Is God outside you, that you can see Him? One can only see oneself. When a ship enters

[1] Bodhebodha

the 'black waters', it does not return. It does not come back to report what it experienced."

Mani — As you say, when one climbs to the top of the monument, one loses sight of everything below: carriage and horse, men and women, houses, rooms, doors, shops, offices and the rest.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, these days I don't visit the Kali Temple. Am I committing an offence? Narendra used to say, 'He still visits the Kali Temple!'

Mani — Sir, you have new and different states of mind every day. How can you commit an offence?

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, someone told Sen about Hriday: 'Hriday is very ill. Please bring two pieces of dhoti and two long shirts for him. We shall send them to his village (Seor).' Sen brought just two rupees. Now tell me what that means. He has so much money and he only brought this sum. Do say something.

Mani — Sir, those who seek to realize God, who aim at attaining knowledge, cannot act in this [miserly] way.

Sri Ramakrishna — God alone is the Substance; all else is meaningless.

Section VII

Sri Ramakrishna is Invited to Calcutta

Chapter I

Thakur's auspicious visit to the house of Ishan Mukherji

The sweet sound of the morning arati is heard in the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. The waving of lights is accompanied by a morning symphony of sanai and other musical instruments[1]. Thakur stands up and repeats God's name in his sweet voice. He salutes the pictures of the gods and goddesses in the room one by one. Then he goes to the circular verandah to the west of his room to have darshan[2] of the holy Ganges and offers his obeisance to it. Some devotees are staying with him. Finishing their morning ablutions, they enter one by one to salute Sri Ramakrishna.

Rakhal is living with Thakur these days. Baburam arrived the previous evening. Mani has been staying with Thakur for the last fourteen days.

It is Thursday, 27 December 1883, the 13th lunar day of the dark fortnight of the month of Agrahayana. Having completed his bath very early in the morning, Thakur is preparing to go to Calcutta.

He calls out to Mani, "I have been invited to Ishan's house today. Baburam will come with me. You come too."

Mani prepares to go with him.

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[1] *Roshan chowki*

[2] Seeing, experiencing; paying respect to a holy place or person by a ceremonial visit; also the blessing or purification felt in the presence of holiness

It is winter. The carriage in which Thakur will travel stops near the nahabat at 8:00 o'clock. All the trees are flowering and the Ganges flows by in front. Joy seems to emanate from all directions. Sri Ramakrishna stands close to the pictures of the deities in his room and salutes them. Repeating the name of the Mother, he gets into the carriage for the journey. With him are Baburam and Mani. They have brought a warm cloth to cover Thakur's body, a warm cap to cover his head and ears, and a little bag of spices. Being winter, they will dress Thakur in warm clothes for the evening.

Thakur is smiling. He enjoys himself throughout the trip. At 9:00 o'clock the carriage enters Calcutta and reaches the road crossing the Machhua Bazaar that passes through Shyambazar. Mani knows the location of Ishan's house. Taking a turn at the street crossing, he asks the coachman to stop when they reach Ishan's house.

Ishan and his relatives come out to joyfully welcome Thakur. He is taken to the lower parlour where he sits down with the devotees.

After polite enquiries, Thakur talks to Shrish, Ishan's son. Shrish, having passed his M.A., L.L.B. examinations, is working as an attorney in Alipur. He secured first position at the University as a result of his Entrance and F.A. examinations – he scored at the top of all the candidates. He is now about thirty years old. His humility matches his scholarship: outwardly he seems to know nothing. He folds his hands to salute Thakur. Mani introduces Shrish to him, saying that a man of such calm disposition is hard to find.

Panacea for the bonds of action[1] and sinful actions – Karma Yoga

Sri Ramakrishna (to Shrish) — What are you doing these days?

Shrish — Sir, I practice law in Alipur.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — For such a man to be a lawyer! (To Shrish) Do you have any question to ask?

"How does one live in the world without attachment?"

Shrish — Sir, one has to do so many unrighteous acts working in the world. Some actions are evil, others are righteous. Are they the result of our past actions that we are impelled to perform them?

Sri Ramakrishna — How long must one perform actions? As long as one does not realize God. One gains everything when one has attained Him. Then one goes beyond virtue and vice.

"When the fruit appears, the flower drops off. It is for making the fruit that the flower appears.

"How long must one perform sandhya and other rituals? As long as the hair on the body does not stand on end and the eyes do not fill with tears while repeating the name of God. Both these states are the signs of God-realization; they indicate pure love and devotion.

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[1] Karma

"Having realized God, one goes beyond virtue and vice."

> Says Prasad: I bow my head before both desire and enjoyment,
>
> And having solved the mystery that Kali is the same as the Absolute, I have given up righteousness and unrighteousness.

"The nearer you approach God, the more He lessens your work. When the daughter-in-law in a household conceives, her mother-in-law gradually decreases her work. As soon as she reaches the ninth month of pregnancy, she ceases to work. When the baby is born, she only busies herself playing with it and enjoying herself with it."

Shrish — It is very difficult to proceed toward God while living a householder's life.

Instructions to a householder – yoga of practice[1] and spiritual discipline in a solitary place

Sri Ramakrishna — Why, what about the yoga of practice? In the countryside [Kamarpukur], the women of carpenter families sell flattened rice. Let me tell you how alert they are when they attend to their work. The pestle of the husking-machine falls constantly into the mortar. With one hand, the woman pushes paddy into the mortar and with the other, suckles a baby in her lap. In the meantime, a customer arrives and she attends to the sale while the pestle goes on pounding the paddy in the mortar. She says to the customer, 'Look, you owe

[1] *Abhyasa Yoga*

me so much money. Pay me and you can take your stuff.'

"Just see, she attends to all these things at the same time: suckling the child, pushing the paddy into the mortar while the pestle is pounding it, separating flattened rice from the powdered husk and taking it out of the mortar – and then talking to the buyer. This is what is known as the yoga of practice. Fifteen annas[1] of her mind are tied to the falling pestle of the husking-machine lest it should pound her hand. With one anna of her mind she suckles the baby and attends to the buyer. Similarly, those who lead a family life, a householder's life, must give fifteen annas of the mind to God. Otherwise, they will face complete ruination and fall into the hands of Death. One must attend to worldly duties with one anna of the mind.

"One can lead a family life after attaining knowledge. But one must first attain it. If you keep the milk of your mind in the water of the world, it will get mixed with water. You must first turn the milk of your mind into curd by placing it in a solitary nook and churn it to take out the butter. Then you can put it in the water of the world.

"It is enough if that much is done. Spiritual practice is needed. It is essential that an aspirant live in solitude in the initial stages of practice. When an Ashwattha tree is only a plant, it must be fenced, otherwise a goat or a cow may eat it. But when it grows a thick trunk, the fence can be

[1] Sixteen annas make one Rupee, one complement

removed. Then even if an elephant is tied to it, no harm can be done to the tree.

"So in the early stage of spiritual life, one must go away and live in solitude from time to time. Spiritual discipline is needed. One wants to eat rice. Is it possible to get cooked rice by just saying there is fire in the wood and rice is cooked over this fire? Fire is produced when one rubs one piece of wood against another.

"One becomes intoxicated and feels joy when one eats hemp. Does one become intoxicated and feel joy, if one doesn't eat it, if one does nothing but mutter, 'Hemp, hemp'?"

God-realization is the aim of life – worldly and spiritual knowledge – drinking milk

"However much one may have studied books, it is all futile unless one has love and devotion[1] for God, unless one has the desire to realize Him. A mere pundit without discrimination[2] and non-attachment[3] has his attention fixed on 'lust and greed'. A vulture soars high in the sky but its eyes remain fixed on the charnel pits where carcasses of animals are burnt.

"The knowledge which leads one to the realization of God is real knowledge. All else is futile.

"Well, what is your idea of God?"

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[1] Bhakti
[2] Viveka
[3] Vairagya

Shrish — I have only understood this much – that there is an All-knowing Person, by seeing whose creation one can know how much wisdom He has. Just take this illustration – what skill God shows to save the lives of fish and other aquatic creatures in a cold country! The colder it is, the more the water contracts. But how wonderful! A little before it turns into ice, the water becomes lighter and expands. Thus fish can survive in the coldest of seasons in the water of a lake. The whole of the upper layer turns into ice, but underneath the water remains liquid. If a very cold wind blows, it only affects the upper surface of ice. The water below it remains warm.

Sri Ramakrishna — That God exists may be known by looking at the universe. But it is one thing to hear about Him, another to see Him, and yet another to talk to Him. Some have heard of milk, others have seen it, and yet others have drunk it. One is happy to see milk, one becomes strong and nourished by drinking it. One attains peace only when one sees God; one feels bliss and becomes strengthened only by talking to Him.

Desire for salvation and yearning for God depends on the right time

Shrish — I don't get time to call on God.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — It is true that unless the time is ripe, nothing comes to pass. A boy said to his mother before going to sleep, 'Mother, please wake me up when I feel the call of nature.' The

mother said, 'Son, its pressure will wake you up. I don't have to wake you.'

"God has already decided what each one shall receive. A mother-in-law used to give a certain amount of rice to her daughters-in-law, measuring it with an earthen cup. The girls did not get enough rice. One day, to the great joy of the girls, the cup broke. The mother-in-law then said, 'You may dance and shout, my children, but I can measure the amount very well with the palm of my hand.' "

Give your power of attorney to the Lord

(To Shrish) "What else can you do? Surrender everything at His feet and give Him the general power of attorney. Let Him do what He considers best for you. If you place your responsibility on a great man, he will never do you any harm.

"Of course, spiritual practice is needed. But there are two kinds of spiritual aspirants. One has the nature of a young monkey, and the other the nature of a kitten. A young monkey somehow manages to cling to its mother. Likewise, some aspirants think that in order to attain God, they have to repeat the Name so many times, meditate for a certain period, and perform a certain amount of penance. This kind of aspirant tries to hold God by his own effort.

"On the other hand, the kitten itself cannot hold onto its mother. All it does is lie where it is and mew to call its mother – let the mother do what she likes. The mother cat sometimes puts it on a bed – or she may put it next to a woodpile. The mother will put it in her mouth and place it

anywhere she likes. The kitten doesn't know how to hold its mother. Likewise, there are some aspirants who do not calculate how much spiritual practice they do: how many times to repeat the Name, how long to meditate, and so on. They only weep and call upon Him with great yearning. Hearing their cries, God cannot stay away, but appears before them to grant His vision."

Chapter II

It is already late. The master of the house is preparing food for Thakur, so he is very busy. He goes inside the house to look after the meal preparation and to make other arrangements.

It is time to eat, so Thakur is a bit concerned. He walks up and down the room. But he still wears a smile on his face. Now and then he talks to Keshab, the musician.

God is the Doer – yet man is responsible for his own actions

Keshab, the musician — So God is both the 'instrument' and the 'cause'. Duryodhana said, 'Oh Krishna[1]! I act as You, seated within my heart, make me act.'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Yes, it is He who makes us do everything. He indeed is the Doer; man is only an instrument.

"But this, too, is true: one has to reap the fruit of one's actions. Eat red chilies and you will feel a

[1] He called him Hrishikesh

burning in your stomach. It is God who has ordained that eating red chilies should give the burning sensation. If you do an evil deed, you will bear the result.

"But he who has attained God, who has gained the Lord's vision, can commit no sin. An expert musician cannot sing a false note. An expert musician sings only the correct notes of the octave: do, re, mi, fa."

The meal is ready to be served. Thakur goes inside the house, accompanied by the devotees, and takes his seat. Several varieties of dishes and many delicious sweets have been prepared in the house of this brahmin devotee**.**

It is about three o'clock. After eating, Sri Ramakrishna comes back to Ishan's parlour and sits down. Shrish and M. sit close to him. Thakur resumes his conversation with Shrish.

Sri Ramakrishna — What is your attitude? Is it the attitude of Soham, or of the Master and the servant?

Is jnana yoga or bhakti yoga for the householder?

"The attitude of the Master and servant is very good for householders. One must act. How can one have the attitude 'I am He' in that state? He who says, 'I am He' considers the world a dream, his body and mind also a dream, even his I-ness a dream. That is why, with this attitude, he is unable to perform worldly duties. For him the attitude of a servant of the Lord is very good.

"Hanuman had the attitude of a servant. Hanuman said to Rama, 'Rama, sometimes I consider You to be the Whole[1] and myself a portion of That, that You are the Master and I am Your servant. But when I attain the knowledge of the Highest Truth[2], I realize that You are none other than I, and I none other than You.'

"When you have attained the highest Knowledge, you may have the attitude of Soham – but it is an attitude far removed from the ordinary man's experience."

Shrish — True, sir. With the feeling of being the servant of God, a man is free from all anxieties and worries. He is fully dependent on the Lord. A dog is very devoted to its master, so it lives in peace by surrendering itself completely to him.

God is with form as well as without form – great importance of Name

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, which do you like – God with form or the formless God? Do you know the truth? He who is formless also takes a form. To a devotee, He appears as a form. It is like a boundless expanse of water, a mighty ocean, without any shore or bank. Some of the water is frozen into ice at some places – the water turns into ice due to extreme cold. Similarly, a devotee has the vision of God with form with the cooling influence of his love and devotion for Him. And when the sun rises, the ice melts and becomes the same water as before.

[1] Purna; perfect
[2] Tattva jnana

Similarly, when a devotee treads the path of Self-knowledge[1], or the path of discrimination, he does not see the aspect of God with form any longer. Then all is formless. When the sun of Self-knowledge rises, the ice of God's form melts away.

"But see, the Being who is formless has Himself taken up a form."

It is dusk. Thakur rises to return to Dakshineswar. He stands and talks to Ishan on an open porch south of the parlour. Someone remarks that repeating God's Name does not always seem to bear fruit.

Ishan says, "What do you mean? Though the seed of the Ashwattha tree is tiny, it contains within it a very big tree. It is only that the tree is not visible for a long time."

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, yes. It takes a long time to see the effect.

Ishan is an unattached householder – state of a paramahamsa

Ishan's house is located east of the house of his father-in-law, Kshetranath Chatterji. There is a path connecting the houses. Thakur stands at the gate of the Chatterji house. Ishan comes with his family to see him off by carriage.

Thakur says to Ishan, "You are living in the household like a mud fish. It lives in the mud of a pond, but the mud doesn't stain its body."

"There are both knowledge[2] and ignorance[3] in this world of maya. Whom do I call a

[1] Jnana
[2] Vidya
[3] Avidya

paramahamsa? He who, like a swan, can take the milk from a mixture of water and milk by separating the water from the milk; he who, like an ant, can take the sugar from a mixture of sugar and sand, leaving aside the sand."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and the harmony of religions – sin does not affect an *Ishvarakoti*[1]

It is twilight. Thakur has arrived at the house of his devotee, Ramchandra Dutta. After visiting him, he will go back to Dakshineswar.

A lamp is lit in the parlour where Thakur is sitting with his devotees. He is talking with Mahendra Goswami. Goswami lives in the same neighborhood. Thakur is fond of him. When he visits Ram, the Goswami usually comes to see him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Both Vaishnavas[2] and Shaktas[3] have the same goal. It is only their paths that are different. True Vaishnavas do not run down Shakti.

Goswami (laughing) — Hara [Shiva] and Parvati are our Father and Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Thank you[4]. Yes, Father and Mother!

---

[1] Eternally free and perfect souls, born on earth for the good of mankind, with at least some of the characteristics of an avatar
[2] Worshippers of Vishnu
[3] Worshippers of Shakti
[4] Sri Ramakrishna said 'Thank You' in English

Goswami — Besides, to criticize anybody, especially for a Vaishnava, is a sin – it is a Vaishnava transgression. All sins can be forgiven – but not this transgression.

Sri Ramakrishna — Not everybody is touched by sin. The *Ishvarakoti* is not affected by sin. For example, an incarnation of God like Chaitanyadeva.

"If a boy holds his father's hand while he walks on the balk of a field, he can fall into the ditch. But if the father holds the boy's hand, he can never fall.

"Listen, I asked the Mother for pure love and devotion[1]. I said to the Mother, 'Here is Your righteousness[2], here is Your unrighteousness[3]. Take them and grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your purity and also Your impurity, only grant me pure love. Mother, here is Your vice and here is your virtue, only grant me pure love and devotion.' "

Goswami — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — You should pay respect to all religions. But there is something called single-minded devotion[4]. You may salute everybody, but when you love someone with your heart and soul, it is known as single-minded devotion.

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[1] Bhakti
[2] Dharma
[3] Adharma
[4] *Nishtha bhakti*

"Hanuman liked no other form than that of Rama.

"The milkmaids[1] had such single-minded devotion that they didn't want to see Krishna of Dwaraka with a turban on his head.

"A wife renders service to her husband's younger and elder brothers, like washing their feet and setting places for them to eat. But the way she serves her husband, she serves nobody else. She has a special relationship with her husband."

Ram treats Thakur with sweets and other refreshments.

Thakur is ready to start for Dakshineswar. He takes the shawl and cap from M. The cap covering his ears is made of baize. Thakur gets into the carriage with the devotees. Ram and other devotees help him sit down. M. also climbs into the carriage to return to Dakshineswar.

[1] Gopis

Section VIII

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra and other devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the smaller cot in his aforesaid room by the Kali Temple. He is listening to devotional songs being sung by Trailokya Sanyal of the Brahmo Samaj.

It is Sunday, 2 March, 1884, 20th Falgun, the fifth day of the bright fortnight, 1290 B.Y. Devotees, including Narendra, Surendra (Mitra) and others, are sitting on the floor listening to the songs.

Narendra's father was an advocate of the High Court. After his passing away, the family has fallen into such dire straights that they sometimes have nothing to eat. Because of these difficult circumstances, Narendra is greatly troubled.

Thakur has not recovered fully from his broken arm. It has been in a splint for many days.

Trailokya is singing a hymn about the Divine Mother. He is saying through the song, "O Mother, take me on your lap and hold me to Your bosom, covering me with the end of your sari."

Let me lie covered in Your lap, O Divine Mother.

May I see your face and cry, "Mother, Mother."

Immersed in the sweetness of Bliss and Consciousness[1], overwhelmed by the sleep of the Great Communion,

May I gaze on You with unblinking eyes and retain Your form in my mind's eye.

I am frightened by the sight and sounds (of this world) and cry bitterly because of this fright.

Hold me to Your bosom, having covered me with the end of Your cloth, O Divine Mother.

As Thakur listens to the song, he sheds tears of divine love and exclaims, "Ah! What feeling!"

Trailokya sings again –

O Hari, You are the destroyer of my shame.

(Please fulfill my wish.)

Who but You can save the honour of Your devotee, O Lord[2]?

You are the Master of my soul, the support of my life. I am Your slave forever.

Bigger measure of kirtan

I have made Your feet my haven. Giving up all ideas of caste and ancestry, I have given up all fear and shame.

Tell me, O Lord, where can this wayfarer go?

Now I have lost reputation for Your sake. How people in the world find frivolous fault with me!

Because I love You, I am reprimanded at home.

All my shame and mistakes are now Yours. Take them or leave them, they are Your responsibility.

O Lord Hari! The honour of Your slave is Your honour.

---

[1] Chidananda
[2] Bhagavan

O Lord of my heart, I derive all honour from You. Do as You will, O Lord.

Smaller measure of kirtan

Taking me from home, enchant me with Your love, O Lord Hari! Give me shelter at Your feet.

Feed me with the honey of Your divine love day after day. O friend of my soul, redeem your Premdas.

Sri Ramakrishna again sheds tears of divine love and then sits on the floor. He begins to sing a song of Ramprasad.

All fame and dishonour, all sweetness and bitterness, belong to You, O Divine Mother!

Why do You ruin my joy and sweetness, O Goddess of all joy and bliss?

Thakur says to Trailokya, "Ah, how sweet your songs are! Your songs are authentic. Only he who goes to the sea can bring sea water and show it to others."

Trailokya sings again –

O Lord, You sing and You dance and You Yourself keep the beat.

Man is only a witness to it; foolishly does he think, 'Me and mine.'

The life of man is only the shadow of a puppeteer's marionette. Only if he walks Your path can he become a god.

You are the driver of the machine of this body. You are the charioteer of the chariot of the Atman. A human being makes mistakes, thinking he has free will.

You are the Lord of the heart, the Soul of the soul, and the Mainstay of all. You can transform an unholy person into a saint by the Power of your holiness.

The Absolute is identical with the phenomenal world – perfect knowledge[1], or vijnana

When the song ends, Thakur speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and others) — It is Lord Hari who is the Master, and He Himself is the servant – this is the attitude of a man of perfect knowledge. First following the path of 'not this, not this,' one realizes that the Lord is the only Reality and all else is illusory. Then one sees that it is the Lord Himself who has become everything – that the Lord Himself has become maya: living beings and the universe. The *Puranas* say that evolution is followed by involution. For example, take the bel-fruit. It has a shell, seeds and kernel. Throw away the shell and seeds and you have the kernel. But if you want to know the weight of the bel-fruit, it will not do to throw away the shell and the seeds. That is why, after negating the universe and its living beings to reach Sat-chit-ananda, one sees that He Himself has become the entire universe and its living beings. The kernel belongs to the bel-fruit, just as the seeds and shell do. Butter is a part of milk, just as buttermilk is; they belong to the same substance.

"Even so, one may ask how Sat-chit-ananda has become so hard – touch the earth and you find it hard. The answer is that blood and semen are fluids, but they produce such a big creature as man. It is possible for God to do anything.

[1] Purna jnana

"One must first reach the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda and then, coming down, observe these things."

World does not exist without God – distinction between a yogi and a devotee

"It is God alone who has become everything. The world does not exist apart from God. Having studied the *Vedas* from his guru, Ramachandra felt a spirit of dispassion[1]. He said, 'If the world is like a dream, one might as well renounce it.' Dasharatha [his father] became frightened at this. He sent guru Vaishishtha to dissuade Rama. Vaishishtha said, 'Rama, why do you talk of giving up the world? Please tell me, does the world exist apart from God? If you can convince me that the world is not born of God, you may renounce it.' Rama was silenced; he could give no reply.

"All elements are finally dissolved into the ether[2]. At the time of creation, ether evolves into *mahat*[3], and from *mahat* emerges the ego. The world is created in this order. It is the process of involution and evolution. The devotee accepts everything. He accepts not only the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda, but also the phenomenal world and its creatures.

"The yogi, however, treads another path. He reaches the Supreme Atman[4] but does not return. He becomes united with the Supreme Atman.

---

[1] Vairagya
[2] *Akasa*; the subtlest of the five elements
[3] Cosmic Intelligence
[4] Paramatman

"He who sees the Lord in one limited area only is a man of 'partial wisdom'. He believes that God does not exist beyond that particular thing.

"There are three classes of devotees. The inferior class of devotee says, 'God is out there' – in other words, he points to heaven. The mediocre devotee says, God resides within the heart as its Inner Controller[1]. And the highest class of devotee says, 'God has become everything. Indeed, all I see are His various forms.' Narendra used to make fun of this, saying, 'He indeed has become all – so He is the pot and the pan.' " (All laugh.)

Doubts vanish after God-vision – leads to renunciation of work – omnipresent[2] Shiva

"All doubts vanish when one sees God. It is one thing to hear about God and quite another thing to have His vision. Through hearing alone, one cannot have one hundred percent faith. However, by having a direct vision of God, one is wholly convinced.

"After God-realization one gives up formal worship. I have given up that kind of worship. I used to worship in the Kali Temple. It was suddenly revealed to me that everything is made of pure Spirit – the *koshakushi*[3], the altar and the door-frame – everything made of Spirit; men, birds and beasts all made of Spirit. So I began to shower

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[1] *Antaryami*

[2] *Virat*; the all-pervading Spirit in the form of the universe

[3] A kosha is a small water container, a kushi is a small spoon for removing water from it. Both are usually made of copper and are used in ritualistic worship.

flowers all around like a crazy man. I began to worship anything and everything I saw.

"One day when I was offering bel-leaves on the head of Shiva, it was revealed to me that the vast universe itself, *Virat*, is Shiva. Then I stopped worshipping the image of Shiva. And when I was picking flowers, it was suddenly revealed to me that every flowering plant is like a bouquet."

Distinction between joy of poetry and God-realization – 'no poetry, O Lord of the Universe'

Trailokya — Oh, how beautiful God's creation is!

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh no, it was revealed to me in a flash, not through calculation. It was shown to me that every flowering plant is a bouquet decorating the Universal Form of God[1]. I stopped picking flowers from that day. I see men in the same way. God indeed moves around in the form of a human body. I see it like a pillow floating on a wave, rising and falling to and fro. Lifted by the wave, it rises; and it descends again with the tide.

Why did Thakur take up a human body? Thakur's desire

"The body is momentary; God is the only Reality. The body now is and the next moment it is not. Many years ago, when I was suffering terribly from dysentery, Hriday said, 'Do ask the Divine Mother to cure you.' I felt ashamed to ask Her to cure my illness. Instead I said, 'Mother, I saw a human

[1] *Virat*

skeleton in the Asiatic Society. Oh Mother, it was given a human shape by joining the bones with wires. Pray fortify my body a little so that I can sing Your glories and repeat Your Name.'

"Why this desire to live? After killing Ravana, Rama and Lakshmana entered Lanka. When they entered Ravana's palace, they saw Ravana's mother, Nikasha, running away. Lakshmana was surprised and asked Rama, 'Rama, Nikasha's whole clan has perished, but she still has so much attraction for life.' Calling her to him, Rama said, 'Do not be afraid! Why were you running away?' Nikasha said, 'Rama, I was not fleeing out of fear. I have been able to see so much of your divine sport because my life was spared. If I live still longer, how much more of it I will witness! That is why I desire to live.'

"If one has no desires, the body does not last.

(Smiling) "I had one or two desires. I said, 'Mother, grant me the company of those who have renounced 'lust and greed'.' I also said, 'I would like to keep the company of Your jnanis and devotees. So grant me a little strength that I may be able to move around a little and visit people here and there.' But She did not grant me the strength to move about."

Trailokya (smiling) — Have your desires been fulfilled?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — A few remain. (All laugh.)

'The body is indeed ephemeral. When I broke my arm, I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother it gives me so much pain!' A carriage and its driver were then revealed to me. One or two screws of the carriage had fallen out. The carriage moved as the driver moved it. The carriage had no power of its own.

"Then why do I try to take care of my body? So that I may enjoy myself with God. So that I may repeat His name and sing His glories. So that I may move about here and there to associate with His devotees and jnanis."

Chapter II

In the company of Narendra and others – Narendra in happiness and sorrow – happiness and misery related to the body

Narendra is sitting on the floor in front of Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and the devotees) — The body is indeed subject to happiness and sorrow. Take the case of Narendra – his father has died and, as a result, his family is in a dire state. Nothing seems able to solve his problems. Sometimes God keeps one in happiness, at other times in misery.

Trailokya — Sir, the Lord will be merciful to him (Narendra).

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — When? No one remains hungry in Annapurna's home at Kashi, yet some have to wait for food until evening.

"Hriday asked Sambhu Mallick for some money. Sambhu Mallick held the views of the English. He said, 'Why should I give you money? You can earn your livelihood by working. Anyway, you are earning something. But if somebody is extremely poor, it is a different matter. The purpose of charity is fulfilled when one gives to the blind, the lame, or the handicapped.' Then Hriday said, 'Sir, then I don't want your money. I pray to the Lord that I do not become blind, handicapped or extremely poor. I don't want you to have to give, nor do I wish to receive.' "

Narendra and atheism – the Lord's way of work and Bhishma Deva

Thakur speaks as if piqued that the Lord has not yet shown mercy to Narendra. He looks affectionately at Narendra every now and then.

Narendra — I am studying atheism.

Sri Ramakrishna — There are both theism and atheism. Why not study the former?

Surendra — The Lord is just. He will certainly look after His devotee.

Sri Ramakrishna — The scriptures say that one who has given in charity in a previous life gains wealth in this life. Even so, do you know how it is? This world is God's maya. And there is a lot of

confusion in the domain of maya. It is all incomprehensible.

"The ways of the Lord are inscrutable. Bhishma Deva was lying on a bed of arrows. The Pandavas, accompanied by Krishna, went to see him. After awhile Bhishma began to weep. The Pandavas said to Krishna, 'Krishna, how amazing! Grandfather Bhishma[1] is one of the eight *Vasus*[2]. There is no man of spiritual wisdom like him. Yet he weeps during his last moments.' Krishna replied, 'Bhishma is not weeping because of that. Ask him why he weeps.' When asked, Bhishma replied, 'Krishna, I have not been able to understand the ways of God at all. I am weeping because I see that Narayana Himself is a constant companion of the Pandavas – still there is no end to their trials and tribulations. When I reflect on this, I realize that it is impossible to understand anything of God's ways.' "

Pure Atman is immutable like Mount Sumeru

"God revealed to me that the Paramatman, which is described as the pure Atman in the *Vedas*, is immutable, like Mount Sumeru, unattached and beyond happiness and sorrow. There is great confusion about the working of His maya. No one can say what event will come after this, or if this will produce that."

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[1] *Pitamah*
[2] A compact group of eight *devas* (gods)

Surendra (smiling) — If one gives away in charity in a previous life and gets wealth in the next, then we should give in charity now.

Sri Ramakrishna — He who has money should give in charity. (To Trailokya) Jaygopal Sen is a wealthy man, so he should give in charity. It is contemptible that he doesn't do so. Some people are miserly even when they are rich. Nobody is sure who will enjoy his riches after he dies.

"Jaygopal came here the other day. He comes by carriage. The carriage carried a broken lantern and was driven by a horse that looked like it had come straight from the charnel house. The coachman looked as if he had just been discharged from the Medical College Hospital. And he brought two rotten pomegranates!" (All laugh.)

Surendra — Jaygopal Babu belongs to the Brahmo Samaj. It seems that Keshab's Brahmo Samaj has no worthwhile men now. Vijay Goswami, Shivanath and some others have founded the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Govinda Adhikari would not keep good actors in his theatre for the *yatras*[1], lest he should have to share the profit with them.

"The other day I saw one of Keshab's disciples. A play was being staged at Keshab's house. I saw that fellow dancing with his son in his arms. I

[1] Religious theatrical performances

understand that he delivers lectures. There is no knowing who is going to teach him!"

Trailokya sings: The waves of love and bliss are rising high in the sea of Knowledge and Bliss Absolute[1].

The song over, Sri Ramakrishna says to Trailokya, "Do please sing that song: O Mother, make me mad with Thy love."

[1] *Chidananda*

Section IX

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Pundit Shashadhar and other Devotees

Chapter I

Kali is Brahman – Brahman, the Absolute, and His Power are inseparable

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in the aforesaid room on a mat spread on the floor. Pundit Shashadhar is seated close to him. Many devotees are sharing the mat with them. Others are sitting on the bare floor. Surendra, Baburam, M., Harish, Latu, Hazra, Mani Mallick and other devotees are present. Thakur is talking about Pundit Padmalochan, who was the court pundit for the King of Burdwan. It is about four o'clock in the afternoon.

It is Monday, 30 June 1884. Pundit Shashadhar had met and talked with Thakur in Calcutta six days ago, on the day of the holy Rathayatra[1]. Today he has come to Dakshineswar, accompanied by Bhudhar Chatterji and his elder brother. Pundit Shashadhar is staying with his brother in Calcutta.

The Pundit follows the path of jnana yoga. Thakur is explaining to him that both the Absolute and the phenomenal world belong to the same Being. One who is Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute has assumed various forms to perform His divine sport. While talking of these things, Thakur loses external consciousness. He speaks, intoxicated

[1] The Car festival

by a divine mood. He says to the Pundit, "Brother, the Absolute is immutable, immovable like Mount Sumeru. But He who is 'immovable' is also 'movable'."

Drunk with the joy of ecstatic love, Thakur begins to sing. His divinely sweet voice puts to shame even the voice of the celestial musicians[1]. He sings song after song –

Song –

Is there anybody who knows Kali, She, the consort of *Kala*[2]? Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her.

The yogi meditates on Her at the Muladhara[3] and Sahasrara[4].

A goose and a gander move around in this wilderness of lotuses, accompanying one another. They are *Kala* and His consort.

My Divine Mother is the most beloved of Shiva (the Absolute), even as Sita is the most beloved of Rama.

She appears in Her majesty in each finite being[5] as an individual, just as She pleases. She is Ichhamai[6].

Mahakala (the Spirit of Eternity, the Absolute) knows the greatness of my Divine Mother – greatness which is hidden from the view of ordinary beings. Who else can know Her so well?

My Divine Mother gives birth to the Universe – now think of Her greatness!

---

[1] Gandharvas
[2] The Spirit of Eternity
[3] Muladhara is the first lotus with four petals and is the root of the Sushumna in the spine. The Kundalini is coiled up at the Muladhara lotus.
[4] Sahasrara is the lotus of a thousand petals, which is the goal of the spiritual energy (Shakti) awakened by the yogi at the Muladhara. When the Shakti reaches the Sahasrara and becomes united with Shiva or Brahman, the result is samadhi, Brahmajnana.
[5] Ghat
[6] She has Her own way in everything

Says Prasad (the poet): 'To think that one can know Her is to think that one can swim across the mighty ocean. One can only laugh at the idea.'

I understand this well enough with my mind; alas, my heart will not see it. It is a dwarf aspiring to reach the moon.

Song –

Is the Divine Mother the daughter of such an ordinary mother,

By repeating whose name, Mahesh (Shiva) remains alive even after drinking deadly poison[1]?

By whose glance, creation, preservation and dissolution come about?

She who keeps the infinite universe in Her belly,

By whom the gods free themselves of their duties by taking refuge at Her feet,

Underneath whose feet Mahadeva, the God of gods, lies prostrate?

Song –

Is my Divine Mother only the chaste wife of Shiva, the Absolute?

She to whom the God of Death[2] pays his obeisance?

Killing foes in the garb of the naked one, She stands on the breast of Mahakala.

O my mind, do tell me how it happens that She kicks the chest of Her Master.

Says Prasad, take the sport of the Divine Mother as wild and violent.

O mind, aspire with care and your intellect will be purified.

---

[1] The gods and demons churned the ocean to obtain the nectar of immortality. The churning also produced deadly poison. To save mankind from the poison, Lord Shiva drank it all.

[2] *Kala*

Song –

I don't take ordinary wine. I say, 'Victory to Kali[1]' and drink the wine of Everlasting Bliss.

When I repeat the Mother's name, it intoxicates my mind and people call me a drunkard.

Taking the Guru's seed mantra and having added the spice of worldly action[2] to it,

My mind becomes drunk by taking only drops of the wine distilled by spiritual wisdom[3].

The container [body] is full of His seed mantra, which I purify by uttering Tara, the name of Divine Mother.

Says Prasad, by drinking such a Wine of Everlasting Bliss, one obtains the four pursuits of life (righteousness, wealth, fulfillment of desire and liberation[4]).

Song –

Can everybody gain the treasure of Mother Shyama?

This foolish mind does not know how priceless this inherited treasure is.

Even with all his penance, indeed rare is Shiva's vision of Her.

Only when the mind is intoxicated, can one attain the crimson feet of the Divine Mother.

Thakur's state of ecstasy relaxes somewhat. He stops singing and is silent for awhile, then he gets up and sits down on the smaller cot.

The Pundit is charmed to hear the songs. He says to Thakur humbly, "Is there going to be any more singing?"

---

[1] Jai Kali
[2] Pravritti
[3] Jnana
[4] The four fruits: Dharma, artha, kama and moksha

After a short time Thakur resumes singing –

Song –

The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.

The rough wind of misdeeds made it fall circling to the ground.

Maya's pull made it heavy and I could not raise it again.

It became entangled in the string of love for wife and children.

Alas! The framework of jnana [of the kite] is rent. One may pull it upwards, but it falls down.

It has lost its bow, so how can it fly? The six passions[1] have overpowered it.

It was tied to the string of bhakti. While playing, it fell into illusion.

O Nareschandra! Rather then weep or laugh, it was better not to have played at all.

Song –

This time I have given my whole mind.

I have learned divine fervour[2] from one well versed in it.

O Mother, I have found a man from a country which has no night.

And now I can no longer distinguish day from night.

I have rendered barren all ritualistic devotions.

Song –

I have surrendered myself at the Fearless feet of the Divine Mother. Am I afraid of Yama any more?

---

[1] Lust, anger, avarice, delusion, pride and envy
[2] Bhava

I have tied to the top tuft of my hair the almighty mantra of the name of Kali,

Having sold my body in the mart of the world, I have bought the name of Durga.

Hearing "I have bought the name of Durga," the Pundit begins to shed tears. Thakur sings again –

Song –

I have planted the wish-fulfilling tree[1], the name of Mother Kali, in my heart.

I am waiting to open my heart to Yama[2] to show him the name of Kali residing there.

I have thrown out the six bad beings[3] that were dwelling in my body.

Says Ramprasad, I am prepared to start my journey of life, taking the name of Durga.

Song –

O my mind, abide by yourself,

Do not go to any other's house.

Search within yourself,

You will find there all you seek.

Having sung this song, Thakur says, "Bhakti is better than mukti (liberation)."

Song –

I am not hesitant to grant mukti (liberation); I hesitate to grant pure bhakti.

Who wins pure love surpasses all. He is served by all.

He triumphs over the three worlds.

---

[1] *Kalpataru*
[2] King of Death
[3] Six passions, namely lust, anger, avarice, delusion, pride and envy

Listen, O Chandravali[1], I will tell you of love.

One may gain liberation, but rare indeed is bhakti.

Because of bhakti, I became King Bali's doorkeeper in the nether world.

Only in Vrindavan can one find pure love.

Except for cowherd boys and milkmaids, no one knows its secret.

Because of bhakti in Nanda's house, taking him as my father, I carried his burden on my head.

Chapter II

Study of scriptures and learning are futile – austerities are essential – man of vijnana

The Pundit has studied the *Vedas* and other scriptures. He enjoys discussing philosophy. Thakur, seated on the smaller cot, looks at him and instructs him during the course of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Pundit) — Certainly there are the *Vedas* and other scriptures. But unless one practices spiritual disciplines and austerities, it is not possible to realize God.

"One cannot see God in the six systems of philosophy, or in the *Vedas*, or the *Tantras*.

"Even so, one should understand the scriptures and act according to their injunctions. Once a person lost a letter and couldn't remember where he had left it. He began to look for it with a lamp. Two or three people set themselves to the task of searching for it and at last it was found. The message of the letter was, 'Send five seers of

[1] One of the gopis at Vrindavan

sandesh[1] and a piece of wearing-cloth[2].' Having read it, the man threw the letter away, for it was no longer of any use. Now he only had to buy five seers of sandesh and a piece of cloth and send them."

The art of teaching – comparison between reading, hearing and seeing

"Higher than reading is hearing and higher than hearing is seeing. One internalizes more when one hears from the lips of the guru, or from a holy man. Then one doesn't have to think about the non-essential part of the scriptures.

"Hanuman said, 'Brother, I don't know the phases of the moon, or the position of the planets. I only contemplate Rama.'

"Seeing is far better than hearing. All doubts vanish when you see. The scriptures talk of so many things. It is all futile without having the direct vision of God, without having love and devotion for His lotus feet, without purification of the heart. The almanac forecasts twenty measures of rainfall. But squeeze the almanac and not a single drop of water falls out. Not even one drop falls."

How long does one have to reason? Till one realizes God – who is a vijnani?

"How long does one have to reason about the text of the scriptures? As long as one does not have the

[1] A kind of sweetmeat in Bengal made of cheese and sugar
[2] Dhoti

direct realization of God. How long does the bee hum? As long as it does not sit on a flower. When it sits on a flower to drink honey, it doesn't make any sound.

"The truth is that one may talk with others even after God-realization. But this conversation only revolves around the divine Bliss of God – it is like a drunkard crying, 'Victory to Kali.'[1] Besides, even a bee hums indistinctly after sipping honey from a flower."

Is Thakur perhaps hinting of his own state by referring to a vijnani?

"The jnani reasons, 'Not this, not this.' Reasoning in this way, he reaches a point of Divine Bliss, and that is Brahman.

"What is the nature of a jnani? He follows the injunctions of the scriptures.

"Once I was taken to Chanak and met a number of sadhus. Some of them were sewing. (All laugh.) They left their sewing when they saw us. They sat cross-legged and began to talk to us. (All laugh.)

"A jnani does not talk about spiritual things unless you broach the subject of God. He will normally ask you, 'How are you doing now? Is all well in the family?'

"But the vijnani conducts himself differently. He doesn't care about anything – maybe his

[1] Thakur means that the drunkard can hardly say anything other than 'Victory to Kali,' on account of his drunkenness.

wearing cloth is off, or held under his arm as children will do.

"He who knows that the Lord exists is a jnani. He who knows that there is fire in firewood is a man of knowledge. But the vijnani is he who makes fire with the wood, cooks his food over it, and eats to his fill.

"The eight fetters[1] fall off the vijnani. He only retains the semblance of lust, anger and the rest."

The Pundit — 'bhidyate hradayagranthi chidyante sarvasaṁśayāḥ.' The knots of the heart are cut and all doubts vanish.

His earlier story – visit to Krishnakishore's house – Thakur's state of a vijnani

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes. A ship was sailing on the ocean. Suddenly all its iron joints, nails, and screws began to fall out. It was passing a mound of magnetic stone, so all the iron began to loosen.

"I used to visit Krishnakishore's house. One day when I went to his house, he asked me, 'Why do you chew betel leaf?' I said, 'If I feel like it, I will chew betel-leaf, look at myself in the mirror, or dance naked among a thousand females.' Krishnakishore's wife scolded him, saying, 'You don't know how to talk to people! What have you said to Ramakrishna?'

"In this state [of vijnana], passions like lust, anger and the rest are burnt up, though the

[1] Hatred, shame, fear, lineage, pride of good conduct, secretiveness, caste and grief

physical body remains the same. One looks just like anybody else. But inside one has become hollow and absolutely pure."

A Devotee — Does the body last after God-realization?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, in the case of a few people, the body remains alive to do some work – to instruct mankind. Sins vanish with a dip in the Ganges and one attains liberation. But one is not cured of one's blindness. Of course, one does not have to be reborn again and again to reap the fruit of sinful actions, which would otherwise have resulted in several rebirths. One has to live till the momentum of the actions of previous births has been exhausted. However, the impetus of current actions[1] does not give rise to future births. In the case of such a person, when passions like lust and anger have been burned up, the body remains to perform a few actions.

The Pundit — This is called samskara[2].

Sri Ramakrishna — The vijnani always sees the presence of God. That is why he is in such a relaxed state of mind. He sees God even with his eyes open. At times he comes down from the Absolute[3] to the phenomenal world[4], and at other times he goes up from the phenomenal world to the Absolute.

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[1] After God-realization
[2] Tendencies inherited from one's past births
[3] Nitya
[4] Lila

The Pundit — I don't understand this concept.

Sri Ramakrishna — The jnani reaches the Eternal and Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda by discriminating, 'Not this, not this[1].' He reasons, saying to himself, 'God is not the embodied being, He is neither the universe nor the twenty-four cosmic principles[2].' Reasoning thus, he reaches the Absolute and sees that God has become everything and dwells in all – embodied beings, the universe, and the twenty-four cosmic principles.

"One must curdle milk and churn it to extract butter. However, when you have taken the butter out, you observe that the butter indeed belongs to the buttermilk and the buttermilk belongs to the butter. The bark of a tree belongs to the pith and the pith belongs to the bark."

The Pundit (to Bhudhar, smiling) — Did you understand? It is very difficult to comprehend.

Sri Ramakrishna — When there is butter, there must also be buttermilk. If you think butter, the idea of buttermilk also comes to mind – for the reason that there can be no butter without buttermilk. Therefore, when you accept the Absolute[3], you have also to accept the phenomenal world[4]. It is a case of involution and evolution. One

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[1] Neti, neti

[2] They are the following, viz. – the five gross elements (earth, water, fire, air, space); the five pranas (vital airs) (prana, udana, samana, vyana, apana); the five organs of sense; the five organs of work; the mind; the determinative faculty (buddhi); the ego; chitta (mind-stuff)

[3] Nitya

[4] Lila

attains this state after having the direct realization of both aspects of God: Personal and Impersonal. The Personal God is symbolic of Consciousness and the Impersonal God is the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda.

"God indeed has become everything. Therefore, 'the world is a mansion of joy' for the vijnani. For the jnani, however, this world is 'a veil of deception'. Ramprasad called it 'a veil of deception'. That is why somebody rejoined –

> This world is indeed a thing of joy; let me eat and drink and be merry.
>
> O physician[1], you are a fool! You only see things on the surface – and I have understood the secret.
>
> King Janaka, the great royal sage, was he inferior in any respect to the holy man who has given up the world?
>
> Oh no, it was he who was loyal to both matter and Spirit, who realized God and at the same time drank his cup of milk. (Laughter.)

"The vijnani has enjoyed the Bliss of God in a special way. Some have heard of milk, others have seen it, and yet there are some who have drunk it. The vijnani has drunk milk, enjoyed it, and been nourished by it."

> Thakur remains silent for awhile and asks the Pundit to have a smoke. The Pundit goes to the long southeastern verandah to smoke.

[1] Ramprasad belonged to the caste of physician.

Chapter III

Jnana and vijnana – Thakur and the rishis of the *Vedas*

The Pundit returns and sits on the floor with the devotees. Thakur, seated on the smaller cot, resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Pundit) — I say this to you. There are three kinds of joy: the joy of worldly enjoyment[1], the joy of worship[2] and the bliss of Brahman[3]. The joy of 'lust and gold' is the joy of worldly enjoyment, it is the joy in which worldly people always remain occupied. The joy of worship is that which one enjoys when chanting the name and glories of God. And the bliss of Brahman is the joy of the vision of God[4]. The rishis became free-willed[5] after experiencing the bliss of Brahman.

"Chaitanyadeva used to experience three kinds of spiritual states: the inmost state, the semi-conscious state, and the conscious state. In the inmost state, he would have the vision of God and pass into samadhi – he would attain the state of *Jada* Samadhi. In the semi-conscious state, he would retain partial awareness of the external world. And in the conscious state, he would sing the name and glories of God."

Hazra (to the Pundit) — So all your doubts are now resolved.

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[1] *Vishyananda*
[2] *Bhajanananda*
[3] *Brahmananda*
[4] Bhagavan
[5] That is, they could step beyond rules and regulations

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Pundit) — What is samadhi? In samadhi, the mind becomes merged with the Absolute. The jnani passes into *Jada* Samadhi – in it, I-consciousness vanishes. The samadhi experienced in bhakti yoga is called *Chetana* Samadhi. In it, one retains the ego of the servant and Master relationship, the ego of lover and Beloved, or the ego of enjoyer and Bliss. The Lord is the Master and the devotee is the servant; the Lord is the Beloved and the devotee the lover; the Lord is the Fountain of Bliss and the devotee its enjoyer. The devotee does not want to become sugar; he wants to eat and enjoy it.

The Pundit — What will happen if God dissolves the ego completely, if He makes sugar of the devotee?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Feel free to say what you have on your mind. 'Be frank for once, mother Kaushalya[1].' (All laugh.) Don't the scriptures talk of Narada, Sanaka, Sanatana, Sananda and Sanatkumara?

The Pundit — Yes sir, the scriptures mention them.

Sri Ramakrishna — Though they were jnanis, they retained their ego of devotion. Haven't you read the *Bhagavata*?

The Pundit — I have read it partially, but not all of it.

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[1] A reference to an episode in the Ramayana about Kaushalya, the mother of Rama

Sri Ramakrishna — Pray to God. He is compassionate. Will He not listen to the words of His devotee? He is the wish-fulfilling tree[1]. Approach Him and ask: He will grant your wish.

The Pundit — I haven't thought much about it before. Now I understand.

Sri Ramakrishna — After one attains knowledge of the Absolute, God permits a little ego to remain. This ego is the 'I of the devotee,' or the 'I of knowledge'. It is with this 'I' that one enjoys His infinite play. Rubbing the pestle for a long time, it was reduced to a very small size. But when it fell into the forest of willows, it brought the destruction of the entire clan of Yadus[2]. That is why the vijnani keeps the 'I of devotion' or the 'I of knowledge', to enjoy the Bliss of God and to teach mankind.

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[1] *Kalpataru*

[2] The childhood friends of Samba, one of Krishna's sons, playfully disguised him as a pregnant woman by dressing him in female clothes and hanging an iron pestle below his waist. They presented him before a group of ascetics and asked them what sort of child the woman would give birth to. Enraged that a joke had been played on them, the munis proclaimed a curse that the iron pestle would be the ruin of the entire clan of Yadus. Fearfully, the boys took the pestle to the ocean and rubbed it for a very long time. The particles that fell from it, on striking the ground, became strong willow reeds. The boys threw the last piece of pestle into the sea.

In the meantime Krishna's clan, the Yadus, had become overbearingly vain and arrogant and they began to fight among themselves. At last they took the powerful willow reeds sprung from the pestle dust and, with them as weapons, fought each other to the death. Krishna, having decided that it was time that he also pass on, bade his father and his wives farewell and seated himself under a tree for meditation. Only one of his legs was not obscured by the leafy and outreaching branches of the tree. A hunter mistook him for a deer and killed him with an arrow, the point of which was the last piece from the pestle that had been thrown into the sea. Thus did the munis' curse find fulfillment.

Rishis had timid natures and were easily frightened – a new light on the Vedanta

"The rishis were timid and easily frightened. Do you know what their attitude was? 'Let me somehow get my own salvation; who knows what will happen in the future? So who can think for others?' A piece of dry or rotten wood somehow is able to float on water, but if even a bird sits on it, it sinks. A heavy log[1] not only floats, but also carries a number of animals. A steamship crosses the ocean and also takes people across.

"Religious teachers like Narada are vijnanis; they are more courageous than other rishis. They are like expert checker players who call out, 'What do you want, a six or a five of the dice?' And lo! Each time he throws the right number! What an expert player! And this fellow twirls his mustaches as he plays!

"Jnanis are afraid. They are like amateur chess players who are anxious to move a piece to the safety zone. The vijnani, on the other hand, has no fear of anything. He has had a direct vision of both aspects of God, Personal and Impersonal. He has talked, communed, with God – he has enjoyed the Bliss of God.

"The vijnani feels Bliss when, through contemplating God, his mind merges in the Indivisible[2]. Again he is in Bliss when he keeps his mind on the divine play, the phenomenal world, without his mind being merged in the Absolute.

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[1] Bahaduri wood
[2] Akhanda

"A mere jnani is monotonous. He only discriminates, 'Not this, not that; all this is like a dream.' 'I have raised both my hands[1]'. That is why I accept everything [both the Absolute and the phenomenal world].

"A woman went to see her weaver friend who was spinning yarn of different kinds of silk. The weaver friend was very happy to see her. She said, 'Friend, I am so happy that you have visited my home; I cannot express my joy. Let me get some refreshments for you.' The weaver friend went out of the room. While she was away, her visitor was tempted by multi-coloured yarn of silk. She hid a bundle of it under her arm. The weaver came back with the refreshments and served them to her with great enthusiasm. But looking at her silk yarn, she understood that her friend had pinched a bundle of it. She thought of a stratagem to recover her yarn.

"She said, 'Friend, we have not seen each other for a long time. This is a very happy day. Let's dance together.' The visitor friend said, 'Yes friend, I, too, feel great joy.' So they began to dance. The hostess saw that her friend was dancing without raising her arms. She said, 'Come, friend, let's dance with our arms raised, it's such a happy day today!' The visitor friend began to dance, but keeping one arm raised and the other pressing her side. The hostess said, 'My dear, what is this, dancing with only one arm raised! Let us dance with both hands raised. See how I am dancing with both hands raised?' But the visitor laughed, still danced pressing one arm to her side, with the other

[1] Refer to the parable next to understand this statement

raised. She continued to dance and said, 'One dances as one knows, friend.'

"I don't press one arm to my side. Both of my hands are free. I have no fear. I accept both the Absolute and the phenomenal world, the Nitya and the lila."

> Does Thakur mean that the jnani cannot dance with both hands raised because of his desire for name and fame, and desire for liberation? Does he mean that the jnani cannot accept both the Absolute and the phenomenal world and fears that he might get bound, but that the vijnani has no such fear?

Sri Ramakrishna — I said to Keshab Sen that he could not succeed spiritually without renouncing his ego. He said, 'If I do that, I won't be able to keep my organization intact.' Then I said to him: I am only asking you to renounce the 'unripe I', the 'rascal I'. There is no harm in retaining the 'ripe I', the 'I of a child', the 'I of God's servant' and the 'I of knowledge'. The 'I of a worldly man,' the 'I of ignorance[1],' and the 'unripe I' are like a stick which divides the water of the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda into two parts. On the other hand, the 'I of God's servant,' the 'child's I,' or the 'I of knowledge' is like a line drawn on the surface of water. One clearly sees that there is one expanse of water. The line appears to divide the water into two, but in reality one sees one expanse of water.

"Shankaracharya retained the 'I of knowledge' to teach mankind."

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[1] Avidya

After attaining the knowledge of the Absolute, some retain the 'ego of a devotee' – attitude of gopis

"God retains the 'I of knowledge,' or the 'I of a devotee' in many people, even after they attain the knowledge of the Absolute. Hanuman had the attitude of a servant of God, of a devotee, after having the direct vision of both aspects of God, Personal and Impersonal. He said to Ramachandra, 'Rama, at times I think of You as the whole and myself as a part of You. Sometimes I say to myself that I am Your servant and You the Master. And then, Rama, when I attain the Highest Knowledge, I see that You indeed are I and I am You.'

"Suffering the pangs of separation from Krishna, Yashoda went to Radha. Noticing her distress, Radha revealed her real nature to Yashoda, saying, 'Krishna is *Chidatma*, Absolute Consciousness, and I am *Chitshakti*, His Primal Power. Mother, ask me for a boon.' Yashoda said, 'Mother, I don't want knowledge of the Absolute. Only grant the boon that I may always see the form of Gopala[1] in my meditation, that I may ever associate with the company of Krishna's devotees, that I may serve the devotees of God, and that I may always chant the name and glories of God.'

"The gopis once wished to see the divine form of the Lord. Krishna asked them to dive into the Jamuna. As they dived, they found themselves in Vaikuntha[2] where they had the vision of the Lord endowed with six divine powers. But the gopis did

[1] Baby Krishna
[2] The abode of Vishnu

not like it. They said to Krishna, 'We only want to see our Gopala, we only want to serve him – please grant this, we want nothing else.'

"Before going to Mathura, Krishna tried to impart the knowledge of the Absolute to the gopis. He said, 'I am within and without every being. Why should you see only one of my forms?' The gopis said, 'Krishna, are you thinking of leaving us? Is that the reason you are imparting the knowledge of the Absolute?'

"Do you know what the attitude of the gopis is? We belong to Radha and Radha belongs to us."

A Devotee — Does this 'I of a devotee' ever disappear altogether?

Sri Ramakrishna and the Vedanta

Sri Ramakrishna — The 'I of a devotee' does disappear completely at times. Having attained the knowledge of the Absolute, one merges into samadhi. I, too, lose I-consciousness, but not all the time. Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti – one cannot stay long at ti [the highest note]. One has to come down again to the lower notes. I say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please don't give me the knowledge of the Absolute.' Formerly many believers in the Personal God used to visit me. Since then the Brahmajnanis[1] have started arriving. During that period I would remain in samadhi most of the time, having lost all external consciousness. And when I would regain outer

[1] Members of the Brahmo Samaj who believed in the Formless Brahman

consciousness, I would pray to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please don't give me the knowledge of the Absolute.'

The Pundit — Does God listen to our prayers?

Sri Ramakrishna — The Lord is a kalpataru, the wish-fulfilling tree. You will certainly receive whatever you ask of Him. But you have to stand near the kalpataru when you ask for something. Only then is your wish fulfilled.

"But then there is something special. God knows one's inner feelings. Whatever one cherishes while practicing spiritual disciplines indeed comes to pass – as one desires, so one gains. A magician showed his magic feats to a king and now and then he said, 'Oh king, give me money, give me cloth.' As he said this, his tongue twisted and got stuck to his palate. At once he had suspension of breath[1]. Now he could neither speak, nor make any sound, and he became motionless. Thinking him dead, they made a brick grave and buried him in that posture. A thousand years later someone dug up that grave. People saw a person seated in the grave merged in samadhi. Taking him as a holy man, they began to worship him. When they shook and moved him, his tongue became detached from his palate. The fellow then regained outer-consciousness and shouted, 'Just see my magic! See my feats! Oh king! Give, give me money, give me cloth.'

"I would cry and say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, destroy my tendency to reason!' "

[1] Kumbhaka

The Pundit — Did you, too, have it (the tendency to reason)?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, at one time.

The Pundit — If you tell us how you got rid of this tendency to reason, we might also free ourselves. How did you get rid of it?

Sri Ramakrishna — It just happened, somehow.

Chapter IV

Aim of life is God-realization – the paths to it

God's splendour and the joy of His Bliss – some people don't want the knowledge of His splendour

Thakur is silent for awhile before he resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — The Lord is a kalpataru, a wish-fulfilling tree. One should pray standing near it. Then one receives whatever one asks of Him.

"How many things has the Lord created! He has created the limitless universe; why do I need to know of His limitless splendours? If you have the desire to know them, first attain God, then He Himself will tell you about them. Why do you need to know how many buildings and how many company shares Jadu Mallick has? What you must do is to somehow talk with this gentleman, even though you have to leap over a ditch or entreat him or be pushed aside by his gatekeeper. After becoming acquainted with him, he will tell you all

about his wealth if you ask him. Moreover, when you have talked to the gentleman, his officials will also show you respect. (All laugh.)

"There are some who don't want to know about God's splendours. Why do I care to know how many litres of wine are in the tavern? I become intoxicated by only one bottle of wine. Why should I desire the knowledge of God's splendours? I am already intoxicated with just a little wine."

Path of Jnana Yoga is very difficult – avataras and the like are ever-perfect[1]

"Bhakti yoga and Jnana Yoga are both paths to realize God. You may take any path and you will reach Him. The path of bhakti is an easy path. The path of jnana and discrimination, however, is difficult.

"Why reason which of the paths is better? I have been talking to Vijay about it for many days. I said to him, 'A person used to pray: Oh Lord, please tell me who You are and what Your attributes are.'

"The path of knowledge and discrimination is difficult. Parvati, revealing Her different forms to her father, Giriraj[2], said: 'Father, if you want the knowledge of Brahman, associate with holy men.'

"It is not possible to express Brahman in words. The *Rama Gita* says that Brahman can be described only by indirect hints. It is like saying that the 'cowherd village' overlooks the Ganges. By saying that the 'cowherd village' overlooks the

[1] *Nityasiddhas*
[2] Himalaya, the king of mountains

Ganges, one indirectly states that the 'cowherd village' is on the bank of the Ganges.

"Why should one not attain the direct realization of the formless Brahman? But it is exceedingly difficult. When one renounces all sense-objects – of form, taste, smell, speech and touch – and the mind is merged, only then one attains the inner experience of God[1]. But then one knows only this much about Brahman, that It exists."

The Pundit — 'astītyopalabdhavya' – God is experienced as Existence.

Sri Ramakrishna — One must establish a relationship with God to attain Him – either the attitude of a hero, or of a female lover of the Lord[2], or of a handmaid, or of a child.

Mani Mallick — Only then can one be steadfast in one's spiritual life.

Sri Ramakrishna — I lived with the attitude of a female companion of God for many days. I used to say, 'I am the maidservant of the All-Blissful Mother, Brahmamayi. Oh handmaids, make me your handmaiden. Saying that I am the maidservant of Brahmamayi, I will walk about proudly.'

"There are some who realize God without practicing spiritual disciplines. They are known as *nityasiddhas*, or ever-perfect. On the other hand,

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[1] *Bodhebodha*
[2] Sakhi; gopi of Vraja

those who realize God after practicing spiritual disciplines[1], such as repetition of the Name and other austerities, are called *sadhanasiddha*, perfected by spiritual disciplines. However, there are some devotees who are perfected by God's grace; they are called *kripasiddha*. For example, when a lamp is brought inside a room that has been lying dark for a thousand years, it is illuminated in a moment.

"And then there are some devotees who suddenly attain God-vision; they are called *hathatsiddha*. For example, a poor man's son is suddenly noticed by a rich man. The aristocrat gives him his daughter in marriage, along with land, house, carriage, servants and maids – he now owns them all.

"And then some devotees are perfected in a dream; they are called *svapnasiddha*. They attain the vision of God in a dream."

Surendra (laughing) — Then I'll go to sleep now. I'll wake up an aristocrat.

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately) — You are already an aristocrat. Add the vowel 'a' to the letter 'k,' it becomes 'ka'. It is futile to add another vowel 'a' to it. But even if you do, it will still be 'ka'. (All laugh.)

"The *nityasiddha* is of an altogether different class. He is, for instance, like tinder stick[2]. Rub it a little and it produces fire. Even without rubbing, it

[1] Sadhana
[2] *Arani* wood; a special kind of wood that produces fire by rubbing

gives fire. The *nityasiddha* realizes God with very little spiritual disciplines, sometimes without performing any spiritual practices at all.

"However, the *nityasiddha*, does practice spiritual disciplines after attaining God. He is like the pumpkin or the gourd plants which first bear fruit, and then flowers."

The Pundit, hearing of 'the pumpkin or gourd plant bearing fruit first,' laughs.

Sri Ramakrishna — And the *nityasiddha* is like the homa bird. Its mother soars high up in the sky. When the chick is born, it falls toward the earth. It grows wings and opens its eyes during the fall – but before striking the ground and hurting itself, it rushes up toward its mother, screaming, 'Where are you mother, where?' Remember, Prahlada shed streams of tears of love as soon as he wrote the alphabet 'K[1]'.

Is Thakur describing his own state by his illustration of the tinder stick and the homa bird, in relation to the *Nityasiddha*?

Thakur seems very happy to see the humility of the Pundit. He talks to the devotees about the Pundit's good nature.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — He has a very fine nature. It is not difficult to drive a nail into a mud wall. But when you try to drive it into a stone wall, its point breaks and no hole appears in the stone. There are people whose spiritual

[1] The alphabet 'K' reminded Prahlada of Krishna, his Chosen Ideal

consciousness is not awakened, though they may hear about God a thousand times. They are like a crocodile whose hide remains unaffected even when hit by a sword.

Spiritual practice is better than learning and scholarship – discrimination[1]

The Pundit — One can injure a crocodile by thrusting a spear into its belly. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What use is it to read so many scriptures? It is philosophy! (All laugh.)

The Pundit (smiling) — Yes, it is mere philosophy.

Sri Ramakrishna — What use is it to talk a lot? When learning archery, one first aims at a banana tree, then at a reed, next a wick, and then at a flying bird.

"That is why one should first concentrate the mind on the Personal God.

"And then there are devotees who have gone beyond the three gunas. They are called *trigunatita* devotees. For example, Narada and others like him are nitya devotees, devoted to God eternally. Such devotees consider Krishna as the embodiment of Spirit[2], His Abode as Spirit, and His devotee as Spirit too. To them the Lord is eternal[3], His devotee is eternal and His abode is eternal too.

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[1] Viveka
[2] Chinmaya
[3] Nitya

"Those who reason and discriminate, saying, 'Not this, not this,' don't believe in God-incarnate[1]. Hazra says well: the Divine Incarnation is for the devotee and not for the jnani. The jnani is content with the attitude of 'Soham[2].' "

Thakur and the devotees remain silent for awhile. Now the Pundit speaks.

The Pundit — Sir, how does one get rid of an insensitive attitude – when one sees someone laughing and the mind thinks of the muscles and nerves? Or when seeing someone in sorrow, the mind goes to the nervous system?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — That is why Narayan Shastri used to say that studying scriptures has its pitfalls. Arguing and reasoning may bring about a downfall.

The Pundit — Sir, is there no way out? Please clarify a little.

Sri Ramakrishna — There is a way out. It is discrimination. A song says[3] –

Ask – about the Lord – the son called viveka who knows the Real (God) from the unreal phenomenal world.

"The way is: discrimination, nonattachment[4], and love for God. Without practicing discrimination, one

[1] Avatar
[2] I am He
[3] For complete song, refer to Volume I, Section II, Chapter VI of this book
[4] Vairagya

cannot make a correct statement. Samadhyayi, after expounding religion for some time, said, 'God is devoid of sweetness and bliss.' That is like saying, 'There is a cowshed full of horses at my maternal uncle's house.' Do horses live in cowsheds?

(Smiling) "You have now become a *chanabara*[1]. It will not only be good for you to remain soaked in syrup for three or four days, but also good for others. Just for three or four days."

The Pundit (smiling) — The *chanabara* has been burnt into coal.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — No, no. It has taken the brown colour of a cockroach.

Hazra — It has been fried well. It will now soak up the syrup nicely.

His earlier story – instruction by Totapuri – significance of the *Gita* – yearn for God

Sri Ramakrishna — You see, there is no need to read the scriptures a lot. Too much reading inclines one to reason and argue. The Naked One (Totapuri) taught me that the essence of the *Gita* is what you hear when the word Gita is repeated ten times. In other words, by repeating 'Gita' ten times, it becomes '*tyagi*,' renunciation.

"The path is to cultivate discrimination, nonattachment, and love for the Lord. What kind of

[1] Bengali sweetmeat made of fried cheese

love? Such love that you yearn for Him with heart and soul, the way a cow runs longingly after her calf."

The Pundit — The *Vedas* say exactly the same thing: 'We call on You the way the cow bellows for its calf.'

Sri Ramakrishna — Weep with yearning for God. If one can renounce everything through developing discrimination and nonattachment, one can have the direct vision of God.

"That yearning brings about God-intoxication, whether you follow the path of knowledge, or of love and devotion. The sage Durvasa was mad with the Knowledge of God.

"There is a great deal of difference between the jnana of a householder and that of an all-renouncing sannyasin. The knowledge of the householder is like the light of an earthen lamp that only lights the room. The householder cannot understand beyond his body, home and family. But the knowledge of an all-renouncing sannyasin is like the radiance of the sun. One can see both inside and outside the room with its light. Chaitanyadeva's knowledge was like that of the sun – the radiance of the sun of knowledge. Further, he was also endowed with the soothing light of the moon of love and devotion. He had both the Knowledge of the Absolute and ecstatic love for God."

Is Thakur describing his own state by referring to the state of Chaitanyadeva?

Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga – bhakti according to Narada in the age of Kali

"Affirmation[1] and negation[2]. Love, devotion and feeling for God[3] is a positive path; the negative path[4] is different. You are talking of the path of negation. But it creates a difficult situation in that the guru and the disciple do not see one another as different. Shukadeva went to Janaka for instruction about the knowledge of Brahman. Janaka said, 'First you have to make an offering of the teacher's fee[5]. When you have attained the knowledge of Brahman, you will not make any offering because then there will remain no difference between guru and disciple.'

"Both the path of affirmation and negation are ways to realize the same goal – there are numberless beliefs and numerous paths. But there is a special point. According to Narada, bhakti is the injunction for the age of Kali. On this path one first develops love and devotion to God, then it matures into bhava[6]. Higher than bhava is mahabhava[7] and prema[8]. An ordinary mortal does not attain mahabhava and prema. He who has attained it has attained the Substance, namely realized God."

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[1] *Bhavamukha chaitanya*
[2] *Abhavamukha chaitanya*
[3] Bhakti
[4] Knowledge and discrimination
[5] Dakshina
[6] Matured bhakti, a state of ecstasy
[7] The highest manifestation of divine love
[8] Ecstatic love; a state in which the devotee forgets the world and his own body

The Pundit — Sir, when one teaches, one must explain in different ways.

Sri Ramakrishna — When you preach, eliminate the 'head and tail[1]'.

Chapter V

Kali is Brahman, Brahman and his Power are inseparable – harmony of all religions

The Pundit is talking to Mani Mallick, who is a member of the Brahmo Samaj. The Pundit raises strong arguments about the good and bad aspects of the Brahmo Samaj. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot and watches them talk. He smiles. Sometimes he intervenes. "This is the tamasic aspect of sattva[2]," he says, "the heroic attitude. This too is needed. One should not keep quiet at the sight of injustice and untruth. You may find that an unchaste woman is trying to take you from your spirituality. You then must assume the heroic attitude. You must say, 'Why, you witch, you're trying to harm my spiritual life! I'll cut you into two pieces right now!' "

Thakur then laughs and says, "Mani Mallick's faith in Brahmo doctrines is long standing. You wish to convert him to your views. Is it easy to change old tendencies so quickly? There was a Hindu who was a great devotee. He used to worship the Mother of the Universe[3] and repeat Her name constantly. When the Muslims conquered the country, they caught this devotee and converted him to Islam, saying, 'You are now a Muslim. Say Allah. You must only repeat the name of Allah.' The fellow began to repeat, 'Allah, Allah,' with great difficulty. At times he uttered,

[1] That is, focus on the essential thing
[2] Qualities that lead Godward
[3] Jagadamba

'Jagadamba' (the name of the Mother of the Universe) in spite of himself. At that, the Muslims decided to kill him. He cried, 'Save me, Sheikh! Please don't kill me. I am trying hard to repeat the name of your Allah. But our Mother of the Universe has filled me up to my throat. She is pushing your Allah out.' "(All laugh.)

(To the Pundit, smiling) "Please don't say anything to Mani Mallick**.**"

"You know how it is. People have different tastes and can only digest certain kinds of foods. God has created various religions, various faiths – for people of differing capacities. Not everybody is qualified for the knowledge of Brahman. So He has made provision for the worship of God with form. A mother brings home fish for her children and cooks it differently – as fish with curry, as fish sauce and fish with fried rice[1]. Not everyone can digest fish with fried rice, so she makes fish curry for him who has a weak stomach. Others like fish sauce, or fried fish. Just as there are people of different temperaments, there is also a difference in their fitness and capacity."

All remain silent. Thakur says to the Pundit, "Go have the darshan of the deity. Then take a stroll in the garden for awhile."

It is half past five. The Pundit and his friend rise. They will visit the shrine. Some devotees accompany them.

After some time Thakur and M. walk down together toward the brick ghat on the bank of the

[1] Pilau

Ganges. Thakur says to M., "Baburam now says: What shall I gain by studying?"

Thakur meets the Pundit on the bank of the Ganges. He says, "Are you not going to the Kali Temple? I came to make sure that you do go." The Pundit is a little embarrassed and says, "Sir, let's go together to have the darshan of the deity."

Smiling broadly, Sri Ramakrishna walks toward the Kali Temple through the courtyard. He says, "Listen to a song." He begins to sing sweetly.

> Is my Mother really black? The Naked One, of black hue, illumines my heart.

Reaching the courtyard of the chandni, he says again, "One of the songs says" –

> Lighting the fire of jnana in the chamber,
>
> Look at the Mother, the embodiment of Brahman.

Reaching the shrine, Thakur lies prostrate in obeisance. Hibiscus flowers and vilwa leaves have been placed at the holy lotus feet of the Mother. She, the three-eyed one, looks at the devotees with eyes full of affection. Her hand is raised to assure fearlessness. The Mother is clad in a Benares sari with jewelry.

Viewing the holy image, the elder brother of Bhudhar remarks, "I have heard that it was made by the sculptor, Nabin." Thakur says, "I don't know about that. What I know is that She is the image of Spirit."

Thakur, accompanied by the devotees, walks through the natmandir toward the south. Seeing the block for sacrificing goats, the Pundit remarks, "The Mother is not able to see the goats being slaughtered." (All laugh.)

Chapter VI

Thakur is now returning to his room. He says to Baburam, "Come with us." M. also joins them.

It is dusk. Thakur comes to the circular verandah west of his room and sits down. He is absorbed in divine emotion – semi-conscious to the external world. Close to him are Baburam and M.

Thakur is having difficulties these days for lack of personal service. Rakhal does not live here now. There are others, but they cannot touch Thakur in all his spiritual states [while offering service]. Thakur says to Baburam with a sign, "Do stay with me. I cannot allow just anybody to touch me in this state. It would be nice if you would stay here[1]."

God-realization and giving up work – a new 'pot' – householder devotee and unchaste woman

The Pundit has returned to Thakur's room after visiting the shrine. From the western circular verandah, Thakur says to him, "Have a little water to drink." The Pundit says, "I have not yet performed the evening worship." Immediately Thakur rises and sings, intoxicated with divine emotion –

What is the need of visiting Gaya, Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi, Kanchi or such holy places

If the lips can utter, 'Kali, Kali', Kali,' when life ebbs away?

He who calls on Kali at the three hours of dawn, noon and dusk needs no daily ritualistic worship.

Worship itself follows his footsteps, but can never overtake him.

[1] Baburam was the embodiment of purity, so could help Thakur with personal service

He can no longer concern himself with repetition of the Name, yajna, worship, or sacrificial fire.

For Madan[1] all worship and rituals mean the blood-red feet of the Mother, the embodiment of Brahman.

Intoxicated with divine love, Thakur says, "How long does one have to perform sandhya[2]? As long as the mind does not merge in Him when repeating 'Om'."

The Pundit — So I will have some water, I can perform sandhya later.

Sri Ramakrishna — I don't want to disturb the current of your personal routine. One does not renounce till the time is ripe. When the fruit is ripe, the flower falls off by itself. One should not push and tug at a coconut when it is not ripe – that would injure the tree.

Surendra is getting ready to go home. He invites his friends to come along, so that he can take them in his carriage.

Surendra — Mahendra, are you coming?

Thakur is absorbed in ecstasy – he has not come back fully to the normal state of consciousness. He says to Surendra in this state, "Don't carry more people than your horse can draw." Surendra pays his obeisance and leaves.

The Pundit leaves to perform evening service. M. and Baburam have to go to Calcutta and they are paying their obeisance to Thakur, who is still in ecstasy.

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[1] Author of the song

[2] Daily service morning, noon and evening, as laid down for the twice-born

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I can hardly speak. You must wait for awhile.

M. sits down, waiting for Thakur's command. Thakur beckons Baburam to sit. Baburam says to M., "Let's stay a little longer." Thakur says, "Fan me a little." Baburam fans him, so does M.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M., affectionately) — Why don't you visit more often?

M. — Sir, there is no particular reason. I have been busy at home.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yesterday I came to know Baburam's spiritual ideal. That is why I insist on keeping him here. A bird hatches its egg at the right hour. Do you know who they are[1]? They are pure Atman, not yet fallen into the trap of 'lust and greed'.

M. — True, sir. He has no stain yet.

Sri Ramakrishna — He is like a new pot [of clay]. Milk will not sour when put in it.

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — I feel the need to keep Baburam here. I am put in various spiritual states and it is essential that such a person stay with me. Baburam says, 'I can manage to stay permanently only gradually. Otherwise, it will create difficulties

[1] Young men like Baburam who are pure in heart

at home; they will raise a row.' I say to him, 'Come on Saturdays and Sundays.'

By this time the Pundit has returned from performing evening service. He is accompanied by Bhudhar and his elder brother[1]. They are ready to eat some refreshments now.

Bhudhar's elder brother says, "Please let us know if we will succeed in spiritual life. What is the way for us?"

Sri Ramakrishna — You are a *mumukshu*[2]. One attains the Lord when one develops yearning for Him. Don't eat the food offered at the death ceremony[3]. You must live with your family like an unchaste woman. An unchaste woman attends to all her household work with full attention, but her mind remains tied night and day to her paramour. Attend to all your household work, but always keep your mind on the Lord.

The Pundit is eating his refreshments. Thakur asks him to sit to eat.

After the Pundit has finished, Sri Ramakrishna says to him, "You have read the *Gita*, no doubt. It says that there is a special power of God in one who is honoured and respected by all."

The Pundit — Whatever being is glorious, prosperous or powerful, know that to have sprung but from a spark of My splendour[4].

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[1] The elder brother of Bhudar spent his last days alone in a very holy mood at Kashi. He constantly thought about Thakur during those days.
[2] One with a burning desire for liberation
[3] Shraddha
[4] Yadyadvibhūtimatsattvaṁ śrīmadūrjitameva vā. (Gita 10:41)

Sri Ramakrishna — You have, no doubt, the power of His spark within yourself.

The Pundit — Shall I persevere in the vows that I have taken?

Thakur, reluctantly says, "Yes, you must." Then he changes the topic to sidetrack the issue.

Sri Ramakrishna — You must accept Shakti[1]. Vidyasagar asked, 'Has God given more power to some?' I replied, 'Otherwise, how can one man defeat a hundred men? Why is Queen Victoria respected and honoured if not because of God's power?' Then I asked him whether he agreed to this fact. He replied, 'Yes, I do.'

The Pundit rises to take leave of Thakur and offers him his obeisance by touching his head to the floor. His companions and friends also salute Thakur.

Thakur says, "Please come again. A hemp smoker is happy to be in the company of another hemp smoker. He may even embrace him. When he sees other people, he hides his face from them. A cow licks the body of its own calf. The others, she pushes away with her horns." (All laugh.)

When the Pundit has left, Thakur laughs and says, "He has become 'diluted' in one day. Did you notice his humility**,** how he accepted everything?"

It is the 7th day of the bright fortnight in the month of Ashada. The rays of the moon fall onto the western verandah. Thakur is still sitting there. M. salutes him. Thakur asks affectionately, "Are you leaving?"

[1] Power of Brahman, personification of the Primal Energy

M. — Yes, sir, I would like to take your leave.

Sri Ramakrishna — I have been thinking that I would visit the homes of the devotees one by one. I shall visit your house one day. What do you say?

M. — That would be very nice, sir.

Section X

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar Temple with Devotees

Chapter I

Sannyasins should not hoard – Thakur is 'intoxicated with divine love, full to the brim'

Sri Ramakrishna is at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. He is sitting on the smaller cot in his room, facing east. Devotees are seated on the floor. It is 9 November 1884, 25th of Kartik, the 7th day of the dark fortnight.

It is about midday when M. arrives. He watches the other devotees gather. Vijaykrishna Goswami is accompanied by a number of Brahmo devotees. Ram Chakravarty, the priest, is also there. A little later Mahimacharan, Narayan, and Kishori arrive. They are followed by many other devotees.

It is early winter. Thakur had been in need of a shirt and had asked M. for one. M. has brought one shirt of broadcloth and another of a heavier cloth. Thakur had not asked him to bring the thicker shirt.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — You had better take that one back and wear it yourself. There is no harm in it. Tell me, what kind of shirt did I ask you to bring?

M. — You asked me to bring an ordinary shirt. You didn't ask me to bring the heavier one.

Sri Ramakrishna — Then please take it back.

(To Vijay and others) "You see, Dwarika Babu gave me a shawl. Later, some Hindustanis [from northwest India] also brought one. I could not accept it."

Thakur was going to say something more when Vijay began to talk.

Vijay — That is right, sir. One should only accept what is needed. And there must be a man to give it. Who but a man will give?

Sri Ramakrishna — It's only the Lord who gives. A mother-in-law said to her daughter-in-law, 'Oh, my child, everybody has an attendant to serve him. It would be nice if there were someone to massage your feet.' Her daughter-in-law answered, 'Lord Hari will massage my feet. I do not need anyone else.' She said this in a spirit of devotion and love for God.

"A fakir went to Emperor Akbar to ask him for money. The Emperor was offering prayers[1] saying, 'Oh Allah, give me wealth and riches.' Hearing this, the fakir started to leave, but the Emperor beckoned him to sit down. After he had finished his prayers, he asked the fakir why he had been going to leave. He replied, 'You were praying for wealth and riches. I thought that if I have to beg, why ask a beggar, why not Allah?' "

Vijay — I saw a sadhu in Gaya who never made any effort to obtain food for himself. One day he wanted to feed some devotees. Special wheat flour

[1] Namaz

and clarified butter arrived from somewhere. There were fruits and other foods, too.

Storing for future and three classes of holy men[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vijay and others) — There are three classes of sadhus: superior, mediocre and inferior. The superior class makes no effort to obtain food. The mediocre and the inferior kinds of holy men – among them *dandis*[2] – beg for alms, saying, 'Namo Narayana,' and stand patiently waiting. The inferior sadhus kick up a row if they are not given alms. (All laugh.)

"The superior sadhu has the nature of a python. It does not move – it sits at one place and food comes to it. A young sadhu, who had been a brahmachari from boyhood, went to beg alms. A girl came up to give him some food. Seeing her prominent breasts, the sadhu thought she had abscesses on her chest. He asked about them. The ladies of the family explained to him that the Lord would provide milk through her breasts for an infant to be born to her. The Lord had provided for all this beforehand. Hearing this, the young sadhu was amazed. He said, 'So there is no need for me to beg for alms. I, too, will have food provided without asking.' "

Some devotees think to themselves, "It will be all right if we, too, make no effort."

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[1] Sadhus
[2] A sect of sannyasins who always carry a staff with them

Sri Ramakrishna — He who feels the need for effort will have to make it.

Vijay — There is a beautiful story in the Bhaktamala.

Sri Ramakrishna — Please tell it.

Vijay — Would you please tell it yourself?

Sri Ramakrishna — No, you should tell it. I don't remember it well. In the beginning, one should hear these things, so earlier I used to hear all this.

Thakur's state of mind – contemplation on Rama – signs of highest spiritual knowledge[1] and ecstatic love

Sri Ramakrishna — I am in a different state of mind now. Hanuman said, 'I don't know the lunar date, nor the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rama.'

"The chatak bird wants only pure water. It may be dying of thirst, but it must fly high in the sky and drink there. The Ganges, the Jamuna and the seven seas are all full of water, but it will not drink the water of the earth.

"Rama and Lakshmana visited Pampa lake. Lakshmana saw a crow trying again and again to drink water, but it did not actually drink. When asked about it, Rama said, 'Brother, this crow is a great devotee of God. It repeats the name of Rama night and day. It is dying of thirst, yet it is not

[1] Purna jnana

drinking because it thinks that if it drinks, its repetition of the Name will be interrupted. On a full moon night, I asked Haladhari, 'Brother, is it the night of the new moon?' (All laugh.)

(Smiling) "Yes, it is true. I had heard that a characteristic of perfect spiritual knowledge is that one does not distinguish the nights of the full moon[1] and the new moon[2]. How could Haladhari believe it? He said, 'This is the age of Kali. He cannot distinguish between the new moon and full moon. And people still respect him!' "

While Thakur is talking, Mahimacharan enters.

Sri Ramakrishna (respectfully) — Come in. Please come in. Take a seat.

(To Vijay and the other devotees) "In such a state of mind, one doesn't remember dates. The other day there was a religious festival at Beni Pal's garden. I forgot the date. I don't remember the last day of the month, when I am going to repeat the Lord's Name with great earnestness[3]. (After reflecting for a few minutes) But I do remember that a certain person is coming to see me."

Where does Sri Ramakrishna's mind dwell – God-realization and inspiration

"Such a state comes when one's mind is fixed one hundred percent on the Lord. Rama said to Hanuman, 'You have brought a report about Sita.

[1] Purnima
[2] Amavasya
[3] It is auspicious to repeat the Name of God on the last day of the month

How did you find her? Please tell me.' Hanuman said, 'Rama, I saw that it was only Sita's body lying there – no mind or soul in it. She has surrendered her whole mind and soul at your feet, so it was only her body lying there. The God of death[1] was hovering around, but he was helpless. It was just her body lying there; there was no mind or soul in it.'

"One acquires the nature of the ideal one meditates upon. By meditating on the Lord night and day, one attains His nature. A salt doll went to fathom the ocean; it became one with it.

"What is the purpose of studying holy books or scriptures? It is the realization of God. Somebody opened a sadhu's book to see what was in it. There was nothing written but the name of Rama – on every page. Nothing else.

"When one develops love for God, one feels spiritually inspired by small things. One reaps the fruit of millions of sandhyas[2], by just pronouncing the name of Rama once.

"A peacock is inspired to see clouds – it spreads its wings and dances full of joy. Radha also used to become inspired when she saw a cloud. The memory of Krishna would awaken in her mind.

"Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was passing close to the village of Mera. He heard that drums were made of the clay from that village. He was completely overwhelmed with divine emotion

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[1] *Kala*; Yama

[2] Worship and meditation performed at dawn, noon and sunset by orthodox Hindus

because drums are played at the time of the devotional singing of the Lord's name.

"Who gets such divine inspiration? One who is rid of worldly wisdom. When the sap of attachment is completely dried up, one attains the inspiration of God in no time. A wet match stick will not strike fire, even if you rub it a thousand times. But when it is dry, it at once strikes fire when rubbed just a little."

After God-realization, self-surrender comes, and a steady wisdom in sorrow and death

"The body, of course, is subject to happiness and sorrow. He who has realized God surrenders his mind, body, prana[1] and soul, all these, to Him. Before taking a dip in Pampa lake, Rama and Lakshmana thrust their bows into the earth near the lake. After his bath Lakshmana saw that his bow was smeared with blood. Seeing it, Rama said, 'Look, brother, some living being seems to have been injured.' Lakshmana dug in the earth and saw a big frog half dead. Full of compassion, Rama said, 'Why didn't you make a noise? We would have tried to save you! When a snake seizes you, you croak loudly!' The frog said, 'Rama, when I am seized by a snake, I croak loudly, 'Rama save me, save me! Oh Rama!' Now when I see that Rama himself is killing me, I don't say anything.' "

[1] Vital breath

Chapter II

How to remain in one's real Self? Why is the path of union with God through knowledge[1] difficult?

Thakur is silent for awhile and is looking at Mahima and the other devotees.

Thakur has heard that Mahimacharan does not believe in the idea of the guru, so he changes the topic of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — One should have faith in the words of the guru. There is no need to consider the guru's character. A saying goes, 'Though my guru visits a tavern, he is yet my ever blissful guru.'

"A person was reading the *Chandi Bhagavata*. He read, 'The broom is no doubt dirty, yet it cleans.' "

Mahimacharan often discusses the Vedanta. His goal is to attain the knowledge of Brahman. He follows the path of jnana, so he discriminates continuously.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — The goal of the jnani is to know the nature of his own real Self. This is jnana. And it is this that is also called liberation. One's own real Self is Parabrahman[2]. Parabrahman and 'I' are one. But one does not know this because of the veil of maya.

"I said to Harish, 'One does not have to do more than this: some basketfuls of earth are lying over gold; all you have to do is remove the earth. That is all.'

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[1] Jnana yoga
[2] The Supreme Brahman

"Devotees retain their I-consciousness, but not jnanis. The Naked One (Totapuri) used to teach how to live in one's own real Self: merge the mind in the intellect and the intellect in the Atman. Then you will be established in the real nature of the Atman.

"But one's 'I' continues to persist, it does not leave. For instance, think of a limitless sheet of water. There is water all around – above, below, in front, behind, right and left. Within this sheet of water is a pot full of water. Though there is water outside and inside, the pot still remains – one's 'I' is like this pot."

His earlier story – thunderbolt in the Kali Temple – body and character of the knower of Brahman

"A jnani's body does not undergo any change after attaining Knowledge. The fire of spiritual knowledge, however, does burn up enemies like lust and the other passions. Long ago a thunderbolt struck the Kali Temple in a rainstorm. I went out and saw that the doors were not affected, but the heads of the screws were broken. The body can be likened to the doors, and such attachments as lust to the screws.

"A jnani only likes spiritual talk. He is greatly troubled to hear about worldly things. A man of the world is in a different class. His turban of ignorance never disappears. He resumes the same worldly talk after having taken a detour for awhile.

"The *Vedas* talk of the seven spiritual planes. When the mind of the jnani rises to the fifth plane, he likes to hear nothing but talk on God. He cannot

talk of anything else – only words of knowledge come as instruction from his mouth."

Is Sri Ramakrishna describing his own state? He adds, "The *Vedas* talk of Sat-chit-ananda Brahman. That Brahman is neither one nor two. It is between one and two. One can neither say, 'It exists' nor 'It does not exist'. It is between 'existence' and 'non-existence'."

Sri Ramakrishna and union with God by the path of love and devotion[1] – loving devotion brings God-realization

Sri Ramakrishna — One attains God by developing an intense attachment[2], or by cultivating love for Him. Devotion acquired through ritualistic worship[3] goes as easily as it comes. What is ritualistic worship? It consists of repeating the Name so many times a day, meditating for a certain period of time, performing so many sacrifices[4] and homa for a certain duration, worshipping with so many articles, and repeating a certain mantra during puja – it is as easy to lose as to get. So many people say, 'Oh brother, I have eaten nothing but *havishya*[5] for so long; I have worshipped the Deity so many times at my home – but to what avail?'

"But intense devotion[6] is never lost. Who gains such passionate devotion? He who has performed

[1] Bhakti Yoga
[2] Raga Bhakti
[3] *Vaidhi bhakti*
[4] Yajna
[5] A holy food consisting of boiled rice with clarified butter
[6] Raga Bhakti

many austerities in an earlier life, or he who is ever-perfect[1]. It is like, while clearing weeds and rubbish in a dilapidated house, one comes across a fountain fitted with a pipe. It was lying covered by earth and red dust but as soon as they are removed, water begins to gush out.

"They who have intense devotion do not say, 'Brother, I have lived on *havishya* for so long, but what have I gained?' They who take up farming for the first time, give up their land if they fail to get a crop. But a hereditary farmer will persist in farming, whether there is a crop or not. Their ancestors have practiced farming, so they know that farming will bring them food.

"They who have intense devotion have real and sincere love for God. He takes their burden on Himself. When you are admitted to a hospital, the physician does not discharge you until you are cured.

"They who are held by the Lord need have no fear. A boy who holds his father's hand while walking on the balk of a field may fall if he loosens his grip for lack of caution. But if the father is holding the hand of his son, he does not fall."

One talks only of God when one develops loving devotion – renunciation of the world and living as a householder

"What is not possible when one has faith in God? He who has genuine faith believes in God with form and the Formless One – Rama, Krishna, and

[1] *Nityasiddha*

Bhagavati (Mother of the Universe) – in all of them.

"When I was going to my village (Kamarpukur), a hailstorm began. There was also the danger of dacoits lurking in the fields. I began to utter the names of all the deities: Rama, Krishna and Bhagavati. And then I called out, 'Hanuman!' I called out the names of all the gods and goddesses. What does that mean?

"Do you know what it is like? When a servant or a maid goes to the market to buy supplies, he counts money taken from the master, saying, 'Here is money for potatoes, here is money for brinjals and this money is for fish.' The money for all the articles is taken separately – and then mixed up.

"When one develops love for God, one likes to talk only of Him. One begins to speak and to hear only of one's beloved.

"A worldly person's mouth begins to water if somebody praises his son. The father immediately says, 'I say, bring some water for your uncle to wash his feet.'

"They who like guavas are very happy to hear good things about them. If, however, someone talks disparagingly of them, he might suddenly say, 'Oh! Has anybody in your fourteen ancestral generations ever grown guavas?' "

Thakur is saying the following to Mahimacharan since the latter is a householder.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — Why renounce the world altogether? It is enough if one gets rid of

attachment. But you need to practice spiritual disciplines. You have to fight with your senses.

"Besides, it is more convenient to fight a battle from within the fort. One receives a lot of help from the fort. The world is a place for enjoyment. One should enjoy it, and then quickly give up one article of enjoyment after the other. Once I had a desire to wear a golden chain around my waist. I even got one and put it on – but I took it off immediately.

"I ate some onion and began to discriminate in this way – my mind, this is what is called onion. I moved it around in my mouth for awhile, first on one side and then on the other. I spat it out after making it touch the mouth on all sides."

Chapter III

In the joy of devotional songs

A musician is coming today for community singing of hymns[1].

Thakur asks the devotees every now and then, "Where is the musician?"

Mahima — We are quite all right as we are.

Sri Ramakrishna — But why, my dear sir? We get this all year long.

Somebody from outside the room says, "The singing party has come! The musician has arrived!"

[1] Kirtan

Full of joy, Sri Ramakrishna asks, "Where is he?"

A mat is spread on the long southeastern verandah of the room. Sri Ramakrishna says, "Sprinkle a little Ganges water. So many worldly people have walked this verandah."

The wife and daughters of Pyari Babu, a resident of Bali, arrive after visiting the Kali Temple. They wish to hear the kirtan when they see the preparations being made for it. Someone says to Thakur, "They are asking if there is enough space for them in the room. Can they sit here?" Listening to the devotional songs, Thakur says, "No, no." He means that there is not enough room.

Just at this moment Narayan arrives. He salutes Thakur.

Thakur says to him, "Why have you come? You had such a beating from the members of your family." Narayan goes toward Thakur's room. Seeing this, Thakur beckons Baburam to give him something to eat.

Narayan enters the room. Suddenly Thakur rises and follows. He wants to feed Narayan with his own hands. After doing so, he comes back and sits on the verandah where the devotional songs are being sung.

Chapter IV

Thakur enjoys devotional songs in the company of devotees

A number of devotees have arrived: Vijay Goswami, Mahimacharan, Narayan, Adhar, M., the Younger Gopal, and some others. Rakhal and Balaram are still in holy Vrindavan.

It is between three and four o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is listening to the songs on the verandah. Narayan comes and sits close to him. Other devotees surround them.

At this moment Adhar enters. Thakur seems excited to see him. When Adhar sits down, after having paid his obeisance, Thakur beckons him to come nearer.

The musicians finish singing and the session comes to a close. The devotees stroll in the garden. Some of them go toward the temples of Mother Kali and Radhakanta to see the evening services[1].

When evening worship is over, the devotees return to Thakur's room.

They again arrange for the singing of hymns in Thakur's room. Thakur is full of enthusiasm. He says, "Bring a lamp." Two lamps light the room brightly.

Thakur says to Vijay, "Why are you sitting there? Move over here."

The tempo of the kirtan rises in crescendo. Thakur becomes intoxicated and begins to dance. The devotees surround him and also dance. Vijay's cloth drops off while he is dancing. He is not conscious of it.

When the song ends, Vijay looks for his key, which he had dropped somewhere. Thakur says, "A special divine sound resounds here." Saying this, he laughs and then says to Vijay, "Why bother about it?" (In other words, Vijay has nothing to do with keys anymore.)

Kishori salutes Thakur and takes his leave. Thakur, full of affection for him, touches his chest with his hand and says, "Do come again." His words are full of tenderness. After awhile Mani and Gopal come and salute him – they are also preparing to leave. Thakur speaks to them with the same

[1] Arati

affection, as if his words were dripping honey. He says, "Leave tomorrow morning. You may catch cold at night."

In the company of devotees

Mani and Gopal do not leave, but decide to stay the night. They sit on the floor with a couple of other devotees. After awhile, Sri Ramakrishna says to Ram Chakravarty, "Ram, where is the other foot mat that was here?"

Thakur has not had time to rest the whole day. Where could he go, leaving the devotees behind? Now he goes out for awhile. Returning to his room, he sees Mani writing down the words of a song being spoken by Ramlal.

Redeem me, O Redeeming Mother!

I am so afraid of Yama, the god of death.

Thakur asks Mani what he is writing. Being told that it is a particular song, he says, "This is a very long song."

Thakur takes a little farina pudding with one or two *luchis*[1] at night. He asks Ramlal, "Do you have any more farina pudding?"

Having written a line or two, Mani does not write any more of the words of the song.

Thakur, sitting on a small carpet on the floor, eats the pudding.

Then he returns to the smaller cot and sits there, while M. sits down on the foot mat lying near the cot and talks to him. When he talks about Narayan, Thakur becomes absorbed in divine emotion.

[1] Fried bread

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you see Narayan today?

M. — Yes sir. His eyes were full of tears. I felt like weeping when I saw his face.

Sri Ramakrishna — I feel the love a parent feels for his child[1] when I see him. They thrash him at home for coming here. He has nobody to defend him. [A song goes –]

> O Kubja[2], there is none who can make you understand.
>
> There is nobody to defend Radha.

M. (smiling) — The other day he left his books at Haripada's house and came here.

Sri Ramakrishna — It was not right for him to do that.

Thakur is silent. After awhile he talks again.

Sri Ramakrishna — You see, he has much substance in him. Otherwise, how could I have been drawn to him even though I was listening to the singing of hymns? I left the devotional singing to come to the room to see him – such a thing has never happened before.

Thakur is silent. After awhile he speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna — In a state of ecstasy, I asked him how he was. He just said, 'I am very happy.'

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[1] *Vatsalya*
[2] The hunchback woman

(To M.) Buy something for him to eat from time to time – feed him lovingly, as a son.

Sri Ramakrishna now talks about Tejchandra.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Ask him what he thinks of me – does he think of me as a jnani? I heard that Tejchandra is very reserved. (To Gopal) Look, tell Tejchandra to come here on Saturdays and Tuesdays.

Thakur is sitting on the floor, eating farina pudding. A lamp is burning on a lamp-stand close to him. M. is sitting close by. Thakur says, "Are there any sweets?" M. had brought sandesh made of fresh raw sugar. He says to Ramlal, "Some sandesh is lying on the shelf."

Sri Ramakrishna — Where is the sandesh? Bring it here.

M. looks on the shelf for the sandesh, rather confused. He does not find it there. It all seems to have been served to the devotees. Embarrassed, he comes back and sits again near Thakur. Thakur speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, I may visit your school once.

M. guesses that Thakur wants to visit the school to see Narayan. So, he says, "It would be all right for you to visit our home."

Sri Ramakrishna — No, I am thinking of something else. Do you know what? I want to see if there are other worthy boys in your school.

M. — You must certainly visit the school. Others visit, so you can also visit the school.

Having finished his meal, Thakur sits on the smaller cot. A devotee prepares a smoke for him. Thakur smokes. In the meantime M. and Gopal, still on the verandah, eat chapattis, lentils and other refreshments. They decide to sleep in the nahabat.

After the meal M. sits on the foot mat near the cot.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — If there are pots and pans in the nahabat, you may sleep in this room.

M. — Very well, sir.

Chapter V

With the attendant

It is ten or eleven at night. Thakur is resting on the smaller cot, leaning against a pillow. Mani is sitting on the floor while Thakur talks to him. A lamp is burning near the wall of the room on the lamp-stand mentioned before.

Thakur is the ocean of motiveless grace. He allows Mani to serve him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Look, my feet are aching. Can you massage them a little?

Mani sits next to Thakur's feet on the smaller cot and, taking his two feet on his lap, strokes them gently. Thakur talks to him every now and then.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — How did you like the conversation today?

Mani — Sir, it was very good.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Did you like the story about Emperor Akbar?

Mani — Yes, sir. It was very good.

Sri Ramakrishna — Tell me what you liked about it.

Mani — A fakir went to see Emperor Akbar while Akbar was offering Namaz. In his prayers he was asking the Lord for wealth and riches. Hearing this, the fakir tried to leave the room quietly. When asked by Akbar why he was leaving, he said, 'If I have to beg, why should I beg of a beggar?'

Sri Ramakrishna — And what else did we talk about?

Mani — We talked a lot about saving for the future.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did we say about saving for the future?

Mani — As long as one feels he should make an effort, he should make the effort. How nicely you told us about hoarding in Sinti!

Sri Ramakrishna — Tell me about it.

Mani — God takes upon himself the burden of one who depends on Him – like a guardian taking the whole burden of a minor. And this we heard: a young boy cannot find for himself a place to sit at a feast. Somebody else shows him a seat to partake of the feast.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, that isn't correct. When a father holds the hand of his son and leads him, the son does not fall.

Mani — And today you talked of three types of sadhus. A superior sadhu is one who does not move about seeking his food. You also talked of a young sadhu who, when he saw the breasts of a girl, said, 'Why does she have sores on her chest?' You also said many other wonderful things – these were the last things you talked about.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What were they?

Mani — One was the fable of the crow of Pampa lake. It repeated the name of Rama night and day, so when it went to the lake to quench its thirst, it couldn't drink the water. And about the book of a particular sadhu – only 'Om, Rama' was written on every page of the book. And also what Hanuman said to Rama.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did he say?

Mani — He said that he had come there after seeing Sita. But only her body was lying there; her

mind and soul were both surrendered at Rama's feet.

"And you also told the story of the chatak bird. It does not drink any water but pure water [of rain that falls at a particular conjunction of stars].

"And about Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga."

Sri Ramakrishna — What was that?

Mani — As long as one is conscious of 'the pot,' the idea that 'I am a pot' persists. As long as one is conscious of one's 'I,' one cherishes the idea, 'I am a devotee, You are Bhagavan.'

Sri Ramakrishna — No. Whether you are conscious of 'the pot' or not, 'the pot' continues to exist. The 'I' doesn't leave you. Reason it out a thousand times, one's 'ego' does not vanish.

Mani is silent for awhile. He again talks.

Mani — You had a conversation with Ishan Mukherji in the Kali Temple. I was very fortunate to be present to hear it.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Yes. Let me hear what we talked about.

Mani — You said that work is only the first chapter of human life. You asked Sambhu Mallick, 'Suppose the Lord appears before you, will you ask Him to provide hospitals and dispensaries?'

"And you said something else that was special – God doesn't reveal Himself as long as one is attached to work. You said this to Keshab Sen."

Sri Ramakrishna — What?

Mani — As long as a child sucks on a pacifier, forgetful of its mother, the latter finishes her cooking. But when the child throws the pacifier away and begins to cry, the mother takes the rice pot off the fire and goes to the child.

"And you talked about something else, too, that day. Lakshmana asked, 'Where can one see God?' After explaining in many ways, Rama said, 'Brother, when you see burning love and devotion[1] in a man – when he laughs, cries, dances and sings, intoxicated with ecstatic love – know that I dwell there.' "

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah! How beautiful!

Thakur is silent for awhile.

Mani — You talked to Ishan only about turning away from worldliness. Since then many people have gained some awareness and are inclined to reduce their duties. You said, 'Ravana died in Lanka while Behula cried her heart out[2].'

Thakur laughs loudly.

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[1] *Urjita bhakti*

[2] Behula was unrelated to Ravana and lived many years later. This saying shows how man gives way to totally irrelevant matters.

Mani (very humbly) — Well, sir, isn't it right to reduce one's duties and the hustle and bustle of life?

Sri Ramakrishna — But it is a different matter if you come across a sadhu or a poor man. You must serve him.

Mani — And that day you spoke rightly to Ishan about his flatterers – that they are like vultures falling on a carcass. You once said this to Pundit Padmalochan too.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, I said this to Vamandas of Ulo.

After awhile, Mani sits on the foot mat near the smaller cot.

Thakur feels sleepy. He says to Mani, "You may go and rest now. Where is Gopal? Please shut the door."

The next day is Monday. Sri Ramakrishna has left his bed very early in the morning to chant the holy names of the deities. Now and then he glances at the Ganges. The morning arati is being performed in the temples of Kali and Radhakanta. Mani has slept on the floor in Thakur's room. He, too, has left his bed to watch and hear the worships.

After his morning oblutions, he comes and sits near Thakur.

Thakur has finished his bath. He goes to the Kali Temple with Mani. Thakur asks him to lock the door of his room.

Reaching the Kali Temple, Thakur takes a seat. He offers flowers, sometimes on his own head, sometimes at the lotus feet of Mother Kali. He fans

the Mother with the *chamara*[1]. Then he returns to his room and asks Mani to unlock the door. He enters the room and sits down on the smaller cot. He is absorbed in divine ecstasy and repeats the holy name of the deity. Mani sits alone on the floor.

Now Thakur begins to sing. Intoxicated with divine emotion, is he trying to teach Mani, through the song, that Kali is none other than Brahman? And that Kali is both with attributes and without attributes? And She is without form and She is also with infinite forms?

Song – Is there anybody who knows Kali, She who is the consort of *Kala*[2]? Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her[3].

Song – All this is the sport of my mad Mother (whose maya[4] has deluded the three worlds). All this is the infallible secret play of that lady[5].

Song — O Kali, who can know You? You have infinite forms.

You are Supreme Knowledge, You are timeless and primeval; You are the breaker of the bonds of the world.

You are Shiva's consort. You enthrall the mind of Govinda. You are the bestower of divine knowledge and of salvation. You fulfill the desires of the mind.

You are Sri Radha who resides in the heart of Sri Krishna. You are the daughter of the mountains. O Sarada, grant us a boon.

Song – O Mother, the Redeemer, take me across quickly this time.

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[1] A fan made of the white hair from the tail of the chamari yak, used in Hindu ritual worship
[2] The Spirit of Eternity
[3] For complete song, see Section I, Chapter V of this volume
[4] Nescience
[5] For complete song, see Section XX, Chapter II of Volume II

I am dying in fear of the God of Death[1].

O, Mother of the Universe, preserver and enchantress of the world, and its begetter.

You took birth from Yashoda's womb and participated in the Lord's divine sport.

As Radha You sported and enjoyed Yourself in Vrindavan with Krishna, the beloved of Vraja.

Full of sweetness, You took delight in the rasa and participated in the divine sport.

You are Shiva's consort; You are the Mother, the heartthrob of Govinda. You dwell in the heart and give spiritual salvation.

You are eternal. You are Ishani, ever full of bliss; You assume all forms; You have attributes and yet You are attributeless. You are ever the beloved of Shiva. Who can know Your greatness?

Mani thinks to himself: If Thakur would only sing this song –

O Mother, I have seen Your crimson feet.

I shall now never forget You, even though You may try to trick me.

How wonderful! As soon as the idea of the song comes to M.'s mind, Thakur sings it. After some time Thakur asks M., "Well, what do you think of my present state of mind?"

Mani (smiling) — You are in your natural and simple state[2] of mind.

Thakur sings the refrain of a song –

Till one is simple at heart, one cannot reach God, the Simple One.

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[1] Yama
[2] Sahaja

Section XI

Sri Ramakrishna Attends a Play about Prahlada's Life

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi

Today Sri Ramakrishna has come to the Star Theatre to see a play about Prahlada's life. He is accompanied by M., Baburam, Narayan and others. The Star Theatre is on Beadon Street. (Later, the Emerald Theatre and Classic Theatre were performed on this stage.)

It is Sunday, 14 December 1884, the 30th of Agrahayana, the 12th day of the dark fortnight. Sri Ramakrishna is seated in a box facing north. The theatre is brightly lit. M., Baburam and Narayan are sitting close to Sri Ramakrishna. Girish has just come to the box. The play has not yet begun. Thakur speaks to Girish.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Ah! You write very good plays!

Girish — But sir, I have not internalized them. I have just written them.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, you have internalized them. The other day I told you that no one can sketch a divine character without love and devotion for God in his heart.

"Assimilation of spiritual truths is a must. I went to see the play '*Nava Vrindavan*' at Keshab's

house. A Deputy Magistrate who earned eight hundred rupees a month was present. Everybody said, 'He is well versed in the scriptures.' But he was extremely busy with his son – he was very anxious that the boy have a good seat and a nice view of the stage. He did not pay any attention to the spiritual talk that was going on. The son kept asking him questions: 'Father, What is this? What is that?' He was very restless because of the boy. He had only read books; he had not internalized their ideas."

Girish — At times I ask myself, 'Why should I engage myself with the theatre and its activities any more?'

Sri Ramakrishna — No, you must continue. Mankind will learn from your plays.

> The play starts. Prahlada has come to school to learn to read and write. At the sight of Prahlada, Thakur affectionately says, "Prahlada, oh, Prahlada!" And he immediately goes into samadhi.
>
> Thakur begins to weep when he sees Prahlada under the feet of an elephant. He again weeps when he sees Prahlada thrown into a furnace.
>
> Lakshmi and Narayana are seated in Goloka[1]. Narayana is worried about Prahlada. Watching this scene, Thakur again goes into samadhi.

[1] The heavenly abode of Vishnu

Chapter II

Talk on spiritual matters with the devotees

Signs of God-realization and the way to know God – three classes of devotees

After the play is over, Thakur is taken to Girish's private room in the theatre. Girish asks him, "Would you care to see the play 'Confusion in Marriage'?" Thakur says, "No, why see that after Prahlada's life? I once said to a troupe of actors from Orissa, 'End a performance with religious talk.' It was so nice to hear about God. That it should be followed by 'Confusion in Marriage!' Such a worldly topic! It would take us back to where we started – we would return to our original attitude in the end."

Thakur is talking of God with Girish and other devotees. Girish asks him, "Sir, how did you like the play?"

Sri Ramakrishna — I saw that He Himself had become all of it. I saw the actors in the play as the very presence of the All-Blissful Mother. I saw the actors playing the parts of the cowherds in Goloka as the manifestation of Narayana Himself. He Himself had become all. But whether or not one has genuinely seen God is indicated by certain signs. One such sign is that one is in bliss – he shows no hesitancy. Such a person is like an ocean that has waves on its surface, but deep, still waters below. He who has attained the vision of God acts sometimes like a mad man and sometimes like an unclean spirit[1]. He doesn't distinguish between purity and impurity. Sometimes he acts like an

[1] *Pisacha*

inert object, for he becomes speechless when he sees God both within and without. Sometimes he is like a child wandering around freely with no attachment, [naked] with his cloth under his arm. He sometimes frolics like a boy, at other times he conducts himself as a young man, working or teaching mankind with the strength of a lion.

"An embodied being[1] cannot see the Lord because of his ego. When the sky is overcast, one cannot see the sun. But because one cannot see the sun does not mean that there is no sun. The sun certainly exists.

"But there is no harm in the ego of a child; on the contrary, it is beneficial. If you eat spinach greens you may fall ill, but hinche[2] leaves are good for the health. So hinche should not be considered in the same category as spinach greens. Sugar candy, similarly, should not to be thought of as an ordinary sweet. Sweets bring indigestion, but sugar candy does not produce phlegm.

"That is why I said to Keshab Sen, 'If I tell you more than I have already said, you will not be able to hold your organization together.' Keshab was frightened. Then I said to him, 'There is no harm in the 'ego of a child,' or the 'ego of a servant'.'

"Those who have realized God see that it is God who has become the universe and its living beings. He has become all. They are superior devotees."

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[1] Jiva
[2] A kind of aquatic plant eaten as leaves

Girish (smiling) — God has become all – but a little ego persists that is not harmful.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Right, there is no harm in it. This little bit of ego exists to enjoy God. It is only when there is the distinction between me and you that one can enjoy – like in the attitude of the Master and the servant.

"And then there are mediocre devotees. They see that God exists in everyone as the Inner Controller[1]. The devotee of the lowest class says, 'God exists. He dwells there, beyond, in the sky.' (All laugh.)

"When I saw the cowherd boys in Goloka, I felt that God had become everything. He who has seen Him knows truly that God Himself is the doer, that He indeed does everything."

Girish — Sir, I have understood that well, that it is indeed God who does everything.

Sri Ramakrishna — I say, 'Mother, I am an instrument and You are the Being who uses the instrument. I am inert and You make me conscious. I act as You make me act. I speak as You make me speak.' The ignorant man says, 'I am responsible for doing some actions and God is responsible for others.' "

[1] *Antaryami*

Karma Yoga purifies one's mind-stuff[1] – why harp on sin? *Ahetuki*[2] devotion

Girish — Sir, since I am not really doing anything (it is God who works), why should I work at all?

Sri Ramakrishna — No, my dear, work is good. If you have prepared the soil, it will grow whatever you sow in it. But work must be performed without any expectation of reward[3].

"There are two kinds of paramahamsas: one follows the path of jnana, the other follows the path of intense love for God[4]. Jnanis are self-seeking – their goal is their own realization. The paramahamsa who follows the path of love, like Shukadeva, first attains God and then teaches mankind. There are some who wipe their mouths after eating a mango, and then there are those who share it with others. There are people who bring baskets and spades to dig a shallow well, and when they have dug it, they throw the spades and baskets in the well. There are others who save their baskets and spades so that others of the community may use them. Shukadeva and others like him preserve their 'baskets and spades' for the use of others. (To Girish) You must keep them for the use of others."

Girish — Please bless me, sir.

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[1] Chitta
[2] Love for God that wells up unbidden out of the depths of the immortal soul
[3] *Nishkama* karma
[4] Prema

Sri Ramakrishna — Have faith in the name of the Divine Mother and you will attain everything.

Girish — But I am a sinner.

Sri Ramakrishna — The rascal who repeats, 'Sin, sin,' becomes a sinner.

Girish — Sir, the spot where I sit becomes impure.

Sri Ramakrishna — What do you mean? If a light is brought into a room that has been dark for a thousand years, does it take long to light the room? Is it not illuminated immediately?

Girish — You have blessed me.

Sri Ramakrishna — If you believe it sincerely. What more can I say? As for me, I merely eat, drink and repeat the Divine Mother's name.

Girish — I am not so sincere. Please give me sincerity.

Sri Ramakrishna — Who am I? Had there been Narada or Shukadeva...

Girish — I cannot see Narada before me. What I receive comes directly from you.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Well, you have faith!

Everyone remains silent for awhile. Now they begin to talk again.

Girish — I have only one special desire: spontaneous love for God[1].

Sri Ramakrishna — Only Ishvarakotis have such love. It is not for ordinary men.

Everyone sits silently. Thakur begins to sing absent-mindedly. His gaze is turned upward.

Does everyone attain the treasure of Shyama? Does everyone get the treasure of Kali?

The ignorant mind does not know what She is.

Even Shiva with all his austerities cannot fix his mind on Her crimson feet.

The riches and wealth of Indra and the other gods is a trifle compared to Her love.

If Mother Shyama turns to one and casts Her glance, one lives in eternal Bliss.

The kings of yogis, the best of munis, and Indra are unable to meditate on Her feet.

But the worthless Kamalakanta still yearns for Her feet.

Girish — But the worthless Kamalakanta still yearns for Her feet.

Chapter III

The way to realize God – yearn for Him

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — One attains God when one has developed intense dispassion[2]. One's heart and soul must yearn for Him. A disciple

[1] *Ahetuki bhakti*
[2] Vairagya

asked his guru how he could attain God. The guru told him to come with him. He took him to a pond and held him under water. After awhile he released him and asked, 'How did you feel under water?' The disciple answered, 'I was panting for breath – as though I were going to die!' The guru said, 'Now listen, you will attain God when your heart and soul are just as restless for Him.'

"So I say that God can be attained when one combines the force of these three attractions: the worldly man's attraction for his possessions, the chaste wife's attraction for her husband, and the attraction of a mother for her child. One immediately attains the vision of God when one loves Him with the combined force of these three attractions.

> Call on Mother Shyama, O my mind, with a real cry!
>
> I shall see then that She will not hold Herself from me.

"God will certainly grant His vision if you call on Him with real longing."

Harmony of Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga – bhakti according to Narada enjoined for the age of Kali

"The other day I told you the meaning of bhakti – to worship God with your body, mind and speech. 'With the body' means to worship and serve Him with your hands, to go to His shrine with your feet, to hear the chanting of His name and glories with your ears, and to see His image with your eyes. 'With the mind' means to contemplate and meditate on Him constantly, and to remember and think

about His divine sport. 'With speech' means to sing hymns and chant His name and glories.

"Bhakti, according to Narada, is suited for the age of Kali: One must constantly chant His name and glories. Those who have no time should single-mindedly chant His name morning and evening, repeating, 'Haribol[1], Haribol,' while clapping their hands.

"There is no pride in the ego of devotion[2]. It does not create ignorance; on the contrary, it helps one to realize God. This ego is not to be counted as an ordinary ego – just as hinche greens are not ordinary greens, which make you ill. By eating hinche leaves, one is cured of an excess of bile[3] – it does one good. Sugar candy is not like ordinary sweets. Sweets are generally harmful, but sugar candy removes acidity.

"Single-minded devotion[4] leads to love for God. When love for God matures, one goes into bhava[5]. When it becomes intense, one goes into Mahabhava[6]. And lastly one develops prema[7].

"Prema is a cord which ties one to the Lord – He cannot escape when one develops prema. An ordinary man can only attain bhava. Only an *Ishvarakoti* can have Mahabhava and prema. Chaitanyadeva attained it.

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[1] A Vaishnava expression meaning "Chant the Lord's name"
[2] Bhakti
[3] One of the humours of the body, namely pitta
[4] Nishtha bhakti
[5] Ecstasy
[6] Highest manifestation of divine love
[7] A state in which the devotee forgets the world and his own body

"What is Jnana Yoga? It is the path by which one realizes the nature of one's own real Self – the awareness that Brahman is one's own real Self.

"Prahlada would sometimes be aware of his identity with Brahman; at other times, he would see God as one Being and himself as another – in the latter state he would remain in a mood of love and devotion for God.

"Hanuman said, 'O Rama, sometimes I see that You are the whole and I a part of You. At other times I see that You are the Lord and I am Your servant. But Rama, when I attain the knowledge of Reality[1], I perceive that You are indeed I and I am You.' "

Girish — Ah!

Can one attain God even in family life?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why can't one attain God in family life! But one must develop discrimination[2] and non-attachment[3]. The Lord is the Reality and all else is ephemeral – for two days only. This idea must become firmly established in the mind. Swimming on the surface will not do. One must dive deep.

Saying this, Thakur sings –

Dive deep, dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the sea of Beauty.

Search the deepest regions in the sea;

[1] Tattvajnana
[2] Viveka
[3] Vairagya

> There you will find the jewel, the wealth of prema (intense love of God).
>
> Within your heart is Vrindavan, the abode of God who is love.
>
> Search and look; search and look; search and look. You will find it.
>
> Then shall burn without ceasing the lamp of divine wisdom.
>
> Who is that Being who steers the boat on land – on land, on solid ground?
>
> Kabir says, 'Listen, listen, listen! Meditate on the hallowed feet of the Guru (Divine preceptor).'

"And then one must remember this – there is the danger of the crocodiles of lust and the other passions."

Girish — But I am not afraid of Yama, the god of death.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, but there is the danger of crocodiles – of lust and the rest. That is why one must first rub one's body with turmeric and then dive – that turmeric is discrimination and non-attachment.

"Only a few attain the knowledge of God[1] in family life. Two kinds of yogis are mentioned: the hidden yogi and the visible yogi. Those who have renounced the world are visible yogis; everyone can recognize them. The hidden yogi cannot be recognized. For example, a maidservant attends to all the work at her master's house, but her mind

[1] Jnana

remains on her children at home. And then as I told you, a woman of easy virtue attends to all her household chores with great enthusiasm – but her mind remains attached to her paramour. It is very difficult to cultivate discrimination and non-attachment. One cannot easily get rid of the feeling 'I am the doer and all these belong to me'. I saw a Deputy Magistrate who earned a salary of eight hundred rupees a month. A religious discourse was being conducted, but he did not pay the least attention to it. He had brought his son with him and was busy the entire time arranging a good seat for him. And I know another man, I shall not name him, who used to repeat the name of God diligently, but gave false evidence for ten thousand rupees. That is why I say that it is possible to attain God even in the world – but only if you cultivate discrimination and non-attachment."

Sinners and afflicted, and Sri Ramakrishna

Girish — What will happen to this sinner [meaning himself]?

Thakur fixes his gaze upward and begins to sing this tune in a touching manner –

O my mind! Contemplate Krishna**,** who gives beauty to man.

You will completely get rid of the fear of Yama.

By contemplating Him, all anxieties and worries of the world vanish.

They who meditate on Tribhanga (the thrice-bent one, Krishna) cross the waves of the world in the twinkling of an eye.

Why have you come to this earth, O my mind?

> What will you gain by infusing bad inclinations and defiling your heart?
>
> Says Dasharathi, it is not right that He will drown you.
>
> He who unites his heart with His attains the eternal feet of the Lord.

(To Girish) — 'Cross the waves of the world in the twinkling of an eye.'

Worship of Mahamaya, the Primordial Power, and the power of attorney

"One attains the vision of God only when Mahamaya[1] steps aside from the door. What you need is the grace of Mahamaya. That is why God's Power[2] is worshipped. You see, God is so very near, and yet one does not know Him because Mahamaya stands between. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were walking along [in the forest during their exile]. Rama was leading, Sita was in the middle and Lakshmana was behind her. Rama was only two and a half cubits away, yet Lakshmana could not see him.

"One must cherish a particular attitude toward God while worshipping Him. I have three attitudes: the attitude of a child, the attitude of a maidservant, and the attitude of a female lover of the Lord[3]. I had the attitude of a maidservant and of a female companion for a long time. I used to dress myself like a woman in a sari and scarf, and I

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[1] The Great Power of illusion, or nescience
[2] Shakti
[3] Sakhi bhava

used to put on jewelry. The attitude of a child is very good.

"The 'heroic' attitude (of a lover) is not good. The shaven-headed Vaishnava monks and nuns[1], and couples in Tantrik worship[2] practice the 'heroic' attitude – in other words, the male aspirant looks upon the female as Prakriti, and tries to please her through intercourse with her. This kind of attitude often brings a downfall."

Girish — I had the same attitude once.

Thakur is worried and looks seriously at Girish.

Girish — This is my little obstacle. Please tell me what to do.

Sri Ramakrishna (after thinking for awhile) — Give God your general power of attorney. Let Him do what He wills.

Chapter IV

God-realization comes after developing sattva guna – Sat-chit-ananda[3] or bliss of divine inebriation[4]

Sri Ramakrishna is talking about the young boy devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish and others) — In meditation I saw the traits of the young devotees.

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[1] *Nedas* and *nedis*
[2] Bhairavas and Bhairavis
[3] Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute
[4] *Karanananda*

They have no thought of owning a house; they have no desire to enjoy female companionship. Even those who are married don't sleep with their wives. Do you know what that means? Unless one is rid of rajas and attains pure sattva, the mind does not become fixed on God. And one does not feel love for Him. Nor can one realize Him.

Girish — You have blessed me.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is that? I only said that you would succeed if you were sincere.

While talking, Thakur exclaims, "Anandamayi[1]! Anandamayi!" and passes into samadhi. He remains in that state for a long time. Returning to a somewhat normal state of consciousness, he says, "Where are those rascals?" M. calls Baburam to him.

Glancing at Baburam and the other devotees, Thakur becomes intoxicated with ecstatic love and says, "The bliss of Sat-chit-ananda is indeed good, but what about the bliss of divine inebriation?" Saying this, he begins to sing –

This time I have given my full attention.

I have learned divine fervour[2] from one well-versed in it.

O Mother, I have found a man from the country which has no night.

And now I can no longer distinguish day and night.

I have rendered barren all ritualistic devotions.

My sleep is broken. Why should I sleep anymore?

I am awake in the sacrifice of yoga.

[1] All-Blissful Divine Mother
[2] Bhava

Having received the sleep of yoga from You, I have put sleep to sleep.

I have given myself permanent colour with the help of borax and sulphur[1].

Both eyes brush the floor of the temple of my mind.

Says Ramprasad: Knowing the truth that Kali is the Supreme Brahman,

I bowed before both bhakti and salvation, and gave up all ideas of what is righteousness[2] and what is unrighteousness[3].

Thakur sings another song –

What need is there of going to the Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi and Kanchi if the lips can utter 'Kali, Kali' when my life ebbs away?

He who utters Kali in all the three sandhyas[4] needs no daily ritualistic worship.

Worship itself follows his footsteps but can never overtake him.

Charity, kindness and vows no longer appeal to him.

For Madan, the poet, all worship means the red feet of the Blissful Mother.

Who can know the qualities of the holy name of Kali,

The praises of which are sung by the God of gods, Mahadeva Himself?

"While praying to the Divine Mother, I used to say to Her, 'Mother, I want nothing else. Pray grant me pure love and devotion[5].' "

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[1] Borax and sulphur render paint permanent
[2] Dharma
[3] Adharma
[4] At dawn, noon and twilight hour
[5] Bhakti

Thakur is happy to see Girish in a calm mood. He says to him, "This mood of yours is very good. Such a simple and natural[1] mood is best."

Thakur is seated in the room of the manager of the theatre. Somebody enters and asks him, "Would you like to see the play 'Confusion in Marriage'? The play is beginning now."

Thakur says to Girish, "What have you done? Why did you stage a play 'Confusion in Marriage' after 'Life of Prahlada'? It is like serving a bitter vegetable dish[2] after serving cheese pudding."

Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of motiveless grace, and women of easy virtue

At the end of the play, Girish instructs the actresses to come and salute Thakur. They all prostrate before him. Some devotees stand nearby, others are sitting as they watch. They are amazed that some of the actresses touch Thakur's feet. When they do, Thakur says, full of tenderness, "Mother, please stop. Please don't do that, Mother."

When they have saluted him and left, Thakur says to the devotees, "All indeed are God in different forms."

Now Thakur gets into the carriage. Girish and other devotees accompany him and help him sit down.

While getting in, Thakur becomes absorbed in deep samadhi.

Narayan and some other devotees also get into the carriage. It leaves for Dakshineswar.

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[1] Sahaja

[2] Prepared with bitter gourd and other vegetables without adding spices and served in Bengal prior to meals

Section XII

Sri Ramakrishna with the Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar with devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is happy in the company of the devotees. Baburam, the Younger Naren, Paltu, Haripada and a few others are seated on the floor. A young brahmin who has been staying with Sri Ramakrishna for two or three days is also there. It is Saturday, 7 March 1885, 25th day of Phalgun; the time is about 3 o' clock. It is the 7th day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra

The Holy Mother is living in the nahabat these days. Occasionally she comes to Sri Ramakrishna's room to serve him. Mohini Mohan has arrived by hired carriage with his wife and Navin Babu's mother.

The ladies have gone to the nahabat to have the darshan of the Holy Mother and salute her. They have stayed there. They will pay their obeisance to Sri Ramakrishna when the male devotees have gone. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot. As he looks at the young devotees, his face beams with joy.

Rakhal is not living in Dakshineswar at the present time. He had been in Vrindaban with Balaram for some months. Since his return, he lived at home.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Rakhal is on 'pension' these days. Since his return from

Vrindaban, he has been staying at home. His wife is there. But he says, 'I will not take a job, even if I am paid a thousand rupees a month.'

"One day when he was resting here he said, 'I don't even like you.' Such was the exalted state of his mind then.

"Bhavanath is married, but he only talks of spiritual matters with his wife.

"Both of them pass their time talking about God. When I said to him, 'Have fun with your wife,' he spoke sharply in anger, 'What! Shall we live a life of frivolity?' "

Sri Ramakrishna is now talking about Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna to the devotees — I haven't felt the same strong longing for the Younger Naren that I have for Narendra. But the Younger Naren doesn't have as much yearning as Narendra has.

(To Haripada) "Do you go to Girish Ghosh's house?"

Haripada — His house is quite close to ours. I often go there.

Sri Ramakrishna — Does Narendra go?

Haripada — Yes, sometimes I see him there.

Sri Ramakrishna — What is his opinion of Girish Ghosh's view (about Divine Incarnation)?

Haripada — He (Narendra) was defeated in arguement.

Sri Ramakrishna — No. He said, 'Girish Ghosh has so much faith, why should I argue with him?'

The brother of Judge Anukul Mukhopadhaya's son-in-law has arrived.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you know Narendra?

The brother of the son-in-law — Yes sir. Narendra is an intelligent boy.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Since he has praise for Narendra, he himself must be a good man. Narendra came the other day. He and Trailokya sang, but I found their songs insipid.

Baburam and guarding 'both the worldly and the spiritual' – go beyond knowledge and ignorance

Sri Ramakrishna looks at Baburam and speaks. Baburam is in the entrance class (tenth) in the school where M. is teaching.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Baburam) — Where are your books? Don't you want to study? (To M.) He wants to cling to both the worldly and the spiritual.

"This is very difficult. What use is it to know God only a little? Even Vaishishtha, though a rishi, suffered at the death of his son. Seeing this, Lakshmana was surprised and asked Rama about it. Rama said, 'Brother, what is strange? He who has knowledge also has ignorance.' When a thorn is

embedded in your foot, you have to look for another thorn to pull out the first one. Having done that, you should throw away both thorns. The thorn of jnana is needed to get rid of the thorn of ignorance. And then you should go beyond both."

Baburam (laughing) — That's what I want.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — But my boy, can you do it while holding to both? If you really want that, come away.

Baburam (laughing) — Pull me away.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — It was different when Rakhal was here. His father had agreed to it. It would create such a disturbance if these boys lived here.

(To Baburam) "You are faint-hearted. You don't have enough courage. Just see what the younger Naren says – that he would come again immediately."

Now Sri Ramakrishna goes and sits with the young devotees on a mat spread on the floor. M. is nearby.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I am looking for one who has renounced lust and greed. When I find some young man, I think that perhaps he might stay with me, but everyone has an excuse.

"A ghost was looking for a companion. If a person dies an unnatural death on Saturday or Tuesday, he becomes a ghost. So, as soon as this

ghost saw that somebody had fallen from the roof or had swooned on one of these days, he would run to him, hoping that the fellow, through an unnatural death, would turn into a ghost and keep him company. But as luck would have it, he saw each one of them survive. He did not find a companion.

"Just see, Rakhal is always talking about his wife. He says, 'What will happen to her?' When I put my hand on Narendra's chest, he half fainted and said, 'Oh! What have you done to me? I have my father and mother!'

"Why has the Divine Mother kept me in this state? Chaitanyadeva embraced sannyasa – so that everybody would pay him obeisance. Whoever salutes an Incarnation, even once, is liberated."

Mohini Mohan has brought some sandesh in a straw container for Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna — To whom does this sandesh belong?

Baburam pointed to Mohini Mohan.

Sri Ramakrishna utters "Om," and touches the sandesh; then he eats a little of it, transforming it into prasad, and gives it to the devotees. To everyone's surprise, he feeds Naren and a couple of other devotees with his own hand.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — This has significance. The Lord is more manifest in pure souls. When I used to go to the countryside (Kamarpukur), I would feed some of the boys in this way. Chiney Shankhari would say, 'Why doesn't he feed us that way?' How could I? Some of them had affairs with

their brother's wife or some other women. How could I feed them?

Chapter II

His great word about devotees in samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna is swimming in a sea of joy with his devotees around. He sits on the small cot and imitates the manners of a woman kirtan singer[1]. The woman singer is in her best dress. She stands, holding a coloured handkerchief in her hand, and coughs as if it were natural and then spits, raising her nose ring. When any important person comes in, she welcomes him, "Come in please," while still singing. At times she raises her arms and uncovers her amulet, armlet, bracelet and other jewelry for everyone to see.

Seeing Sri Ramakrishna's imitation, all the devotees burst into laughter. Paltu can't control his laughter. Thakur looks at him and says to M., "Isn't he a child? He is beside himself with laughter!"

Sri Ramakrishna (to Paltu, laughing) — Don't tell your father all this. What little regard he has for me will disappear. He is an 'Englishman[2]'.

Gossip during japa and dip in the Ganges

(To the devotees) "So many talk about worldly things during their daily prayers and devotions.

"Without uttering a word, keeping their mouths shut, they speak by signs: bring this, take

[1] Kirtaniya
[2] He means English educated

that away, 'Uh, Huh'. They do all these kinds of things. (Laughter.)

"And some bargain for fish with fishermen while counting their beads. Doing japa, with a finger they point out a particular fish. A ripe time indeed to settle their accounts! (All laugh.)

"Some of them go for a bath in the Ganges, but instead of thinking of God, they gossip about different worldly matters: 'Your son has been married, what jewelry did they give as a dowry?… So-and-so is very ill... Has so-and-so returned from her father in-law's house?… So-and-so came to see the girl (for matrimonial purposes). She would give a lot in dowry and have a very festive wedding ceremony... Harish is such a loving boy. He can't live without me for even a moment... I couldn't come these many days because I had to settle the marriage of such-and-such girl. I was so busy, you see.' All this gossip.

"Just see, they have come for a holy dip in the Ganges and talk only about worldly things."

Sri Ramakrishna looks steadily at Naren and soon goes into samadhi. Is he seeing the presence of God in a pure soul?

The devotees watch Sri Ramakrishna, this image of samadhi. There had been so much laughter, but now the room is still, as if no one were there. His body is motionless, his eyes fixed, and he is sitting with folded hands, as in a picture.

After awhile his samadhi breaks. His breathing had stopped; now he heaves a long sigh. Slowly he gains external consciousness. He looks at the devotees.

He is still in ecstasy. He addresses each devotee to some extent – about his state of mind, or what he will attain. (To the Younger Naren) "I had great longing to see you. You will attain the goal. Do come here once in awhile. Well, what do you prefer? Knowledge, or love and devotion for God[1]?"

The Younger Naren — Only love and devotion for God.

Sri Ramakrishna — To whom will he offer his love, if he doesn't know Him? (Pointing at M. and laughing) If you don't know him, how can you offer him your love? (To M.) But since a pure soul has said that he wants only love and devotion, it certainly has some meaning.

"Without inborn tendencies[2], love and devotion for God does not come spontaneously. This is the mark of prema-bhakti. Jnana-bhakti is love of God based on reasoning. (To the Younger Naren) Let me see your body. Take off your shirt. Let me see. If your chest is fairly broad, you will succeed. Do come here now and then."

Sri Ramakrishna is still in divine ecstasy. He affectionately addresses each devotee, saying –

(To Paltu) "You, too, will succeed spiritually. But it will take a little more time."

(To Baburam) "Why don't I pull you here? Because it would create a row in the end.

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[1] Bhakti
[2] Samskaras

(To Mohini Mohan) "You are already there. Only a little remains. When that is done, all household duties will fall off. But should all of them fall off?"

Saying this, Thakur looks affectionately at him, as if to read the feelings of the innermost recesses of his mind. Was Mohini Mohan thinking that one should give up everything for the sake of God? After awhile Sri Ramakrishna adds, "God keeps a teacher of the holy word[1] tied by a single string. Otherwise, who would propagate the holy word? He keeps this bond to enable him to teach humanity. The Divine Mother has kept you in the world just for this."

Now he addresses the young brahmin.

Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga – the state of the Brahmajnani and that of the liberated in this very life

Sri Ramakrishna (to the young man) — Give up knowledge and reasoning. Take up bhakti instead. Bhakti is the essence. Have you already been here for three days?

The Young Brahmin (folding his hands) — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Have faith. Depend on Her. Having done this, you will not have to do anything. Mother Kali will do everything.

"Knowledge can go to the outer gate. But love and devotion can enter the palace. The pure soul is unattached. He has both knowledge and ignorance within him, but he is not attached to either. There is fragrance in the air, sometimes good and

[1] The Bhagavata Pundit

sometimes foul, but the air is free from both. Vyasadeva was going to cross the Jamuna. The milkmaids came to the same crossing. They had to go to the other side to sell curds, milk and butter, but there was no boat. How were they to cross? They were standing there wondering how they could cross.

"Just then Vyasadeva said, 'I am very hungry.' The milkmaids fed him with milk, cream, and butter. Vyasadeva finished almost all they had.

"Addressing the river Jamuna, Vyasadeva then said, 'Oh Jamuna! If I have not eaten anything, may your waters part and make a path for us to cross over.' And this is exactly what happened. The Jamuna divided itself, leaving a path between the waters. Vyasadeva and the gopis crossed over the river by this path.

"The significance of Vyasadeva's words, that he had eaten nothing, is that he was a pure soul and the pure soul is unattached – it is beyond nature. It has neither hunger nor thirst, neither birth nor death; it is deathless, it never grows old – like mount Sumeru.

"He who has attained this knowledge of Brahman is liberated in this very life. He rightly realizes that the body and the Soul are separate.

"After God-realization one's identification with the body disappears. One realizes that the body and the Soul are separate – like a dry coconut. When the milk inside it dries up, the kernel becomes separate from the shell. The Atman continues to move about in the body. As soon as the water of

worldliness dries up, one realizes the Self – one knows that the Atman is separate from the body. An unripe betel nut and an unripe almond cannot be separated from their shells.

"But when they are mature, the betel nut and the almond are separate from their shells. When ripe, the juice is dried up. Similarly, on realizing Brahman, the water of worldliness dries up.

"But this knowledge is very difficult to attain. Brahmajnana is not attained by just talking. Some people pretend to have attained it. (Laughing) A certain person used to tell lies, but he said, 'I have attained Brahmajnana.' When reprimanded, he retorted, 'But why not? This world is like a dream. If it is all illusion, is the truth otherwise? Falsehood is, of course, false – but truthfulness is also false.' " (All laugh.)

Chapter III

For establishment of righteousness, I am born age after age[1] – a mystic talk

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with his devotees on a mat spread on the floor. He is smiling. He says to the devotees, "Please stroke my feet a little." The devotees render him this service. (Laughing to M.) "This service has great significance."

Placing his hand on his chest, he continues, "If there is anything here, this service will erase all ignorance and illusion completely."

Then suddenly he goes into a profound mood – perhaps he will reveal a mystic experience.

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[1] Dharmasaṁsthapanārthāya sambhavāami yuge yuge (Gita 4 : 8)

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — There is no outsider here. The other day when Harish was here, I saw Sat-chit-ananda come out of this sheathe[1]. It said, 'I incarnate myself age after age.' I thought perhaps I was giving vent to my own thoughts, but I kept silent. Again Sat-chit-ananda spoke and said that Chaitanya had also worshipped Shakti.

The devotees listen to Sri Ramakrishna in amazement. Some of them wonder whether God – Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute – is Himself seated before them in the form of Sri Ramakrishna, whether God has once again incarnated Himself.

Addressing M., Sri Ramakrishna says, "I saw His perfect and full manifestation. But His supreme splendour was manifested through the quality of sattva."

The devotees are speechless with wonder as they listen to him.

Yogamaya – the Primordial Power – and the worldly sport of the avatar

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I said to the Mother (of the Universe), 'I can no longer talk much.' And I said, 'Grant, Oh Mother, that a person may attain awakening by just a touch.' Such is the supreme power of Yogamaya, She can perform this magic. In Her sport in Vrindavan, Yogamaya performed this magical feat. It was by Her power that Subol brought Radha to meet Krishna. Yogamaya – that is, Primeval Power – has this power to attract. I have made use of the same power.

[1] Sri Ramakrishna's body

"Well, do you think they who come here gain something?"

M. — Yes, sir. Why else would they come?

Sri Ramakrishna — How do you know?

M. (laughing) — Everybody says, 'Whoever goes to him never returns to the world.'

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — A big frog fell into the clutches of a non-poisonous snake. The snake could neither swallow it nor let it go. The frog suffered such pain – it croaked continuously. This was pain from a non-poisonous snake. Had it been caught by a cobra, it would have quieted down after a single croak. (All laugh.)

(To the young boy devotees) "Please read the book by Trailokya called *Bhakti Chaitanya Chandrika*. Get a copy from him. It contains beautiful facts about Chaitanyadeva."

A Particular Devotee — Will he give it to us?

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Why not? If there is a big crop of green melons in the field, the farmer can easily give away two or three. (All laugh.) Why won't he give it to you?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Paltu) — Come here now and then.

Paltu — I shall come to visit you whenever possible.

Sri Ramakrishna — Come and see me in Calcutta when I go there.

Paltu — I shall try.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is the answer of a calculating mind.

Paltu — If I didn't say that I would try, it would have been a lie.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I don't think they lie in what they say. They are not free (to move at will).

Sri Ramakrishna is talking to Haripada.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Haripada) — Why doesn't Mahendra Mukherji come?

Haripada — I'm not quite sure.

M. (laughing) — He practices jnana yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna — No. The other day he promised to send his carriage for us to see (the play) 'the Life of Prahlada'. But he didn't. Maybe that is why he doesn't come.

M. — One day he went to see Mahima Chakravarty and talked with him. It seems that he often visits him.

Sri Ramakrishna — But why? Mahima also talks of love and devotion to God. How nicely he chants the

hymn, 'What is the need of austerities if God is worshipped with love?'

M. (laughing) — He [Mahima] repeats the hymn when you ask him to.

Girish Ghosh has just begun to visit Sri Ramakrishna. These days he talks of nothing but Sri Ramakrishna.

Hari — Girish Ghosh sees many visions these days. When he leaves this place, he remains absorbed in spiritual moods – and he sees many things.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is possible. When one goes to the Ganges, one sees many things: boats, ships and what not.

Hari — Girish Ghosh says, 'I will now engage myself only in work. I will sit down with pen and ink at a certain time every morning. And the whole day keep writing.' He says this, but he can't do it. As soon as he sees us, he only talks about you. You asked for Narendra to be brought here. Girish Babu said, 'I will arrange a carriage for him.'

It is now five. The Younger Naren is going home. Standing alone on the long northeastern verandah, Sri Ramakrishna is giving him various instructions. After some time, the Younger Naren salutes Thakur and leaves. Many other devotees also leave.

Sitting on the smaller cot, Sri Ramakrishna talks with Mohini. Mohini's wife has almost gone mad because of the death of her son. She laughs, then she cries. But when she comes to Dakshineswar to see Sri Ramakrishna, she becomes peaceful.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is your wife?

Mohini — She becomes peaceful here. But at home she sometimes makes a terrible disturbance. The other day she wanted to commit suicide.

Hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna worries for some time. Mohini says humbly to him, "Do please say a word or two to her."

Sri Ramakrishna — Don't let her cook. It heats the brain. And she must not be left alone.

Chapter IV

The strange state of sannyasa of Sri Ramakrishna – conversation with Tarak

It is already dusk. Preparations are being made for arati in the temple. A lamp has been lit and incense burnt in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Sitting on the smaller cot, Thakur has offered obeisance to the Mother of the Universe and is chanting Her Name. There is no one in the room except M.

Sri Ramakrishna rises, so does M. too. Pointing at the western and the northern doors of the room, Thakur says to M., "Please shut those doors." M. shuts the doors and goes to Sri Ramakrishna, who is on the verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "I would like to go to Kali's shrine." Saying this, he holds M.'s hand. Leaning on him, he reaches the platform of Kali's shrine. Before sitting down, he says to M, "Please call Baburam." M. fetches Baburam.

Having had the darshan of Kali, Sri Ramakrishna now returns to his room, walking

through the middle of the extensive courtyard. He chants, "Mother, Mother Rajarajeshvari."

Returning to his room, Sri Ramakrishna sits down on his small cot. He is in a particularly strange state of mind. He cannot touch anything metal. He says, "It seems that the Divine Mother is taking my mind completely off material riches." He takes water in an earthen vessel. Since he cannot touch the metallic pot used for washing, he has asked the devotees to bring an earthen pot. The moment he touches a metal pot or plate, his hand aches as if pricked by a horned fish.

Prasanna has brought a number of utensils; they are very small. Laughing, Sri Ramakrishna says, "The utensils are very small, but this boy is good. He stripped naked in front of me when I asked him to. How childlike!"

The devotee and woman; beware, sadhu

Tarak of Belgharia and a friend have arrived.

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot. A lamp is burning in the room. A couple of devotees are there, including M.

Tarak is married. His parents don't allow him to visit Sri Ramakrishna. His home is in Bowbazar, Calcutta. Tarak stays at home most of the time. Sri Ramakrishna is very fond of him. Tarak's companion is somewhat lazy (tamasic). He is inclined to ridicule religion and Sri Ramakrishna. Tarak is about 27 years old. When he arrives, Tarak prostrates before Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Tarak's friend) — Why don't you go to see the temple?

Tarak's Friend — I have already seen it.

Sri Ramakrishna — All right. What do you think of Tarak's visiting here?

Tarak's Friend — You know best.

Sri Ramakrishna (pointing at M.) — He is a headmaster.

Tarak's Friend — Oh!

Sri Ramakrishna makes polite enquiries of Tarak and talks to him about a lot of things. After a long spiritual talk, Tarak wants to leave. Sri Ramakrishna cautions him about several things.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Tarak) — Beware, sadhu! Beware of 'lust and greed'. Once you are drowned in the maya of lust, it is impossible to rise. There is a deep whirlpool in the Vishalakshi river. He who falls into it once can never again rise out of it. Please come again.

Tarak — My people won't let me.

A Devotee — If somebody's mother says, 'Don't go to Dakshineswar and swears, 'You will be drinking my blood if you ever go there...'

One may go against the advice of one's superior for God's sake

Sri Ramakrishna — The mother who says such a thing is not a mother. She is the image of ignorance. There is no harm in not listening to such a mother. Such a mother places hurdles in the way of God-realization. There is no harm in disobeying

the Guru for the sake of God. Bharata did not listen to Kaikeyi for the sake of Rama. The gopis did not listen to their husbands when they forbade them the darshan of Krishna. Prahlada did not listen to his father. King Bali did not listen to his guru, Shukracharya, for love of God. Bibhishana did not listen to Ravana, his elder brother, to reach Rama.

"You must listen to everything they say except in the matter of walking the path to God. Let me see your hand."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna seems to weigh Tarak's hand. After awhile he says, "There is a little hurdle. But it will pass in time. Pray to Him and visit this place now and then. You will get rid of it. Have you rented the Bowbazar house in Calcutta?"

Tarak — Not I. They have done it.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Is it you or they? Are you afraid of the 'tiger'?

By 'tiger' Sri Ramakrishna means women [of non-divine nature, who take the mind toward darkness and away from God].

Sri Ramakrishna lies down on the smaller cot. Perhaps he is thinking of the welfare of Tarak. Suddenly he says to M., "Why am I so worried about him?"

M. does not say anything. Perhaps he is thinking what to say. Sri Ramakrishna insists on a reply, "Do speak up."

In the meantime Mohini Mohan's wife enters the room, salutes Sri Ramakrishna, and sits to one side. Thakur is talking to M. about Tarak's companion.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why did Tarak bring him here?

M. — It is a long distance, so he brought a companion with him.

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna addresses Mohini's wife, "One becomes a she-ghost when one dies an unnatural death. Beware. You must control your mind. After hearing so much and seeing so much, is it going to end this way ultimately?"

Mohini is taking leave of Thakur. He lies prostrate on the ground. His wife also salutes Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna stands near the northern door of his room. The wife, covering her head, says something to him in a low voice.

Sri Ramakrishna — You wish to stay here?

The Wife — Yes, I want to come and stay in the nahabat with the Holy Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is good. But when you talk of dying, I am frightened – the Ganges is flowing so near.

Section XIII

Sri Ramakrishna at a Devotee's House in Calcutta

Chapter I

With his intimate disciples at Balaram Basu's house

It is long past three o'clock. Being the month of Chaitra it is very hot. Sri Ramakrishna is seated in Balaram's drawing room with one or two devotees; he is talking to M.

It is Monday, 6 April 1885; 25th of Chaitra, the seventh day of the dark fortnight. Thakur has come to Calcutta to a devotee's house. He will meet with his intimate disciples and visit Devendra on Nimu Goswami street.

Telling the truth and Sri Ramakrishna – the Younger Naren, Baburam and Purna

Thakur remains intoxicated day and night with ecstatic love for God – constantly absorbed in spiritual mood or in samadhi. His mind is totally unaware of the external world. His only interest is that his intimate disciples know the Self. He is like a parent, anxious about his weak or disabled children, always thinking how they might grow into manhood. Or he is like a bird always engaged in nurturing its young.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I had promised that I would come at three o'clock – that's why I'm here. But it's very hot.

M. — It is, sir. You have been quite inconvenienced.

The devotees fan Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna — I have come to see the Younger Naren and Baburam. Why haven't you brought Purna?

M. — He doesn't want to come to a gathering of devotees. He is afraid you might talk well of him before others and that members of his family will hear about it.

Pundits and holy men impart different instructions – company of sadhus

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, that's true. I won't talk about him from now on. You are giving religious instruction to Purna. That is very good.

M. — Well, Vidyasagar's book *Selection* says the same: love the Lord with body, mind and soul[1]. If we instruct our students in this way, the proprietors of the school are displeased. What should we do then?

Sri Ramakrishna — There are many ideas written in books. But the authors of the books do not assimilate the ideas themselves. It is only by keeping the company of holy men[2] that one can internalize them. It is only when a holy man with genuine renunciation instructs them that people

[1] With all thy soul love God above,
And as thyself thy neighbour love
[2] Sadhus

listen. When a mere pundit writes a book or lectures, people do not assimilate much. If a doctor with a pot of treacle by his side says to a patient, 'Don't eat treacle,' the patient doesn't listen to him.

"Well, how do you find Purna? Does he sometimes go into ecstatic moods?"

M. — No, I haven't found any outer signs of ecstasy in him. One day I told him what you had said.

Sri Ramakrishna — About what?

M. — What you had said – that an 'ordinary receptacle' can't contain ecstasy. A 'big receptacle' can enter into a deep ecstatic mood, but it does not show outwardly. As, you said, the surface of a big lake remains undisturbed when an elephant enters it, but when the elephant goes into a small pond, it produces a lot of commotion and the water splashes over the edges of the pond.

Sri Ramakrishna — Outwardly Purna would not show signs of ecstasy. He is an unusual 'receptacle'. All his signs are good. What do you say?

M. — He has beautiful, bright and prominent eyes.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not enough that his eyes are bright. Spiritual eyes are different. Well, did you ask him what happened to him after meeting me?

M. — Yes, we did talk about that. For the last four or five days he has been saying that whenever he

thinks about God and repeats His name, tears flow from his eyes and the hair on his body stands on end.

Sri Ramakrishna — What more is needed?

Thakur and M. are both silent. After awhile M. says, "There he stands."

Sri Ramakrishna — Who?

M. — It is Purna. It appears that he is standing at the door of his house. If any of us passes that way, he comes running to salute us.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah! Ah!

Thakur leans against a pillow to rest. M. had brought a twelve year old boy with him. He is a student at M.'s school. His name is Kshirode.

M. says, "This boy is very good. It makes him very happy to hear about God."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — He has the eyes of a deer.

The boy touches Thakur's feet and prostrates to salute him. He gently strokes Thakur's feet in a very devotional manner. Thakur talks about the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Rakhal is living at home now. He is not well; he has a boil. I hear that he is probably going to have a child.

Paltu and Binode are seated in front of him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Paltu, smiling) — What did you say to your father? (To M.) He spoke up to his father when his father told him not to come here. (To Paltu) What did you say to him?

Paltu — I said, 'Yes I go to him. Is that wrong?' (Thakur and M. laugh). If I have to, I'll say this even more strongly.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to M.) — No. Should he go that far?

M. — I agree, sir. He should not go that far. (Thakur laughs.)

Sri Ramakrishna (to Binode) — How are you? Why haven't you come [to Dakshineswar]?

Binode — Sir, I almost went, but I was afraid. I have not been well.

Sri Ramakrishna — You must come. The breeze there is bracing. It would help you recover.

The Younger Naren has arrived. Thakur is going out to wash. The Younger Naren carries some water and a hand towel for him. M. is with them.

The Younger Naren washes Thakur's feet in the northern corner of the western verandah [of Balaram's house]. M. stands near him.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is very hot.

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — How do you live in such a small room? Isn't it hot on the upper floor?

M. — Yes, sir. It is very hot.

Sri Ramakrishna — Besides, your wife has some disease of the brain. She should be kept in a cool place.

M. — Yes, sir. I have told her to sleep downstairs.

Thakur comes again to the drawing room and sits down. He says to M., "Why didn't you come [to Dakshineswar] last Sunday?"

M. — Sir, there was nobody else at home. My wife is suffering from the disease of the brain and there was nobody to look after her in my absence.

Now Thakur goes to Devendra's house on Nimu Goswami Street. He is accompanied by the Younger Naren, M. and one or two other devotees. He is talking about Purna; he is anxious about him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — He is a great 'receptacle'. Were it not so, could he have made me do japa for his welfare? But Purna doesn't know anything about that.

M. and the other devotees are speechless with wonder to hear that Thakur should have performed japa of the bija mantra[1] for Purna.

[1] A mystic word or words of great power to be recited silently within

Sri Ramakrishna — It would have been nice if you had brought him here with you today. Why didn't you?

Seeing the Younger Naren laugh, Thakur and the devotees also begin to laugh. Thakur points to him in a happy mood and says to M., "Look. Just see how naive he looks when he laughs, as if he knows nothing. He has no desire in his mind for anything; he does not want any of these three – property, wife, or money. One does not realize God unless 'lust and greed' have vanished from the mind."

Thakur is proceeding toward Devendra's house. Once he told Devendra in Dakshineswar that he was thinking of visiting him at his house. Devendra had said, "I came today specifically to ask you to. Kindly come this very Sunday." Thakur had said, "But you are not earning much. Don't invite many people. And it is so costly to hire a carriage." Devendra had laughed and replied, "What does it matter if my income is small? 'One must eat ghee even though one has to borrow. One must, however, definitely eat ghee.' " Hearing this, Thakur began to laugh. He couldn't control his laughter.

When he reaches the house, Thakur says, "Devendra, please don't prepare anything special for me to eat – just an ordinary meal will do. I am not feeling very well today."

Chapter II

In Devendra's house with devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in the drawing room on the ground floor of Devendra's house. The devotees sit around him. It is already dusk. A lamp has been lit in the room. The Younger Naren, Ram, M., Girish, Devendra, Akshay, Upendra and other devotees are sitting close to him. Thakur is looking at a young

devotee and is beaming with joy. While instructing him, Thakur says to the other devotees, "He has no desire for any of the three things which bind one to the world – property, money, or wife. When one keeps one's mind on these three, one cannot establish union with God. And he had a vision, too." (To the devotee) "Tell me, what did you see?"

Renouncing 'lust and greed' and joy of Brahman

The Devotee (smiling) — I saw many pots of excreta. Some people were sitting on them and some sat a little away.

Sri Ramakrishna — He has seen the plight of worldly people who are forgetful of God. That is why he is developing renunciation for these things. Need one whose mind is freed from the attachment to 'lust and greed' worry about anything?

"Oh, how strange! I had to perform so much repetition of the Name and meditation to get rid of these desires. How is it that he has absolutely freed his mind from desire so quickly? Is it so easy to get rid of lust? Oh, what a sensation I felt in my chest even six months after starting my spiritual practices! I would lie under a tree and weep. I cried to the Divine Mother, 'Mother! If I experience the feeling of lust, I will cut my throat with a knife!'

(To the devotees) "If the mind is free from 'lust and greed,' what else remains to be attained? Then one enjoys only the joy of Brahman."

Sashi[1] had just begun visiting Thakur. He was a first year B.A. student at Vidyasagar's college. Thakur now talks about him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — As for that young man who visits, I see that for some time his mind will be attracted by money. However, I also see others who are not at all interested in it. Some of the young men will not marry.

The devotees listen to him without saying a word.

Who can recognize an incarnation of God?

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Unless you have rid your mind completely of 'lust and greed,' you cannot recognize an incarnation of God. Somebody asked an eggplant merchant to evaluate a diamond. He said, 'I can give you ten seers of eggplants for it – nothing more than that.' (All laugh.) The Younger Naren laughs loudly.

Thakur notices that the Younger Naren has understood the essence of these words.

Sri Ramakrishna — What a subtle mind he has! The Naked One[2] could understand just as quickly – whether it was the *Gita*, or the *Bhagavata*, or some other scripture.

[1] Later Swami Ramakrishnananda
[2] Nangta; Totapuri

Dispassion from childhood is wonderful indeed – how can a prostitute be redeemed?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is indeed wonderful for one to renounce 'lust and greed' from one's childhood. Very few people develop such renunciation. And without it one is like a mango pecked by a kite – the fruit can't be used in the service of the deity. Even eating it yourself is risky.

"If a man who has committed many sins earlier in his life repeats the name of God in his old age, it is better than doing nothing.

"The mother of a certain Mallick comes from a very big family. She asked me whether a prostitute could be redeemed. She had herself led that kind of life in her earlier days – that's why she asked me. I said to her: Yes, she can be redeemed if she weeps with a sincere heart and intense longing and repents, vowing, 'I shall not repeat it.' Just repeating the Lord's name will not be of any help. One has to weep with a sincere heart."

Chapter III

Thakur in the joy of devotional songs and in samadhi at Devendra's house

The singing of devotional songs is going on, accompanied by drum and cymbals. The musician sings –

O! What a wonderful sight have I seen in Keshab Bharati's cottage!

O brother! A beautiful light glows on the face of Gauranga and he sheds a hundred streams of tears of love for God.

Gaur, surcharged with divine love, mad like an intoxicated elephant, sometimes dances and sings, and at other times rolls in the dust. His eyes are flooded with tears.

He is weeping and uttering Hari. And he is rending the mortal world and heaven with his thunderous voice. And then, taking a straw between his teeth[1] and folding his hands, he begs for liberation from slavery.

Shaving off his curly hair, he dons the cloth of a yogi. One's heart begins to melt on seeing the gush of his loving devotion for God.

Having been smitten by human sorrow, he has renounced his all and has come to dole out ecstatic love for God.

Premdas wishes only that he could become the slave of Sri Chaitanya's feet and move from door to door.

While listening to the song, Thakur becomes absorbed in ecstasy[2]. The musician is describing the state of the gopis of Vraja who are suffering the pangs of separation from Sri Krishna.

The gopis of Vraja find Madhava[3] in a madhavi[4] bower –

O madhavi, give me my Madhava. Give, do give; give me my Madhava.

Give me my Madhava and make me your slave forever.

Just as water is life for fish, Madhava is my life breath.

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[1] A Vaishnava expression meaning extreme humility, in that the cow, which chews straw, is the humblest of creatures
[2] Bhava
[3] An appellation of Sri Krishna
[4] A spring creeper with fragrant flowers

You have hidden him away. Knowing us to be helpless and innocent, you have hidden him from us.

I cannot live, O madhavi! without Madhava. I cannot do without the sight of my Madhava.

Now and then Sri Ramakrishna adds his own lines during the song, "How far is Mathura where dwells the beloved of my soul?"

Thakur goes into samadhi. His body is motionless. For a long time he remains in this state.

Now he returns to normal consciousness to some extent. He is, however, still absorbed in ecstasy. In this state he talks about the devotees and speaks to the Divine Mother now and then.

Sri Ramakrishna (still in ecstasy) — Mother, please attract him to You. I cannot worry about him any more. (To M.) As for your relative[1], he attracts my mind a little.

(To Girish) "You may go on using abusive language and vulgar words for a little longer. Let it continue. It is good that all this comes out of you. For people suffering from blood poisoning, the more it comes out, the better.

"There is noise when one is getting rid of *upashis*[2]. Firewood crackles when it burns. When it is totally burnt, it makes no sound.

"You will become more and more pure every day. You will rise higher and higher every day. People will be wonderstruck to see you. I may not be able to come here frequently. Be that as it may, you will attain by yourself."

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[1] M.'s brother-in-law
[2] Limiting adjuncts

The ecstasy of Sri Ramakrishna is becoming more and more intense. He again talks to the Divine Mother, "Mother, what is heroic in making a good man even better? Mother, what will You accomplish in killing an already dead man? Your greatness lies in killing one who is standing erect."

Stabilizing himself a little, Thakur suddenly speaks somewhat loudly to the Divine Mother, "I have come from Dakshineswar. I am coming back, Mother."

It is like a child replying to his mother's call from a distance. Thakur is again motionless. He sits still in samadhi. The devotees gaze at him fixedly without saying a word.

Thakur speaks again in ecstasy, "I shall not eat any more *luchi*[1]." One or two Vaishnava priests[2] of the neighbourhood had come. They rise and depart.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna in the company of devotees at Devendra's house

Sri Ramakrishna is talking happily with the devotees. Being the month of Chaitra, it is very hot. Devendra has made some ice cream[3]. He is serving it to Thakur and the devotees. The devotees thoroughly enjoy the ice cream. Mani says in a whisper, "Encore! Encore!" Everybody laughs. At the sight of the ice cream, Thakur is as happy as a child.

Sri Ramakrishna — The devotional songs were nicely sung. How beautifully they described the state of the gopis, 'O madhavi, give me my

[1] Fried bread
[2] Goswamis
[3] Kulfi

Madhava.' This is the state of the gopis intoxicated with ecstatic love. How wonderful! They are mad for Krishna!

A devotee points at another and says, "He has the attitude of a female friend[1], the attitude of a gopi."

Ram — He has within himself both: the *madhura* bhava[2] and intense jnana bhava[3].

Sri Ramakrishna — What are you talking about?

Thakur now speaks of Surendra.

Ram — I sent him word, but he didn't come.

Sri Ramakrishna — He is so busy working, he can't come.

A Particular Devotee — Ram Babu has been writing about you.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What is he writing?

The Devotee — He has written on the love and devotion[4] of the Paramahamsa.

Sri Ramakrishna — Very good. It will bring Ram name and fame.

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[1] Sakhi
[2] The attitude of a lover
[3] One who follows the path of Knowledge
[4] Bhakti

Girish (smiling) — He has written it as your disciple.

Sri Ramakrishna — I have no disciple, or anything like that. I am the servant of the servant of Rama.

Some people of the neighbourhood have arrived, but Thakur is not pleased to see them. He says, "What kind of place is this? I find no one spiritual here."

Devendra now takes Thakur inside his house. Refreshments are ready to be served. Thakur goes in. However, he returns with a smile on his face and takes a seat in the sitting room. The devotees are sitting close by. Upendra[1] and Akshay[2], seated on either side of Thakur, are gently stroking his feet. Thakur talks about the ladies of Devendra's family. He says, "Nice ladies. They are from the countryside, so they are full of love and devotion for God."

Thakur is rejoicing in the company of the Self[3]. He sings happily. What is his state of mind as he sings? He has entered into a joyous mood, so he sings many songs.

Song –

Unless you are simple, you cannot recognize the Simple One[4].

Song –

O wandering sannyasin, stop for awhile. Hold your begging bowl and stop. Let me see your illumined face.

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[1] Upendranath Mukherji is a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna

[2] Akshay Kumar Sen is poet devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. He authored Sri Ramakrishna Punthi (Life of Sri Ramakrishna in verses), and thus immortalized himself. His birthplace is Maynapur village at Bankura district.

[3] *Atmarama*

[4] Sahaja, meaning God

Song –

A fakir[1], ever absorbed in the Divine, has arrived. Alike is his holiness to both Hindus and *Pir*[2] of the Muslims.

Girish salutes Thakur and leaves. Thakur returns his salute with a namaskar.

Devendra and other devotees take Thakur to the carriage.

Returning, Devendra sees a person from his neighbourhood sleeping on a wooden cot in the courtyard south of his living room. He calls out, "Rise. Please get up." Rubbing his eyes, the fellow gets up and asks, "Has the paramahamsa arrived?" Everybody bursts into laughter. This fellow came to meet Thakur even before he had arrived. Feeling hot, he lay on a mat-covered bench in the open courtyard. Thakur proceeds toward Dakshineswar. He says happily to M., "We ate plenty of ice cream! Please bring four or five cones for me when you visit." And he adds, "My mind is being attracted by some of these young men now – the Younger Naren, Purna, and your relative."

M. — Do you mean Dwija?

Sri Ramakrishna — Dwija is, of course, one of them. My mind is now going to the elder brother.

M. — Oh!

Thakur goes happily along in the carriage.

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[1] A mendicant ascetic
[2] A Muslim saint

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna in the Company of Devotees at Balaram's House

Chapter I

Thakur's description of his spiritual practices

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees in Balaram's sitting room in Calcutta. Girish, M. and Balaram are present. One by one the Younger Naren, Paltu, Dwija, Purna, Mahendra Mukherji and a number of other devotees arrive. Trailokya Sanyal, Gopal Sen and several other devotees of the Brahmo Samaj show up, one after the other. Many women devotees have come. Seated behind a straw curtain, they have the darshan of Thakur. Mohini's wife[1] is there. She is nearly mad with grief for her dead son. She and many others stricken with sorrow have the faith that they will find peace by coming in contact with Thakur.

It is Sunday, 12 April 1885, the first of Vaishakh, the 13th day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra. The time is about three o'clock.

When he enters, M. sees Thakur sitting with the devotees. He is describing his own spiritual practices and a variety of states of mind. M. salutes Thakur and sits close to him at his bidding.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — At the time (of spiritual practices) when I meditated I used to see a real person sitting close to me with a trident

[1] M.'s wife

in his hand. He threatened to strike me with the trident if I didn't fix my mind at the lotus feet of God, to pierce my chest and kill me if my mind was not fixed on God.

Union of the Absolute[1] and the phenomenal world[2] – Purusha and Prakriti – Yoga of Discrimination[3]

"Sometimes the Divine Mother would put me in such a state that my mind would descend from the Absolute to the phenomenal world. At other times it would rise from the phenomenal world to the Absolute.

"When my mind descended to the phenomenal world, I would meditate on Rama and Sita day and night. And I would constantly have the image of their forms before me. I used to go around holding Ramlala[4]. Sometimes I would give him a bath and other times feed him. And yet other times I was absorbed in the mood of Radha and Krishna. I would see their forms constantly before me. And then again my mind would be filled with the mood of Gauranga – he represents the harmonization of the two ideals, Purusha and Prakriti. In this mood I always saw the form of Gauranga. Later, this state also changed. Leaving the phenomenal world, my mind would ascend to the Absolute. I found no distinction between the ordinary sajina plant and the sacred tulsi. I no longer liked seeing the forms of God. I said to them, 'You, too, cause a feeling of separation' – so I let the forms go. I removed all the

[1] Nitya
[2] Lila
[3] Viveka
[4] Image of baby Rama made of eight metals

paintings and images of the deities that were in my room. I began to meditate on the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda, the Primal Purusha. I had the attitude of a handmaiden – the maid of Purusha.

"I have practiced all kinds of spiritual disciplines. There are three classes – sattvic, rajasic and tamasic. In the sattvic practices, one calls upon Him with intense yearning, or simply repeats His sacred name without expecting any result. In rajasic disciplines one practices various kinds of exercises – purascharana[1], visits to places of pilgrimage, a certain duration of panchatapa[2], worship with sixteen articles, and so forth. The aspirant who practices tamasic sadhana takes recourse to the qualities of tamas. Such an aspirant calls out, 'Victory to Kali! Why will You not grant me Your vision? I'll cut my throat with a knife if You do not reveal Yourself to me!' The last kind of discipline is not morally pure – it is like the practices prescribed in the *Tantra*.

"During this time (of sadhana), I used to have strange visions. I distinctly saw the communion of the Atman. A person resembling me entered my body and communed with each one of the six lotuses. The petals of the six lotuses were closed. As he communed with each of them, the lotuses bloomed, one after the other – they opened and turned upward. In this way all the lotuses – of the Muladhara, the Svadhisthana, the Anahata, the Vishuddha, the Ajna and the Sahasrara – opened.

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[1] The performance of japa a certain number of times each day, methodically increasing and decreasing the amount

[2] Practicing japa and meditation seated within five fires

They were facing downward, but then they turned up. I perceived this phenomenon very clearly."

Discipline of Dhyana Yoga – like an unwavering lamp flame in a windless place

"During the practice of spiritual disciplines when I meditated, I would think of the flame of a lamp set in a windless place – the flame did not flicker in the least.

"In deep meditation the awareness of the outside world completely vanishes. A hunter was aiming at a bird while a bridal procession was passing nearby. What lights, bands, carriages and horses were in the procession! They all passed close to him, but the hunter was quite unaware of them. He did not know that a bridegroom had passed that way in a procession.

"A man was fishing alone on the bank of a pond. After a long time the float moved – at times it even dipped down. Taking the fishing rod in his hand, he tried to pull it up. Just at that moment a wayfarer stopped and asked, 'Sir, can you please tell me where Mr. Bannerji lives?' The fisherman did not reply. Fishing rod in hand, he was now trying to pull in his catch. The stranger repeated his question loudly, 'Sir, can you please tell me where such-and-such Bannerji lives?' But our fisherman was unaware of the outside world – his hand was trembling and his eyes fixed on the float. The wayfarer left in a huff. When he had gone quite some distance, the fisherman's float sank and he pulled the fish out onto dry land. Wiping his face with a hand towel, he shouted to the stranger, 'Hey,

brother! Listen.' The wayfarer didn't want to return, but he came back after hearing the fisherman shout for some time. He said, 'But, sir, why are you calling me now?' The fisherman replied, 'What were you asking me?' The wayfarer said, 'I repeated my question so many times and now you ask me what I was saying.' The fisherman said, 'The float was bobbing, so I didn't hear anything you said.'

"Such concentration is developed in meditation that a person sees nothing and hears nothing. He is not even aware of touch. A snake can wriggle over his body, but he does not know it – neither the one who is meditating, nor the snake, are aware of each other.

"The sense organs cease to function during deep meditation. The mind does not look outward. It is as if the door of the outermost room of the house is shut. There are five organs of sense – form, taste, smell, touch and speech – they are left outside.

"At the beginning of meditation, sense objects appear before the mind. In deep meditation they cease to form any impression – they are left outside. During meditation, I used to have many different kinds of visions. I saw before me a heap of rupees, a shawl, a big tray full of sandesh and two females with big round nose rings. I asked my mind, 'Oh my mind, what do you want? Do you want to enjoy them awhile?' The mind said, 'No, I don't want anything. I want nothing but the lotus feet of God.' I saw the inside and outside of the women, like one sees objects in a glass room. I saw

inside their bodies: the intestines, blood, excreta, worms, phlegm, mucus, saliva and urine – all these."

Eight occult powers and Sri Ramakrishna – profession of the guru and prostitution

At times Girish talks of curing disease by repeating Thakur's name.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish and the other devotees) — Only people of small intellect pray for occult powers – to cure a disease, to win a lawsuit, to walk on water, all these kind of things. A pure devotee wants nothing but the lotus feet of God. One day Hriday said to me, 'Uncle, ask the Divine Mother for some powers, for some occult powers.' I have a childlike nature. While practicing japa in the Kali Temple I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, Hriday wants me to ask You for some occult powers.' The Divine Mother at once showed me an old prostitute who came in front of me and sat on her heels with her back to me. She was a woman of about forty with large hips. She wore a black-bordered sari and noisily defecated. The Divine Mother showed me by this that all occult powers are like the excreta of an old prostitute. I then went to Hriday and scolded him, saying, 'Why did you teach me such a prayer! It is because of you that I had this bad experience.'

"People with a little occult power gain name, fame and authority over others. Many of them want to be Gurus to attain recognition and have disciples and attendants. People may say, "Gurucharan's brother is having a wonderful time these days. So

many people visit him and he has several disciples and attendants. His home is filled with goods. Many people give him presents. And if he wants, since he has the power, he can feed a multitude!

"Being a guru is like practicing the profession of prostitution. One sells oneself for such trifling things as money, name, fame and creature comforts. The body, mind and soul, which are meant to realize God[1], should not be pulled down for insignificant things. Someone said, 'Savi is on top of the world these days – she is so well off! She has rented a house and has so many things: cow dung cakes[2], a wooden cot, some cooking utensils, bedding, finely woven mats and pillows. Many men are under her spell and visit her often.' In other words, Savi has taken to prostitution. That is why she has all these conveniences. Before, she was a maid in a respectable household. Now she has become a prostitute. She has ruined herself for such insignificant things."

Temptations during the spiritual practices of Sri Ramakrishna – knowledge of Brahman and intellect of differentiation

Sri Ramakrishna and Islam

"During my spiritual practices, while meditating, I used to see many other kinds of visions. Once I was meditating under the bel tree. Sin, taking the form of a man, appeared before me and tried to tempt me in different ways. He had come in the form of a

[1] Nātmanamavasādayet (Gita 6:5)
[2] Used as fuel to cook food

white soldier. He wanted to tempt me with money, name and fame, sexual pleasure and different kinds of powers. I began to call out to the Divine Mother – this is a great secret – She revealed Herself to me and I asked Her to kill him. I still remember that form of the Divine Mother, that world-enchanting form, the form of Krishnamayi[1]. The whole universe seemed to move at Her glance."

Thakur stops talking. Later on, however, he says, "I have so much else that I am not being allowed to talk about – it is as if someone is shutting my mouth."

"Tulsi and the ordinary sajina plants appeared the same to me. My understanding of differentiation was taken away. I was meditating under the foot of a banyan tree. I was shown a Muslim with a beard who brought some cooked rice on a porcelain plate. He fed some of it to the *malechhas*[2] and then gave a little to me. The Divine Mother revealed to me: There is only One, without a second – it is Sat-chit-ananda alone who has assumed different forms. God Himself has become the living beings and the phenomenal world – indeed everything. It is He who has become food."

Sri Ramakrishna in a childlike mood, enters into ecstasy

(To Girish, M. and others) "I have the nature of a child. Hriday said to me, 'Uncle, ask the Divine Mother for some occult powers.' At once I went to the temple to ask for it. I was kept in such a state

[1] She was in the form of a young daughter of Balaram Bose
[2] A non-Hindu

that I had to listen to the person who lived with me. A small child sees darkness all around if there is no one near; I was put in such a state. I felt my life draining away unless Hriday was near me. Just see, the same mood is coming over me now. As I am talking, I am feeling inspired by God."

While speaking, Thakur goes into ecstasy. He loses all consciousness of time and place. He tries hard to control this divine mood. In ecstasy he says, "I still see you people. But I feel that you have been sitting here forever. I don't remember when you came or where you are."

Thakur remains still for a long time.

Returning somewhat to normal consciousness, he says, "I want some water." Thakur generally says this at the end of his samadhi, to bring his mind to a lower plane of consciousness. Girish is a newcomer and doesn't understand this. He starts to bring water. Thakur stops him, saying, "No, my dear, I am not able to drink water now." Thakur and the devotees remain silent for some time. Then he talks.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — My dear sir, have I been wrong to talk of all these (secret) things?

What can M. say in reply? He remains silent. Thakur then says, "Mother, how can it be wrong? I say all this to instill faith in others." After a long time, he says entreatingly to M., 'Will you arrange a meeting with him?" (He refers to Purna)

M. (hesitatingly) — Sir, I will send word to him right now.

Sri Ramakrishna (eagerly) — The end (of the cord) is here.

Does Thakur mean that Purna is the last of his intimate disciples? There is almost no one after him.

Chapter II

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna's mahabhava – Brahmani's service to him

Addressing Girish, M. and the others, Thakur describes his own experience of mahabhava.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — The joy that one feels after that experience equals the pain of separation before it. Mahabhava – that is, divine ecstasy – disturbs the body and the mind violently. It is like a big elephant pushing its way into a straw cottage. The whole house is shaken. It may even fall to pieces.

"The burning fire that one feels when one is separated from God is not ordinary. When Rupa and Sanatana[1] sat under a tree in that state, the leaves of the tree became scorched. I lay unconscious for three days in that state. I could not move. I lay in one spot. When consciousness returned, she (the Brahmani[2]) held me and took me for a bath. But I could not stand the touch of her hand on my body, so my body was covered completely with a heavy sheet. Then the Brahmani held me with her hand on the sheet and led me. The earth that had stuck to my body when I lay on the ground was baked.

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[1] Both were two great disciples of Chaitanya

[2] A Brahmin woman who was one of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual preceptors

"In that state I felt as though a ploughshare were sticking through my spine. I cried out, 'I am dying, I am dying!' But afterwards I was filled with great joy."

The devotees listen to this description of Mahabhava in amazement.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — You people don't have to go that far. My ecstasy serves only as an example. You involve yourself with so many things, but I have only one interest. I enjoy nothing but God. It is His will. (Smiling) There are trees with only one branch, just as there are other trees with five branches. (All laugh.)

"My experiences are only for illustration. As for you, live in the world – but without attachment. Some mud will stick to your body, but you must wipe it off as a mudfish wipes off mud. You will swim in muddy waters – even then your body should not be stained."

Girish (smiling) — You, too, have married. (Laughter.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — I married for the sake of samskara[1], but how could I live a worldly life? They put the sacred thread around my neck, but it dropped off. I couldn't keep it on. According to one school of thought, Sukadeva also married. He had a daughter, too – all for the sake of samskara. (All laugh.)

[1] Marriage is one of the ten samskaras, or purification rites in Hindu religion

"The world is nothing but 'lust and greed' – they make one forget God."

Girish — How can one free oneself from 'lust and greed'?

Sri Ramakrishna — Pray to Him with intense longing, pray that you develop the faculty of discrimination. God is the only Reality and all else is transitory – this is discrimination. One must purify water by passing it through a fine sieve. The dirt in the water remains on one side and the clean water passes to the other side of the sieve. Apply the sieve of discrimination to the world. Know Him and live a family life. It will then be the world of spirituality[1].

"Just see what bewitching power women have, the ones who are manifestations of ignorance[2], who tend to take one away from God. They make worthless fools of men. When I see a man and a woman sitting together, I say to myself, 'Oh, they are doomed!' (Glancing at M.) Haru was such a good-looking boy, but a witch possessed him. 'Oh Haru, where are you? Where have you gone? I say, where is Haru!' People saw him sitting quietly under a banyan tree – he had lost his beauty, his strength and his joy. The witch who lives in the banyan tree had cast her spell on him.

"If a wife says, 'Go there for awhile,' the fellow immediately rises to take leave. And if she says, 'Sit down,' he at once takes his seat.

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[1] Vidya
[2] Avidya

"A certain job-seeker became frustrated, continually visiting the manager of an office for a job and not getting it. The manager said to him, 'There is no vacancy now, but come from time to time and enquire about it.' In this way a number of days passed and the candidate became thoroughly disappointed. He shared his frustration with a friend. The friend said, 'How dumb you are! Why do you wear out your shoes visiting him again and again? You must contact Golap and you'll get a job in no time.' The candidate said, 'All right, I will go see her right now.' Golap was the manager's mistress. The candidate met her and said, 'Mother, unless you help me, I won't get a job. I am in great distress. I am a brahmin's son, where else shall I go? Mother, I have been without work for so many days! My children are starving without food. Just a word from you and I will get a job.' Golap asked the brahmin's son, 'Child, whom should I talk to?' She began to think, 'Ah, the poor brahmin. He is in great trouble.' The candidate said, 'Just say a word for me to the manager. Surely I will get a job then.' Golap said, 'I will speak to the manager this very day and arrange everything.' The next morning a person came to the candidate's house and said, "Please come to the manager's office. He has recommended you to his English boss[1], saying, 'He is a very competent person and has been appointed to the job. He will contribute a great deal to the business.' "

[1] Sahib

"Everybody is deluded by 'lust and greed'. But I don't like all that. Truly, I swear that I know about nothing but God."

Chapter III

Speaking truth is austerity for the age of Kali – *Ishvarakoti*[1] and *jivakoti*

A Devotee — A new cult by the name of 'Nava Hullol' has been started. Lalit Chatterji is one of its members.

Sri Ramakrishna — There are so many views. Every belief is a path to reach God. But everybody thinks that only his belief is right, that only his watch is giving the right time.

Girish (to M.) — What does Pope say? 'It is with our judgments[2] etc.'

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I say, what does it mean?

M. — Everybody thinks that his watch gives the right time. But watches of different people seldom say the same.

Sri Ramakrishna — Even so, howsoever the watches may give incorrect time, the sun always

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[1] Eternally free and perfect souls

[2] It is our judgments as with our watches. None goes just alike, yet each believes his own.

moves correctly. One should match the time of the watch with the sun.

A Devotee — A certain devotee frequently tells lies.

Sri Ramakrishna — Speaking the truth is the austerity for the age of Kali. The other [ancient] austerities are not easy to practice in this age. By sticking to truth, one attains God. Tulsidas says –

> Telling the truth, taking refuge in Him, and considering other men's wives as your mothers,
>
> If these do not take you to Lord Hari, think of Tulsi as a liar.

"Keshab Sen agreed to pay the debt of his father. Anyone else would never have accepted it, for there was no record in writing. I went to Devendra's Samaj in Jorashanko and saw Keshab seated on the dais meditating. He was very young then. I told Mathur Babu that only the 'float' of this young man, out of all those meditating, had dipped under water. The 'fish' approached the 'bait' and circled around it.

"A person – I shall not name him – gave a false statement in court for ten thousand rupees. He asked me to make an offering to Mother Kali to win his lawsuit. Childish as I was, I made the offering to Her. He had just said to me, 'Father, make this offering to the Mother.' "

The Devotee — What a mean fellow indeed!

Sri Ramakrishna — But he had so much faith in me that he believed the Divine Mother would grant his prayer if I made the offering.

Referring to Lalit Babu's talk, Sri Ramakrishna says:

"Is it possible to get rid of one's pride? There are only a few people who are without pride. Balaram is one of them. (Pointing to a devotee) And this person too. Had they been anybody else, they would have parted their hair on one side and shown other traits of tamas, puffed up with the ego of learning. The fat brahmin still has a little pride. (To M.) Isn't Mahima Chakravarty very learned?"

M. — Yes, sir. He has read many books.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — I wish he would have a conversation with Girish Ghosh. We could then observe a discussion.

Girish (smiling) — Didn't he seem to say that anybody can become Sri Krishna by practicing spiritual disciplines?

Sri Ramakrishna — Not exactly. But something like that.

The Devotee — Sir, can everybody become like Sri Krishna?

Sri Ramakrishna — Incarnations of God or those born with some of their characteristics are called *Ishvarakotis*. Ordinary men are called jivas, or *jivakotis*. The latter can attain God by practicing

spiritual disciplines, but they don't return to normal consciousness after attaining samadhi.

"The *Ishvarakoti* is like the son of a king. He has the keys to all seven stories of the palace – he can climb to all seven floors and come down at his will. A *jivakoti* is like a junior official. He can only go to a small area in the seven-storied palace – that is all.

Harmony of jnana and bhakti

"Janaka was a jnani – he attained divine knowledge by practicing spiritual disciplines. Sukadeva, however, was the very embodiment of divine knowledge."

Girish — Ah!

Sri Ramakrishna — Sukadeva did not attain divine knowledge by practicing austerities. Narada, like Sukadeva, had the knowledge of Brahman, but he retained love and devotion for God in order to teach mankind. Sometimes Prahlada was in the mood of 'Soham[1],' and at other times he thought of himself as a servant, or as a child, of God. Hanuman was also like that.

"All cannot attain such a lofty state just by wishing it. Some bamboos are hollower than others; some are more solid inside."

[1] I am He

Chapter IV

'Lust and greed' and intense dispassion[1]

A Devotee — If all your experiences are just examples for us, what should we do?

Sri Ramakrishna — Intense dispassion is essential to attain God. You must renounce immediately what you think is an obstacle in your way to God. You cannot pass over it, saying, 'It can be dealt with later.' 'Lust and greed' are hurdles on the way. You must take your mind off them.

"It will not do to lack enthusiasm or diligence. A person with a small towel on his shoulder was going for a bath. His wife said, 'You are worthless. You are getting old and yet you have not been able to give up anything. You cannot live without me even for a day. Look at such-and-such person. What a man of renunciation he is!'

Husband — Why, what has he given up?

Wife — He has sixteen wives and he is renouncing them one by one. You will never be able to renounce.

Husband — Renouncing one by one! Oh, silly woman, he will not be able to renounce. If a man genuinely wants to renounce, does he do it bit by bit?

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[1] Vairagya

Wife (smiling) — Even so, he is better than you.

Husband — Silly woman, you don't understand. He cannot renounce. But I can. See? I am leaving.

"This is intense dispassion. No sooner does one attain discrimination than one renounces. He left with just a hand towel on his shoulder. He didn't come back to settle household affairs. He did not turn back even once to look at his home.

"A person who wishes to renounce must have great will power. He must be reckless, like a dacoit. A dacoit shouts, 'Kill, loot, murder!' before he commits a robbery.

"What should you do? Cultivate love and devotion for God and so pass your days.

"Unable to find Krishna, Yashoda became nearly insane with grief and went to see Radha. Seeing her grief, Radha appeared before her in the form of the Primal Power. She said, 'Mother, ask me for a boon.' Yashoda replied, 'What boon can I ask? Just grant that I may serve Krishna in body, mind and speech, that I may behold His devotees with these eyes, and go with these feet wherever He is enacting His divine sport, and that I may serve Him and His devotees with these hands. Let all my sense organs be engaged in the service of Him alone."

As Thakur speaks these words, he is about to pass again into divine ecstasy. All of a sudden he says, "Kali is the embodiment of destruction! No, She is Nitya Kali[1]!"

[1] The Eternal Divine Mother

Thakur controls his ecstasy with great difficulty. He takes a little water and then again begins to talk of Yashoda. Mahendra Mukherji enters. He and his younger brother, Priya Mukherji, have only recently started visiting Thakur. Mahendra has a flour mill and other businesses. His brother is an engineer. Both have assistants to look after their work, so they have a great deal of leisure. Mahendra must be thirty-six or thirty-seven, and his brother about two years younger. Their home is in Kedeti village and they also have a house at Baghbazar in Calcutta. A young devotee named Hari accompanies them on their visits to Thakur. He is married, but he has great love and devotion for Thakur. Mahendra has not been to Dakshineswar for quite some time, nor has Hari. Mahendra is fair in complexion, medium in build, and always has a smile on his face. He prostrates before Thakur. Hari also offers his salutations.

Sri Ramakrishna — Hello! Why haven't you come to Dakshineswar for such a long time?

Mahendra — Sir, I was away in Kedeti – away from Calcutta.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why? You have no children. You don't have to work for anybody. Still you have no leisure. It is disgusting!

The devotees remain silent. Mahendra is somewhat embarrassed.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahendra) — Why do I say this to you? You are guileless and generous at heart. And you have love and devotion for God.

Mahendra — Sir, it is for my benefit that you have said it.

Sadhus looking for money – the attachment for children

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — You don't have to put anything in the collection plate for the performance[1] here. That is why Jadu's mother says, 'All other sadhus only ask for something. But it is different with you, sir.' Worldly people are annoyed if they have to spend money.

"A theatrical performance was being given at a certain place. One fellow was very keen to see it. Peeping through the crowd, he saw people paying for it in a collection plate. He quietly stole away. Another performance was being staged somewhere else. He went there and, after inquiry, found that no collection would be taken. Soon a big crowd gathered. He pushed people with both hands and his elbows to enter. He found himself a good seat and, twirling his moustaches, sat down to listen. (Laughter.)

"And you have no children to distract your mind. A Deputy Magistrate was getting a salary of eight hundred rupees a month. He went to Keshab Sen's house to see a play (Nava Vrindavan). I was there. Rakhal and many other devotees had gone with me and were sitting close to me. Rakhal left his seat for a few minutes and the Deputy Magistrate came, sat down, and made his young child sit on Rakhal's seat. I said, 'Please don't take

[1] Yatra

this seat.' My state of mind was such that I would obey anybody who was sitting close to me. That is why I had seated Rakhal beside me. All through the play the Deputy talked to his son. The rascal did not look at the play even once. I have heard, too, that he is a slave to his wife. When she wants him to stand, he stands up; and when she asks him to sit, he sits down. And he didn't see the performance for that snub-nosed monkey of a son! Do you meditate?"

Mahendra — Yes sir, I meditate a little.

Sri Ramakrishna — You will visit Dakshineswar some time, won't you?

Mahendra (smiling) — Sir, you know very well where I have knots. Please straighten them out.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — First make a visit; then I can press you and see where you have developed the knots. Why don't you visit?

Mahendra — I can't come because of the great pressure of work. Besides, I have to visit my Kedeti house [in the countryside] sometimes.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahendra, pointing his finger at the devotees) — Don't these people have homes? Have they no work? How do they make it?

Bondage of wife

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hari) — Why don't you come to Dakshineswar? Is it because your wife has returned to live with you?

Hari — No, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Then why have you forgotten?

Hari — Sir, I fell ill.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — He has gotten thin, but his love and devotion to God[1] hasn't diminished. Who can even fathom the depth of his devotion! But it is of a somewhat troublesome nature! (Laughter.)

Thakur calls a devotee's wife by the name of 'Habi's mother'. The brother of Habi's mother has arrived. He is a college student and is about twenty. He has to leave to play cricket, so he rises. His younger brother is also a devotee of Thakur. He leaves with him. In a little while, Dwija returns. Thakur asks him, "Didn't you go with them?"

A certain devotee says, "Perhaps he has returned because he wants to hear the music."

Today Trailokya, a Brahmo devotee, is to sing devotional songs. Paltu arrives. Thakur says, "Look, Paltu has arrived."

Purna, another young devotee, has also arrived. Thakur has been able to get him here only after great difficulty. The members of his family strongly object to his visiting Thakur. He studies in class five in the school where M. teaches. The boy

[1] Bhakti

prostrates before Thakur. The latter makes him sit beside him and talks to him in whispers. Only M. is seated near them. The other devotees are talking of different things. Girish, sitting on the other side of the room, is reading a biography of Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Purna) — Come nearer.

Girish (to M.) — Who is this boy?

M. (irritated) — He is a boy, what else?

Girish (smiling) — I need no ghost to tell me that!

M. is afraid that others will know who he is, which might create a row in Purna's house and M. himself might get blamed. This is also the reason Thakur is talking to the boy in whispers.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you practice all that I told you to?

The Boy — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you see anything in your dreams – a flame, the light of a torch, a married woman, a cremation ground? It is good to see these things.

The Boy — I dreamed about you. You were seated and you said something.

Sri Ramakrishna — What was I saying? Please tell me some of it.

The Boy — I don't remember now.

Sri Ramakrishna — Never mind. But it's very good. You will make progress spiritually. You do feel attracted to me, don't you?

After awhile Thakur says, "Won't you go there?" (to Dakshineswar)? The boy says, "I can't say if I will or not."

Sri Ramakrishna — Why? Don't you have a relative living there?

The Boy — Yes, sir, I have. But it wouldn't be convenient for me to go there.

Girish is reading Keshab Sen's biography written by Trailokya of the Brahmo Samaj. The book says, "The Paramahamsa Deva was initially very averse to the world, but he has changed his mind since meeting Keshab. The Paramahamsa now says that it is possible to lead a spiritual life in the household too." Some devotees who read this have brought it to Thakur's notice. They want to discuss it with Trailokya. All the passages from the book have been read out to Thakur.

Thakur's state – giving up company of devotees

Seeing the book in Girish's hands, Thakur says to Girish, M., Ram and the other devotees, "These people are busy living a worldly life, so they are harping on 'world'. They are living in 'lust and greed'. When one has realized God, one doesn't talk like this. After attaining the bliss of God, the world becomes like the droppings of a crow. I had brushed it all away in the beginning. I had not only given up the company of worldly people, but at times I even kept myself away from devotees. I noticed that the devotees were dying one by one, and my heart began

to writhe with pain. But now I do live in the company of a few devotees."

Chapter V

Thakur enjoys devotional songs in company of devotees

Girish has gone home. He will return.

Trailokya arrives with Jaygopal Sen. They offer salutations to Thakur and sit down. Thakur makes polite enquiries of them. The Younger Naren arrives and salutes Thakur by prostrating on the ground. Thakur asks him, "Why didn't you come this Saturday?" Trailokya is going to sing now.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah, that day you sang the song of the All-Blissful Mother! What a nice song! The songs of other people seem insipid to me. That day I didn't even like Narendra's singing. Please sing the same song again.

Trailokya sings: Victory to Sachi's son!

Thakur leaves to wash. Women devotees are sitting behind a screen, eagerly awaiting him. He will go see them so they can have his darshan[1]. Trailokya's song continues.

Returning from the room, Thakur says to Trailokya, "Please sing for awhile the song about the All-Blissful Mother." Trailokya sings –

Divine Mother, how great is Your love for Your human children!

O Mother! Streams of the tears of ecstatic love flow from our eyes as soon as we remember You.

[1] Seeing, experiencing; paying respect to a holy place or person by a ceremonial visit; also the blessing or purification felt in the presence of holiness.

I have been guilty of transgressing Your laws since I was born.

Even so, You cast a loving glance from Your beautiful face and call upon me with such sweet words.

As I remember You, tears of ecstatic love begin to flow from my eyes.

Mother, I can no longer bear the burden of your ecstatic love!

My soul, having pierced my heart, cries to feel Your affection and love.

Mother, please accept me under the shelter of Your holy feet!

Listening to the song, the Younger Naren becomes merged in deep meditation. He sits there like a log of wood. Thakur says to M., "Just see what deep meditation he has plunged into! He has absolutely lost outer consciousness."

The song ends. Thakur asks Trailokya to sing, 'O Mother, make me mad with Thy love. What need is there for knowledge or reason?[1]'

Ram says, "Let us repeat the name of Hari." Trailokya sings –

O my mind, utter the name of Hari just once, do repeat His name.

Repeat the name of Hari. Let us go beyond the sea of this world.

M. says in a whisper, "O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers…"

Thakur, too, asks for this song to be sung. Trailokya and the devotees all sing together –

O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers are so full of compassion.

[1] For complete song see Volume I, Section XII

Thakur joins them in singing. As soon as the song ends, he sings another song –

Behold the two brothers[1] who shed tears on chanting Hari's name have come.

They who ask for prema (ecstatic love) even after receiving blows, these two brothers have come.

They who are Kanai and Balai of Vraja, these two brothers have come.

They who embrace even the pariah, these two brothers have come.

Just after this song is over, Thakur sings another song –

Behold, the whole of Nadia is shaking under the waves of the divine love of Gaur!

Thakur then adds –

Who are they passing, chanting 'Haribol, Haribol' with their lips?

O Madhai, please go and find out.

It seems Gaur and Nitai are going.

They who have golden anklets on their feet,

They who have shaven heads and rags on their bodies,

O Brother, they almost look mad!

The Younger Naren takes his leave.

Sri Ramakrishna — You must show great devotion to your parents. But if they are an obstacle on the way to God, don't obey them. Have determination and say, 'Oh, you rascal!'

[1] Gauranga and Nityananda

The Younger Naren — Truly, I am not in the least afraid of them.

Girish returns. Thakur introduces him to Trailokya, saying, "Please talk to each other for awhile." After they had had a little talk, he says to Trailokya, "Sing that song once again." Trailokya sings –

Victory to Sachi's son, Gaur, a mine of qualities, the love jewel, the sea of the joy of ecstasy.

What a lovely and charming form of golden hue! The joy of the eyes reflecting a beauty even greater than the stalk of a water lily.

His long arms reaching below his knees. The two delicate hands stretched out in love.

Face, like a beautiful lotus, drowned in the essence of love.

The locks of his hair waving in the air. Beautiful cheeks surcharged with the love of Hari. Unmatched attraction.

Merged in mahabhava, saturated with the nectar of Hari. And the hair of the body in horripilation with love.

Like a mad elephant, of golden complexion, all limbs surcharged with emotion, full of the love of God.

Always singing the praises of Hari, a hero of the nectar of love. He brings the light of joy in holy hearts; He is the sea of devotion for Chaitanya.

O, addressing the pariah as a brother, he embraces him with love, his eyes watering.

'Where is Hari, the treasure of my heart?' So saying, he weeps. He perspires and trembles and gives out thunderous cries.

The hair on his body stands on end. His lotus-like body looks so beautiful, having rolled in the dust.

It is the home of the nectar of Hari's sport. He is the spring of the nectar of bhakti, a friend of the helpless, Gaur of Bengal.

Blessed you are, Sri Chaitanya, the moon of love.

Hearing that Gauranga laughs, weeps, dances and sings, Thakur stands up, absorbed in ecstasy. He is completely unconscious of the external world.

Partially returning to normal consciousness, he says most humbly to Trailokya, "Please sing that song once: 'Oh, what have I seen…' "

Trailokya sings –

What an exquisite bright form of Sri Gauranga – his eyes streaming with the tears of love – have I seen in Keshab Bharati's hut!

The song ends. It is already twilight. Thakur is now seated with the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram) — There are no musical instruments here. The song becomes lively when sung in accompaniment with a good musical instrument. (Smiling) Do you know how Balaram arranges a festival? Like a miserly brahmin whose cow should eat a little but yield milk in torrents! (All laugh.) Balaram has this kind of attitude: sing your own songs and play your own instruments. (All laugh.)

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna and spiritual life – take to worldly pursuits after God-realization

It is already dusk. Lights have been lit in Balaram's parlour and on the verandah. Sri Ramakrishna

salutes the Mother of the Universe, repeats the *mulamantra*[1] and chants Her Name. He is surrounded by devotees listening to the sweet name of God chanted by him. Girish, M., Balaram, Trailokya and many other devotees are still there. They want to discuss with Trailokya the section in the book 'Biography of Keshab' which talks of the change in the attitude of Thakur. Girish initiates the conversation.

Girish says to Trailokya, "You have written about the change in attitude of Sri Ramakrishna concerning worldly life. It is not really correct."

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and the devotees) — Having enjoyed 'this' joy, one doesn't like the 'other' joy. Having tasted divine bliss, the joy of the world appears to be tasteless. If a man gets a shawl, he doesn't care for broadcloth.

Trailokya — I referred to people who wanted to lead a family life. I didn't say anything about renouncers.

Sri Ramakrishna — What are you talking about? People who harp on 'worldly duties,' if once taste the bliss of God do not like anything else. Their duties are reduced. Gradually, as they derive more bliss from spiritual life, they simply cannot perform their worldly duties. They seek that divine bliss alone. What are worldly pleasures and sexual joy compared to the bliss of God? Having once tasted the bliss of God, one runs after it madly – whether one can preserve one's worldly life or not.

[1] An esoteric word or words of great power repeated during prayer and meditation

"The chatak bird is dying of thirst. The seven oceans and all the rivers and reservoirs are full of water, but it does not drink from them. Its parched throat is almost cracking from thirst, yet it does not drink! It sits with its mouth wide open waiting just for the rainwater of the Svati[1] constellation of stars. All waters are dry except the water of the Svati constellation."

Two annas of wine and saving both sides

"He says, 'I shall hold to both God and the world.' Taking a small quantity of wine, a man may be pleasantly intoxicated and also conscious of the world. But can he be both after getting well drunk?

"One likes nothing else after experiencing the bliss of God. Any matter relating to 'lust and greed' then falls like a stone on the chest. (Thakur chants to the tune of the kirtan) 'It is different with others, but I like nothing else.' When one becomes mad with love for God, he is not attracted by money and the rest."

Trailokya — One certainly requires money to live in the world. One even has to hoard. There are so many things to spend money on – charity...

Sri Ramakrishna — What do you mean? That you have to accumulate money first, and then seek God? And you talk of charity and compassion! One spends thousands of rupees on the marriage of one's daughter – while his neighbours may be starving. How difficult he finds it to give them two fistfuls of

[1] The fifteenth of the twenty-seven zodiacal stars according to Hindu astronomy

rice! He calculates so much before giving them anything. He says to himself, 'People may be starving, but what can I do? Let the rascals live or die. What I care about is whether the members of my family are living comfortably.' One merely talks of compassion for all living beings!

Trailokya — There have been good householders too – for instance, Pundarika Vidyanidhi, the devotee of Chaitanyadeva. He lived the life of a householder.

Sri Ramakrishna — He was intoxicated up to his neck with the wine of divine love. Had he drunk a little more, he would not have been able to lead the life of a householder.

> Trailokya doesn't say anything in reply. M. says aside to Girish, "So, what he has written is not correct."

Girish (to Trailokya) — Then it is not true, what you have written.

Trailokya — Why so? One can practice spiritual life in the household. Doesn't he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] say that?

Sri Ramakrishna — Spiritual life in the household is possible. But one should first attain the knowledge of God[1] before entering family life – one should first realize God before living as a householder. Then 'even though one may swim in the black waters of lamp-black, the body will not be

[1] Jnana

stained.' One can then live like a mudfish. The household life which one leads after God-realization is a world of spirituality[1]. There is no 'lust and greed' in it – only devotion, devotee and God[2]. I, too, have a wife. I also have a few utensils in my room. I, too, feed a few vagabonds. And when devotees like Habi's mother come to visit, I also worry about them.

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna and avatarhood

A Devotee (to Trailokya) — I read in your book that you do not believe in divine incarnations. You said this with reference to Chaitanyadeva.

Trailokya — Chaitanyadeva himself protested against the idea of divine incarnation. When Advaita and the other devotees in Puri sang a song saying, 'He indeed is God,' Chaitanyadeva shut the door of his room. God has infinite glories. As he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] says, the devotee is the living room of God. Does it mean that if the living room is well decorated, there is no splendour anywhere else?

Girish — He says that ecstatic love[3] alone is the essence of God. We need the person who is the conduit of this ecstatic love. He says that cow's milk flows through the udder, so we need the udder. No

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[1] Vidya
[2] Bhakti, bhakta and Bhagavan
[3] Prema

other parts of the cow's body are important to us – its forefeet, its legs, its horns, and so on.

Trailokya — The milk of God's ecstatic love is channeled through various conduits. He has infinite powers.

Girish — Can any other power match His ecstatic love?

Trailokya — It is possible if He who has the power wants it. Everything has sprung out of His power.

Girish — All may be His power, but there is also the power of nescience, or ignorance[1].

Trailokya — What is ignorance? Does such a thing as ignorance exist? It is merely a negation. For example, darkness is the negation of light. God's ecstatic love is invaluable – just a drop of it is like an ocean for us. But if you say that ecstatic love is the last word about God, it would mean that He can be limited.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and the other devotees) — Yes, yes. That is true, of course. But if I take even a small quantity of wine, I become intoxicated. What need is there to find out how many gallons of wine there are in the tavern? What need is there for us to find out about the infinite powers of God?

[1] Avidya

Girish (to Trailokya) — Do you believe in the incarnation of God?

Trailokya — God incarnates Himself in his devotee. Infinite power does not manifest, it is simply impossible. It cannot manifest itself in any person.

Girish — We can serve our children as 'Brahma Gopala[1]'. Why can't we worship a spiritually elevated personality by calling him God?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya) — Why do you bother yourself with infinity? Do I need to touch your whole body to touch you? If you wish to take a dip in the Ganges, do you have to touch the water of the Ganges from Hardwar to Gangasagar? 'All troubles cease when the ego dies'. As long as one retains the feeling of 'I', so long one is conscious of differentiation. Nobody can know, nobody can express by word of mouth, what remains after the ego vanishes. Only that which exists remains. One cannot tell by word of mouth that this much power is manifested in this man and the remainder in another. Imagine the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda in which an earthen pot of ego is immersed. As long as there is the earthen pot, so long is the water divided into two parts – the water inside the pot and the water outside. The moment the pot breaks, it is all one stretch of water. One cannot even say this. Who remains to tell?

After this discussion, Thakur has a sweet conversation with Trailokya.

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[1] A name of God; baby Krishna

Sri Ramakrishna — Are you having a good time?

Trailokya — Well, the moment I get up from here, I'll become the same old self. Right now I am feeling very inspired.

Sri Ramakrishna — There is no danger of thorns, if one is wearing shoes. One has no fear of 'lust and greed' when one knows that 'God is the only Reality and all else ephemeral.'

Balaram takes Trailokya to another room when he is asked to serve the latter some refreshments. Sri Ramakrishna describes to the devotees the state of mind of Trailokya and people of his views. It is 9:00 p.m.

Who can recognize an incarnation of God?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish, Mani and other devotees) — Do you know what these people are like? A frog in a small well who has never seen dry land. It only knows its own small well. It will never believe that there is dry land. He has not tasted the bliss of God, so he goes on harping about the world.

(To Girish) "Why do you waste your breath on these people? They are living both a worldly and a spiritual life. Unless one has tasted the bliss of God, one cannot understand that bliss. Can one explain sex pleasure to a boy of five? Worldly people talk about God only from hearsay. Children, hearing their two old aunts quarrelling, learn to say, 'I believe in God,' 'I swear by God ...'

"Let it be. It is not their fault. Can everybody conceive of Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss

Absolute? Only twelve rishis were able to recognize Ramachandra as an incarnation of God – others could not understand. Some took him as an ordinary human being, others as a sadhu. Only a few knew him as an avatar.

"A person values an article according to his own wealth. A gentleman asked his servant to take a diamond to the market. 'When you come back,' he said, 'tell me how much each trader is willing to pay for it. First take it to an egg-plant seller.' The servant went to a trader in egg-plants. He examined it to evaluate it and said, 'Brother, I can give you nine seers of egg-plants for it.' The servant said, 'Brother, make it a little more. Give me ten seers of egg-plant.' The egg-plant seller said, 'I have already offered more than the market rate. You may give it to me if the price suits you.' The servant laughed. He returned the diamond to his master and told him, 'The egg-plant seller will not give more than nine seers of egg-plants, not one more. He said that he had already offered more than the market rate.'

"The gentleman laughed and said, 'Well, take the diamond now to a cloth merchant. This fellow deals in egg-plant. What does he know? The cloth merchant is wealthier. Let's see what he says.' The servant went to the cloth merchant and said, 'Sir, would you care to buy this diamond? How much would you pay for it?' The cloth merchant said, 'Well, you have brought something very nice. It can be made into a beautiful piece of jewelry. Brother, I can pay nine hundred rupees for it.' The servant said, 'If you give a little higher quote, I can give it to you. Let it be a thousand rupees, if not more.'

The cloth merchant said, 'Brother, don't bargain any more. I have already quoted higher than the market price. I can't pay a rupee higher than nine hundred rupees.' The servant returned to the master and said, laughing, 'The cloth merchant could not give a rupee more than nine hundred. He even said that he has already offered more than the market rate.' The master laughed and said, 'Now take it to a jeweler. Let us see what he says.' The servant went to a jeweler and the moment the jeweler glanced at it, he said, 'I can offer a hundred thousand rupees.' "

Godmen[1] and ordinary human beings

"These people talk of practicing religion while leading a worldly life. It is like a person who has shut himself in a room – with all the doors and windows closed – with just a small hole for a little light to come in from the roof. Can one see the sun with a roof overhead? What will he do with only a little light? 'Lust and greed' constitute the roof. Can one see the sun unless the roof is removed? Worldly people have, as it were, shut themselves inside a room.

"Incarnations of God are *Ishvarakotis*. They walk freely in the open – they are never bound to the world, they never imprison themselves. Theirs is not a gross 'I' – like that of worldly people. The 'I' of worldly people is bound – it is bound within the four walls, with a roof overhead. They can see nothing outside. The 'I' of an incarnation of God is the subtle 'I'. One can always see God through this

[1] Ishvarakotis

'I'. It is as if a person is standing within a four-walled enclosure. There is a limitless field on all sides. If there is a hole in the wall, one can see everything on the other side. If the hole is big enough one can even go out and return through it. The 'I' of the avatar is like this wall with a hole. Even while he remains on this side of the wall, he can see a limitless space beyond it. It means that he can always live in communion with God, even when he is in a human body. And then when he wills, he can merge into samadhi, having gone out of the big hole in the wall. If the hole is big enough, he can even visit and revisit. He can come down to the worldly plane even after passing into samadhi."

The devotees sit speechless listening to Thakur describe avatarhood.

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram Basu's House in Calcutta

Chapter I

Narendra and Hazra

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees in Balaram's parlour on the second floor of the house. He is smiling. A number of devotees, including Narendra, M., Bhavanath, Purna, Paltu, the Younger Naren, Girish, Ram Babu, Dwija, and Binode are sitting around him.

It is Saturday, 9 May 1885, three o'clock in the afternoon; the tenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Vaishakh.

Balaram is not at home. Being unwell, he has gone to Monghyr for a change of climate. His eldest daughter (who is now deceased[1]) has invited Thakur and the devotees and has celebrated their coming with a feast. Thakur rests awhile after the meal.

Thakur repeatedly asks M., "Please tell me whether I am large-hearted." Bhavanath laughs and says, "What will he say? He will keep quiet."

A beggar from north India has arrived to sing. The devotees listen to one or two of his songs. Narendra likes them. He says to the singer, "Do sing more."

[1] She was deceased at the time of M.'s writing of this Volume

Sri Ramakrishna — Enough! Stop! We don't want any more songs. Where is the money? (To Narendra) You asked him to sing, but who will pay!

A Devotee (smiling) — Sir, he takes you to be a rich man, the way you are leaning against that bolster. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — He may also think I am ill.

The topic of conversation now drifts to Hazra's egotism. Hazra had been compelled to leave the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar.

Narendra — Hazra now admits he was egotistic.

Sri Ramakrishna — Don't believe him. He says that so he can return to Dakshineswar. (To the devotees) Only Narendra says that Hazra is 'a grand person'.

Narendra — I still say so.

Sri Ramakrishna — But why, even when you have heard so many bad things about him?

Narendra — He has a few faults, but he has many more good qualities.

Sri Ramakrishna — He does have single-minded devotion[1] to his ideal.

[1] Nishtha

"He says to me, 'You don't like me now, but later you will want my company.' A goswami of Srerampore came the other day. He is a descendent of Advaita Goswami[1]. I wanted him to stay on for a day or two. I asked him respectfully to stay at Dakshineswar. Hazra said, 'Send him to stay with the treasurer of the temple.' What he meant was that the goswami might ask for some milk or food and that he would have to share with him. I said, 'You rascal! I myself prostrate before him because he is a goswami. You, on the other hand, live a worldly life, holding on to 'lust and greed,' and do all sorts of pranks. You perform a little japa and become egotistical. Don't you feel ashamed of yourself?'

"Sattva guna leads one to the Lord. Rajo guna and tamo guna take one away from Him. Sattva is described as white, rajas as red, and tamas as black. One day I asked Hazra to tell me how much sattva each one of us possessed. He said, 'It is sixteen annas[2] in the case of Narendra, and eighteen annas in my case.' I asked him, 'How about me?' He said, 'You still have tinges of red – sattva guna is only twelve annas in your case.' (All laugh.)

"Hazra used to sit and perform japa at Dakshineswar. While telling his beads, he would also try to make money from the visitors. He had incurred a debt of several thousand rupees in his native village. Talking of the brahmin cook, he remarked, 'Do I care to talk to people like that?' "

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[1] An intimate disciple of Chaitanyadeva
[2] Sixteen annas make one Rupee, or one complement

Desire is an obstacle to God-realization – God has nature of a child

"You know what the truth is? Even if you have the least desire, you cannot attain God. The progress of actions can be very subtle. Say you have to thread a needle. It will not enter the eye of the needle if there is the least fibre sticking out.

"Why does one not attain God even after telling the beads for thirty years? If one has a festering wound, powerful measures have to be applied to cure it. Ordinary medicine alone does not cure the wound.

"Howsoever much religious discipline you may practice, you will not achieve spiritual perfection if you have desires. However, this fact is also true: You can attain perfection at once by the Lord's grace and compassion. Just as all darkness is dispelled in a moment when a light is brought into a room that has been dark for a thousand years.

"Say a poor man's son has attracted the attention of a big man. The latter gives his daughter in marriage to him. Immediately he has everything: a house, furniture, a horse-drawn carriage, maids and attendants, clothes and other comforts."

A Devotee — Sir, how does one receive God's grace?

Sri Ramakrishna — God has the nature of a child. Think of a boy holding jewels in the end piece of his cloth. A number of people are passing by. Many of them ask him to give them the jewels. Placing his hand on the cloth and turning his face away, the

boy says, 'No, I will not give you any.' But he may run after someone else who has not asked him for the jewels and give all of them away.

Renunciation brings God-Realization – his earlier story – attitude of Mathur Babu

Sri Ramakrishna — One cannot realize God unless one renounces.

"But who will accept my words? I am looking for a companion – a companion with the same attitude as mine. When I see a devout devotee, I say to myself, 'Perhaps he will accept my ideal.' But later I see that he has become quite a different man.

"A ghost was looking for a companion. One becomes a ghost if one dies an unnatural death either on Tuesdays or Saturdays. Whenever this ghost found that somebody was dying an unnatural death on a Saturday or a Tuesday, he would run to him. He thought to himself that he was perhaps now going to have a companion. But no sooner did he come near the ghost than he saw the man getting up. Perhaps he had fallen from a roof and had lost consciousness, but didn't die.

"Once Mathur Babu was in an ecstatic mood. He remained intoxicated, unable to do any work. Everybody said, 'Who will manage his estate if he remains like this?' They thought that the younger Bhattacharya (Sri Ramakrishna) had cast a spell on him."

Narendra loses outer consciousness – two stories of the guru and the disciple

"On one of Narendra's first visits to Dakshineswar, he lost outer consciousness when I touched his chest with my hand. Regaining consciousness, he began to weep and said, 'I say, why did you do this to me? Sir, I have my father, I have my mother.' This 'me' and 'mine' comes from ignorance.

"A guru said to his disciple, 'The world is illusory, so leave it and come away with me.' The disciple replied, 'But Master, all these people love me a great deal – my father, my mother, my wife. How can I leave them to accompany you?' The guru said to him, 'Although you repeat 'me' and 'mine,' and you say that they all love you, you are very much mistaken. I am going to teach you a trick of deception. Try it and you will know whether they genuinely love you or not.' Saying this, the guru put a pill in the disciple's hand and said, 'Take this and you will look like you are dead, but you will not lose consciousness and you will be able to hear and see everything. When I visit you, you will gradually regain normal consciousness.'

"The disciple did exactly as he was told. There was weeping and wailing in the house. The mother, the wife, everyone began to weep, having fallen on the ground. Just then a brahmin came and asked them what had happened. They all replied that the man had died. The brahmin felt his pulse and said, 'What? He is not dead. I will give him some medicine. As soon as he takes it, he will be cured.' Every member of the family felt as if they had been granted something very precious. 'But,' the

brahmin continued, 'there is a condition. Somebody has to take the medicine before it is given to him. And that person will die. I see that he has so many loving relatives; someone will surely take it. His mother and wife are wailing so bitterly. One of them will certainly take it.'

"At once the wailing stopped and there was silence. The mother said, 'It is such a big family. If I die, who will look after them all?' She was very worried. The wife who was weeping and wailing just a few moments ago, saying, 'Oh my elder sister, I have fallen into big trouble,' now said, 'What had to happen to him has already come to pass. I have small children. Who will look after them if I die?'

"The disciple saw and heard everything. He stood up at once and said, 'Master, let us go. I will follow you.' (All laugh.)

"Another disciple said to his guru, 'My wife serves me so well, Master. I can't leave her behind to follow you.' This disciple practiced hatha yoga. The guru taught him a ruse, too. One day there was a lot of weeping and wailing in the house. The neighbours came and saw the practitioner of hatha yoga seated on a small carpet in the house, his body stiff and twisted. Everybody thought that he had breathed his last. His wife was crying and had fallen on the ground, saying: 'Oh mother, what catastrophe has befallen me! How have you provided for our future? Oh my friends, I never imagined I would meet with such a fate.' In the meantime her relatives brought a cot to take him out of the room.

"But then a problem arose. He could not be taken through the door since his body was stiff and twisted. A neigbour ran and brought an axe and began to chop the door frame. The wife was weeping bitterly. Hearing the sound of wood being chopped, she came running and, still weeping, asked, 'What are you doing?' He said, 'The body can't be taken out, so we are chopping away the door frame.' 'Please,' the wife said, 'don't do this. I am a widow now. There is nobody to look after me and I have to bring up these children. If the door is chopped, I will not be able to replace it. I say, he is already dead. You must chop off his hands and feet.' Hearing this, the hatha yogi stood up. The effect of the medicine had worn off. He stood up and said, 'You mean woman! You are going to chop off my hands and feet?' Saying this, he renounced home and went away with his guru. (All laugh.)

"In most cases mourning is a pretense. When a woman has to wail, she first removes her nose ring and other ornaments. She locks them safely in a box. Then she comes out, falls on the ground and wails, beating her breast, 'Oh my friends! What misfortune has befallen me!' "

Chapter II

Narendra and others discuss incarnation of God in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna

Narendra — How can I believe, without proof, that the Lord incarnates Himself as a human being?

Girish — Faith in itself is sufficient proof. This article is lying here. What is the proof? Your faith alone is the proof.

A Certain Devotee — Have philosophers been able to prove that the external world exists outside us? They only say we have an irresistible belief in it.

Girish (to Narendra) — Even if the Lord came before you, you wouldn't believe it. You might say, 'This man says that God Himself has incarnated in him – but he is surely an impostor.'

The topic of discussion is now whether the heavenly gods are immortal.

Narendra — Where is the proof?

Girish — Even if you saw them in front of you, you wouldn't believe them.

Narendra — I want proof that they existed in past ages.

Mani whispers something to Paltu.

Paltu (smiling, to Narendra) — What is the need for immortals to be without a beginning? For one to be immortal, one has only to be without end.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Narendra is the son of a lawyer, and Paltu of a deputy magistrate. (All laugh.)

All are silent for awhile.

Jogin (smiling, to Girish and other devotees) — He (Thakur) does not accept Narendra's opinions any more.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Once I said to Narendra that the chatak bird drinks no water except rainwater. Narendra said that the chatak drinks ordinary water too. Then I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, are my words not true?' I was terribly worried. Narendra came on another day. He saw some birds fluttering in the room. Seeing them he said, 'There they are! There they are!' I asked, 'What?' He replied, 'The same chatak birds.' I saw that they were only bats. Since then I don't accept what he says. (All laugh.)

Is vision of the form a delusion of the mind?

Sri Ramakrishna — Narendra said to me in Jadu Mallick's garden, 'The visions of God that you see are all hallucinations.' Amazed, I said to him, 'But they speak to me!' Narendra said, 'Such delusions happen.' Then I went to the Divine Mother and implored Her with tears, 'Mother, what is this? Is it all false? Narendra said so.' The Divine Mother then showed me Consciousness, Indivisible Consciousness, and said, 'If your visions are illusions, why do they tally with facts?' Then I said to Narendra, 'Rascal, you are robbing me of my faith! Don't come here again.'

Sri Ramakrishna – scriptures and word of God – revelation

The discussion continues. Narendra is arguing. He is twenty-two years and four months old.

Narendra (to Girish, M. and others) — How can I put my faith in religious texts? The *Mahanirvana Tantra* says at one place that a person goes to hell if he doesn't attain the knowledge of Brahman. Then at another place it says, 'There is no salvation without worshipping Parvati, the Divine Mother.' In the *Manusamhita*, Manu writes about himself, while Moses describes his own death in the Pentateuch.

"The *Samkhya* philosophy says God does not exist for the reason that His existence cannot be proved. It also says, 'One must believe in the injunctions of the *Vedas*, that the *Vedas* are eternal scriptures.'

"I don't deny what the scriptures say. I just don't understand them, so please explain them to me. People have explained the scriptures based on their own interpretation. Which opinion shall I accept? A white light looks red when it goes through a red medium, and green when it passes through green glass."

A Certain Devotee — The Lord has said so in the *Gita*.

Sri Ramakrishna — The *Gita* is the essence of all scriptures. A sannyasin may or may not have any other book, but he must have a pocket *Gita* with him.

A Certain Devotee — The *Gita* contains the words of Sri Krishna.

Narendra — The *Gita* contain the words of Sri Krishna – or any other fellow!

Sri Ramakrishna listens to these words of Narendra in amazement.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is a very good discussion.

"There are two interpretations of religious texts: the literal and the real. One should only take the real – that which tallies with the words of God. There is a great difference between what you read in a letter and what you hear from the lips of the letter writer. A religious text is like the words of a letter, and the Lord's word is like the words of the letter writer. I accept nothing till I have seen that it agrees with the Divine Mother's words."

The discussion again turns to God-incarnate[1].

Narendra — It is enough if one has faith in God. There is no need for me to know where God is strolling, or what He is doing. Infinite is the universe and infinite are God's incarnations.

Hearing the words "Infinite is the universe and infinite are God's incarnations," Sri Ramakrishna bows with folded hands and says, "Ah."

Mani whispers something to Bhavanath.

Bhavanath — He says, 'If one has not seen an elephant, how can he know whether or not it can pass through the eye of a needle? Similarly, if one has not known God, how can one know by

[1] Avatar

reasoning whether God can incarnate Himself as a human being?'

Sri Ramakrishna — Everything is possible for God. It is He who casts the spell. The magician can thrust a dagger into his throat and take it out again. He can even swallow pieces of brick!

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and work – his state of knowledge of Brahman

A Devotee — The members of the Brahmo Samaj say that the duties of family life should be performed. One should not renounce them.

Girish — Yes, I read that in their paper, the *Sulabha Samachar*. It says that. But one is not able to perform all the actions required to know God. How, then, can he think of performing other worldly duties?

Sri Ramakrishna smiles a little and, looking at M. beckons with a sign of his eye, as if to say, "What he says is right."

M. has understood that performing duties[1] is very difficult.

Purna has arrived.

Sri Ramakrishna — Who told you about my being here?

[1] *Karmakanda*

Purna — Sarada.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the women devotees present) — Please give him (Purna) some refreshments.

Now Narendra would like to sing to Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees.

Narendra sings –

Song –

The mountain, the ocean and the firmament thunder. O Rudra, wake up!

You are the God of gods, the Supreme God, you are the *Kala* (death) of *kala* (time), You are the Supreme *Kala*.

O Shankara Shiva, the lord of justice, take away my sins.

Song –

O refuge of the lowly, Your holy name is beautiful indeed!

A current of nectar flows within it. One who hears it becomes at peace.

Song –

O mind, why don't you call upon Him who removes the fear of danger?

What an irony that you remain ever intoxicated with the world, which is nothing but an illusion!

Your wealth, your kith and kin will not last. Why forget Him?

Give up the insignificant and worship the substantial. Your trials of the world will end.

Listen attentively to these words of good, and retain them in your heart.

Repeat the name of Hari on your lips and proclaim Him ever and anon.

If you wish to cross over the ocean of the world, give up your sense attachments.

And surrendering your body, mind and soul to Him, worship Him.

Paltu — Will you sing that song?

Narendra — Which one?

Paltu —

When I have seen Your peerless face beaming with intense love,

What fear of earthly woes and frowns of catastrophe!

Narendra sings the song –

When I have seen Your peerless face beaming with intense love,

What fear of earthly woes and frowns of catastrophe!

Just as the first ray of the dawning sun dispels darkness,

So too, O Lord, when Your blessed radiance brightens the heart,

Its sweet consolation acts as a balm to the grief-stricken heart of the devotee.

When I ponder in my heart Your ecstatic love and Your grace,

I cannot restrain my tears of joy; they overflow my heart.

Victory to You, Gracious One, victory to You!

Singing about Your intense love for the devotee,

Let my life-breath ebb away while I perform Your work.

He sings another song at M.'s request. M. and many other devotees sit with folded hands listening to this song.

Song –

O my mind, drink the wine of Hari's nectar and be intoxicated.

Roll on the ground, weeping and chanting, 'Hari, Hari.'

Let the name of Hari thunder deep in the firmament.

Raise both of your arms and dance, crying, 'Hari, Hari.'

Go to people's doors and dole out the name of Hari.

Swim day and night in the nectar of the joy of God's love, and sing Hari's name.

Let your supreme desire be fulfilled and lowly desires be destroyed.

Song –

O my mind, meditate on Lord Hari, the rarefied spirit, the spotless one...

Song –

Wondrous and supreme is Your creation...

Song –

The sun and the moon blaze like lamps and the stars dazzle like diamonds in the dish of the sky.

The soft Malaya breeze is the incense and the wind moves to and fro as a fan before your holy face.

The whole forest has burst into brightness. All the vegetation in the forest is glowing with light.

What a unique worship of Yours is this! You, the breaker of world bonds, Your worship!

The *Anahata Shabda*, the uncaused sound, constitutes the drum beat.

Song –

Fix your mind, O man, on the Primal Purusha, the Stainless One...

At the request of Narayan, Narendra sings again –

O my Mother! Come, do come. You are my sweetheart, You, the marionette of my life breath.

Mother! Please take your seat in my heart and let me gaze at You.

I have been looking at Your face since my birth.

You, of course, know, my Mother, what sorrows I have passed through.

Pray, open the lotus of my heart and reveal Yourself in it, O Goddess of joy and bliss.

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi – in the state of knowledge of Brahman

Narendra sings a song of his own choice.

Song –

O my Mother! Your effulgent form shines in pitch darkness.

Therefore the yogi meditates in the mountain cave.

Sri Ramakrishna is going into samadhi as he listens to this song of samadhi. Narendra sings the song time and again –

O my mind, drink the wine of Hari's nectar and be intoxicated.

Sri Ramakrishna is absorbed in divine ecstasy. He is sitting on a pillow, leaning against the wall and

facing north, his feet hanging down. The devotees surround him on all sides.

Thakur is talking alone with the Divine Mother, absorbed in ecstasy. He says, "I shall go after taking my meal. You have come? Have you found your lodging, left Your baggage there, and then come out?"

Is Thakur saying that the Divine Mother has arrived? Are Thakur and the Divine Mother separate from each other?

Sri Ramakrishna says, "I don't like anybody's company now. Mother, why should I hear devotional songs? They will draw part of my mind to the outside world."

Thakur is gradually regaining outer consciousness. He looks at the devotees and says, "I used to wonder why people kept fish alive in a pot. I would say to myself, 'How cruel they are,' as they would kill it later. When the state of my mind began to change, I noticed that the body was nothing but a pillowcase. It doesn't matter if it survives or not. There is no difference if it goes."

Bhavanath — So, can one kill a human being, murder him?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, one can do it in that state of mind[1]. But not everybody attains this state, the state of the knowledge of Brahman.

"One enjoys God's love and the devotee only when one comes down a step or two (from samadhi).

"In God there is both knowledge[2] and ignorance[3]. Vidya maya takes one toward the Lord,

[1] The Atman is not killed when the body is slain
[2] Vidya [3] Avidya

avidya maya takes one away from Him. Spiritual knowledge, love and devotion for God[1], compassion and dispassion belong to the realm of vidya. By resorting to them, one draws near to God.

"And if one takes a step up, one reaches Him – attains the knowledge of Brahman. In this state one clearly perceives that God Himself has become everything. He sees no difference between acceptance and denial. He cannot be angry with anyone.

"I was going by carriage when I saw two prostitutes standing on a verandah. I took them as the embodiment of the Mother of the Universe Herself. So I bowed to them.

"When I first attained this state, I could neither worship Mother Kali nor offer Her food to eat. Haladhari and Hriday said, 'The manager of the temple says that if the priest [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] does not offer food to the deity, what else might he do?' When I heard these malicious words, I simply laughed – I didn't feel the least irritated.

"After attaining the knowledge of Brahman, one should move about enjoying the divine sport. A sadhu was walking through a city enjoying its sights. He met another sadhu, an acquaintance of his. The latter said, 'You are walking around enjoying yourself, but where is your baggage? I hope nobody has stolen it from you.' The former said, 'No, my luggage is not stolen. I first arranged for lodging, and then placed it safely in the room

[1] Bhakti

and locked it. Now I am going around enjoying the sights in the city.' " (All laugh.)

Bhavanath — This is a very lofty idea.

Mani (to himself) — To enjoy the divine sport after attaining the knowledge of Brahman! To come down to the plane of the phenomenal world after attaining samadhi!

Sri Ramakrishna (to M. and others) — Is it easy to attain the knowledge of Brahman? It is not possible until the mind is completely annihilated. A guru said to his disciple, 'Give me your mind and I will give you divine knowledge.' The Naked One (Totapuri) used to say, 'Don't let your mind scatter.'

Biology – 'Natural Law' in the spiritual world

"In this state, one likes nothing but talk about God and the company of devotees.

(To Ram) "You are a doctor. You know that medicine works only when it mixes with the blood. Similarly, in the state of the knowledge of Brahman, one sees God both within and without. One sees that He has become the body, the mind, the vital breath and the soul."

Mani (to himself) — Assimilation!

Sri Ramakrishna — One attains the state of Brahmajnana when the mind is annihilated. When the mind vanishes, one's ego is wiped out – that which goes on repeating 'I,' 'I'. One reaches this

state through the path of love and devotion for God as well as through the path of divine knowledge, that is to say the path of discrimination. The jnani reasons saying, 'Not this, not this,' – that is to say, 'it is all maya, like a dream.' This world is 'not this, not this,' – it is just maya. When the world disappears, only the individual remains – that is, the pot of 'I-consciousness' remains.

"Imagine that there are ten pots full of water. They all reflect the sun. How many suns do you see?"

A Devotee — Ten reflected suns and one true sun.

Sri Ramakrishna — Imagine now that one of these pots breaks. How many suns do you see?

The Devotee — Nine reflected suns. And, of course, the real sun.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, suppose nine pots are broken. How many suns will you see?

The Devotee — One reflected image of the sun and the true sun.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — What remains after the last pot is broken?

Girish — That real sun, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — No. There are no words to describe what remains. It is what really is. When there is no reflected sun, how can you say that

there is the real sun? In the state of samadhi the 'I' vanishes. What a man sees then, cannot be expressed in words when he comes down to a lower plane.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna heartens the devotees with hope and promises

It is twilight. Lamps are lit in Balaram's parlour. Sri Ramakrishna is still in an ecstatic mood. Devotees surround him. He says in his state of ecstasy:

"I am saying this to you as no outsider is present here. He who sincerely tries to know God will realize Him. He will assuredly know Him. He who yearns for God and seeks nothing but Him will succeed.

"All the devotees of the inner circle have already come. The devotees who will come later will belong to the outer circle. They will also go there [to Dakshineswar] every now and then. The Divine Mother will instruct them, 'Do this. Call on God in this way.'

God alone is the guru – the only way for the embodied being to attain liberation

"Why doesn't the mind of embodied being turn toward God? The attraction (of Mahamaya) is much stronger than that of God. The orderly of a judge is more powerful than the judge. (All laugh.)

"Rama said to Narada, 'Narada, I am very happy to hear your hymn of praise. Please ask for a

boon from me.' Narada said, 'Rama, grant that I may have devotion[1] to your lotus feet and faith[2]. And grant that I may never be enchanted by your world-bewitching maya.' Rama said, 'So be it. Please ask for another boon.' Narada said, 'Rama, I don't want anything else.'

"Everyone is enchanted by His world-bewitching maya. Even when God takes up a human body, He too is enchanted by maya. Rama wandered about weeping in search of Sita. Bound by the five elements, even Brahman laments.

"Even so, remember, if God wills He can liberate Himself at once."

Bhavanath — A railway guard, of his own will, shuts himself in a coach, but he can come out whenever he wants to.

Sri Ramakrishna — *Ishvarakotis*, such as divine incarnations, can be liberated whenever they want. But ordinary human beings cannot. Embodied beings are bound by 'lust and greed'. They have shut the doors and windows of their houses and fastened them tightly with screws. How can they come out?

Bhavanath (smiling) — They are like third class railway passengers. They are locked in their compartments; they can't get out.

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[1] Bhakti
[2] Shraddha

Girish — If a man is bound in this way from all sides, then what is the way for him?

Sri Ramakrishna — He has nothing to fear if God, having come down as the guru, cuts asunder the bonds of maya.

> Is Thakur hinting that he himself has taken up a human body in the form of the Guru and is breaking the bonds of maya?

Section XVI

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at the House of a Devotee

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at Ram's house

Sri Ramakrishna has come to Ram's house. He is sitting in the ground floor parlour surrounded by devotees. He is smiling and full of joy talking to them.

It is Saturday, 23 May 1885. The 10th day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha. The time is about five o'clock. Mahima is sitting in front of Thakur. M. is on his left side and Paltu, Bhavanath, Nityagopal and Harmohan sit around them. When Sri Ramakrishna had entered the room, he had enquired after the welfare of the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Hasn't the Younger Naren arrived yet?

The Younger Naren appears in a few minutes.

Sri Ramakrishna — And that person hasn't come?

M. — Who, sir?

Sri Ramakrishna — Kishori. And aren't Girish Ghosh and Narendra coming?

Narendra soon arrives and salutes Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — It would have been nice if Kedar (Chatterji) had come. He agrees with Girish Ghosh. (Laughing, to Mahima) He, too, says the same [that Sri Ramakrishna is an incarnation of God.]

A kirtan is being arranged in the room. With folded hands, the musician says, "Please give your permission to start singing."

Thakur says, "I wish to have some water first."

After having refreshments, he takes some spice powder from a small bag and asks M. to close the bag.

The kirtan starts. The sound of the drum puts Thakur in an ecstatic mood. As he hears 'Gaur Chandrika,' he merges completely in samadhi.

Nityagopal is close to him. Thakur stretches his legs out on Nityagopal's lap. Nityagopal is also passing into ecstasy. All the devotees watching his state of samadhi are speechless with wonder.

Yoga, subjective and objective – identity of the Absolute, the soul and the cosmos

Partially returning to outer-consciousness, Thakur speaks, "Descending from the Absolute to the phenomenal and ascending from the phenomenal to the Absolute." (To Nityagopal) "Which one do you like?"

Nityagopal (humbly) — Both are good.

Sri Ramakrishna says, shutting his eyes, "Is God visible only in this way? Is it that He is visible only when you shut your eyes, and He does not exist when you don't? The Absolute belongs to the same Reality as the phenomenal world; the phenomenal world belongs to the same Reality as the Absolute."

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — I say this to you, my dear, just once.

Mahimacharan — Sir, both are by the will of God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Some people climb seven stories and cannot come down. But some, having climbed the seven stories, can come down – and ascend again as well.

"Uddhava said to the gopis, 'He whom you call Krishna dwells in all beings and the elements – He has become the world and its creatures.'

"So I ask: Is meditation possible only with eyes shut? Is it not possible with eyes open?"

Mahima — I have a question to ask.

A Devotee — Doesn't he need to attain Nirvana[1] sometime?

His earlier story – Totapuri wept – is Nirvana the end of life?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not essential to attain Nirvana. There is, in fact, the Eternal Krishna[2] and there are His eternal devotees. Krishna[3] is the embodiment of Consciousness, and His realm is Consciousness too.

"There is the moon and there are stars. Just so, where there is the Eternal Krishna, there are also His eternal devotees. Don't you yourself say, 'If

[1] Total annihilation of the ego
[2] Nitya Krishna
[3] Shyam

the Lord is seen both within and without, what is the need for austerity[1]?' I told you that if a devotee is born of Vishnu, his seed of love and devotion for God does not vanish. I fell into the hands of a jnani. He taught me Vedanta for eleven months. But the seed of bhakti did not die in me. Wherever my mind would go, it came back to repeat, 'Mother, Mother.' The Naked One[2] would weep when he heard me sing devotional songs. He would say, 'Oh, how wonderful!' See, he was such a big jnani and even he was moved to tears! (To the Younger Naren and others) Once the seed of bhakti has fallen into your heart, it cannot but sprout. Gradually you will see its tree, its fruit and its flowers.

" 'The pestle will destroy the whole clan[3]'. The pestle was rubbed a great deal, until most of it was ground away. Yet a little piece of it still remained. And the whole dynasty of the Yadus was annihilated with that small piece of pestle[4]. Reason and argue a thousand times, but if you have the seed of love and devotion for the Lord within, you will come back and chant 'Hari, Haribol.' "

The devotees listen to Sri Ramakrishna without uttering a word. Laughing, Thakur asks Mahimacharan, "What do you like most?"

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[1] Refer Narada Pancharatra to find the complete text of this hymn.
If Hari is both inside and outside what need is there of penance. And if He is not there, what need of penance? If you worship Hari, what need is there of penance? And if you do not, what need of penance? So, O brahmin, get disengaged, dear boy. What is the need of penance? Go at once to Shankara, the sea of jnana. Attain deep devotion for Hari, which the Vaishanavas speak of.

[2] Totapuri

[3] Mūsalam kulanāśanam

[4] Reference: a story in the Mahabharata in which a curse on a pestle destroyed the Jadu clan

Mahima (smiling) — Nothing. However, I like mangoes.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Would you eat them all yourself? Or would you share with others?

Mahima (smiling) — I have no great desire to share. It is enough for me to eat them myself.

Sri Ramakrishna's correct attitude

Sri Ramakrishna — But do you know what my attitude is? Is God not visible when I open my eyes? I accept both the Absolute[1] and the phenomenal[2].

"When one has realized God, one knows that He Himself is self-existent[3] as well as the All-pervading in the form of the universe[4]. He is the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute and He has also become the world and its living beings."

Mere knowledge of scriptures is illusory – direct knowledge is obtained by practice of spiritual disciplines

"The practice of spiritual disciplines is essential. Mere study of scriptures does no good. I found Vidyasagar very learned. But to what end? Didn't you see that his only joy was to teach boys how to read and write? He has never tasted the Bliss of God. What will mere study do? What does one

[1] Nitya
[2] Lila
[3] *Svarata*; He alone exists, without any support
[4] *Virat*

assimilate of the injunctions of the scriptures? The almanac says there will be twenty measures of rainfall, but however much you press the almanac, not a drop of water comes from it."

Mahima — There are so many duties that one has to do in the world. Where is the time for the practice of spiritual disciplines?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why, don't you yourself say that the world is like a dream?

"Seeing the ocean in front of him, Lakshmana took a bow and arrow in his hand and said angrily, 'I am going to kill Varuna[1]. This ocean keeps us from going to Lanka.' Rama explained to him, saying, 'All that you see is like a dream, ephemeral. The ocean is ephemeral – and so is your anger.' To dispel the unreal with the unreal is illusory too."

Mahimacharan remains quiet.

Karma Yoga or Bhakti Yoga? Who is the Sadguru?

Mahimacharan has many household duties to perform. Also, he has founded a new school – for the purpose of doing good to humanity.

Sri Ramakrishna now talks about other things.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — Sambhu said to me, 'I want to spend this money on acts of public good – to build schools and dispensaries, construct roads and build bathing ghats on the river.' I said, 'It will be good if you can do it without expecting

[1] The presiding deity of the waters

any return. But it is very difficult to work without any selfish motive. Some desire somehow creeps in. I ask you this: If the Lord reveals Himself to you, will you pray to Him for such things as schools, dispensaries and hospitals?'

A Particular Devotee — Sir, what is the way for worldly people?

Sri Ramakrishna — Keeping the company of holy men and listening to spiritual talk.

"Worldly people are intoxicated – they are inebriated with 'lust and greed'. A drunkard gradually comes to his senses if he is fed rice water in small quantities at regular intervals.

"And one must listen to the instructions of a Sadguru[1]. There are signs of a Sadguru. One should listen about Kashi from one who has visited Kashi, who has seen it. A man of mere learning will be of no help. One should not listen to the instructions of a pundit who has not realized that the world is ephemeral. Only a pundit who has gained discrimination and dispassion[2] has the right to instruct mankind.

"Samadhyayi said that the Lord is totally devoid of sweetness, love and bliss[3]. He called Him joyless and tasteless who is the very fountain of love and bliss[4]! Somebody said, 'My maternal uncle keeps a cowshed full of horses.' (Everybody laughs.)

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[1] A perfected Master; a genuine spiritual preceptor
[2] Viveka and vairagya
[3] *Neeras*
[4] *Rasaswaroop*

'I' and 'mine' constitute ignorance – jnana and vijnana

"Worldly people are intoxicated with worldliness. They are always thinking: 'I am the doer of all these actions. And this home and family are mine.' Baring his teeth, a man says, 'What will happen to them (wife and children)? How will they manage without me? Who will look after my wife, my family?' Rakhal said, 'What will happen to my wife?' "

Harmohan — Did Rakhal say that?

Sri Ramakrishna — What else could he do? He who has knowledge also has ignorance. Lakshmana said to Rama, 'Rama, how strange! Even a saint like Vaishishtha Deva is suffering the bereavement of his son!' Rama said, 'Brother, he who has knowledge also has ignorance. You must go beyond both knowledge and ignorance.'

"Take, for example, a person whose foot is pierced by a thorn. He finds another thorn to take out the first one. After he has removed the former with the help of the latter, he throws away both thorns. To pull out the thorn of ignorance, one has to use the thorn of knowledge. When one throws away both the thorns of knowledge and ignorance, one attains vijnana. Assimilating the idea that the Lord exists, one has to know Him in a special way. One must talk to Him intimately. This is vijnana. That is why Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, 'You must go beyond the three gunas.'

"To attain vijnana, one has to take refuge in vidya maya[1]. Vidya maya includes the discrimination that the Lord is the Reality and the world ephemeral – this idea, in other words, constitutes discrimination and non-attachment. Besides, vidya maya also includes chanting His Name and glories, meditation, keeping the company of holy people, prayer, and so on. Vidya maya is like the last few steps leading to the roof – climb a step or two more and you are on the roof. To be on the roof is God-realization."

Worldly people and young men who have renounced 'lust and greed'

"Worldly people are intoxicated – inebriated with 'lust and greed'. They have lost their awareness. That is why I am fond of the young men. 'Lust and greed' have not yet entered their minds. They are 'good receptacles' and can be of use in the Lord's work. Worldly people are full of worthless stuff. They are like bony fish – trying to eliminate the bones, one is left with nothing in the end, very little meat.

"They are like mangoes struck by a hail storm. They can be eaten only when purified by sprinkling them with Ganges water. They cannot, generally speaking, be offered in the worship of the Deity. If one has to use them at all, one has to take recourse to the knowledge of Brahman, that is to say, tell the mind that God Himself has become everything."

[1] Vidya maya is the aspect of maya which leads man closer to the realization of Brahman

A Theosophist gentleman has arrived with Aswini Kumar Dutta and the son of Behari Bhaduri. The Mukherji brothers come in and salute Thakur. Arrangements for a kirtan have been made in the courtyard. At the sound of the drum, Sri Ramakrishna leaves the room and comes to the courtyard. The devotees follow him and take their seats there.

Bhavanath introduces Aswini to Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur introduces M. to Aswini by pointing at him. They are both in conversation when Narendra arrives and sits down. Thakur says to Aswini, “This is Narendra.”

Section XVII

Sri Ramakrishna with Captain, Narendra and other Devotees, at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Beginning of Sri Ramakrishna's throat ailment

Sri Ramakrishna is resting in his room at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. Saturday, 13 June 1885, the first day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha. It is the last day[1] of the month of Jaishtha. The time is three o'clock. After his midday meal, Thakur is having a siesta on the smaller of the two cots.

A pundit is sitting on a mat on the floor. A sorrow-stricken brahmin woman[2] is standing near the northern door of the room. Kishori and a neighbour of Akhil, with a boy from Assam, are also present. M. enters and salutes Thakur. He is accompanied by Dwija and others.

Sri Ramakrishna is not well. He is feeling cold because of a lump in his throat. This is the beginning of his throat disease.

Because of extreme heat, M. has also not been feeling well. He has not been able to come regularly to Dakshineswar to see Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna — I say, you have arrived. The bel-fruit you sent me is very good. How are you?

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[1] Sankranti

[2] Golap-ma (Golap Sundari Devi), a companion and friend of Holy Mother

M. — I am feeling a little better now.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is very hot. Eat some ice now and then. I am feeling unwell, too, my dear, because of this extreme heat. I have eaten too much ice cream, so I have developed a lump in my throat. I have never experienced such a bad smell in my saliva before.

"I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please cure me. I will not eat ice cream again.'

"Then I said to Her that I wouldn't eat ice either."

Sri Ramakrishna and holding on to truth – the state of a jnani and a devotee of God

"When I have promised the Divine Mother, 'I will not eat it,' I won't. But sometimes I forget and make a mistake. I once said that I wouldn't eat fish on Sundays, but one day I ate it by mistake.

"However, I never break my promise knowingly. The other day I asked a devotee to take my wash pot to the Jhautala (willow grove). As he had to go elsewhere, somebody else brought the pot. After answering the call of nature, I noticed that it was somebody else holding the wash pot. I could not use the water from the pot. What was I to do? I stood there with some clay in my hand [to use as soap] until the first man brought water for me.

"When I renounced everything by offering flowers at the lotus feet of the Divine Mother, I said to Her, 'Here, Mother. Take your purity and take your impurity, take both your righteousness and

unrighteousness. Here, Mother, take your sin and virtuous deeds. Here, take your good and take your evil. But pray grant me pure love and devotion for God.' I could not say to Her, 'Here, Mother, take your truthfulness and take your falsehood' – I couldn't do that."

A particular devotee brought some ice. Thakur asks M. again and again, "Well, my dear, should I eat it?"

M. says humbly, "Sir, please don't eat it until you have consulted the Divine Mother."

Sri Ramakrishna did not take the ice.

Sri Ramakrishna — Purity and impurity are for a devotee, not for a man of knowledge. Vijay's mother-in-law said, 'Well, what have I attained? Even now I cannot eat just anybody's food.' I said to her, 'Does one attain spiritual knowledge by eating everyone's food? A dog eats anything and everything. Does that mean the dog possesses spiritual wisdom?'

(To M.) "Why do I eat different kinds of food? Lest I become monotonous and be forced to part from them (the devotees).

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'If I talk to you of higher spiritual ideas, your organization and group of devotees will break up.'

"In the state of divine knowledge, groups and organizations are illusory – like a dream.

"I gave up eating fish. In the beginning I used to suffer, but later on I got used to it. If someone burns a bird's nest, it flies hither and thither, taking shelter in the sky. If one genuinely realizes

that the body and the world are unreal, one's soul attains samadhi.

"Earlier I experienced a state of mind similar to that of a jnani. I didn't enjoy people. I would hear that a jnani or a devotee lived in Hathkhola. After a few days, I would learn that he had died. So I didn't enjoy people any more. After that incident, the Divine Mother brought my mind down and rested it in devotion, in love for God and devotees."

M. listens with wonder to the change in Thakur's state of mind. Thakur is now telling the devotees why the Lord incarnates Himself as a human being.

Secret meaning of the avatar and his divine sport as a human being – Dwija and past samskaras

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Do you know why the Lord incarnates Himself as a person? It is because one can hear God's words only from the lips of a man. Devotees enjoy His divine bliss and taste His sweetness through a human body.

"But there is some manifestation of God's power in all devotees. It is like getting a little taste of something you have been sucking for a long time, or like extracting a little honey from a flower after much sucking. (To M.) Did you understand this?"

M. — Yes, sir. I understand it well.

Thakur talks to Dwija. He is fifteen or sixteen years old. His father has married a second time. Dwija occasionally accompanies M. to see Thakur. Thakur is very fond of him. Dwija says that his father did not want him to come to Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Dwija) — Do your brothers also hold me in low esteem?

Dwija does not reply.

M. — After experiencing a couple of blows from the world, any low esteem they entertain for you will be knocked out.

Sri Ramakrishna — They are already receiving blows, since they have a stepmother.

Everyone is silent.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — You should introduce him (Dwija) to Purna.

M. — All right, I will. (To Dwija) You must go to Panihati.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes. I ask everybody to go to Panihati. (To M.) Will you go?

Thakur will attend the celebrations at Panihati, so he is asking the devotees to go too.

M. — Sir, I do want to go.

Sri Ramakrishna — We will have to take a big boat, so it won't rock. Will Girish Ghosh be there?

Everlasting Yea and Everlasting Nay

Thakur looks at Dwija.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, there are so many young men. How is it that only he comes here? Tell me. He certainly has some good past samskaras[1].

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Samskaras – he has done good deeds in his past life. One is guileless in one's last life. In that life one experiences the madness of extreme spiritual joy.

"But, do you know what? It is His will. It is by His 'Yea' that everything happens in this world. When He says, 'Nay,' it all comes to a halt.

"Why should one man not bless another? Because nothing happens by man's will. It is by God's will alone that everything happens.

"The other day I went to Captain's house. I saw some young men walking along the road. They were different. There was one nineteen or twenty years old who had parted his hair on the side and he was whistling as he walked along. As he walked, someone said, 'Nagendra! Kshirode!'

"I saw another person steeped in deep tamas. He was whistling – that itself made him rather arrogant. (To Dwija) Why should one who has attained spiritual knowledge be afraid of criticism? His firm and steadfast understanding[2] is like a

[1] Tendencies from past lives
[2] *Kutastha* intellect

blacksmith's anvil – any number of hammer blows does not affect it.

"I saw the father of such-and-such person walking up the road."

M. — He is a very guileless man.

Sri Ramakrishna — But he has red eyes.

Captain's character and Sri Ramakrishna – union of Purusha[1] and Prakriti[2]

Thakur had visited Captain's home – he is talking of this visit. Captain had criticized all the young men who visit Thakur. Perhaps he had been influenced by Hazra.

Sri Ramakrishna — I had a talk with Captain. I told him that there was nothing [in the universe] but Purusha and Prakriti. Narada said, 'Rama, all the men you see are all parts of You and all women are parts of Sita.'

"Captain was very happy to hear this. He said, 'You alone have attained true knowledge. Being parts of Rama, all men are Rama. And being parts of Sita, all women are Sita.'

"No sooner had he said this than he began talking ill of the young men. He said, 'They study English. They eat anything and everything indiscriminately. And these boys visit you regularly

[1] The Self, the Absolute, Spirit. Pure Consciousness, the witness of the changes of Prakriti

[2] Primordial Nature, composed of the gunas, the material of the universe of mind and matter

– this is not good. It can be harmful to you. Hazra is a very special person – a good man. Please don't let these young men visit you so frequently.' At first I said, 'What can I do if they come?'

"Then I gave him a good dressing down. His daughter began to laugh. I said, 'He who has worldly wisdom is very far from the Lord. If a person has no worldliness, the Lord remains in his grip – very close to him indeed.' Speaking of Rakhal, Captain said, 'He eats in anyone's house.' Perhaps he heard it from Hazra. I said to him, 'A man can perform any amount of repetition of the Name and austerities, but if he remains possessed of worldly thoughts, he can never attain God. On the other hand, if a person eats pork but his mind remains attached to the Lord, he is blessed indeed. Such a person gradually attains the Lord – there is no doubt about it. Hazra practices so much repetition of the Name and austerities, but he tries to earn money as a broker while he is practicing!'

"Captain then said, 'True. What you are saying is indeed true.' So I said to him, 'Just a few minutes ago you said that all men were parts of Rama and so they are Rama. And that all women, being parts of Sita, are Sita. And now you say this.'

"Captain said, 'Yes, that is true. But even you do not love everybody.'

"I said, 'Water is God[1]. There is water all around. But one kind of water is used for drinking, the other for bathing, and yet another for washing dirty things. Your wife and daughter who are

[1] Apo Narayana

sitting in front of me are the very personification of the All-Blissful Mother[1].' Captain then said, 'Yes, yes. This is true!' And he proceeded to touch my feet again and again."

Having said this, Thakur begins to laugh. Then he tells how many good qualities Captain has.

Sri Ramakrishna — Captain is a man of many virtues – he regularly performs daily rituals, he himself worships the family deity, he repeats the sacred mantras while taking his bath. How many more devotions Captain observes! He is a great man of ritual – worship, repetition of Name, arati and chanting of sacred hymns – he attends to all these daily devotions.

Captain and learning – Captain and Thakur's state

"I reprimanded Captain. I said, 'You are being messed up by your study of books. Don't read anymore.'

"Captain described my state of being as that of a bird soaring in the firmament. There are these two – the Supreme Soul[2] and the individual soul[3]. The individual soul is like a bird and the Supreme Soul is like the sky, the sky of Consciousness[4]. Captain said, 'Your individual soul soars in the sky of Consciousness and thus you enter into samadhi.' (Smiling) Captain spoke ill of Bengalis. He said, 'Bengalis are blockheads. The gem [meaning Sri

[1] Anandamayi
[2] Paramatman
[3] Jivatman
[4] Chidakasa

Ramakrishna] lives close by but they do not recognize it.' "

Householder devotee and Sri Ramakrishna – how long does one have to practice ritualistic worship[1]?

"Captain's father was a very great devotee. He was a subadar in the British army. He would attend to worship at the proper time. Even on the battlefield, he would worship Shiva with one hand and use a sword and gun with the other.

(To M.) "But you know what? Day and night Captain is engaged in worldly work. Whenever I go to his home, I find him surrounded by his wife and children. Besides, he also has his ledger of accounts open from time to time. Truly, his mind goes to the Lord, but only for a short time. He is like a man suffering from delirium. He remains diseased, though he regains consciousness for awhile. Then he shouts out, 'I want water, I want water to drink!' As soon as he is given water, he goes into delirium again and has no awareness of the outside world. I said to Captain, 'You are a ritualistic worshipper.' Captain said, 'Sir, I feel so much joy in worship and things like that. There is no other way for worldly people but ritualistic worship.'

"I said, 'But does one have to perform ritualistic worship forever? How long does a bee buzz around a flower? As long as it has not alighted on it. It stops buzzing when it sips the honey.' Captain said, 'Can we people, like you, renounce worship and ritualistic devotions?' But he does not

[1] Karma

say the same thing all the time. Sometimes he says that everything is inert, at other times that all is Consciousness. I say, 'Is there anything inert? Everything indeed is Consciousness.' "

Purna and M. – forced marriage and Sri Ramakrishna's opinion

Thakur asks M. about Purna.

Sri Ramakrishna — If I see Purna once more, my yearning to see him will decrease. How intelligent he is! He is greatly attracted to me. He says, 'How my heart, too, longs to see you.' (To M.) His parents have removed him from your school. Will that harm you?

M. — If he (Vidyasagar[1]) says that Purna has been taken away from the school because of me, I have an explanation to give him.

Sri Ramakrishna — What will you say?

M. — I will just say this: Association with the holy enables one to contemplate the Lord. This is not a wrong thing to do, in any respect. In fact, the textbooks the school has prescribed say, 'One must love the Lord with heart and soul.'

Thakur laughs.

Sri Ramakrishna — I sent for the Younger Naren when I was at Captain's house. I asked him, 'Where is your house? Let's go there.' He said, 'Do come,

[1] The founder of the school

please.' But he was nervous when he walked with me, lest his father should know about it. (All laugh.)

(To Akhil's neighbour) "Well, you haven't been here for many days – it may be seven or eight months."

The Neighbour — Yes, sir. It must be a year.

Sri Ramakrishna — A gentleman used to visit with you.

The Neighbour — Yes, sir. Nilmani Babu.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why doesn't he come any more? Ask him to visit me. Please arrange it. (Seeing a child with him) Who is this boy?

The Neighbour — His home is in Assam.

Sri Ramakrishna — Where is Assam? In what direction?

Dwija is talking about Ashu. Ashu's father is going to arrange his marriage, but Ashu doesn't want to marry.

Sri Ramakrishna — Just see, he doesn't want to marry. He is being forced.

Thakur instructs a devotee to show regard for his elder brother, "An elder brother is like one's father. You must give him due consideration and respect."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and essence of Radhika – the essence of birth and death

A pundit is sitting with the devotees. He is from the northwestern region of India.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to M.) — He is a great scholar of the Bhagavata.

M. and the devotees look at the pundit.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the pundit) — Well, what is Yogamaya?

The pundit gives an explanation.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why isn't Radhika called Yogamaya?

The pundit gives a reply to this question. Thakur then explains it himself –

"Radhika is the very embodiment of pure sattvic love, while Yogamaya contains all three qualities – sattva, rajas and tamas. Radhika has nothing but very pure sattva within. (To M.) Narendra now accepts Radha to a great extent. He says, 'If one wants to learn how to love Sat-chit-ananda, he must learn it from Radha.'

"Sat-chit-ananda has Himself created Radha to taste divine bliss. Radha was created from Sat-chit-ananda Krishna. Sat-chit-ananda Krishna Himself is the 'container' and He Himself is the

'contained' in the form of Radha – in order to taste His own Bliss, or to enjoy Bliss by loving Sat-chit-ananda.

"The scriptures of the Vaishnavas say: Radha did not open her eyes after taking birth. In other words, she did not want to see any person other than Krishna. When Yashoda went to see Radhika with Krishna in her arms, Radha opened her eyes to behold Krishna. Being playful, Krishna had placed his hand on Radha's eyes. (To the boy from Assam) Have you seen infants touching others' eyes with their hands?"

Difference between worldly men and pure-souled young men

The pundit takes his leave.

The Pundit — I must go home now.

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately) — Have you saved any money?

The Pundit — The market is very depressed these days. Employment is not available.

In a few minutes the pundit offers his obeisance to Thakur and leaves.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Just see what a great difference there is between worldly men and these young men [who visit me]! This pundit talks day and night about money. He has come to Calcutta to earn a living. Otherwise, the members of his family will have nothing to live on. That is why he has to

knock on so many doors. When will he get time to meditate on God with a concentrated mind? On the other hand, these young men have no 'lust and greed' in their minds. They can give their minds to God whenever they like.

"These young men do not have attachment for the worldly people. Rakhal used to say at times, 'I feel frightened at the sight of a worldly person approaching me.'

"When I first had spiritual experiences, I used to close the door of my room when I saw a worldly person."

Sorrow at the bereavement of a son or a daughter, and Sri Ramakrishna – his earlier story

"I had such great affection for Ram Mallick in my native village. But when he came here, I couldn't even touch him.

"I was so very fond of him in my childhood. We were together day and night. We used to sleep together. I was sixteen or seventeen years old then. People would say, 'If one of them were a woman, they would marry each other.' We used to play together at his house. I remember all those days. His relatives used to arrive by palanquin. The palanquin men would repeat, '*Hinjoda*! *Hinjoda*[1]!"

"I sent word to him through many people to come see me. He is now running a shop in Chanak. He came here the other day and stayed for two days.

[1] Meaning pull the palanquin with force

"Ram told me, 'I had no child of my own. I brought up my brother's son, but he died.' He heaved a big sigh when he said this. Tears flowed down his cheeks. He has suffered a great loss at the death of his nephew.

"And then he said that because she had no child of her own, his wife gave all her love and affection to the nephew. She was now overwhelmed by grief. I have been telling her, 'You are crazy! What can you gain by grieving? Would you like to go to Kashi?'

"When he called his wife crazy, I found him absolutely 'diluted'. I could not touch him. I could see that there was nothing [no substance] in him."

While Thakur is saying all this in connection with bereavement, the sorrow-stricken brahmin woman stands near the northern door of the room. She is a widow. She had given her only daughter in marriage to a man from an important family. Her daughter's husband, Upadhikari, with the title of Raja, was a resident of Calcutta and a landlord[1]. Whenever the girl visited her paternal home, security men accompanied her. Seeing this, the mother felt very elated. Some days ago that daughter died.

Standing there, the brahmin woman hears the account of the bereavement of Ram Mallick at the death of his nephew. Mad with grief, seeking some relief, she has been running to see Sri Ramakrishna from her home in Baghbazar for many days. She has hoped that Thakur would be able to prescribe some means for overcoming such inconsolable sorrow. Thakur continues –

[1] Zemindar

Sri Ramakrishna (to the brahmin woman and the other devotees) — A fellow came here the other day. He sat for only a short time before he said, 'Let me go now and see my moon-faced[1] son.'

"I couldn't control myself anymore. I said: You fool! Leave this place! Is the face of your son more moon-like than that of the Lord?"

Truth about birth and death – magic of magician

(To M.) "The fact is, God is the Reality and all else is ephemeral. Living beings, the universe, house and home, children and family – they are all the magic of the magician. The magician beats his drum with a stick and cries out, 'See my magic! See this trick!' As soon as he takes the lid off his pot, a number of birds fly out into the sky. Only the magician is real; all his tricks are ephemeral – they are here now, but there is no trace of them in a little while.

"Shiva sits on Mount Kailas with Nandi, his bull, close to him. Suddenly there is a great sound. Nandi, the bull, asks, 'Maharaj, where is the sound coming from?' Shiva says, 'Ravana is born. That is how this sound is produced.' After awhile there is another frightening sound. Nandi asks, 'Now what is this sound?' Shiva laughs and says, 'Ravana has now been slain.' Birth and death are both like the magic of the magician. They are here now and then gone in a little while. Only God is real, all else is ephemeral. Only the water is real, its bubbles are

[1] It is a term of endearment that means lovely and sweet face

only momentary. The bubbles merge in the water, from where they arose.

"God is like a mighty ocean and living beings like bubbles in the ocean – they are born out of it and are dissolved back into it.

"Sons and daughters – they are like five or six small bubbles round a big bubble.

"Indeed, God is the Reality. Now you must endeavour to develop love and devotion[1] for Him and find how to attain Him. What use is your grieving?"

They are all silent. The brahmin woman says, "I must leave now."

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately) — Are you leaving? The sun is very hot. Why don't you go with them later in the carriage?

It is the last day of the month of Jaishtha, about three or four o'clock. It is very hot. A devotee has brought a new sandalwood fan for Thakur. He is very happy to receive it and exclaims, "Oh, how very nice! Om Tat Sat! Kali!" Saying this, he first fans the deities with it. Then he says to M., "Just see what a fine breeze it generates!" M. thoroughly enjoys it.

[1] Bhakti

Chapter III

The ripe 'I,' or the servant 'I'

Captain has arrived with his sons.

Thakur says to Kishori, "Show them around the temple."

M. speaks to Captain.

M., Dwija and other devotees are sitting on the floor. The teacher from Damdama is there. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot facing north. He asks Captain to sit in front of him on one side of the same cot.

Sri Ramakrishna — I told them about you, about your great devotion – so much worship, and about your various kinds of arati.

Captain (shyly) — What worship and arati can I perform? Who am I?

Sri Ramakrishna — The harmful ego is the one that is attached to 'lust and greed'. There is no harm in having the 'I' of a servant of the Lord. Nor is there any harm in a child's 'I' – the child is not subject to any guna (qualities of nature). One moment he fights, and the next he loves. He builds a dollhouse with great care, and then suddenly tears it down. There is no harm in the servant's 'I' or the child's 'I'. This 'I' is not to be counted as ego. Like sugar candy which, though sweet, is not like other sweets. While other sweets bring indigestion, sugar candy brings relief. Or like 'Omkar' – it is not like other sounds.

"It is with this 'ego' that one loves Sat-chit-ananda. The ego cannot be gotten rid of – so one must cling to the 'I of a servant,' or 'I of a devotee.' Otherwise, how can a man live? What love the gopis had! (To Captain) Tell us something about the gopis. You read the Bhagavata a lot."

Captain — Even when Sri Krishna was in Vrindavan and had no riches or splendour, the gopis loved him more than their own hearts and souls. That is why Krishna said, 'How can I repay the debt I owe them – the gopis who have surrendered their all to me – body, mind and soul.'

Sri Ramakrishna is becoming absorbed in ecstasy. Saying, "Govinda, Govinda," he is becoming completely absorbed! He has almost lost outer-consciousness. In wonder, Captain mutters, "How blessed!"

Captain and all the other devotees gather to watch Sri Ramakrishna in this wondrous state of ecstatic love. They sit perfectly still, gazing at him, until he regains normal consciousness.

Sri Ramakrishna — And what after that?

Captain — He [Krishna] is not reached by yogis. It is difficult for even yogis to reach Him[1] – but He is attained by such love as the gopis had. He who was not attained by years of communion by the yogis, the gopis reached effortlessly.

[1] Yogibhiragamyam

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — He ate with the gopis, played with them, cried and demanded much of them – all this He did.

Bankim and biography of Sri Krishna – avatarhood

A devotee says, "Bankim has written a biography of Krishna."

Sri Ramakrishna — Bankim accepts Sri Krishna, but not Radha.

Captain — It seems that he doesn't accept the divine sport of God.

Sri Ramakrishna — And he also says that lust and other passions are necessary.

Teacher from Damdama — Bankim has written in the *Navajivan* (magazine) that the purpose of religion is to energize the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions of man.

Captain — He says that lust and other passions are necessary but he doesn't accept the divine sport of God. God incarnated Himself as a human being in Vrindavan to enact the sport of Radha and Krishna. Why doesn't he accept it?

Avatar is full manifestation of Brahman – difference between mere book-learning and realization

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — The newspaper does not talk of these things. How, then, could he accept such ideas?

"Someone said to his friend, 'Yesterday I was passing though a certain neighbourhood when I saw a house crash to the ground.' The friend said, 'Wait a minute. Let me check the newspaper.' There was no mention in the paper of a building having crashed to the ground. So the fellow said, 'Well, the paper doesn't mention it, so it's of no significance.' The first man said, 'But I saw it myself!' His friend said, 'That might be true, but since it's not in the paper, how can I believe it?' How could Bankim believe that God incarnates as a human being to enact His divine sport? Such ideas aren't in the English education. It is very difficult to comprehend how God fully and perfectly manifests himself in human form. Isn't that true? It is the manifestation of the Infinite in three and a half cubits!"

Captain — One says, 'kṛṣṇastu bhagavān svayam,' – Krishna is God Himself – but you have to use the terms 'whole' and 'partial' manifestation to describe Him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Whole and partial manifestation are like fire and its sparks. An Incarnation of God is for the sake of the devotee and not for the man of knowledge[1]. The Adhyatma Ramayana says: Oh, Rama, You are the all-pervading Spirit and You, Yourself, are everything pervaded. 'vācyavācakabhedena tvameva parameśavara' – Oh Supreme Lord, You are

[1] Jnani

distinguished as the *vachaka*, the signifying symbol, and *vachya*, the object signified.

Captain — The signifying symbol means the pervading Spirit, and the object signified means what is pervaded.

Sri Ramakrishna — The pervaded being, in other words, means a finite form, God incarnating Himself as a human being.

Chapter IV

Egoism is the cause of one's destruction and obstacle in God-realization

Everybody is seated while Sri Ramakrishna talks to Captain and the devotees. Jaygopal Sen and Trailokya of the Brahmo Samaj arrive. They salute Thakur and sit down. Thakur glances at Trailokya and smiles.

Sri Ramakrishna — One does not see God because of one's pride. This stump of a tree of egotism is barring the door of the Lord's room. Unless one jumps over the stump, one cannot enter His room.

"A man had acquired the power to tame ghosts. No sooner did he summon a ghost than it appeared. It said, 'Tell me what work you want me to do. The moment you can't give me any work, I will break your neck.' Whatever work the man had to do, he asked the ghost to do. At last there was no more work to be done. Then the ghost said to the man, 'I will now break your neck.' The man said, 'Wait a minute. I will be right back.' Saying this, he

went to his revered guru. 'Sir, I am in great trouble,' he said, 'what should I do?' The guru said, 'Ask him to straighten this curly hair.' The ghost worked at it day and night. But can tightly curled hair ever be straightened? It remains curly. Egoism also seems to go away for awhile, but it soon returns.

"The Lord's grace does not dawn until one gets rid of egoism.

"When there is a festival in a house, the master of the house appoints a person to be in charge of the store-room. He does not enter it when the person in charge is present. But when the latter leaves the store-room, the master locks it and takes charge of it himself.

"Only a minor is given a guardian. When a child cannot safeguard his wealth and property, the king assumes the responsibility for it on his behalf. Unless one rids oneself of ego, the Lord does not take up one's burdens and responsibilities.

"Once Lord Narayana (Vishnu) and Lakshmi (his consort) were sitting in Vaikuntha. Lakshmi was gently stroking his feet. The Lord suddenly jumped up. Lakshmi asked him, 'Where are you going, Lord?' Narayana said, 'One of my devotees is in great danger. I am going to save him.' Saying this, Narayana went out. But he immediately returned. Lakshmi exclaimed, 'Lord, you have returned so soon!' Narayana laughed and said, 'A devotee overwhelmed with ecstatic love for Me was walking down the road. Washermen were putting out clothes to dry. The devotee trampled the clothes. Seeing it, the washermen came with a stick

to beat him. That is why I went to protect him.' Lakshmi asked, 'But then why have you returned?' Narayana laughed and said, 'I saw the devotee himself picking up a brick to throw at the washermen. (All laugh.) So I didn't have to go save him.' "

His earlier story – Keshab and Gauri – let there be the attitude of a servant after attaining the state of Soham

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'You must get rid of your ego.' Keshab answered, 'But sir, then how would I keep my group together?'

"I said, 'What lack of understanding you have! Please give up the 'unripe I' which attaches you to 'lust and greed'. I am not asking you to give up your 'ripe I,' the 'I of a servant,' or the 'I of a devotee'. 'I am the servant of the Lord,' 'I am the Lord's son' – is the 'ripe I'. There is no harm in it."

Trailokya — It is very difficult to get rid of the ego. A man thinks he has known the highest truth.

Sri Ramakrishna — So that he would not later develop egoism, Gauri would never say, 'I'. Instead he would say, 'this.' I, too, began saying, 'this,' following his example. Instead of saying that I had eaten, I would say, 'This has eaten.' Noticing it, Mathur Babu one day said, 'What is this, my dear sir? Why do you speak like this? Let those people who have egotism do it, but you don't have I-consciousness. There is no need for you to speak in this way.'

"I said to Keshab, 'The ego will not vanish, so one must live with the attitude of a servant, a servant of God. Prahlada had both attitudes. At times he would feel, 'You are I and I am You' – that is, the attitude of 'Soham.' When his sense of I-consciousness would return, he would cherish the idea, 'I am Your servant and You are my Master.' When one has been firmly established in the attitude of 'Soham,' one should later live with the attitude of a servant – as, 'I am the servant of God'."

Signs of having attained the knowledge of Brahman – 'I of a devotee' – renunciation of work

(To Captain) "There are some signs by which one recognizes a person who has attained the knowledge of Brahman. The *Srimad Bhagavata* talks of four states of a man of spiritual knowledge: He appears like (1) a child, (2) an inert object, (3) a crazy man, and (4) a ghoul. Sometimes he acts like a five-year-old child. And sometimes he acts like a mad man.

"At times he lives like an inert object. In this state he cannot attend to work – all work drops off. If you say that Janaka and others did not renounce work, the fact is that in that period of time people used to give their responsibilities to subordinate officers and thus freed themselves of worry. Moreover, people then had intense faith."

Sri Ramakrishna is talking of renunciation of work. Yet he is also saying to those who are attached to duties to attend to them in a detached spirit.

Sri Ramakrishna — After attaining Knowledge one cannot do much work.

Trailokya — Why? Pavhari Baba is such a great yogi, but he settles people's quarrels and disputes. He even decides their lawsuits.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, yes, that's true. Dr. Durgacharan was a great drunkard – he used to drink twenty-four hours a day. But he was precise when he worked. He made no mistakes when treating his patients. There is no harm in attending to work after attaining love and devotion[1] for God. But it is exceedingly difficult – it needs intense practice of spiritual disciplines.

"It is God who does everything. We are only His instruments. The Sikhs said in front of the Kali Temple, 'The Lord is compassionate.' I asked them, 'Compassionate to whom?' The Sikhs said, 'Why, to us, Master.' I said, 'We are all His children. What does compassion to one's own children mean? He looks after His children. If He didn't, are people from the neighbourhood[2] supposed to?' Well, those who call Him compassionate don't understand that we are God's own."

Captain — True, sir. They forget that they are God's own.

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[1] Bhakti
[2] Thakur mentions Vamanpara

The devotee and performing worship and other rituals – God, the gracious loving Lord of the devotees – a perfect jnani

Sri Ramakrishna — Should we not, then, say that God is kind and compassionate? As long as we practice spiritual disciplines, we should call Him compassionate. But when one has realized God, one rightly feels that He is one's own Father or Mother. As long as one has not realized God, one feels distant from Him – like somebody else's child.

"During the stage of practicing spiritual disciplines, one should describe God by all of His attributes. One day Hazra said to Narendra, 'God is infinite, so is His splendour. Does He care to eat your sandesh or banana? Does He want to listen to your songs? These are all illusions of the mind.'

"Narendra immediately fell down ten cubits [spiritually]. I said to Hazra, 'What a scoundrel you are! If you talk to youngsters like this, what will they do?' Once a man loses love and devotion for God[1], what remains for him to live by? God has infinite splendour, yet He is under the control of His devotee. The gate-keeper of a rich man comes to a meeting of the master and his friends; he stands on one side of the room. He has something in his hand covered with a piece of cloth. He is very hesitant. The master asks him, 'What is the matter, gate-keeper? What do you have in your hand?' The gate-keeper places a custard apple before the master hesitantly and says to him, 'I wish for you to eat it.' The master, touched by the devotion and

[1] Bhakti

feelings of the gate-keeper, takes the custard apple with great reverence and says, 'Ah! It is a custard apple of such good quality! Where did you get it? You must have taken a great deal of trouble to find it!'

"God is under the control of His devotee. Duryodhana showed great love and respect for Sri Krishna and said, 'Please stay here and have your meal.' The Lord, however, went to Vidur's cottage. He is the gracious, loving Lord of the devotees. He ate Vidur's simple rice and vegetables as if they were ambrosia.

"A perfect jnani has this sign – he sometimes behaves like a ghoul. He doesn't care what he eats or drinks, he doesn't discriminate between purity and impurity. In fact, the perfect jnani and the absolutely crazy person may look alike externally. The perfect jnani might not recite the holy mantras while taking a dip in the Ganges. He may have placed all the flowers indiscriminately at the feet of the deity while performing worship and left without uttering any sacred mantras."

Man of karma and Sri Ramakrishna – how long does one have to perform work?

"As long as one craves worldly enjoyment, one cannot renounce work. One has to perform work as long as one desires pleasure.

"A bird sat absent-mindedly on the mast of a ship. The ship was sailing on the Ganges until it finally reached the mighty ocean. The bird then came to its senses. It looked all around and could see no landmark or shore. It flew toward the north,

hoping to reach land. Having flown a long distance, it grew tired, but could still see no landmark. What could it do? It returned to the ship and sat on the mast again.

"After some time the bird flew away again – this time toward the east. It couldn't see anything in the east either – there was only a vast sheet of water. It became extremely tired and again returned to the mast of the ship and perched there. After resting for a long time, it went to the south and then to the west. When it found no sign of land anywhere, it sat on the mast again and flew no more. It sat there peacefully. Now it had no feeling of urgency, restlessness, or anxiety in its mind. Being at peace, it made no more effort to fly."

Captain — Ah, what a nice illustration!

One develops deep longing for God when desire for worldly pleasures has ceased – it leads to God-realization

Sri Ramakrishna — Worldly people become exhausted after wandering around in all directions seeking happiness. When attached to 'lust and greed' they only suffer pain and grief. Then they develop dispassion[1] and renunciation. Most people cannot renounce unless they have enjoyed the pleasures of the world. There are two kinds of spiritual aspirants: *kutichaka* and *vahudaka*. Religious aspirants of the latter class visit numerous places of pilgrimage – they cannot settle at one place for any length of time. They drink the

[1] Vairagya

water from many different holy places. When their restlessness ceases by constant roaming about, they build themselves a hut and settle down. Then they meditate on God free from worry and effort.

"What is there in the world to enjoy? 'Lust and greed' only bring momentary pleasures. One moment there is pleasure, the next it is no more.

"The world is like a cloudy sky pouring rain; generally one cannot see the sun. There is sorrow the greater part of life. The clouds of 'lust and greed' do not let one see the sun.

"Some people ask me, 'Sir, why has the Lord created such a world? Is there no way out for us?' "

The way – yearning and renunciation

"I say, why shouldn't there be a way? Take refuge in God and pray to Him with a yearning heart for a favourable breeze to give you an auspicious opportunity. God definitely listens to the prayers of one who calls on Him with a longing heart.

"The son of a man was critically ill. His father went to various people asking with great yearning for a remedy. Somebody said, 'He will be cured if you can arrange this: That the water of the svati nakshatra[1] fall into a skull; that a frog drink that water; that a snake chase and pounce upon the frog; that the venom of the snake falls into the skull as the frog escapes its bite. If you give a little of that poison water to the patient, he should get well.'

[1] A particular conjunction of stars

"With great longing this fellow set out in search of the medicine during the svati constellation of stars. It was raining. He implored the Lord longingly, 'Lord, please let me locate a skull. It is raining during the svati constellation of stars.' Then he added to his prayer, 'I appeal to you, Oh Savior. Grant that I may also find a frog and a snake.' He had such great yearning that he found them all immediately. In no time the snake chased the frog. As it was going to bite the frog, its poison fell into the skull.

"If you surrender to the Lord and call on Him with a heart full of yearning, He is bound to listen and take care of everything for you."

Captain — What an illustration!

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, God does make everything favourable. It may be possible that one is not married and so is able to devote his entire mind to the Lord. Or perhaps his brother begins to earn (money), or his son grows up, so that he is relieved of household responsibilities. In that case he can effortlessly give one hundred percent of his mind to God. But without renouncing 'lust and greed,' one does not succeed. It is only by renunciation that ignorance[1] is dispelled. When the rays of the sun fall on a lens, many objects burn. On the other hand, if you take the lens inside a room where there is no sunlight, nothing is burned – you have to come out of the room to use the lens.

[1] Ajnana

One can enter household life after realizing God, like Janaka and others

"Some people lead householder lives after attaining spiritual knowledge. They are able to see both the inside and outside of the room. The light of spiritual knowledge illumines the household, by virtue of which they can discriminate between what is good and what is bad, what is eternal and what is ephemeral.

"The ignorant who live in the world without having faith in God are like people living in a house made of mud walls. They can see only a little of the inside of the house in its dim light. But those who live a householder's life after attaining spiritual knowledge, having realized God, are like people living in a house made of glass. They can see both inside and outside the house. The light of the sun of Knowledge lights up the inside of the house well. Such a man sees everything inside the house very clearly – what is good and what is bad, what is permanent and what is transitory.

"God is the only doer, we are just His instruments.

"That is why the jnani should also be free from ego. The author of *Mahimastava*[1] was proud to have written this hymn. But his pride was crushed when Shiva's bull bared his teeth. He saw that each one of its teeth was one of the sacred verses[2] written by him. Do you know what this means? All

[1] A hymn to Lord Shiva
[2] Mantras

sacred verses have existed since eternity – he had only brought them to light.

"It is not good to be a professional guru. One cannot become a religious teacher without receiving a command from God. He who says that he is a guru is a man of low intelligence. Haven't you noticed the pans of a weighing scale? The pan that is lighter goes higher. The person who considers himself higher is, in fact, lighter [of lesser substance]. Everyone wants to be a guru – a disciple is hard to find."

Trailokya is sitting on the floor toward the northern side of the smaller cot. He is going to sing a devotional song. Sri Ramakrishna says, "Ah, how nicely you sing!" Trailokya sings to the accompaniment of a tanpura –

Song –

We have given our hearts to You; You indeed are everything that exists.

Song –

You are my everything, O Lord! The support of my life and its quintessence.

But for You there is none in the three worlds whom I can call my own.

Listening to the song, Thakur is becoming overwhelmed with divine ecstasy. He says, "Ah! Ah! You indeed are everything that exists."

The song ends. It is six o'clock. Thakur goes toward the Jhautala for a wash. M. accompanies him.

Thakur laughs and talks while he is walking along. Suddenly he says to M., "Oh, you people have not eaten anything! None of you have!"

Sri Ramakrishna is eager to serve prasad to the devotees.

Narendra and Sri Ramakrishna

Thakur is going to Calcutta in the evening. Returning from the Jhautala, he says to M., "In whose carriage will I go to Calcutta?"

It is evening. A lamp is lighted in Thakur's room and incense is burned. Lamps have also been lit everywhere in the temples and buildings. A symphony of sanai and other instruments is being played. Arati will now be performed in the twelve Shiva temples, in the Vishnu temple, and in Mother Kali's temple.

Sitting on the smaller cot, Sri Ramakrishna chants the name of the deities and then meditates on the Divine Mother. The evening worship is over. Thakur begins pacing up and down the room, occasionally talking with the devotees. He consults M. about his visit to Calcutta.

Narendra arrives, accompanied by Sarat and one or two other young devotees. Lying prostrate on the ground, they salute Thakur.

Seeing Narendra, Thakur's heart overflows with love and affection. Touching Narendra's face as one would a child's, he caresses him and says affectionately, "Ah, you have come!"

Thakur stands in the middle of the room facing west. Narendra and the other young men salute him and sit facing east in front of him. They talk. Turning to M. Thakur says, "Should we go to Calcutta, now that Narendra has come? I sent someone to fetch him. Should we go then? What do you think?"

M. — Whatever you wish. Let's not go today.

Sri Ramakrishna — All right. I'll go tomorrow – if not by boat, then by carriage. (To the other devotees) It is already dark. You may leave now.

The devotees salute Thakur one by one and leave.

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna at Devotees' Homes in Calcutta

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram's house

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in Balaram's parlour with the devotees. It is about three o'clock in the afternoon. He is smiling. Binode, Rakhal, M. and a few others are sitting near him. The Younger Naren arrives.

It is Tuesday, 28 July 1885, the first lunar day of the dark fortnight of the month of Ashada. Thakur had come to Balaram's house in the morning and had taken his midday meal there with the devotees. Sri Jagannath Deva is the deity worshipped at Balaram's house, so Thakur says that the food at Balaram's house is very pure.

Narayan and some other devotees had told Sri Ramakrishna that there were several pictures of gods and goddesses at Nanda Bose's house. Thakur is going there this afternoon to see the pictures. A brahmin woman[1] devoted to Sri Ramakrishna lives near Nanda Bose's house. The brahmin woman, deeply afflicted with sorrow at the death of her daughter, occasionally visits him at Dakshineswar. She has invited Thakur with intense longing to visit her house. Thakur will visit her, as well as the home of Ganu's mother, another devotee.

Whenever Thakur comes to Balaram's house, he sends word to the young boy devotees to come there to see him. He sends the message through other

[1] Golap-ma (Golap Sundari Devi), a companion and friend of Holy Mother

devotees. Once the Younger Naren said to Sri Ramakrishna, "I am so busy with work, I can't always come to see you. I have to study for my examinations." When the Younger Naren arrives, Thakur talks to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Younger Naren) — I didn't send for you today.

The Younger Naren (laughing) — What can be done about it now?

Sri Ramakrishna — I don't want your studies to suffer. You should come to see me when you are free.

Thakur says this as though he were annoyed with a loved one.

The palanquin has arrived. Thakur will now go to Nanda Bose's house.

Chanting the name of the Lord, he gets into the palanquin. He is wearing black, varnished slippers and a red-bordered dhoti. He has no shawl. Mani places the slippers on one side of the palanquin and walks along with it on foot. Paresh soon joins him.

The palanquin enters the gate of Nanda Bose's house. Crossing its spacious courtyard, the palanquin stops in front of the residence.

Some members of the family come and salute Thakur. Thakur asks M. to give him the slippers. Then he gets out of the palanquin and goes to the hall on the upper floor. It is a very spacious room. Pictures of gods and goddesses hang on all sides.

The master of the house and his brother, Pasupati, talk with Thakur. After some time the devotees who had followed the palanquin join them in the hall. Atul, Girish's brother, is there, as well as

Prasanna's father, who is a frequent visitor to Nanda's house.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna's gracious visit to the house of Nanda Bose

Sri Ramakrishna gets up to look at the pictures of gods and goddesses. M. and many other devotees stand around him. Pasupati, Nanda's brother, accompanies him and explains the pictures.

Thakur first sees the picture of Vishnu with four arms. As soon as he sees it, he is overwhelmed with divine ecstasy. He had been standing, but now he sits down. He remains absorbed in this spiritual mood for some time.

The second picture is of the gracious and loving Lord of the devotees, Sri Ramachandra.

Sri Rama, placing his hand on Hanuman's head, is blessing him. Hanuman's eyes are fixed on Sri Rama's lotus feet. Sri Ramakrishna gazes at this image for a long time. Full of divine emotion, he says, "Ah! Ah!"

The third picture is of Sri Krishna standing with a flute to his lips under the kadamba tree.

The fourth picture is of Vamana[1] with an umbrella over his head, going to Bali's yajna. Sri Ramakrishna utters, "Vamana," and then fixes his eyes on him.

Having seen the picture of Narasimha[2], Thakur looks at one of Sri Krishna in the cow pasture. He is tending his cows with his cowherd friends on the bank of the Jamuna at Vrindavan.

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[1] Vamana, the dwarf – an incarnation of Vishnu

[2] God incarnated as half lion and half man to protect Prahlada

Mani exclaims, "Oh, a very nice picture!"

Seeing the seventh picture, Thakur says, "Dhumavati." The eighth is of Shorashi; the ninth of Bhuvaneshvari; the tenth of Tara and the eleventh of Kali. Thakur says, "All these pictures depict the terrible aspects of the Divine Mother. They should not be kept at home, but if they are, they should be worshipped. You are very fortunate to be able to keep them in your house."

Looking at the picture of Mother Annapurna, Thakur says in an ecstatic mood, "Grand! Grand!"

The next painting is of Radha dressed as a king. She is seated on a throne in the nikunja grove surrounded by her milkmaid friends [as attendants]. Sri Krishna is standing at the gate of the grove dressed as a gatekeeper.

Then there is a picture of the festival in which Sri Krishna is swung in a cradle[1]. Thakur looks at the next for a long time – it is the image of Saraswati[2] inside a glass case. The goddess is holding a vina[3] and singing raga and ragini[4] in ecstasy.

Having seen the pictures, Thakur goes back to the master of the house and says to him, "We have had such joy today. Grand! You are a real and devout Hindu. Instead of keeping English pictures, you have these. How surprising!"

Nanda Bose is seated. He says respectfully to Thakur, "Please sit down. Why are you standing?"

Sri Ramakrishna (sitting) — These are very important pictures. You are a real Hindu.

Nanda Bose — I have European pictures too.

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[1] Dol
[2] Vinapani, the goddess of learning and music
[3] A stringed musical instrument
[4] An Indian musical mode

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — But they are different. You haven't the same attitude toward European pictures.

A picture of Keshab Sen's Navavidhan is hanging on one wall of the room. Suresh Mitra had had it painted. He is one of Thakur's beloved disciples. In this picture the Paramahamsa Deva is showing Keshab the followers of different religions going toward God on different paths – the difference is only in paths.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah! This picture was painted for Surendra[1].

Prasanna's Father (smiling) — You, too, are in the picture.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — It is a unique portrait; it contains all the beliefs. It is an ideal for modern times.

While speaking, Thakur is suddenly becoming absorbed in divine ecstasy. He talks to the Mother of the Universe.

After awhile he says, as if intoxicated, "I am not unconscious." Looking around the house, he says, "It is a big building. But what is in it? Bricks, wood and clay."

In a few minutes he says, "I am so happy to see all these pictures of gods and goddesses." Then he adds, "Images of the terrible aspects of the Divine Mother – Kali, or Tara (the consort of Shiva who lives in the cremation ground among corpses) – should not

[1] The name by which Thakur addressed Suresh Mitra

be kept in a household. If you do, they must be worshipped."

Pasupati (smiling) — It will be as long as He wills it.

Sri Ramakrishna — Of course that's true. But it is good to keep the mind on God. It is not good to forget Him.

Nanda Bose — But one does not want to think of Him!

Sri Ramakrishna — One thinks of Him by His grace.

Nanda Bose — But God does not seem to grant His grace. Does He have the power to bestow grace?

Is God indeed the doer – or is the work itself God?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — I see, you think like the pundits do – one reaps the fruit of one's actions. Give up this idea. By taking refuge in the Lord, one's duties and karmas cease to exist. Taking flowers in my hand, I used to say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, here is Your sin and here Your holy deeds. I want neither; pray grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your good and here Your evil. I want neither good nor evil; pray grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your righteousness, here Your unrighteousness. I want neither of them; pray grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your Knowledge, here is Your ignorance. I want neither knowledge nor ignorance; pray grant me pure love

and devotion. Here is Your purity, here Your impurity. Pray grant me pure love and devotion.'

Nanda Bose — Can God change the law?

Sri Ramakrishna — What do you mean? He is the Lord of all – He can do anything and everything. He who has made the law can change it.

Does awakening come when one has done away with worldly enjoyments, or is it by His grace?

"But you can talk that way. Since you crave worldly enjoyments, you may say so. There is a view that a man doesn't attain spiritual awakening until his desire for worldly enjoyments is over. But what is there to enjoy? The pleasures of 'lust and greed' are momentary – this moment they exist and the next moment they disappear. What is there in 'lust and greed'? Its enjoyment is like eating a hog-plum that is all stone and rind. Eat it and you get colic. The moment you swallow sweet sandesh, it is gone."

Is God partial? Why is there ignorance? It is His sweet will

Nanda Bose is silent for a few minutes. Then he says, "Oh yes! People no doubt talk that way. But is God partial? If one can succeed by His grace, it is obvious that He is partial."

Sri Ramakrishna — God Himself has become everything. He Himself has become living beings, the universe – everything. When one attains

Absolute Knowledge[1] one realizes this. He has become the mind, the intellect, the body – and the twenty-four cosmic principles. To whom, then, can He be partial?

Nanda Bose — Why has He taken so many forms? Why is there knowledge in one place and ignorance in another?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is His sweet will.

Atul — Kedar (Chatterji) said something nice. Somebody asked him, 'Why did God create the world?' He replied, 'I was not present at the meeting in which He planned His creation.' (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna — It is God's will.

Saying this, Thakur sings –

All is Your will, O Mother Tara! You have Your own way in doing everything!

You do Your works, O Mother! People, however, say that they do it.

You bind the elephant in the mud, and You make the lame cross the hills.

To some You grant the seat of Brahman, and others You take down,

I am the instrument, You are the operator; I am the dwelling, You are the dweller within.

I am the chariot, You are the Charioteer; I move as You make me move.

I speak as You make me speak.

[1] Purna jnana

"She is the All-Blissful Mother. She creates, preserves and dissolves in Her sport. There are numberless beings, but only one or two of them attain salvation – that alone makes Her happy. 'She claps and laughs when She sees one or two kites out of millions breaking free of their strings.' Likewise, some people are being entangled in the world and some are being liberated.

> "In the sea of the world, so many boats, O mind, sail, while others sink."

Nanda Bose — That is Her sweet will. But what about us, who are suffering so much?

Sri Ramakrishna — Do 'you' really exist? It is She who has become everything. As long as one does not know Her, one goes on repeating, 'I, I.'

"Everyone will know Her – everyone will indeed be liberated. Some people get their meal in the morning, others at midday and yet others in the evening – but no one will remain hungry. Indeed, everyone will realize his own true nature."

Pasupati — True, sir. It seems that He Himself has become everything.

Sri Ramakrishna — Just try to find out what you are. Are you bones and flesh, or blood, or the intestines? Looking for 'I', you find 'You' – in other words, there is nothing inside you but God's power. There is no 'I', only 'You'. You have so much wealth, but you have no egotism. It is not possible to get rid of 'I' altogether. So if the 'I' does not vanish, let the rascal remain as the servant of God. (All laugh.) It

is good to have the pride of being a devotee of God, or His son, or the servant of God. The 'I' which is attached to 'lust and greed' is the 'unripe I'. One must renounce such an ego.

Hearing such a clear elucidation of egoism, the master of the house and the others are delighted.

Pride of wealth and self-forgetfulness

Sri Ramakrishna — There are two signs of a person who has attained spiritual knowledge. First, he has no pride; second, he develops a serene attitude. You have both these signs, so you must have received the grace of God.

"When one has too much wealth, one forgets God. That is the nature of wealth. Jadu Mallick has become very wealthy. He doesn't talk much about God these days. Earlier he used to speak so nicely about the Lord.

" 'Lust and greed' are a kind of intoxicant. When one is drunk, one fails to recognize one's own maternal and paternal uncles. One may even say to them, 'Cursed be your family...' A drunkard can't distinguish between his superiors and inferiors."

Nanda Bose — That is true.

Theosophy – salvation through momentary communion with God – practicing pure love and devotion

Pasupati — Sir, what do you think about Spiritualism and Theosophy? And about the solar world and the lunar world and the world of planets?

Sri Ramakrishna — I don't know, my dear. But why worry about all these calculations? Eat mangoes. What is the use of knowing how many mango trees, how many branches, how many millions of leaves are in the garden? I have come to the garden to eat mangoes. Let me eat and go.

"A man has no desire to know all these useless details when he develops spiritual awakening, when he knows God. In delirium what nonsense one speaks: 'I shall eat five seers of cooked rice. I shall drink a pitcher of water.' The physician says to such a patient, 'Yes, yes, you want all this. All right, you may eat it.' Saying which, the physician goes on with his smoke. But he listens to the patient when he is no longer delirious."

Pasupati — Our delirium might last forever!

Sri Ramakrishna — Why? Fix your mind on God. You will attain spiritual awakening.

Pasupati (smiling) — Our communion with God is momentary – no longer than the time it takes to smoke. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna — So what. Even a momentary communion with God gives liberation.

"Ahalya said, 'Rama, may I be born as the offspring of a pig, or any other being, but pray grant that I may fix my mind at Thy lotus feet and develop pure love and devotion for Thee.'

"Narada said, 'Rama, I want no other boon from You. Only grant pure love and devotion. And

may I never be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya. Pray, bless me.' When one sincerely prays to Him, one can fix one's mind on Him – then one does develop pure love and devotion at His lotus feet."

Sin and the after-life – thought of God at the time of death – King Bharata

" 'Shall we ever get rid of our delirium? What will happen to us? We are sinners' – one must give up such ideas. (To Nanda Bose) Let there be this faith: Since I have called on the name of Rama, how can there be any sin in me?"

Nanda Bose — Does an after-life exist? Is one punished for one's sins?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why don't you eat mangoes! What need do you have to calculate all these things – does an after-life exist or not? What use is it to talk about such things?

"Please eat mangoes. 'Mango,' or love and devotion for God, is the one thing essential."

Nanda Bose — Where are mango trees? Where can I get them?

Sri Ramakrishna — Trees? He exists as the eternal and infinite Brahman. He does exist, He is permanent. The fact is that He is the wish-fulfilling tree[1] of heaven.

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[1] *Kalpataru*

O my mind, pick up the four fruits from under the wish-fulfilling tree of Kali.

"You must go to the wish-fulfilling tree and pray to it. Then alone can you obtain the fruit – then only will the fruit fall to the ground. You can then gather it and bring it with you. The four fruits are: righteousness, economic security, fulfillment of legitimate desires and liberation[1].

"Jnanis seek the fruit of liberation and devotees want love and devotion for God – love for God that wells up unbidden out of the depths of the immortal soul. They are not interested in righteousness, economic security and fulfillment of desires.

"You ask about the after-life. According to the *Gita*, one becomes what one thinks of at the hour of death. King Bharata quit his mortal frame remorsefully repeating, 'Deer, deer' because he was grieving over his pet deer. So he was born as a deer in the next birth. For this reason, day and night one should practice repetition of the Name[2], meditation, worship and other spiritual exercises. Only then, by virtue of practice, will one think of the Lord at the hour of death. That is how one attains the real nature of God after death.

"Keshab Sen also asked me about the after-life. I said to him too, 'What need have you for all these calculations?' And I added, 'As long as one does not realize God, one has to repeatedly come to this world.' A potter dries his earthen pots and lids by putting them in the sun. If they are trampled by

[1] *Dharma, artha, kama and moksha*
[2] *Japa*

goats or sheep, he throws away the baked and broken pots. However, he mixes the unbaked ones with more clay and moulds them again into new vessels on the potter's wheel."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and his blessings on a householder – signs of rajas

The master of the house has shown no sign of offering refreshments to Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna himself mentions it, saying –

"Let's have something to eat. I said to Jadu's mother the other day, 'Look here, please offer me something to eat.' Otherwise, it brings harm to the family."

The master of the house orders some sweets. Thakur eats them. Nanda Bose and the others look intently at him. They notice how Sri Ramakrishna conducts himself.

Sri Ramakrishna now wishes to wash his hands. The sweets had been on a plate placed on a sheet on the carpet, so he could not wash his hands on it. A servant brings a brass bowl for him to use.

The brass bowl is a sign of rajas. Thakur exclaims, "Please take it away." The master of the house says to him, "Please wash your hands."

Thakur is preoccupied with some other thought. He asks, "What? Do I have to wash my hands?"

Thakur rises and goes to the southern verandah. He asks Mani to pour water on his hands. Mani does so from a pitcher with a spout. Sri

Ramakrishna dries his hand with his own cloth and returns to his seat. Some betel leaves have been brought on a platter for the gentleman guests. Thakur does not take it when a betel leaf from this platter, which had already been offered to the other guests, is offered to him.

Offering food ritualistically to one's ideal deity – love and devotion for God mixed with knowledge, and pure love

Nanda Bose (to Sri Ramakrishna) — May I ask you something?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What?

Nanda Bose — Why didn't you take the betel leaf? Everything else went fine, but you seemed unreasonable about that.

Sri Ramakrishna — I take food only after offering it to God.

Nanda Bose —But it would have been eaten by God!

Sri Ramakrishna — The path of jnana is one and the path of love and devotion for God[1] another. The school of jnana evaluates everything by applying the knowledge of Brahman[2]. In the path of love and devotion, one differentiates a little.

Nanda Bose — But you did not act correctly.

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[1] Bhakti

[2] The jnani believes in Oneness of God in all objects and does not distinguish between holy and unholy

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — That is my own particular attitude. What you say is also right.

Thakur is cautioning the master of the house about flatterers.

Sri Ramakrishna — Here is one particular caution. Your courtier friends hover around you for their own selfish ends. (To Prasanna's father) Do you live here?

Prasanna's Father — No sir, I live in the neighbourhood. Would you care for a smoke?

Sri Ramakrishna (humbly) — No, you may smoke. I don't feel like smoking.

Nanda Bose has a very big house. That is why Thakur says to him, "Jadu's house is not this big. I told him so the other day."

Nanda Basu — He has built a new house at Jorashanko.

Thakur now encourages Nanda Bose.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Nanda Bose) — It is not a small matter that, though living in the world, you have kept your mind on God. Those who have renounced the world do have to call on God – what bravery is there in that? He indeed is blessed who calls on Him though living in the world. Such a person has to remove a twenty maund stone to be able to find something.

"One should take recourse to a particular attitude when calling upon God. Hanuman had the attitude of bhakti mixed with knowledge, Narada had pure love and devotion for God.

"Rama asked Hanuman, 'Hanuman, what is your attitude when you worship me?' Hanuman said, 'Sometimes I see that You are the whole and I a part of You. At other times, I see that You are the Master and I am Your servant. And Rama, when I have the knowledge of Absolute Truth, I see that You are I and I am You.'

"Rama said to Narada, 'Please ask me for a boon.' Narada said, 'Rama, please grant only that I may have pure love and devotion for Your lotus feet and that I may never be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya.' "

Thakur now wishes to leave.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Nanda Bose) — According to the *Gita*, the person who is recognized as great by the world has a special power of God in him. You have divine power.

Nanda Bose — All people are endowed with equal power.

Sri Ramakrishna (irritated) — All of you people have just this one thing to say! Can all people have equal power? Though it is the same Omnipresent God[1] who is present in every being, the

[1] *Vibhu*

manifestation of His powers are different in different beings.

"Vidyasagar also said the same thing, 'Has God given more power to some and less to others?' I said in reply, 'If there was no difference between power in different people, why should we come to see you? Have you grown two horns on your head?' "

Thakur now rises, as do the devotees. Pasupati gets up and accompanies them to the door.

Section XIX

Sri Ramakrishna at Devotees' Homes in Calcutta

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at the home of a grief-stricken brahmin woman[1]

Thakur arrives in Baghbazar, to an old brick house belonging to a grieving brahmin woman. Upon entering, there is a cowshed to the left. There is space on the roof for sitting. Here, people have formed rows, some standing, while others are seated. They are all eager to have a glimpse of Sri Ramakrishna.

The brahmin woman and her sister are widows. Their brothers also live in the house with their families. The brahmin woman has suffered inconsolable grief at the loss of her only daughter. She has been hard at work the whole day in preparation for Thakur's setting his holy feet in her home. While Thakur was at Nanda Bose's house, she had been going in and out of her house anxiously awaiting his arrival. Thakur had told her that he would come to her house after visiting Nanda Bose. Because he was delayed, she wondered if he would come at all.

Thakur sits with the devotees on the roof, where seating arrangements have been made. M., Narayan, Jogen Sen, Devendra and Jogin sit close to him on a mat. Soon the Younger Naren and many other devotees join them. The brahmin woman's sister comes to the roof and offers salutations to Thakur, saying, "My sister has just gone to Nanda

[1] Golap-ma (Golap Sundari Devi), a companion and friend of Holy Mother

Bose's house to find out why there is so much delay in your coming. She will return soon."

Hearing a sound downstairs, she says, "It is my sister coming." She looked for her, but the sister had not yet returned.

Thakur is smiling, sitting there surrounded by devotees.

M. (to Devendra) — What a wonderful sight! Young and old, men and women, all standing in rows, eager to see Sri Ramakrishna and hear his words.

Devendra (to Sri Ramakrishna) — M. says that this place is better than Nanda Bose's. How great is their love and devotion for God!

Thakur laughs.

Now the brahmin woman's sister says, "Here comes sister!"

The brahmin woman comes and salutes Thakur. Then she is unable to decide what to say or do.

Beside herself with emotion, she says, "Oh my dear, I am not going to survive this joy. All of you, please tell me how I can save myself! When my Chandi [daughter] visited me, she was accompanied by armed men to guard her on the road. Even then I didn't feel such joy as now. I don't feel the least grief at Chandi's death. I was afraid that he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] would not come and I had decided to throw everything I had prepared into the Ganges. And I wouldn't speak to him any more. I would only go once where he visited and see him from a distance, then I would return home."

"Let me go and tell everybody, 'Come! Come! See my joy!' Let me show Jogin how fortunate I am!"

Still overwhelmed with joy, the brahmin woman says, "Sir, a labourer paid a rupee for a lottery ticket and won a hundred thousand rupees. The moment he heard that he had won all that money, he died of joy. He really died. It is the same with me. Please bless me, friends, or I will surely die."

Seeing her intense joy and ecstatic state, M. is fascinated. He goes to take the dust of her feet. "What are you doing?" she exclaims. Instead, she salutes M.

The brahmin woman is delighted to see the devotees in her home. She says, "I am glad to see all of you here. I have brought the Younger Naren. I said to him, 'Without you, who would make us laugh?' " While she was talking, her sister came and said anxiously, "Come, sister. How can you keep standing there? Come downstairs. How can I manage by myself?"

The brahmin woman is absorbed in joy. She looks at Thakur and the devotees. How can she leave them and go downstairs?

After some conversation, full of devotion, she takes Thakur to another room and offers him sweets and other refreshments. The devotees also have refreshments on the roof.

It is about 8:00 p.m. and Thakur is ready to leave. One goes west through a room downstairs to a verandah in the courtyard. With the cowshed on the right, one comes to the main gate. When Thakur goes with the devotees through the verandah toward the main gate, the brahmin woman calls out, "I say, sister-in-law, come quickly and take the dust of his feet!" Both the brahmin woman's sister-in-law and one of her brothers salute Sri Ramakrishna.

The brahmin woman says to Thakur, "This is one of my brothers. He is a fool!"

Sri Ramakrishna — No, no. They are all good people.

A person shows the path with a lantern, but some places are not sufficiently lit.

The Younger Naren calls out loudly, "Bring the light here! Show the light here! You haven't lit the path well enough." (All laugh.)

At the cowshed, the brahmin woman says to Thakur, "This is my house for cows." Thakur stops for awhile in front of the cowshed. The devotees are all around him. Mani prostrates before Thakur to salute him and takes the dust of his feet.

Thakur will now visit Ganu's mother[1].

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at the home of Ganu's mother

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in the living room of Ganu's mother's house. It is on the ground floor. Next to the street, it is used as a concert room. Several young men now and then play music for Thakur's entertainment.

It is half past eight in the evening. It is the first day of the dark fortnight of the month of Ashada. The sky, the house and the main road are all bathed in moonlight. The devotees had come in with Thakur and taken their seats in the room.

The brahmin woman, who has accompanied them, first goes inside the house and then comes and stands at the door of the living room. A number of boys from the neighbourhood look at Thakur through its windows. When they hear of his arrival, people of

[1] Yogin-ma (Yogindra Mohini Biswas), Holy Mother's confidant and friend

the neighborhood, young and old, come eagerly to see the great saint.

Seeing more and more boys peeping in from the windows, the Younger Naren says, "I say, why are you all here? Go home, please." But Sri Ramakrishna says affectionately, "No, no. Please stay."

From time to time Thakur chants, "Hari Om! Hari Om!"

An asana has been placed over an ordinary cotton carpet. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on it. Some young musicians who have brought their instruments are asked to sing some songs. When they can't find comfortable seats, Thakur asks them to sit close to him on the cotton carpet.

He says, "Why don't you sit here? Here, I am making room." Saying this, he gathers up his asana. The boys sing –

Song –

O Keshab, wandering in the groves and glades, bestow Your grace on this distressed soul.

O Madhava, charmer of the mind, holding a magic flute.

(Say Haribol, Haribol, Haribol, O my mind)

You are the youth of Vraja, the tamer of Kalia and the dispeller of the fear of the distressed.

With eyes askance, the peacock feather aslant in the crest, the charmer of Radha's heart.

The lifter of Mount Govardhan, bedecked with sylvan flowers, O Damodar, the destroyer of the pride of Kamsa.

O Shyam, sporting and dancing with the gopis!

(Say Haribol, Haribol, Haribol, O my mind)

Song –

Come, O mother Uma, my life...

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, what a great song! What a nice violin! How well it was played!

One of the young men played the flute. Thakur points to him and the other young man with his finger and says, "They make a nice pair."

The concert continued. Pleased with the music, Thakur says, "How nice! Beautiful indeed!"

Pointing to one young man, he says, "He can play all the instruments."

Then he says to M., "They are all good people."

When the song is over, Thakur says to the devotees, "You sing some songs, too." The brahmin woman is standing near the door. She says, "None of them can sing – except perhaps Mahima Babu. But he won't sing in front of him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna]."

The Young Man — Why? I even sing before my father.

The Younger Naren (laughing loudly) — But he has not advanced that far.

Everyone laughs. In a few minutes the brahmin woman comes and says, "Please come inside." Sri Ramakrishna asks, 'Why?"

The Brahmin Woman — Refreshments are to be served there. Kindly go inside.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why don't you bring them here?

The Brahmin Woman — Ganu's mother says, "If he once gives the dust of his feet in the house, it will

turn into Kashi. Then even dying in the house will no longer be a problem for me."

Sri Ramakrishna enters the inner apartments with the brahmin woman and the young men. The devotees pace up and down in the moonlight. M. and Binode talk to one another as they stroll the main path south of the house.

Chapter III

Secret message – 'the three are indeed one'

Sri Ramakrishna is resting in the room to the west of the parlour in Balaram's house. He would like to take a nap. It was already late in the evening when Thakur returned to Balaram's house from the home of Ganu's mother – it must have been about 10:45 p.m.

Thakur says, "Jogin, please massage my feet gently for awhile."

Mani is seated close by.

While Jogin gently strokes his feet, Thakur says, "I am feeling hungry. I would like to have a little farina pudding."

The brahmin woman has also accompanied Thakur to Balaram's house. Her brother can play the *banya*[1] and the tabla beautifully. Seeing her again, Thakur says, "The next time Naren or any other singer comes, we will invite her brother to come too."

Thakur takes a little farina pudding. Gradually Jogin and the other devotees leave the room. Mani is gently stroking his feet. Thakur talks with him.

[1] A semi-circular percussion instrument played along with tabla

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, how happy they were (the brahmin woman and her relatives).

Mani — How wonderful! The same thing happened at the time of Jesus Christ. They, too, were devotees, and sisters – Martha and Mary.

Sri Ramakrishna (eagerly) — What is their story? Please tell me.

Mani — Jesus Christ had gone to their house just as you did, with his devotees. One of the sisters was filled with the joy of ecstasy to see him – as the song of Gaur says:

> Drowned forever, never to return, my eyes sank in the ocean's depths.
>
> Forgetting to swim in the sea of Gaur's beauty, my mind went to the bottom of the sea.

"The other sister was preparing the food all by herself. Becoming fretful over how much she had to do, she came to Christ and complained to him, 'Lord, just look at this. How unfair of my elder sister! She is sitting here alone quietly and I am having to do all the work all by myself.'

"Jesus said, 'Blessed is your sister to have attained the one thing needful in life (that is, ecstatic love of God).' "

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, what do you feel when you see all this?

Mani — I feel that the three persons are indeed one – Jesus Christ, Chaitanyadeva and you – are one person.

Sri Ramakrishna — Of course, one. What is there except one? It is He alone who dwells in this body.

After saying this, Sri Ramakrishna points to his own body – as if to say that the Lord has incarnated Himself and is dwelling in his body.

M. — You explained the other day how God incarnates on earth.

Sri Ramakrishna — Tell me what I said.

Mani — You said, for instance, that there is a vast open and desolate field. In front of it is a wall that one cannot see through. But there is a small round hole in this wall. Through it, one can see a little of the infinite expanse of the field.

Sri Ramakrishna — Tell me, what is this 'hole'?

Mani — You are that 'hole'. Through you, one can see everything – one can see that vast infinite expanse.

Sri Ramakrishna, very pleased, pats Mani and says, "It is very good that you have understood."

Mani — As a matter of fact, it is particularly difficult to understand. We are unable to comprehend how God, Perfect Brahman, can dwell in such a small body.

Sri Ramakrishna — 'I say, no one has recognized Him who roams from home to home in the guise of a mad man.'

Mani — And you were talking of Jesus.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did I say?

Mani — You had passed into bhava samadhi when you saw the picture of Jesus at Jadu Mallick's garden house. You saw Jesus come out of the picture and enter into you.

Thakur remains silent for awhile. Then he says more to Mani, "Perhaps there is a meaning in the disease that I have contracted in my throat – that I should not make myself appear light before all, so that I would not go to all sorts of places and sing and dance."

Thakur talks about Dwija. He asks, "Didn't Dwija come today?"

Mani — I asked him to come. He was supposed to. I don't know why he hasn't.

Sri Ramakrishna — He has great love for me. Well, he must belong to the intimate circle of devotees here, mustn't he?

Mani — Yes, sir, it must be. Otherwise, how could he have so much love?

Mani enters the mosquito net and fans Thakur.

Turning a little toward him, Thakur continues talking. The topic is that God incarnates in the human body to enact His divine sport.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is your spiritual ideal. At one time I didn't see divine forms. That state passed, and now I don't have visions often.

Mani — I like His play as a human being the best of all, His divine sport.

Sri Ramakrishna — That alone is enough to succeed. And you see [His play in] me?

> Is Sri Ramakrishna saying that the Lord has incarnated Himself as a human being in his person and is enacting His divine sport?

Section XX

Thakur with the Devotees on the Holy Vijaya Dashami Day

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees at the Shyampukur house

It is the holy Vijaya Dashami day, 18 October 1885. Thakur is staying at the Shyampukur house[1]. He is unwell. A physician has come from Calcutta to treat him. The devotees stay there to serve him. None of them has yet renounced the world – they come from their family homes.

Surendra's love and devotion to God – 'Divine Mother must reside in the heart'

It is winter, eight o'clock in the morning. Thakur is not feeling well. He is sitting on his bed acting like a five-year-old child who knows nothing but his mother. Surendra arrives and sits down. Navagopal, M. and some other devotees are already present. Surendra has celebrated the Durga Puja at his home. Thakur had not been able to go but had sent his devotees to have the darshan of the image. It is now Vijaya day[2] and Surendra is feeling sad (at the impending separation from the Divine Mother, as on this day Her image will be immersed in the waters of the Ganges.)

Surendra — I ran away from the house.

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[1] Thakur's illness could not be attended properly at Dakshineswar, so his devotees had rented a house in the Shyampukur area of Calcutta

[2] The fourth day of the worship

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Though the image may be immersed in water, let the Divine Mother reside in the heart.

Quietly repeating, "Mother, Mother," Surendra says a few things about the Supreme Goddess.

Thakur looks at him and sheds tears. Looking at M., he says in a voice choked with emotion, "What bhakti! What love and devotion he feels for God!"

Sri Ramakrishna — Around seven or seven-thirty yesterday evening, I had a vision of the worship hall in your home. The image of the deity was bathed in divine light. This place and your worship hall were joined by a stream of light that illumined both places.

Surendra — At that time I was crying 'Mother, Mother' in the worship hall. My elder brothers had gone upstairs, leaving me alone. I felt that the Mother said, 'I will come again.'

Sri Ramakrishna and the *Bhagavad Gita*

It is nearly eleven in the morning. Thakur has eaten the food prescribed for him. Mani is pouring water into his palms so that he can rinse his mouth.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Rakhal fell sick eating gram lentils. It is good to eat only sattvic food. Haven't you read that in the *Gita*? Do you read the *Gita*?

Mani — Yes, sir. The *Gita* speaks of moderation in diet. It talks of sattvic food, rajasic food and tamasic food. It also talks of sattvic kindness,

rajasic kindness and tamasic kindness. And it describes the sattvic ego and so on.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you have a copy of the *Gita*?

Mani — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — It contains the essence of all the scriptures.

Mani — Yes, sir. It speaks of realizing God by following various ways. Just as you say that one can reach Him by a number of paths – of knowledge, of love and devotion, of action and of meditation[1].

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you understand the meaning of Karma Yoga? It is to surrender the fruit of all actions to God.

Mani — Sir, the *Gita* does say that. It also says that work can be performed in three different ways.

Sri Ramakrishna — In what three different ways?

Mani — One, to attain knowledge; two, to teach others; and three, according to one's own nature.

Thakur takes a betel leaf after rinsing his mouth. He offers a piece of it from his mouth to Mani as prasad[2].

[1] Jnana, bhakti, karma and dhyana
[2] Sacramental food

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna, Sir Humphrey Davy and the concept of avatar

Thakur is talking to M. about Doctor Sarkar. The previous day M. had gone to the Doctor's house to report Thakur's condition.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did he talk about with you?

M. — The Doctor has many books in his house. I was reading one of them while I sat there. Then I started reading it aloud to the Doctor. The book was by Sir Humphrey Davy. It talked of the need of an incarnation of God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Indeed! What did you say to him?

M. — One passage in the book says that the Divine Truth must be made human truth to be appreciated by us. That is why an incarnation of God is necessary.

Sri Ramakrishna — Very good. All this is very nice.

M. — The foreign author gave this illustration: one cannot gaze at the sun, but one can look at its reflected rays.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, nice idea. Anything else?

M. — In another passage it says that true jnana (knowledge) is nothing but faith.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is a grand idea! One who has faith, surely has everything.

M. — The author had dreamt of Roman gods and goddesses.

Sri Ramakrishna — Have such books really been published? It is God Himself at work there. Did you talk of anything else?

Sri Ramakrishna and 'doing welfare work,' or Karma Yoga

M. — He says that he works for the welfare of the world. That is why I told him what you said.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What did I say?

M. — You talked of Sambhu Mallick. He had said to you: 'I want to build hospitals, dispensaries, and schools with my money. That will benefit many.' I told the Doctor what you had said to him: Suppose God appears before you. Will you ask Him to build hospitals, dispensaries and schools for you? And I said another thing to the Doctor.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, it is a different class of people who are born for work. What else did you say?

M. — I said: If your aim is to have the darshan of Mother Kali in the temple, what will you gain by

giving in charity to a mendicant? Rather, try the best you can to have the darshan of Kali. After that, you can give in charity as much as you like.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you talk about anything else?

The devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and victory over lust

M. — We agreed that many of those who visit you have conquered lust. The Doctor said, 'In my case, too, lust has vanished – did you know?' I said, 'You are indeed a great man. That you have conquered lust is not surprising. But it is amazing that even insignificant and ordinary people influenced by him [Sri Ramakrishna] have conquered their passions.' Then I told him what you said to Girish Ghosh.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What did I say to him?

M. — You said to Girish: 'The Doctor hasn't been able to change your mind.' You said that with reference to his calling you an incarnation of God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Please talk to the Doctor about divine incarnation – that he who liberates is God-incarnate. The scriptures talk of ten avatars, or twenty-four avatars, and also of innumerable incarnations of God.

Gradually giving up drinking altogether

M. — The Doctor asks a lot about Girish Ghosh. He keeps asking, 'Has Girish Ghosh given up drinking altogether?' He keeps a sharp eye on him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you tell Girish about it?

M. — Yes, sir, I did. And I talked to him about his giving up drinking.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did he say to you?

M. — He said, 'I take your words as those of Thakur, so I accept them. I cannot, however, promise anything.'

Sri Ramakrishna (happily) — Kalipada told me that he has given up drinking altogether.

Chapter III

Identity of the Absolute or Universal Ego and the phenomenal world

It is afternoon. Doctor Sarkar has arrived. Amrita (the Doctor's son) and Hem have come with him. Narendra and other devotees are present. Thakur is talking privately with Amrita. He asks him, "Are you able to meditate?" He adds, "Do you know what one experiences in meditation? The mind becomes like a continuous flow of oil – one has just one thought, that of God. No other thought intrudes." Now Thakur talks to everyone else.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — Your son doesn't believe in the incarnation of God. That's all right. It doesn't matter if he believes it or not.

"Your son is a nice boy. Why shouldn't he be? Can an ordinary mango be borne by a [fine] 'Bombay' mango tree? How great is his faith in God! He whose mind dwells in God is truly a man[1] – that is, *mana-hosha* (of awakened mind). He whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened knows clearly that God is eternal and everything else is ephemeral. He is a man with an awakened mind. Your son does not believe in divine incarnation. There is no harm in that.

"It is enough if one believes that God exists and the universe and its living beings are the manifestations of His power. It is like a rich man and his garden.

"Some say there are ten avatars, some say twenty-four avatars, others that there are innumerable incarnations of God. Wherever you see a special manifestation of His power, God has incarnated Himself. This is my belief.

"And there is another view, according to which God has become everything – whatever you see. Take, for example, the bel-fruit – it consists of three parts: seeds, rind and kernel. The Absolute belongs to the same Being to whom the phenomenal world belongs. And the phenomenal world belongs to the same Being to whom the Absolute belongs. Disavowing the Absolute, you simply cannot understand the phenomenal world – because the

[1] That is *manushya*

phenomenal world does exist. Only by transcending it step by step can one reach the Absolute.

"As long as one entertains the feeling of I-consciousness, one cannot go beyond the phenomenal world. By negating the Relative while meditating, saying, 'Not this, not this[1],' one reaches the Absolute. But nothing can really be denied, as I gave you the illustration of the bel-fruit."

The Doctor — That is certainly true.

Sri Ramakrishna — Kacha passed into Nirvikalpa samadhi. When his samadhi ended, someone asked him, 'What do you see now?' Kacha said, 'I see that the world is one with Him. Everything is filled with God. It is God who has become all that I see. I do not know what to reject and what to accept.'

"Do you know what I think? Having attained the vision of the Absolute, together with the phenomenal world, one should live with the attitude of being a servant of God. Hanuman saw both God with form and without form. Thereafter, he lived with the attitude of a servant of God, as His devotee."

Mani (to himself) — One must accept both the Absolute[2] and the phenomenal world[3]. Since the Vedanta philosophy has reached Germany, some of the European philosophers have accepted this line of thought. Thakur, however, says, 'One does not

[1] Neti, neti
[2] Nitya
[3] Lila

attain the vision of the Absolute and the phenomenal world without renouncing everything, without renouncing 'lust and greed'. One has to totally renounce; one must have absolute non-attachment to the world.' This is the crucial difference between him and such [European] philosophers as Hegel.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna and doctrine of avatar – reconciliation of free will and predestination

The Doctor says that God has created us, and the soul of all of us will make infinite progress. He does not accept that one person is greater than another. That is why he doesn't believe in an incarnation of God.

The Doctor — One makes infinite progress! If that is not so, why live five or seven years more? I would rather hang myself with a rope.

"What is an incarnation of God? Why should I prostrate at the feet of a person who has to ease himself and urinate? But yes, I accept that God's light reflects in man."

Girish (laughing) — Have you seen God's light?

Before the Doctor answers, he hesitates for a moment. A friend sitting close to him whispers something to him.

The Doctor — You have only seen the reflection, nothing else.

Girish — I see it! I see the light! I shall prove that Sri Krishna is an avatar. If I fail, I will cut out my tongue!

Only a person suffering from mental aberration or delirium reasons – reasoning stops in the state of perfect knowledge

Sri Ramakrishna — The conversation you have just had carries no weight.

"It is just like the raving of a person suffering from delirium. Such a diseased person says, 'I wish to drink a pitcher of water and eat a pot of boiled rice.' The physician says to him, 'Yes, all right. We will give you whatever you want after you have taken the prescribed medicine.'

"When butter is heated, it makes a crackling sound. But when it is thoroughly boiled, the crackling sound ceases. As a man's mind is, so is his conception of God. I have seen portraits of rich people – the queen and so forth – hanging on the walls of rich people's homes. But devotees have images of deities hung in their houses.

"Lakshmana said, 'Rama, Vaishishtha is a great sage[1] but even he grieved at the death of his son.' Rama replied, 'Brother, he who has knowledge also has ignorance; he who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. Go beyond both knowledge and ignorance[2]. One attains such a state only when one knows God intimately – this is what is known as vijnana.

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[1] Rishi
[2] Jnana and ajnana

"When a thorn digs into one's foot, one must take another thorn to take it out. Afterwards, you throw them both away. By removing the thorn of ignorance with the thorn of knowledge, one should throw away both the thorns of knowledge and ignorance.

"There is a sign of perfect knowledge. One stops reasoning. Just as I said that butter, when heated, crackles until it is thoroughly boiled."

The Doctor — But can one retain perfect knowledge permanently? If God has become everything, why are you behaving like a paramahamsa? And why do these people come here to serve you? Why don't you sit quietly and not say a word?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Water is water, whether it is still or moving. It remains water when it is in waves.

Voice of God or conscience – mahout as Narayana

"There is something else. Why should I not listen to what the mahout Narayana says? The guru said to his disciple that everyone was God. A mad elephant was approaching. Putting his faith in the words of his guru, that the elephant was Narayana too, the disciple did not move away. The mahout shouted, 'Everyone, please get away! Do get away!' But the disciple did not move. The elephant picked him up and threw him to the ground and then went its way. The disciple did not die. He regained consciousness when water was poured into his mouth. Asked why he didn't move away, he said,

'My revered guru said that everything is Narayana.' The guru then said, 'Son, why didn't you listen to the mahout Narayana?' God resides within as pure mind and pure intellect. I am the machine, God is the operator. I am the house and He is the indweller. It is God who is the mahout Narayana."

The Doctor — I ask you this, 'Why, then, do you ask me to cure your illness?'

Sri Ramakrishna — I talk that way as long as I am conscious of the 'jar' of the 'ego'. Imagine an immense ocean of water. A jar is immersed in the ocean. The jar then has water inside and outside it. The water in the jar does not become one with the water outside until the jar is broken. God Himself has kept this jar of I-consciousness in me.

Who am I?

The Doctor — What is this 'I' that you are talking about? You must explain it. Is God playing tricks on us?

Girish — Sir, how do you know that He is not playing tricks?

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — It is certainly God who has kept this 'I' in us – it is His play, His lila. A king has four sons (who are all princes) but, playing with each other, one takes the role of a minister, another a police officer, and so forth. Though a son of a king, he plays the role of a police officer.

(To the Doctor) "Listen. When one has a direct vision of the Atman, one accepts all this. All doubts vanish when one has vision of God."

Son-ship and the Father – Sri Ramakrishna and Jnana Yoga

The Doctor — Does one ever get rid of all doubts?

Sri Ramakrishna — Just learn this much from me. If you wish to learn more, pray to God about it in a solitary corner. Ask Him why He has created all this.

"A boy can only give a beggar a cup of rice as alms. If the beggar asks for train fare, the master of the house must be called. (The Doctor is silent.)

"Well, you like to reason and discuss things. I will reason with you, but please listen to me. A jnani does not believe in the incarnation of God. Krishna said to Arjuna, 'You call me an avatar time and again. Let me show you something. Come with me.' Arjuna accompanied him for some distance, then Krishna asked, 'What do you see?' Arjuna said,' A big tree with black berries hanging in clusters.' Sri Krishna said, 'They are not black berries. Go a few steps nearer and look at them.' Arjuna then saw that they were clusters of Krishnas hanging on the tree. Krishna said, 'Do you see how many Krishnas like me exist there?'

"Kavirdas said of Sri Krishna, 'The gopis clapped their hands and he danced like a monkey.'

"The nearer you approach God, the fewer of His attributes you notice. A devotee first had the

vision of God with ten arms. Going nearer, he saw that God had six arms. When he advanced still closer, he only saw Gopala[1] with two arms. The closer he went to God, the less he saw His splendour and glories. At last he saw only divine light – there was no visible attribute.

"Listen a little to Vedantic reasoning. A magician came to a king to show him his magic feats. When he moved a little to one side, the king saw that a rider on horseback was coming. He was well-dressed and held weapons in his hands. The king and the audience in the court began to wonder what, in fact, was real. Evidently the horse was not real, nor the robes or weapons. Finally they saw that the only reality was a rider standing there alone. The significance of this is that Brahman alone is Real and the world is illusory. When you reason, nothing whatsoever remains."

The Doctor — I have no objection to this.

The world and the scarecrow

Sri Ramakrishna — However, it is not easy to dispel the illusion that the world is real. It persists even after one attains divine knowledge. A person sees a tiger in a dream. He wakes up and the dream ends. But his heart continues to pound.

"Some thieves went to a farm to steal. A man's figure made of straw had been put there to frighten intruders. The thieves could not persuade themselves to enter. One of them went closer and

[1] Baby Krishna

found that it was only a scarecrow. He came back to the other thieves and told them there was nothing to fear, but they still refused to go – they told him that their hearts were beating violently. The thief then laid the scarecrow down on the ground and said, 'It is nothing, it is nothing.' This is the process of '*Neti, neti*[1]'."

The Doctor — These are all very nice words.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — What kind of words?

The Doctor — Fine.

Sri Ramakrishna — Say, 'thank you'[2] at least once.

The Doctor — But don't you understand what feelings there are in my heart? And I take such trouble to come here to see you!

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — No, my dear, it is not that. Say something for the benefit of the ignorant. Bibhishana did not want to become the king of Lanka [after Ravana was killed by Rama]. He said, 'What would I get by being a king after I have obtained you?' Rama said, 'Bibhishana, become king for the benefit of the ignorant. Become a king to instruct those who ask what riches you have gained by serving Rama so much.'

The Doctor — Are there ignorant people here?

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[1] Not this, not this
[2] The words 'thank you' were said by Sri Ramakrishna in English

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) —Yes, yes, you have oysters and snails here as well as conch shells. (All laugh.)

Chapter V

Purusha and Prakriti – eligibility of taking spiritual instructions

The Doctor gives two globules of medicine to Thakur, saying, "I give you both globules: one is Purusha and the other Prakriti." (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Yes, they live side by side. Haven't you seen pigeons? They can't live apart from one another. Where there is Prakriti, there is Purusha; and where there is Purusha, there is Prakriti.

It is the Vijaya Dashami day today. Thakur asks the Doctor to have some sweets on the occasion. The devotees serve him sweets.

The Doctor (while eating) — I 'thank you' for the sweets. It is not for the instructions you have given today. Why should I give that 'thank you' in words?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Fix your mind on God. What more can I say? Meditate a little. (Pointing to the Younger Naren) Just see, his mind becomes absolutely merged in God. Those things I told you ...

The Doctor — Tell these people too.

Sri Ramakrishna — It all depends on one's capacity to digest. Can everyone understand all I have told you? I can't talk to everyone as I talked to you. A mother has brought home some fish to cook. Her children do not have the same digestion, so for one she prepares pulao and for the others fish curry – the latter have poor digestion. (All laugh.)

The Doctor leaves. It is Vijaya Dashami today. All the devotees pay obeisance to Thakur by prostrating on the ground and taking the dust of his feet. Then they embrace one another. They are beyond themselves with joy. In this happiness, they forget that Thakur is seriously ill. Their embracing and enjoying of sweets continues for a long time. The Younger Naren, M. and few other devotees sit with Thakur. He talks happily with them. The topic of conversation is the change in Dr. Sarkar.

Sri Ramakrishna — I shall not have to instruct the Doctor much more.

"When a tree is almost axed in two, the person who is felling it stands some distance away after his last blow. In a little while the tree falls by itself."

The Younger Naren (smiling) — All these are principles!

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Hasn't the Doctor changed a great deal?

M. — Yes, sir. When he comes here, he becomes stupefied. He doesn't even talk about the medicine he will give you. When we remind him of it, he says, 'Yes, yes, he has to be given medicine.'

Some of the devotees are singing in the parlour.

When they return to the room where Thakur is sitting, he says to them, "You were singing. Why was the song not in rhythm? I once heard of a man who was perfect at losing the beat – you sang like him." (They all laugh.)

A boy, the Younger Naren's relative, has arrived. He is dressed as a dandy and is wearing glasses. Thakur is talking to the Younger Naren.

Sri Ramakrishna — Look here. A boy with a pleated robe was going by here. The way he was walking! He would remove his scarf to show the pleats on the front of his dress. Then he would look around to see if anybody had noticed him. When he walked, his hips seemed to be out of joint. (All laugh.) Just look at him.

"A peacock makes a show of its feathers – but it has hideous feet. (All laugh.) The camel is so ugly. Everything about it is ugly!"

Naren's Relative — But it conduct's itself well.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, it does. But it eats thorny bushes. Though its mouth bleeds, it continues to eat them. A worldly person loses his son and soon after pines for another.

Section XXI

Sri Ramakrishna at the Shyampukur House

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at the Shyampukur house in Calcutta with devotees

It is Friday, 30 October 1885, the seventh day of the dark fortnight of Aswin, 15th of Kartik. Sri Ramakrishna has come to Shyampukur for treatment. He is in his room on the upper story. It is 9 o'clock. He is talking with M. privately. M. will soon go to Doctor Sarkar to report Thakur's pain in the throat and to bring him to the Shyampukur house. Thakur is so very sick, yet his only concern is the welfare of his devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M., smiling) — Purna came to see me this morning. He has such a good nature. Manindra has a feminine attitude[1]. How amazing! After reading the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* he is inclined toward the attitude of a gopi[2], or a female lover of the Lord[3] – as though God is male and he female.

M. — Yes, sir

Purna Chandra is a schoolboy, 15 or 16 years old. Thakur is very eager to see him, but Purna's family

[1] Prakriti bhava
[2] Milkmaid at Vraja
[3] Sakhi

does not let him visit. One time he became so eager to see Purna that he went at night from Dakshineswar to M.'s house in Calcutta. M. brought Purna there to meet with Thakur. After a long conversation about how to call on God, Thakur had returned to Dakshineswar.

Manindra is also 15 or 16 years old. He is called Khoka[1] by the devotees – they still call him by this name [referring to the time the book was written]. He dances, absorbed with divine ecstasy, when he hears the chanting of the name and glories of God.

Chapter II

The Doctor and M.

It is between ten and ten-thirty. M. has gone to Doctor Sarkar's house. There is a verandah, which adjoins the parlour on the first floor and overlooks a path. There they sit on a wooden bench and talk. In front of the Doctor is a glass aquarium in which goldfish are swimming. Now and then the Doctor throws pieces of the green husk of cardamoms in the water. He also throws little balls of refined wheat flour, which he has made, to the open roof for sparrows and other birds to eat. M. watches him.

The Doctor (laughing, to M.) — Look at the goldfish watching me. They don't see the green cardamom husks I have thrown them. So I say that mere love and devotion[2] will get you nowhere. You need knowledge[3] too. (M. laughs.) Look. The sparrows flew away when I threw the wheat balls at them. They were frightened. They gained no love and

[1] Baby
[2] Bhakti
[3] Jnana

devotion because they have no knowledge. They don't know that wheat balls are food.

The Doctor goes to the drawing room. Books fill shelves all around the room. He takes a little rest while M. browses through the books and even reads a little. At last, he picks up the book *Life of Jesus* written by Canon Farrar. He reads it for some time.

The Doctor says something now and then. He asks M. to read the correspondence about the homeopathic hospital, which had come into existence after many problems. He says, "You will find this correspondence in the *Calcutta Journal of Medicine* of 1876." The Doctor has great love for homeopathy.

M. picks up a book with the title *Munger's New Theology*. The Doctor notices it.

The Doctor — Munger has based his principles on very nice reasoning and logic. Your Chaitanya has said one thing, the Buddha and Jesus Christ have stated something else. You put your faith in their words simply because these people have said so.

M. (smiling) — So we should not believe in Chaitanya, or Buddha, but we should believe in Munger.

The Doctor — All right, whatever you say.

M. — People have to quote someone as the authority; that is how Munger became established. (The Doctor smiles.)

The Doctor gets into the carriage with M. The carriage proceeds toward Shyampukur. It is midday. The Doctor and M. continue talking while the

carriage moves on. They talk about Doctor Bhaduri who also comes to treat Thakur now and then.

M. (smiling) — Talking about you, Bhaduri said, 'He has to begin over again as a brick-bat.'

The Doctor — What do you mean?

M. — You don't believe in great spiritual personalities[1], subtle bodies and all that. Apparently Doctor Bhaduri is a Theosophist. Besides, you don't believe in the divine sport of incarnations of God. Therefore, he jokingly says about you, 'He will not be born as a human being in the next birth, not even as a creature, nor as an animal, tree or plant. He will have to start as a piece of brick. Then, after many, many births, he might some day assume a human body.'

The Doctor — Good gracious!

M. — He further says that the knowledge of science that you have acquired is illusory – it is here now, but it may disappear the next moment. He gives an illustration. There are two wells. One of them receives its water from an underground spring. The other well has no spring; it is filled with rainwater. The water in the latter well cannot last long. Your knowledge of science will also dry up like the rainwater in the well.

The Doctor (smiling) — Really!

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[1] Mahatmas

The carriage reaches Cornwallis Street. Doctor Sarkar picks up Doctor Pratap, who had visited Thakur the previous day.

Chapter III

Instructions to Doctor Sarkar – meditation of a jnani[1]

Thakur is seated in the same second story room with some devotees. He is talking with Doctor Sarkar and Doctor Pratap.

Dr. Sarkar (to Sri Ramakrishna) — So you had *kashi*[2] again? (Smiling) It is, however, good to visit Kashi. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — It brings liberation[3], dear. But I don't want liberation, I want only love and devotion for God[4]. (The doctors and the devotees laugh.)

Pratap is the son-in-law of Dr. Bhaduri. When he sees Pratap, Thakur speaks highly of Bhaduri.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Pratap) — Ah, what a person he has turned into! He contemplates God, observes purity in conduct, and accepts both attitudes of formless God and God with form.

M. is very keen to discuss Dr. Bhaduri's saying that Dr. Sarkar would be born again as a brickbat. He whispers to the Younger Naren just loud enough that

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[1] Man of Knowledge
[2] Pun upon the word that means both coughing and Benares, another name of Kashi
[3] Mukti
[4] Bhakti

Thakur can hear, "Do you remember what Bhaduri said about bricks and brickbats?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to Dr. Sarkar) — Do you know what he said about you? Since you don't believe in these things, you will have to start all over again by becoming a brickbat in the next cycle[1]. (All laugh.)

Dr. Sarkar (smiling) — So I will start again as a stone or a brick and assume a human body after many, many births. Even after I have come to this place [referring to Sri Ramakrishna], I will still have to start all over again with bricks and pieces of brick! (The Doctor and others laugh.)

Thakur is so sick. Even so, he goes into divine moods. And he always talks of spiritual things – such is the trend of the conversation.

Pratap — I saw you yesterday in an ecstatic mood.

Sri Ramakrishna — It came by itself. It wasn't much.

Dr. Sarkar — It is not good for you to talk with others now, and go into divine ecstasy.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — I saw you yesterday in my ecstasy. I saw that you are a mine of knowledge, but it is absolutely dry knowledge. I didn't find the taste of divine bliss in it. (To Pratap) If he (Dr. Sarkar) once tastes the joy of divine bliss,

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[1] *Manvantar*, the period of millions of years of Manu

he will see everything, above and below, filled with it. Then he will not say that only what he says is right and what others say is wrong. Then his lips will cease uttering sharp and aggressive words.

Goal of life – his earlier story – instructions of the Naked One

The devotees are all silent. Thakur suddenly becomes absorbed in divine ecstasy and speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Doctor Sarkar) — I say, Mahendra Babu, why do you harp on money? You talk so much of your wife and of name and fame. Give all these up and direct your mind to God with full concentration. Enjoy the bliss of God.

Doctor Sarkar does not utter a word. Everyone else is also silent.

Sri Ramakrishna — The Naked One[1] used to tell how the jnani meditates. There is an expanse of water stretching everywhere – all regions above and below are full of water. The individual soul is like a fish swimming joyfully in this water. One actually sees this when one really meditates.

"There is a boundless expanse of ocean with no limit to its water. Now imagine a pot in the ocean. There is water both inside and outside the pot. The jnani sees that there is the same Paramatman both within and without. Then what is the pot? It is the I-consciousness. Because of the pot, water seems to be divided into two parts – as if one part of the

[1] Totapuri

water is inside the pot and the other outside. As long as one's 'pot of ego' persists, one feels this way. But when the ego vanishes, what remains is that which is. It cannot be spoken in words.

"Do you know another way the jnani meditates? There is the boundless sky with a bird flying in it joyfully with extended wings. That is the sky of consciousness, and the Atman is the bird. The bird is not within a cage – it is flying in the sky of consciousness. Its joy is limitless[1]."

The devotees hear of the yoga of meditation[2] in amazement. After a short time, Pratap resumes the conversation.

Pratap (to Dr. Sarkar) — If you reflect on it, you find it is all only a shadow.

Dr. Sarkar — For a shadow to be there, three objects are necessary: the sun, the object reflected, and the reflection. There can't be a shadow without an object. You say that God is real and the creation unreal. The creation is real too.

Pratap — Well, just as one sees a shadow in a mirror, similarly one sees this world in the mirror of the mind.

The Doctor — Can there be a shadow without an object?

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[1] Compare P.B. Shelley's 'To a Skylark'
[2] Dhyana yoga

Naren — Why, God is the object! (The Doctor is silent.)

Universal consciousness and science – God alone is the Doer

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — You have said a very nice thing: that one goes into bhava samadhi[1] when the mind is in union with God[2]. Only you have said this, no one else has said it.

"Shivanath says, 'Too much contemplation of God deranges one's brain.' He says, 'By meditating on the universal consciousness, one loses consciousness.' God is the very Self of consciousness! That one should lose the power of consciousness by meditating on Him through whose consciousness one is conscious of the world!

"As for your science – by combining this substance with that, it becomes that; and by mixing such and such a substance with that produces this. One can definitely get robbed of one's consciousness by thinking of those things – it is just the grinding of gross objects together."

Dr. Sarkar — One can see God in those things.

Mani — One can see God all the more clearly in a man, and even more clearly in a spiritually elevated person. There is a greater manifestation of God in great souls.

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[1] *Bhava-avashtha*, the highest spiritual state of absorption just before the mind merges in the Absolute Oneness

[2] Yoga

Dr. Sarkar — Yes, no doubt in man.

Sri Ramakrishna — Can man get robbed of his consciousness by contemplating God? By God's consciousness even inert things gain consciousness – it is behind the movement of hands, feet and body. One says the body is moving, but doesn't know that it is God who is moving it. One says that the hand has been scalded by water. The water does not scald anything. It is the heat in the water, the fire in the water, that scalds the hand.

"Rice is boiling in a pot. Eggplant and potatoes are bobbing up and down in it. A little boy seeing them says, 'The eggplant and potatoes are dancing.' He doesn't know that there is fire underneath. People say that the sense organs do their work of themselves. They don't know that inside dwells God, whose very nature is consciousness."

Doctor Sarkar rises to take his leave. Sri Ramakrishna stands up, too.

Dr. Sarkar — One calls upon God[1] in adversity. One willingly says *tuhu*, *tuhu* (Thou, Thou – the sound of the carding bow). You speak as you do because you have this disease in your throat. As you yourself say, you have fallen into the hands of a carder. You had better speak to the carder about it. I am just quoting your own words.

Sri Ramakrishna — What can I say?

[1] Madhusudana

Dr. Sarkar — We dwell in God's lap and defecate in His arms. Why not speak about our illness to Him?

Sri Ramakrishna — Quite right. Sometimes I try – but I cannot.

The Doctor — Why should it be necessary to say anything to Him? Doesn't God know it?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — A Muslim was loudly calling out, 'O Allah! O Allah!' during his offering of Namaz. Someone said to him, 'Why are you shouting so loudly when you are calling upon Allah? He can hear even the sound of little anklets on an ant's feet!'

Signs of a yogi – yogi is introverted – saint Vilwamangal

Sri Ramakrishna — When the mind is united with God, one sees God very near. One sees God within one's own heart.

"But then it is true that the more one is established in union with God, the greater one's mind withdraws itself from external objects. The holy scripture *Bhaktamala* talks of a devotee (Vilwamangal) who used to visit a prostitute. One day he was going to visit her very late at night. The shraddha ceremony of his parents at home had delayed him. He was carrying the shraddha food for the prostitute. His mind was so focused on her that he was not aware where he was walking. A yogi was seated on the path, meditating on God with his eyes closed. Vilwamangal was about to step on the yogi. The yogi cried out in anger, 'Can't you see I

am meditating on God and you are about to walk on my body?' Vilwamangal said, 'I beg your pardon, but I want to ask you something. I have lost all awareness thinking of a prostitute, whereas you are meditating on God and yet are fully aware of external things. What kind of meditation is that?' Vilwamangal in time renounced his household and went away to worship God. He said to the prostitute, 'You are my guru. You have taught me how one must love the Lord.' He addressed the prostitute as his mother and gave her up."

Dr. Sarkar — This is the Tantrik form of worship, when one considers the woman with whom one cohabits[1] as one's mother.

Worldly man has no right to instruct mankind

Sri Ramakrishna — Look here, listen to a story. There was a king who used to listen to the reading of the *Bhagavata* from a pundit every day. After the reading, the pundit would ask the king, 'Sir, have you understood it?' The king would reply, 'You must understand it yourself first.' And when he returned home the pundit would ask himself, 'Why does the king say this every day? I explain everything to him so clearly, yet he repeats, 'Understand it yourself first.' What does it mean?' The pundit used to practice spiritual disciplines. After some days he realized that God alone is real and that everything else – hearth and home, wealth, family, relatives, name and fame – are all unreal. When he realized that all things in the world are illusory, he

[1] *Ramani*

renounced it. However, when leaving, he asked a man, 'Please tell the king that I have now understood.'

"And listen to another story. Someone wanted to engage a scholar well versed in the Bhagavata to come daily and read *Srimad Bhagavata* to him. But he couldn't find such a scholar. After a great search, a person came to him and said, 'Sir, I have found an excellent pundit of the Bhagavata.' The man said, 'Very good! Please bring him.' His friend said, 'But there is a complication. The man has a number of ploughs and bullocks; he is busy with them all day long. He has to look after his farm – he has no leisure at all.' The man who was seeking the scholar of the Bhagavata said, 'Oh Brother, I don't want a pundit of the holy word who has to look after ploughs and bullocks. I am looking for a man who has leisure and can tell me about the Lord.' (To the Doctor) Do you understand?"

The Doctor remains silent.

Mere learning and the Doctor

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you want to know the truth? Mere learning and scholarship benefit one not at all. Pundits know so much and hear a lot of things – the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras*. But of what avail is mere learning? Discrimination and non-attachment are necessary. One must listen to him alone who has attained discrimination and non-attachment. Of what use are the words of those who have made the world their main goal in life?

"What happens when you read the *Gita*? If you repeat the word *Gita* ten times, it becomes *tagi*[1]. Only he who has renounced his attachment to 'lust and greed' and who can direct a hundred percent of his love to God can understand the essence of the *Gita*. One doesn't have to read the whole of the *Gita*. Just say, '*Tagi*, *tagi*,' and it is done."

Dr. Sarkar — *Tagi* needs the extra letter 'y' to become *tyagi* [the correct Sanskrit word for a renouncer].

Mani — Goswami Navadvip said to Thakur that one can do without adding the letter 'y'. When Thakur attended the festival at Panihati, Goswami Navadvip talked to him about this context of the *Gita*. The Goswami said, 'By the root 'tag' it becomes 'taga'. Add the 'i' suffix to tag and it becomes '*tagi*'. Both '*tagi*' and '*tyagi*' convey the same meaning.'

Dr. Sarkar — Someone told me what Radha means. He asked me whether I knew the meaning of the word Radha. He said, 'It is what it becomes when you reverse the word; in other words, it means 'dhara,' 'dhara[2]'. (All laugh.) (Smiling) Let us stop here today at 'dhara'.

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[1] A man of renunciation

[2] A word which has no particular meaning. The doctor was making fun of a play on words.

Chapter IV

Worldly knowledge and science

The Doctor has gone. M. comes and sits close to Sri Ramakrishna. They talk quietly together. M. had been to the Doctor's house. He speaks of what they talked about there.

M. (to Sri Ramakrishna) — The Doctor was feeding his goldfish with the husk of green cardamom and sparrows with balls of refined wheat flour. He said, 'See, they didn't see the cardamom husk, so they left. First of all, one needs to have knowledge[1]; love and devotion[2] will follow. As soon as the flour balls were thrown at the birds, one or two flew away. They didn't have the knowledge that the balls were food, therefore they gained no devotion.'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — This kind of knowledge is called worldly knowledge – the knowledge of science.

M. — He then said, 'I will not put faith in words just because a Chaitanya, or a Buddha, or a Jesus Christ said them.'

"A grandson has been born to him. He praised his daughter-in-law. He said, 'I don't notice her in the house at all, she is so quiet and bashful.' "

Sri Ramakrishna — He has been thinking of this place [meaning himself], so slowly he is gaining

[1] Jnana
[2] Bhakti

faith and respect. Is it possible to get rid of one's ego altogether? He is so learned, enjoys such name and fame – and he has a lot of money! Yet he does not show disrespect for what he hears here.

Chapter V

Descent of divine power, or ever-blissful state

It is five o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the same upper story room. The devotees are sitting quietly around him. Many of them are outsiders. No words are spoken.

M. is seated close to Sri Ramakrishna. He talks with him quietly on one or two topics. Thakur wants to wear his long shirt – M. helps him to put it on.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — You see, now I don't have to practice meditation or other spiritual disciplines as much. I become aware of the Indivisible Being all at once. Now I see Him alone.

M. is silent and so is everybody else in the room. After awhile Thakur says something else to him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, you are seeing all these people sitting quietly and looking at me. They don't talk, nor do they sing. What do they see in me?

Is Thakur hinting that the Divine Power of the Lord has incarnated in him? Is that why so many people are attracted to him, why the devotees are gazing at him speechless with wonder?

In reply, M says, "Sir, all these people have already heard a lot about you. Now they are seeing what they have never seen before – an ever-blissful

childlike nature, with no ego, and intoxicated with ecstatic love for God. The other day you went to Ishan Mukherji's house and paced the outer room. I was there with you. Someone said about you, 'I have never seen such a blissful person before.' "

M. stops talking. It is again completely quiet in the room. After some time Thakur speaks to M. in his sweet voice.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, how is the Doctor doing? Is he now accepting more ideas from here?

M. — How can an imperishable seed be lost? It must sprout somewhere some time. I still laugh at what happened the other day.

Sri Ramakrishna — What was that?

M. — You said, 'Jadu Mallick becomes so absent-minded that he can't tell whether there is salt in his food or not. If anybody tells him there is no salt in such and such item, he exclaims, 'Why, what? No salt?' ' You told the Doctor about it. He also used to say, 'I become so absent-minded.' You made him understand that his absent-mindedness comes from thinking of worldly things; it is not because of meditation on God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Will he not reflect on these words?

M. — How can he help but think about them? But he remains busy in numerous activities, so he forgets many things. Today, too, you replied to him

nicely when he said, 'In Tantric discipline one looks on the *ramani*[1] as mother.'

Sri Ramakrishna — What did I say?

M. — You talked about the Bhagavata pundit who owned a number of ploughs and bullocks. (Sri Ramakrishna laughs.) And you told the story of the king who said to the pundit, 'First understand it yourself.' (Sri Ramakrishna laughs.)

"And you also talked about the *Gita*, that the main message of the *Gita* is renunciation of 'lust and greed' – giving up attachment to 'lust and greed'. You said to the Doctor that being a householder (without renouncing them), one could teach nothing. It seems he didn't understand. He changed the subject by saying, 'Dhara dhara' in the end and left."

Thakur is worried about the welfare of the devotees. He is worried about Purna and Manindra, two of his young devotees. He has sent Manindra to talk to Purna.

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna talks about the basic truth of Radha and Krishna – everything is possible – the Absolute and the phenomenal

It is evening. A lamp is burning in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Many devotees and visitors who have come to see Thakur are seated in the same room some distance away from him. Thakur is introspective and

[1] Woman with whom one cohabits

not talking to anyone. Those who are sitting in the room are also silent and meditating on God.

After awhile, Narendra arrives with a friend. Narendra introduces him, "He is a friend of mine. He has written several books. He wrote *Kiranmayi*." The author of *Kiranmayi* salutes Sri Ramakrishna and takes a seat. He would like to talk with Thakur.

Narendra — He has written about Radha and Krishna.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the author) — What have you written, my dear? Tell me a little, let me hear.

The Author — Radha and Krishna are the supreme Brahman – they are a dot of Om. From this very Supreme Brahman, Radha and Krishna, has emerged Vishnu. From Vishnu have sprung Purusha and Prakriti – Shiva and Durga.

Sri Ramakrishna — Beautiful! Nanda Ghosh had the vision of the Eternal[1] Radha. Radha sported in Vrindavan in her aspect of Love[2]. Chandravali was Radha's aspect of the Seductress[3].

"The Seductress and the Love Radha. Advance further and there is the Eternal Radha. When you peel an onion, you find the outermost skin red. Then comes pink. Then white. There is nothing more to peel off. This is the real nature of the Eternal Radha – where reasoning 'not this, not this' ends.

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[1] Nitya
[2] Prema
[3] Kama

"Radha and Krishna have two aspects: the Absolute and the Phenomenal – like the sun and its rays. The sun represents the Absolute and its rays signify the phenomenal world.

"A pure-hearted devotee sometimes dwells on the Absolute and at times on the phenomenal world. The Absolute and the phenomenal belong to the same Reality. It is all one – neither two nor many."

The Author — Sir, why do they say 'the Krishna of Vrindavan' and 'the Krishna of Mathura'[1]?

Sri Ramakrishna — That is according to the goswamis. The scholars of upper India [west Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab] don't think this way. To them, there is only Krishna, and no Radha. The Krishna of Dwaraka is not associated with Radha.

The Author — Sir, Radha and Krishna are themselves the Supreme Brahman.

Sri Ramakrishna — Beautifully said. But everything is possible for God. He is indeed with form and also formless. He is both the individual[2] and the universal[3]. He is Brahman, and He is Shakti.

"There is no end to God – no limit. Everything is possible for God. However high kites and

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[1] Sri Krishna of Vrindavan where he exhibited rasa lila is always associated with Radha and the gopis, whereas Sri Krishna of Mathura and Dwaraka, where he was the king, is not associated with Radha

[2] *Svarata*

[3] *Virat*

vultures fly, they cannot touch the top of the sky. If you ask what Brahman is like, well, it is not possible to describe in words. Even if one has realized Brahman, one cannot explain. If someone were to ask what clarified butter is like, the only answer to is, 'Clarified butter is like clarified butter.' The only analogy of Brahman is Brahman; nothing else."

Section XXII

Sri Ramakrishna at the Shyampukur House

Chapter I

With devotees at the Shyampukur House on Kali Puja Day

Sri Ramakrishna is standing in the southern room on the second floor of the Shyampukur house. It is nine o'clock. He is dressed in a freshly laundered cloth and wears a sandal paste mark on his forehead.

At the behest of Thakur, M. has brought some prasad from the Siddheshwari Kali Temple. Holding it in his hand, Thakur very devotedly eats some and touches a little to his forehead. Before eating, he takes off his sandals. He says to M., "Very nice prasad."

It is Friday, 6 November 1885, the Amavasya[1] of the month of Aswin. Kali's worship will be performed today.

Thakur had asked M. to offer morning worship to Mother Siddheshwari Kali at Thanthania – with flowers, green coconut, sugar and sandesh. After taking a bath, M. had gone barefoot to the puja and offered worship. He has now come to Thakur, still barefoot, with the prasad.

Thakur had also asked him to purchase books of the songs of Ramprasad and Kamalakanta to give to Doctor Sarkar.

M. says, "I have brought the books. They have the songs of Ramprasad and Kamalakanta." Sri

[1] The darkest night of the month

Ramakrishna says, "All these songs shall enter his (Doctor Sarkar's) mind."

Song – O my mind, why are you reasoning so much about Him, like a mad man in a dark room?

It is an emotional matter. Can you catch it without emotion?

Song – Who knows what Kali is like? Even the six systems of philosophy[1] cannot give a glimpse of Her.

Song — O my mind, you do not know how to farm. This human land has remained unattended. If you had cultivated it, it would have yielded gold.

Song – Come, O mind! Let us go for a walk.

At the foot of the wish-fulfilling tree of Kali, you will get the four fruits – righteousness[2], wealth[3], fulfillment of desires[4] and liberation[5].

M. — Yes, sir.

Thakur paces the room with M. He has slippers on his feet. He is so sick, but his face is beaming.

Sri Ramakrishna — This song is nice too: 'The world is a veil of deception.' And the other one, 'This world is a mart of joy. Come, brother, let us enjoy ourselves in the mart.'

M. — Yes, sir.

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[1] Six Systems of Hindu Philosophy: Samkhya of Kapila, Yoga of Patanjali, Vaiseshika of Kanada, Nyaya of Gautama, Purva Mimamsa of Jaimini, and Vedanta of Badarayana
[2] Dharma
[3] Artha
[4] Kama
[5] Moksha

Thakur's body suddenly jerks. He at once takes off his slippers and stands motionless. He enters into deep samadhi. It is the day of the worship of the Mother of the Universe. Is it because of this that he frequently starts and goes into samadhi? After a long time, he exhales a long breath, as if it were with great difficulty that he controls his ecstatic state.

Chapter II

With devotees on the Kali Puja day

Thakur is seated with the devotees in the same second floor room. It is ten o'clock. He is seated on the bed, leaning against a pillow. Devotees sit around him: Ram, Rakhal, Niranjan, Kalipada, M. and many others. The topic of conversation is Hriday Mukherji, a son of Thakur's sister.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram and others) — Hriday is still talking about land. When he was in Dakshineswar, he said, 'Give me a shawl or I will take you to court.'

"The Divine Mother removed him. Whenever visitors came, he would ask them for money. Had he continued to stay, all those people would have stopped coming [to Dakshineswar]. The Mother took him away.

" 'Go[1]' also began to act like that. He began to find fault with others. If he was to accompany me in the carriage, he would delay our departure. He would become upset when other young men would come to see me. If I went to Calcutta to visit them,

[1] Reference to Rakhal, through his association with Sri Krishna as gopal, a cowherd boy

he would say, 'Are they going to renounce the world that you go to see them?' Before giving refreshments to everyone, I would say to him out of fear, 'Eat, and give some to them.' It seemed to me that he would not stay.

"Then I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, don't take him away altogether like you did Hriday.' Later I heard that he was going to Vrindavan.

"If 'Go' had stayed on at that time, none of these young men would have come to me. When he went to Vrindavan, the boys started visiting me."

'Go' (humbly) — Sir, that was not in my mind.

Ram Dutta — Can you understand your mind as he can?

'Go' remains silent.

Sri Ramakrishna (to 'Go') — Why do you behave this way? I love you more than a father loves his child.

"Now keep quiet. You no longer have that attitude."

After talking with the devotees, when they had gone to the other room, Thakur called 'Go' and asked him, "Are you thinking about something?"

'Go' — No, sir.

Thakur says to M., "It is the Kali Puja day. It would be nice to make some arrangements for the worship. Go tell the devotees. Ask them if they have brought a stalk of jute for fuel."

M. goes to the parlour and speaks to the devotees about it. Kalipada and the others begin to make arrangements for the worship.

The Doctor comes to see Thakur at about two o'clock. A teacher named Nilmani is with him. A number of devotees are seated around Thakur: Girish, Kalipada, Niranjan, Rakhal, Khoka (Manindra), Latu, M. and others. After talking a little to the Doctor about his sickness and medicine, Thakur smiles and says to him, "We have these books for you."

M. gives both books to the Doctor.

The Doctor wants to hear some songs. At Thakur's request, M. and another devotee sing some songs of Ramprasad –

Song – How can you, O my mind, know His essence, groping like a mad man in a dark room?

Song – Who knows what Kali is? Even the six systems of philosophy cannot give a glimpse of Her.

Song – O my mind, you do not know how to farm.

Song – Come, my mind! Let us go for a walk.

The Doctor says to Girish, "Your song is good – the one about the vina. It is from Buddha's life."

Thakur beckons Girish and Kalipada to sing. They chant the song –

This is my beloved vina, in which I have intertwined a garland of strings.

He who plays the vina carefully, ever gets nectar from it.

If you are able to sing a song of inspiration having a nice musical note, sweet melody flows out in a hundred streams.

The vina does not play music by stretching or breaking its soft string, or by loosening a string.

Song – I want peace. Where can I get it?

Where have I come from and to what do I swim?

I go and return repeatedly. How much I laugh and weep!

So I ask myself, where should I go?

Who is making me play? And why should I play at all?

Even though I am awake, I am asleep – as if by a spell.

What darkness is this? Will there ever be a dawn?

I am running ceaselessly, like a strong current of wind.

I do not know who has come from where, why he has come, and where he is being taken.

I swim and swim, and reach so many countries. A din of the cries of distress surrounds me.

So many come and go, laughing and singing – now they are here, then they are not.

What has brought me here and what work have I engaged myself in? Who knows what play is being staged.

Can the current of water stop? Where am I to go? Is there no bank?

O Consciousness, make me conscious!

Who is conscious? When will this dream of mine end?

If you have become awakened, do not sleep again. This deep darkness is very frightening.

Dispel the darkness, Lord! And bring light, O Lord.

Except for You, there is no way, so I pray for refuge at Thy feet.

Song –

Hold me, Nitai. Today my soul is writhing terribly.

Nitai is now ready to give Hari's name to all embodied beings.

It is like a wave rising on the river of ecstatic love; and I am now sinking into this wave.

Nitai, to whom shall I convey my inner feelings of distress?

I am becoming immersed in the sorrows of embodied souls.

Song –

Come, let us call 'Hari, Hari' with a heart full of devotion.

Come on, Jagai and Madhai, let us dance.

Song –

Come, let us enjoy the intense love of the teen-aged Radha. A tide of intense love is flowing!

Love is flowing in a hundred waves. One receives as much as one wants.

The lass of ecstatic love is heartily dispensing love of her own will.

Call out 'Hari' in the intense love of Radha.

She intoxicates my soul with ecstatic love.

She makes one dance on the wave of prema. Come, come on, in the love of Radha, call out 'Hari'!

Two or three devotees go into ecstasy listening to the songs – among them are Khoka (Manindra) and Latu, who had been sitting beside Niranjan. After the songs

are over, Thakur talks with the Doctor about other things. The previous day, Pratap (Majumdar) had given the medicine nux vomica to Thakur. Hearing this, the Doctor becomes upset.

The Doctor — I am not dead yet! Why nux vomica?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — No, let only your avidya[1] die.

The Doctor — I have never had avidya.

The Doctor takes avidya to mean a woman of easy virtue.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Oh, no. Mother ignorance[2] of a sannyasin dies giving birth to discrimination[3] as her son. When mother ignorance dies giving birth to the son, impurity [because of the death] develops in the house. So they say that the sannyasin must not be touched.

Hariballav enters. Thakur says to him, "I am happy to see you." Hariballav is a very humble person. He takes his seat on the bare floor, not the mat, and then fans Thakur. He is a noted attorney in Cuttack.

Nilmani, the teacher, is seated nearby. Thakur, out of consideration for him, says, "It's a great day for me today." After awhile, the Doctor and his friend, Nilmani, leave. Hariballav, who is also leaving, says, "I shall come again."

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[1] Ignorance
[2] Avidya
[3] Viveka

Chapter III

Worship of Sri Kali (worship of the Mother of the Universe in the person of Thakur)

It is Amavasya in autumn, time 7:00 p.m. All arrangements for the worship have been done in the same second floor room. The devotees have brought Thakur flowers of different kinds, sandal paste, vilwa leaves, hibiscus flowers, milk pudding and sweets of various kinds. Thakur is sitting, surrounded by devotees: Sarat, Sashi, Ram, Girish, Chunilal, M., Rakhal, Niranjan, the Younger Naren, and Behari among others.

Thakur says, "Bring some incense." After awhile he offers all the articles to the Mother of the Universe. M. is seated close to him. Thakur glances at him and says, "All of you, meditate for awhile." They all meditate for some time.

Soon after, Girish offers a garland of flowers at Thakur's feet. M. also offers flowers and incense. He is followed by Rakhal. Ram, too, offers flowers at his feet.

Niranjan offers flowers at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, chanting, 'Brahmamayi, Brahmamayi,' and prostrates himself touching his head to Sri Ramakrishna's feet. They all repeat, "Victory to the Mother! Victory to the Mother!"

In no time, Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi. How wonderful! The devotees see an amazing transformation. Thakur's face is resplendent with celestial light. Both of his hands grant fearlessness to the devotees. His body is motionless and he has lost outer consciousness. He sits facing north. Has the Mother of the Universe Herself manifested Herself through him?

Everyone is speechless gazing at this wonderful form of the Mother of the Universe granting fearlessness to Her devotees.

They now chant a hymn of praise. Each of them sings the hymn individually, and then in unison.

Girish sings the following hymn –

Who is this woman of the colour of dark blue clouds in the celestial assembly of gods?

Who is She, standing with both red lotus feet on Shiva's chest?

Who is She whose toe-nails shine with the light of the moon?

Her feet shine as so many suns. Her face is radiant with a soft smile, but then She thunders in a loud voice.

He sings the following song as well –

You redeem the helpless, You are the Saviour from one's sins, and You contain the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas.

You, who create, preserve and dissolve, are with form as well as Formless, O my Mother. You are indeed manifested in all forms.

You, Yourself, are Kali, Tara and the great Primordial Power.

You, Yourself, incarnate as avatar in the form of a fish, a tortoise and a boar.

You, Yourself, are earth, water, fire and air.

You, Yourself, are ethereal space, You indeed are Mother of the Absolute.

The votaries of the systems of philosophy of Samkhya, Patanjali, Mimamsa and Nyaya,

Think of You alone and meditate on You.

Vaisheshika and Vedanta are confused and have not been able to know You until now.

In order to comprehend You, spiritual aspirants define you with beginning and end, and identify You with adjuncts.

Taking up the five forms of Ganesha and others (Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Bhavani and Ganesha), You are able to deceive *Kala* and dispel the fears of the world.

You are always present in the three periods of time: past, present and future.

For the votary of God with form, You manifest with form.

And for the worshipper of the Formless, you manifest without form.

Some say that Brahman is all-illumining. You are that daughter of the mountain.

When a person transcends his mind, he calls you Parabrahman.

After this is the state of Turiya, which is beyond speech.

You are all, O Mother Tara – immanent in the three worlds.

Behari now chants this hymn –

O my Mother, seated on a corpse, listen to my prayer.

O Mother, when they perform my *antarjali*[1] (at death), please appear before me.

Then I'll pick hibiscus flowers from the forests of my heart.

[1] The Hindu rite of keeping immersed the lower part of the body of a dying person in a holy river

And Mother, mixing them with the sandal paste of divine love, I will make an offering of them at Your feet.

Mani sings, accompanied by the devotees –

All is Your will, O Mother Tara! You are free to will.

You do all works in the world, Mother! People say that they do it.

You mire the elephant in mud and make the lame cross hills.

To some You grant the seat of Indra, and others You take downward.

I am the machine and You are the operator.

I am the house and You are the resident.

I am the chariot and You are the charioteer.

I move as You make me move.

Song –

By Your compassion, O Mother, people are going across and being liberated.

Unsurpassable obstacles like mountains – all hurdles – are removed.

You are the mine of blessings – You are always dispensing goodness.

Why, then, am I worried so about the good or bad result of anything?

Song –

O Mother! You are the very image of joy and bliss. Pray do not rob me of my happiness.

Song –

O my Mother! Your effulgent form shines forth in pitch darkness.

Thakur comes down to normal consciousness. He asks for the following song to be sung –

Song – In what moods do you remain, Mother Shyama, the river of nectar?

The song over, Thakur asks for this song to be sung –

Song – The Divine Mother is lost in an ecstasy of joy in the company of Shiva.

Though She staggers, She does not fall.

Thakur takes a little farina pudding to make the devotees happy but, suddenly overwhelmed with divine emotion, he loses outer consciousness.

After some time the devotees all salute him, take some prasad, and go to the parlour. They eat the prasad there, full of joy. Thakur sends word that the worship of Kali would be performed tonight at Surendra's house and that they should go there to participate.

Enjoying themselves on the way, the devotees reach Surendra's house on Simla street. With affection, Surendra takes them upstairs to the parlour. He asks them to be seated. The atmosphere is one of celebration, with everyone singing or playing a musical instrument.

It is past midnight before they take prasad and return home.

Section XXIII

With Devotees at the Cossipore Garden House

Chapter I

Narendra's yearning for the Lord

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the second story room of the Cossipore garden house. He is telling M. that Ram Chatterji had come from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple to enquire after his health. He asks M. whether it is very cold at Dakshineswar.

It is Monday, 4 January 1886. 21st of Pausha, the 14th day of the dark fortnight, 4:00 p.m.

Narendra comes in and sits down. Thakur glances at him from time to time and smiles – it is as though he were beside himself with love and affection for Narendra. He tells Mani with a sign, "He wept." Thakur remains quiet for awhile. Then he says by signs to Mani that Narendra had cried all the way from home.

Everyone is silent; then Narendra speaks –

Narendra — I am thinking of going there today.

Sri Ramakrishna — Where?

Narendra — To Dakshineswar. Tonight I will light a fire under the bel tree and meditate.

Sri Ramakrishna — No. Those people (the proprietors) will not allow it. The Panchavati is a

nice place. Many sadhus have practiced the repetition of God's name and meditation.

"But it is very cold there, and dark."

Everyone is silent. Thakur continues.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra, smiling) — Won't you study?

Narendra (looking at Thakur and Mani) — I wish I had some medicine that would make me forget everything that I have studied.

The Elder Gopal is there. He says, "I will go with him." Kalipada Ghosh had brought a box of grapes for Thakur; it is lying beside him. He distributes the grapes to the devotees. First he gives some to Narendra, then to Hari. Then he pours them on the floor so the devotees may gather as many as they like.

Chapter II

Narendra's yearning for the Lord and his intense dispassion[1]

It is already evening. Narendra, sitting downstairs smoking, tells Mani privately how his soul is yearning for the Lord.

Narendra (to Mani) — I was meditating here last Saturday. Suddenly there was a strange sensation in my chest.

[1] Vairagya; non-attachment to things of the world

Mani — Waking of the Kundalini!

Narendra — It must be that. I clearly perceived the Ida[1] and the Pingala[2] nerves. I asked Hazra to place his hand on my chest to feel the sensation.

"Yesterday, Sunday, I went upstairs to see him [Sri Ramakrishna] and told him about it.

"I said, 'Everyone else has attained realization; please give me some. Everyone else has attained it. Should I be the only one not to succeed?' "

Mani — What did he say to you?

Narendra — He said, 'Please come here after settling your family affairs. You will get everything. What do you want?'

Sri Ramakrishna and the Vedanta – accept both the Absolute and the phenomenal

"I said, 'I want to remain absorbed in samadhi for three or four days. I want only to rise now and then to eat a little food.'

"He said, 'You are very small-minded! There is a state higher than this! Don't you yourself sing, "You are all that is"?' "

Mani — Yes. He always says, 'He Himself has become all that you see when you come down from samadhi – He Himself has become the universe and its living beings. A God-man[3] can attain that state.'

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[1] A spiritual column of nerves on the left of the spinal cord
[2] A spiritual column of nerves on the right of the spinal cord
[3] *Ishvarakoti*

He says, 'If an ordinary human being[1] attains samadhi, he cannot come down from it.'

Narendra — He said, 'Go and settle things in your household. It is possible for you to attain a state higher than samadhi.'

"I went home this morning. Everybody began to scold me. They said, 'Why are you roaming around creating confusion? Your law examination is very near and you don't study. Instead you roam around aimlessly.' "

Mani — Did your mother say anything?

Narendra — No. She wanted to feed me. There was venison. I ate it, though I didn't feel like it.

Mani — And then?

Narendra — I went to the home of my grandmother to study. When I began to read, I felt a peculiar pain, as if studies were something frightful. My chest began to palpitate wildly! I have never wept so bitterly!

"I threw the books away and ran out onto the road. My shoes fell off somewhere. I ran close to a haystack and got covered with hay. I kept running down the road to Cossipore."

Narendra is silent for awhile. Then he continues.

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[1] *Jivakoti*

Narendra — I have begun to feel worse since reading the *Vivekachudamani*. Shankaracharya says that three things – human birth, the desire for liberation, and the refuge of a great spiritual soul – come to one if he has done great spiritual practice and is very fortunate.

"I began to reflect: I have indeed achieved all three things. As a result of great austerities, I have been born as a human being; as a result of the same, I have developed the desire for liberation; and it is because of so much spiritual practice that I have been able to meet a great saint."

Mani — Ah!

Narendra — I don't like worldly life any more. I don't like those who live a worldly life – except for one or two devotees...

Narendra suddenly stops talking. He has developed intense dispassion. His heart is pining for God. He continues –

Narendra (to Mani) — You have attained peace, while my soul is so troubled! You are indeed blessed.

Mani is silent. He does not reply. He reflects: Thakur said, 'One must yearn for the Lord, only then does one attain His vision.' Soon after dusk, Mani goes to the room upstairs. He finds Thakur asleep.

It is about 9:00 p.m. Niranjan and Sashi are sitting beside Thakur, who is now awake. Every now and then he talks of Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna — How wonderful Narendra's state of mind is! You see, in the beginning this same Narendra did not accept God with form. Do you see how his heart is pining for the Lord now? Someone asked his guru, 'How can one realize God?' The guru said, 'Come with me, I'll show you in what state He can be attained.' Saying this, he took the disciple to a pond where he immersed him and held his head under water. After some time he released the disciple and asked him, 'How did you feel?' The disciple said, 'I felt I was going to die!' It is like this with Narendra.

"When one's heart pines for God, know that God-realization is not far away. At dawn – when the eastern sky is red – one knows that the sun is soon going to rise."

Thakur's condition is worse today. He is suffering so much – yet he talks of all these things about Narendra, though mostly in signs.

Narendra has gone to Dakshineswar tonight. It is pitch dark – the beginning of the Amavasya[1]. One or two devotees have gone with him. Mani is staying for the night at the garden house. He dreams that he is seated among sannyasins.

Chapter III

Intense dispassion of the devotees – living in the world and suffering in hell

The next day is Tuesday, 5 January, 22nd day of Pausha. The Amavasya lingers for a long time. It is

[1] The darkest night of the month

four o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on his bed. He is talking to Mani alone.

Sri Ramakrishna — If Kshirode goes on pilgrimage to Gangasagar, please buy him a blanket.

M. — Yes, sir.

Thakur is quiet for awhile. He resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, can you tell me what is happening to these young men? One is running to Sri Puri[1], while the other is going on pilgrimage to Gangasagar.

"They are all renouncing their homes and coming here. Look at Narendra. When such intense dispassion develops, the world appears to be a deep well and one's relatives as venomous snakes."

Mani — Sir, there is so much suffering in the world.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is the suffering of hell – from the moment of one's very birth! Don't you see what trouble it is to have a wife and children?

Mani — Yes, sir. And you also said that those people (who have not entered family life) owe nothing to the world and expect nothing from it. Others remain entangled in the world to satisfy their expectations and carry out their obligations.

[1] Kshetra

Sri Ramakrishna — Have you observed Niranjan? His attitude is, 'Take what is yours, and give me what is mine' – that's all. He has no further relationship with the world. He has no attachment to it.

"Indeed 'lust and greed' is worldly life. Just see, if one has money, one wishes to keep it."

Mani bursts out laughing. Thakur laughs too.

Mani — One calculates so much before taking the money out. (Both of them laugh.) But you said at Dakshineswar that one lives in the world very differently if one has gone beyond the three gunas[1] [sattva, rajas and tamas].

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, one becomes like a child.

Mani — True, sir. But it is exceedingly difficult. It requires a great deal of will power.

Thakur is silent for awhile.

Mani — Yesterday when they had gone (to Dakshineswar) to meditate, I had a dream.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did you dream?

Mani — I dreamt that Narendra and some others had become sannyasins. They were sitting around a fire. I, too, was seated with them. They were

[1] *Trigunatita*

puffing tobacco smoke. I said that it smelled like Indian hemp[1].

Who is a sannyasin? Thakur's pain and the state of a child

Sri Ramakrishna — It is enough if one renounces in the mind. That too makes one a sannyasin.

Thakur doesn't say any more. Then he talks about other things.

Sri Ramakrishna — But one has to set fire to one's desires. Only then can one succeed.

Mani — You said to the pundit of the Marwaris from Burrabazar that you had the desire for love and devotion to God. Perhaps the desire for bhakti is not to be counted as a desire.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is like hinche leaves, which are not counted as greens. Hinche controls an excess of bile.

"Well, there was so much joy and ecstasy before. Where has all that gone?"

Mani — I feel that you have attained the state of *trigunatita*[2], spoken of in the *Gita*. Sattva, rajas and tamas are performing their functions, but you, yourself, are unattached. You are not even attached to the sattva guna.

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[1] Ganja
[2] Beyond the three gunas

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, I have been kept in the state of a child.

"Well, will my body survive this illness?"

Thakur and Mani remain silent. Narendra comes up from downstairs. He is going home and will return after settling family affairs.

Since the death of his father, Narendra's mother and brothers have been in great difficulties. At times they don't have enough to eat. Narendra is their only hope. He has to take a job and provide them food. But he has not been able to take his law examination because he is in a state of intense dispassion. He is going to Calcutta today to make arrangements for his family. A friend of his will lend him hundred rupees. That will take care of their rations for three months.

Narendra — I am leaving for home now. (To Mani) I am going by way of Mahima Chakravarty's home. Would you like to come with me?

Mani doesn't want to go. Thakur looks at him and asks Narendra, "Why?"

Narendra — I am going that way. I will visit him and chat for awhile.

Thakur looks intently at Narendra.

Narendra — A friend who comes here has said he would lend me hundred rupees. I am going to arrange for the needs of my family for three months with this amount.

Thakur is silent. He looks at Mani.

Mani (to Narendra) — No, you go on. I will go later.

Section XXIV

Sri Ramakrishna at the Cossipore Garden House with His Intimate Companions

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna has taken up a body for the sake of his devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is staying at the Cossipore Garden House. It is evening. Thakur is not well. He is sitting in the second story hall facing north. Both Narendra and Rakhal are gently stroking his feet. Mani is seated close by. Thakur beckons him to also gently massage his feet. Mani does so.

It is Sunday, 14 March 1886, 2nd of Chaitra and the 9th day of the bright fortnight in the month of Falgun. On the previous Sunday, worship was performed in the garden in commemoration of Thakur's birthday. Last year, his birthday was celebrated at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple with grandeur. This time he is ill and the devotees are drowned in a sea of grief. They performed worship, but with little celebration.

The devotees are always present at the garden house to serve Thakur. The Holy Mother is engaged around the clock attending him. Many of the young devotees stay with him: Narendra, Rakhal, Niranjan, Sarat, Sashi, Baburam, Jogin, Kali, Latu and others.

The older devotees stay here occasionally, but they come almost daily to have his darshan and to enquire about his health. Tarak and Gopal of Sinthi are here all the time, as well as the Younger Gopal.

Thakur is particularly unwell today. It is midnight on the 9th day of the bright fortnight. The whole garden appears lit up with joy by the moon's light. Thakur is suffering intense pain, so the sight of the pure rays of the moon does not bring joy to the hearts of the devotees. They feel as though they were in a very beautiful town that is being besieged by enemy troops. Except for the rustling of leaves by the touch of a spring breeze, it is completely silent. Thakur lies on his bed in the hall upstairs. His suffering is great. He cannot sleep. One or two devotees sit silently, close to him to attend to his needs. He is feeling sleepy at times and seems to doze off.

Is it slumber, or mahayoga[1] – the state wherein established, he is not shaken even by the heaviest affliction[2]? Is he in the state of communion with God?

M. is seated nearby. Thakur beckons him to come closer. Even stones would melt to see Thakur's suffering. With great difficulty he whispers to M., "I am undergoing all this suffering because you people will weep otherwise. This mortal frame will go if you all say, 'He is suffering so much; let his body go.' "

These words rend the hearts of the devotees. That he who is their father and mother, he who protects and provides for them, should say this! They are all silent. Some of them think to themselves, "This is crucifixion – sacrificing the body for the sake of the devotees."

It is dead of night and Thakur's disease is getting worse. What can be done? A messenger is sent to Calcutta. Girish brings Doctor Upendra and Navagopal Kaviraj that very night.

The devotees are seated close to Thakur. Feeling slightly better, he says, "The body certainly

[1] Supreme yoga experience

[2] Yasminsthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate (Gita 6:22)

has to undergo suffering. But I clearly see that it is made up of the five elements[1]."

Looking at Girish, he says, "I am seeing so many forms of God. This (his own) is among them."

Chapter II

In samadhi

The morning of the next day, Monday, 15 March 1886, 3rd day of Chaitra, time about seven or eight. Thakur's health is a bit more stable. He talks to the devotees in whispers and signs. Narendra, Rakhal, M., Latu, Gopal of Sinthi and others are sitting with him.

The devotees have no words. They sit silently in deep grief, remembering the state of Thakur's health the previous night.

Thakur has visions – the Lord, creatures and the universe

Sri Ramakrishna (gazing at M., to the devotees) — Do you know what I see? God has become everything – human beings and all the other creatures that I see. They appear to be made of leather, while He Himself, from inside, moves the hands, the feet and the heads. It is the same as I once saw before – houses, gardens, garden paths all made of wax. Also cows, everything – all made up of the same wax material.

"I see that God Himself is the executioner, the sacrificial victim and also the sacrificial block."

[1] Earth, water, fire, air and ether

What is Thakur saying? That, after being deeply aggrieved for humanity, he is sacrificing his body for them?

"The Lord Himself has become the executioner, the sacrificial victim and the sacrificial block." While saying this, Thakur is overcome with divine emotion and exclaims, "Ah! Ah!"

Again he enters samadhi, losing all outer-consciousness. The devotees sit silent, not knowing what to do.

Returning to partial consciousness, Thakur says, "Now I am not suffering at all. I am my former self."

Seeing this state beyond happiness and sorrow, the devotees are wonderstruck. Gazing at Latu, Thakur says –

"This Loto is sitting with his head resting on his hand. I see the Lord Himself sitting there with His head resting on His hand."

Thakur looks at the devotees and his heart seems to melt with love and affection for them. He caresses Rakhal and Narendra as one does little children, by touching and stroking their faces with his hand.

Why there is an end to Sri Ramakrishna's divine sport

After awhile Thakur says to M., "Had this body lasted a few days more, many people would have been illumined." He is silent again.

He resumes, "God is not going to preserve it."

The devotees wonder what Thakur is going to say next. Then he repeats, "God will not preserve this body lest – everyone knows me to be guileless and foolish person – I might give away spiritual wealth to all, simple person that I am. The fact is that in the

age of Kali, people don't practice meditation and repetition of God's Name."

Rakhal (lovingly) — Please speak to God, that He may preserve your body.

Sri Ramakrishna — That would only be if the Lord wills.

Narendra — Your will and the Lord's will have become one.

Thakur is silent for awhile, as if reflecting on something.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra, Rakhal and the others) — But then, nothing will happen, even if I say so.

"I see that it has all become one. In fear of her sister-in-law, Radha said to Krishna, 'Please dwell in my heart.' But later on, when she yearned for a glimpse of Krishna, a yearning like that of a kitten which continues scratching its paws, He did not come out of her heart."

Rakhal (to the devotees, in a sweet voice) — He is talking about the incarnation of God as Gauranga.

Chapter III

Secret talk – Sri Ramakrishna and his intimate companions

The devotees sit motionless and silent. Thakur looks at them lovingly and places his hand on his heart. What is he going to say?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and the others) — They are both inside this [meaning Sri Ramakrishna]: One, He Himself…

The devotees wait to hear what he is going to say next.

Sri Ramakrishna — One, He Himself – and the other, the devotee. The devotee broke his arm and it is he who is suffering from illness. Do you understand?

The devotees sit silently.

Sri Ramakrishna — Whom shall I tell? Who will understand what I say?

After awhile, Thakur speaks again.

"He incarnates as a human being, as God-incarnate, and is accompanied by devotees [intimate companions]. The devotees depart with him."

Rakhal — 'But please don't leave us now!'

Thakur smiles sweetly and says, "A troupe of bauls[1] came out of the blue – they danced, they sang, and then they suddenly left. They came and then left. No one recognized them." (Thakur and the devotees smile momentarily.)

After remaining silent for few moments, Thakur speaks again –

"When one takes up a body, there is bound to be suffering.

"I say time and again, 'May I not have to return [to the mortal world]!'

"Even so, the fact remains that one does not enjoy a meal of urada lentils and rice at home after having enjoyed a feast.

"Besides, this assuming of a human body is for the sake of the devotees."

Is Sri Ramakrishna saying that he enjoys the offerings and the invitations of the devotees? That he enjoys himself in their company?

Narendra's knowledge, and love and devotion for God – Narendra's renunciation of the world

Thakur looks lovingly at Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — A pariah was carrying a load of meat. Shankaracharya passed that way after a dip in the Ganges. The pariah suddenly touched him. Shankara became upset and said, 'You have touched me!' The pariah replied, 'Lord, neither have I touched you, nor you me.

[1] Minstrels

Please reflect: Are you the body, or the mind, or the intellect?' Reason out what you are. The pure Atman remains unattached to everything. It is not stained by any of the three gunas, sattva, rajas, or tamas.

"Do you know what Brahman is like? He is like the air. There are smells, both good and bad, in the air. The air, however, is not affected by them."

Narendra — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Brahman is beyond the three gunas and beyond maya – He is beyond the power of nescience[1] and also beyond the power leading toward God[2]. 'Lust and greed' are nescience. Knowledge, dispassion and love and devotion for God – all these are the splendours of power leading Godward. Shankaracharya kept the 'maya of knowledge'. The feeling of concern that you and these people entertain for me is indeed the 'maya of knowledge'.

"Following the path of the 'maya of knowledge' step by step, one attains the knowledge of Brahman. 'The maya of knowledge' is like the last few steps of the stairs. Only the roof remains beyond. Some people like to climb up and down the staircase even after reaching the roof. They retain the 'ego of knowledge' even after attaining the knowledge of Brahman – in order to instruct mankind, to taste the bliss of divine love, and to enjoy the company of devotees."

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[1] Avidya maya
[2] Vidya maya; maya of knowledge

Narendra and the other devotees are silent. Is Thakur describing his own state of mind?

Narendra — Some people get angry with me when I talk of renunciation.

Sri Ramakrishna (in a sweet voice) — But renunciation is necessary.

Pointing at parts of his body, Thakur says, "When an object is covered with another object, don't you have to remove the top object to get the lower one? Can you reach one without removing the other?"

Narendra — Right, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (sweetly, to Narendra) — When one sees that everything is filled with God, can one see anything else?

Narendra — Does one have to renounce the world?

Sri Ramakrishna — As I said, what else can one see after having the glimpse of everything filled with God? The world is not visible then.

"But one must renounce in the mind. No one who comes here is a worldly person. Some of them had a slight desire – to live with women. (Rakhal, M. and others smile a little). That desire is now fulfilled."

Narendra and the heroic attitude[1]

Thakur looks lovingly at Narendra and becomes completely filled with joy. Glancing at the devotees, he says, "Wonderful!" Narendra smiles and asks Thakur, "What is wonderful?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — You are renouncing very nicely.

Narendra and the devotees look silently at Thakur. Rakhal then speaks.

Rakhal (smiling, to Thakur) — Narendra understands you pretty well.

Thakur laughs and says, "Yes, I have noticed that there are many others, too, who understand me." (To M.) "Am I right?"

M. — Yes, sir.

Thakur gazes at Narendra and Mani. With his finger he draws the attention of the other devotees to them. At first, he points at Narendra and then at Mani. Rakhal has understood Thakur's hint and speaks –

Rakhal (smiling, to Sri Ramakrishna) — You are saying that Narendra has the heroic attitude, while he [M.] that of the handmaid of God. (Thakur laughs.)

Narendra (smiling) — He [M.] doesn't talk much and is timid. Is that why you say that?

[1] The fearless attitude of burning faith

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to Narendra) — Well, what about my attitude?

Narendra — You have both attitudes, the heroic as well the attitude of handmaid of God.

Who is Sri Ramakrishna?

Thakur becomes filled with ecstasy when he hears this. Placing his hand on his chest, he mutters –

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and the other devotees) — I see that whatever exists has emerged out of this.

He asks Narendra by a sign what he has understood.

Narendra — Every created object has come from within you.

Sri Ramakrishna (joyfully, to Rakhal) — Did you hear what he said?

Thakur asks Narendra to sing a song. Narendra hums a tune and then sings. He is in a mood of renunciation:

Transitory is human life, like drops of water dancing on lotus leaves,

The company of a holy man even for a moment serves as a boat to take one across the sea of this world.

When he has sung a couple of lines, Thakur says to Narendra by a sign, "What is this? What is this? It is a very ordinary idea."

Now Narendra sings a song expressing the attitude of a gopi.

O, my friend, where has the divine lover of Vraja gone? Do you not see that the separation from Him will kill me?

Artless daughter of a milkman as I am, He has forgotten me and made love to others more beautiful than I!

Who knew, my dear friends, that a lover so tender, so divine, would go begging for external beauty.

Fool I was to have forgotten myself at the sight of His heavenly beauty and to have held His feet fast to my throbbing bosom!

O, now I must consign this body to a watery grave in the Jamuna! Or take poison and put an end to my miserable existence!

Or give me a creeper from the woods to fasten round my neck; let me thus die by hanging from a young Tamal tree, dark brown like Him;

Failing all this, let me repeat day and night the sweet name of the beloved: Shyam[1], Shyam, Shyam, Shyam, and stop not until this body ceases to breathe.

Hearing the song, Thakur and the devotees are deeply touched. Tears of divine love roll down Thakur's and Rakhal's cheeks. Narendra is intoxicated with the love of the gopis of Vraja. He sings another song, humming its tune like a devotional hymn –

O, my beloved! O beloved, mine!

What do I say to you, O what do I say?

(Foolish woman that I am and never a favourite of Fortune)

You are the mirror to be held by my hands, You are the flower for my head!

O, I shall make You a flower and wear You in my hair.

[1] A name of Sri Krishna

I shall hide You, hide You, O my beloved, under my braided hair.

Worn under the hair, no one shall see You.

O, You are cooling collyrium for the eyes.

You are the betel leaf chewed with nuts and sweet fragrant spices for the mouth.

I shall make You, O my beloved, my Shyam, collyrium for the eyes, and thus wear You.

They shall think I have painted my eyes with dark-brown pigment and shall not find You.

You are the cool fragrant sandal paste for the body, and the necklace for the neck.

I shall cool, O my Beloved, my body, mind and soul with You, my dark-brown sandal paste!

And I shall make You my necklace and wear You round my neck and on my bosom and next to my heart.

To the body, You are life! To the house, You are the one thing that one cannot do without.

To me, O my Beloved, You are verily what wings are to the bird – what water is to the fish.

Section XXV

Sri Ramakrishna at Cossipore Garden House with Narendra and other Devotees

Chapter I

The Buddha and Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna is living with devotees at the Cossipore Garden House. Today is Friday, five o'clock, 9 April 1886, the fifth day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra.

Narendra, Kali, Niranjan and M. are sitting on the floor talking.

Niranjan (to M.) — I hear that Vidyasagar is going to start a new school. Why don't you try to arrange some employment there for Narendra?

Narendra — I have had enough of service under Vidyasagar.

Narendra has just returned from Bodh-Gaya, where he saw an image of Buddha. He had become merged in deep meditation before it. A new tree has grown up in the same spot as the bodhi-tree under which the Buddha had practiced austerities and attained nirvana. He saw it while he was there. Kali says, "One day Narendra sang a song at Umesh Babu's house in Gaya, to the accompaniment of a drum. He sang a kheyal, a dhrupada and so forth."

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on a bed in the hall. A good part of the night has elapsed. Mani is sitting

with him alone, fanning him. Latu comes in and sits down.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Please bring a chadar[1] and a pair of slippers.

Mani — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Latu) — The chadar is worth ten annas, and then there is the pair of slippers. How much will both of them cost?

Latu — One rupee ten annas.

Thakur asks Mani by a sign to note the price.

Narendra comes in and sits down. Sashi, Rakhal and one or two other devotees also come in and take their seats. Thakur asks Narendra to gently massage his feet.

Sri Ramakrishna asks Narendra by a sign, whether he has had anything to eat.

Was the Buddha an atheist? 'The state beyond theism and atheism'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to M.) — He went there (to Bodh-Gaya).

M. (to Narendra) — What did the Buddha believe in?

[1] A long piece of cloth worn over the upper part of the body, often draped as a shawl

Narendra — He could not express in words what he attained from spiritual practices. So everybody says he was an atheist.

Sri Ramakrishna (by signs) — Why an atheist? No, he was not an atheist. It is only that he could not express his experience in words. Do you know what a Buddha is? To become one with bodha (enlightenment) by continually meditating on it – to become transformed into Pure Intelligence Itself.

Narendra — Yes, sir. There are three classes of buddhas: the Buddha, the Arahat and the Boddhisattva.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is indeed God's play – a new and special divine sport.

"Why should he be an atheist? It is a state between 'is' and 'is not' in which one realizes one's own Real Self."

Narendra (to M.) — It is the state in which contradictions meet. Hydrogen and oxygen produce refreshing water; the same hydrogen and oxygen are used in the Oxy-hydrogen blowpipe.

"It is the state in which both the performance of work and the renunciation of work is possible – in other words, it is performing *nishkama* karma, or work without the desire for its fruits.

"Worldly people who are involved with sense objects believe in the 'existence' of the universe, while the Mayavadins, illusionists, believe that

nothing exists. Buddha's state was beyond 'existence' and 'non-existence'."

Sri Ramakrishna — 'Existence' and 'non-existence' are the attributes of prakriti (nature). Reality is beyond both 'existence' and 'non-existence'.

The devotees remain silent for awhile. Thakur speaks again.

Narendra and the kindness and dispassion of the Buddha

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — What did Buddha say?

Narendra — He did not comment on whether God 'exists' or not. He only preached compassion.

"A hawk took hold of a bird and was about to eat it. The Buddha cut a piece of flesh from his own body and gave it to the hawk to save the prey's life."

Sri Ramakrishna is again silent. Narendra talks more about the Buddha with great enthusiasm.

Narendra — Oh, what dispassion! Though Buddha was a prince, he renounced everything. What can those who possess nothing, who have no riches, renounce?

"After attaining nirvana, Buddha once visited his home and persuaded his wife and son and other members of the royal family to adopt a life of dispassion. What renunciation he had! Compare this with the conduct of Vyasadeva, who dissuaded

Shukadeva from giving up the world. He said to him, 'Son, practice religion as a householder.' "

Thakur is silent. He still does not comment.

Narendra —Buddha did not believe either in divine power[1], or in love and devotion for God[2]. He sought only nirvana. What dispassion! When he sat under the bodhi-tree to meditate, he said, 'ihaīva śuṣyute meṁ śarīram.' In other words, if I do not attain nirvana, then let my body dry up here. Such firm resolve!

"Indeed, it is the body that is mischievous! Is it possible to do anything without bringing it under control?"

Sashi — But you say that eating meat develops sattva. You insist that meat-eating is good.

Narendra — I eat meat just as I relish eating rice. I can eat rice alone, even without salt.

After awhile, Sri Ramakrishna talks. By signs, he enquires about the Buddha.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did Buddha have a tuft of hair on his head?

Narendra — No, sir. He has hair that looks like strings of rudraksha beads coiled a number of times on top of his head.

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[1] Shakti
[2] Bhakti

Sri Ramakrishna — And his eyes?

Narendra — His eyes are lost in samadhi.

Direct vision of Sri Ramakrishna: 'I am indeed He'

Thakur is silent. Narendra and the other devotees have fixed their eyes on him. Suddenly he smiles a little and begins to talk again to Narendra. Mani is fanning him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — Well, don't you have everything here – lentil pulse, gram pulse and even tamarind?

Narendra — After experiencing all those states, you are staying on a lower plane now.

Mani (to himself) — He is in the state of a devotee now – after living all the states.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is as if someone keeps pulling me down to a lower plane.

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna takes the fan from Mani's hand and resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — The way I see this fan directly in front of me, in exactly the same way, I have the sight of God. And I have also seen…

Saying this, Thakur brings his hand over his heart and says to Narendra by a sign, "Tell me what I said."

Narendra — I have understood it.

Sri Ramakrishna — Let me see what you heard

Narendra — I didn't hear you clearly.

Sri Ramakrishna repeats with a sign, "I have seen that He (the Lord) and the Being who resides within the heart are one and the same person."

Narendra — Yes, yes. Soham (I am He).

Sri Ramakrishna — But there is a thin line dividing the two – (the ego of the devotee) so that I may enjoy the divine play.

Narendra (to M.) — When a great soul attains salvation, he continues to live in the world for the welfare of mankind. He retains his ego, and his body is subjected to pleasure and pain.

"For instance, consider the work of a porter. People like us do the work of a porter under compulsion, but great souls work willingly as porters."

Sri Ramakrishna and grace of the Guru

Everyone is silent again. Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of motiveless grace, speaks again. He is explaining to Narendra and the others more about himself.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and the other devotees) — One can see the roof, but it is very difficult to climb onto it.

Narendra — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — But if someone has already reached the roof, he can pull another person up with a rope.

Five kinds of samadhi of Sri Ramakrishna

"A sadhu from Rishikesh visited here. He said to me, 'How wonderful! I have seen five kinds of samadhi in you.'

"At times, it is like a monkey: The spiritual current jumps like a monkey in the tree of the body, from one branch to another, leading to samadhi.

"At other times it is like a fish: Just as a fish swims swiftly in water, the spiritual current moves up inside the body and brings about samadhi.

"And sometimes it is like a bird: Like a bird it is sometimes on this branch of the tree of the body and sometimes it hops to another branch.

"At times it is like an ant: The spiritual current creeps up slowly within like an ant. When it reaches the Sahasrara (the thousand-petalled lotus in the top of the head), one attains samadhi.

"And sometimes it is like a snake: In other words, the spiritual current moves in a wriggling motion like a snake and brings about samadhi when it reaches the Sahasrara."

Rakhal (to the devotees) — Let us stop. There has been too much conversation. It will aggravate his illness.

Section XXVI

Sri Ramakrishna at the Cossipore Garden House with his Intimate Companions

Chapter I

At Cossipore Garden house with devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is lying on his bed in the second story room of the Cossipore Garden house. Sashi and Mani are in the room. Thakur asks Mani by a sign to fan him. He does so.

It is 5 or 6 o'clock in the afternoon on Monday, 12 April 1886; Sankranti of the month of Chaitra, the day of the worship of Vasanti Mahalakshmi; the eighth day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra, 31st Chaitra.

There is a fair in this residential neighbourhood celebrating the last day of the Bengali year with a special worship of Shiva. Thakur had sent a devotee to buy some articles there. He has returned.

Sri Ramakrishna — What have you brought?

The Devotee — Sugar drops worth a pice, a vegetable knife[1] worth two pice and a spoon worth two pice.

Sri Ramakrishna — What about the [other] knife?

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[1] Large knife fixed at right angle on a piece of wood used to cut vegetables and fish

The Devotee — He would not sell it for two pice.

Sri Ramakrishna (excitedly) — Please go quickly and buy it.

M. is strolling around downstairs. Narendra and Tarak have returned from Calcutta. They visited Girish Ghosh's house and other places.

Tarak — Today we ate a lot of meat and other heavy food.

Narendra — The mind has gone down a great deal. Let us practice some austerity.

(To M.) "What slavery to the body and the mind! We are just like porters. As if the body and the mind do not belong to me, but to someone else."

It is getting dark. Light has been brought to the upper room, as well as to other parts of the house. Thakur is sitting on the bed facing north. He is contemplating the Mother of the Universe. After some time Fakir, who belongs to the family of Balaram's priest, recites from the holy book the hymn, 'Dissolver of sins[1],' which addresses the Divine Mother. He is sitting in front of Thakur.

I suffered great distress in the womb of my mother before I was born.

But even after being born, I did not take refuge at Your feet, nor did I worship them.

Though born again and again, I didn't take You as my refuge, nor did I serve You.

Formidable Goddess, pray excuse my sins.

[1] *Apradha bhanjan*

Sashi, Mani and one or two other devotees are in the room.

The recitation of the hymn is over. Sri Ramakrishna bows down with folded hands in a mood of great devotion and reverence.

Mani is fanning him. Thakur says to him by a sign, "Please bring a stone bowl for me." With his hand he indicates the shape of the bowl to Mani. Then he says, "It should hold a quarter litre of milk. And it should be white stone."

Mani — Right, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — When I eat vegetable soup in other bowls, it smells of fish.

Chapter II

Does an *Ishvarakoti* bear the result of his actions? Is he bound by destiny? Yogavashishtha

The next day, Ram Naomi, Tuesday, 13 April 1886, the first of Vaishakh. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on his bed in the second story room. It is between 8 and 9 in the morning. Mani had stayed the night. He took a dip in the Ganges in the morning, then came to Thakur and prostrated before him. Ram Dutta also came and saluted Thakur, then took his seat. Ram has brought a garland of flowers, which he offers to Thakur. Most of the devotees are downstairs; only one or two are present in Thakur's room. Ram is talking to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram) — How do you find me?

Ram — You have everything in you. Soon the conversation will be your illness.

Sri Ramakrishna smiles and asks Ram by a sign, "The topic will be my illness?"

Thakur's slippers pinch his feet. Doctor Rajendra Dutta asks him for the measurement of his feet so he can get slippers made to fit. The measurement is taken[1].

Sri Ramakrishna asks Mani by a sign, "What about the stone bowl?" Mani rises at once. He wants to leave for Calcutta to buy one.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Please don't bother now. Leave it."

Mani — Sir, these devotees are going to Calcutta. I can go with them.

Mani buys a white stone bowl from a shop in the new market at the Jorashanko crossing. It is already midday when he returns to the Cossipore Garden House. He comes to Thakur to salute him and places the bowl before him. Thakur looks at the white stone bowl and holds it in his hand. Dr. Rajendra Dutta, Dr. Sreenath, Rakhal Haldar and several other devotees come in. Dr. Sreenath holds a copy of the *Gita* in his hand. Rakhal, Sashi, the Younger Naren and the other devotees are in the room. The doctors hear the news of Thakur's illness.

Dr. Sreenath (to his friends) — We are all subject to prakriti. Nobody can evade the fruit of his actions! One has to reap the *prarabdha*[2]!

Sri Ramakrishna — Why, when one repeats God's Name, meditates on Him and surrenders to Him…

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[1] These slippers are worshipped in the Belur Math now

[2] Stored-up karma from past lives which has begun to bear fruit in the present life

Dr. Sreenath — Sir, where will the effect of *prarabdha* go – the effect of one's actions of so many earlier births?

Sri Ramakrishna — Certainly one must, to some extent, reap the fruit of one's actions. But by virtue of the repetition of God's Name, a lot of the bondage of actions is dispelled. Maybe one had to be born blind in seven births because of his actions of previous births. But after a dip in the Ganges, which brings liberation, maybe this fellow remained blind for the rest of his life, but he was not born another six times.

Dr. Sreenath — But, sir, the holy books say that there is no way to free oneself from the result of one's actions. (Dr. Sreenath was ready to argue.)

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Please tell him that there is a great deal of difference between an *Ishvarakoti* and a *jivakoti*[1]. An *Ishvarakoti* does not commit any sin. Why don't you say this to him?

Mani remains silent. He says to Rakhal, "Please talk to him about this."

After awhile the doctors leave. Thakur talks to Rakhal Haldar.

Haldar — Dr. Sreenath studies the *Vedanta*. He reads the *Yogavashishtha*.

[1] An ordinary human being

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not good to live as a householder and still hold the view that 'everything is like a dream'.

A Devotee — Kalidasa says, 'That fellow, too, discusses the *Vedanta*, but he has lost all his wealth in a law suit.'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — To say that it is all maya and then to sue in a court of law? (To Rakhal) Mukherji of Janai also used to talk big, but later he understood. If I were well, I would talk to him [Dr. Sreenath] a little longer. Can one attain divine knowledge just by repeating 'knowledge, knowledge'?

Sri Ramakrishna's hair stands on end when he notices those who have conquered lust

Haldar — I have heard so many things about divine knowledge, but now all I need is a little love and devotion for God. The other day I came to you with a question. You have answered it.

Sri Ramakrishna (eagerly) — What was it?

Haldar — Sir, when this young man arrived, you said that he had mastered his senses.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, my dear. Worldly thoughts have not entered into him at all. He says he doesn't know what lust is.

(To Mani) "Touch me. The hair of my body is standing on end."

Reminded of such a pure state devoid of the least trace of lust, the hair on Thakur's body stands on end. God is present where there is no lust. Is Thakur being inspired by God-consciousness thinking of this?

Rakhal Haldar takes his leave.

Sri Ramakrishna is still sitting with the devotees. A crazy woman creates a row, insisting on seeing him. This woman entertains the attitude of a lover[1]. She often visits the garden house and suddenly rushes up to Thakur's room. Even when the devotees beat her, she doesn't stop.

Sashi — I will push her out if the 'crazy woman' comes again.

Sri Ramakrishna (in a voice full of compassion) — No, my dear. Let her come. She will leave by herself.

Rakhal — Before, I would feel jealous when I saw so many other people visiting him. But he was kind enough to make me realize that my guru was the Guru of the whole world. Has he incarnated just for our sake?

Sashi — No, not at all, but why bother him when he is sick? She causes such a row!

Rakhal — Well, everyone creates some kind of row. Have all the visitors who have come to him attained perfection before coming? We do not harm them. Narendra and others – what were they like when they first came? How many arguments Narendra used to raise!

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[1] *Madhura* bhava

Sashi — Whatever Narendra said, he carried out in action.

Rakhal — How much Dr. Sarkar argued! On test, no one is without guilt.

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately, to Rakhal) — Will you eat something?

Rakhal — I won't eat now.

Sri Ramakrishna is asking Mani with a sign whether he will eat here today.

Rakhal — Why don't you? He is asking you to.

Thakur is sitting with the devotees naked, like a child of five. Just now the crazy woman climbs up the stairs and stands at the door.

Mani (in a whisper to Sashi) — Ask her to bow to him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] and leave. There is no need to say anything more.

Sashi sends the crazy woman downstairs.

It is the first day of the new year. A number of women devotees have arrived. They offer salutations to Thakur and the Holy Mother and receive their blessings. The wives of Balaram and of Manomohan and the Brahmin woman of Baghbazar are among them. Some of them have brought their children.

The women devotees come to the second story room to pay their respects to Thakur. Some of them offer flowers and vermilion powder at the lotus feet of Thakur. Two girls, nine or ten years old, sing a hymn to Sri Ramakrishna –

Song –

I want to attain peace. But where can I find it?

Where have I come from and to where am I floating away?

I go and come back time and again; I cry and laugh so much.

O brother, I am always asking myself where I should go.

Song –

O my vina, chant the name of Lord Hari.

Song –

Look, O young lady! He is coming before you, He who has slanting eyes and holds a flute in his hand[1].

Song –

O my tongue! Ever repeat the name of Durga.

Who but She will save you during trials and tribulations?

Sri Ramakrishna says by signs, "O my Mother! How beautifully she sings!"

The brahmin woman has the nature of a child. Thakur laughs and says to Rakhal by a sign, "Why don't you ask her to sing?" The brahmin woman sings. The devotees smile.

O Hari! I shall play with You today.

I have found you alone today in the Nidhu grove [at Vrindavan].

The two girls go downstairs.

[1] Meaning Sri Krishna

It is evening. Mani and a couple of devotees are sitting near Thakur. Narendra enters the room. As Sri Ramakrishna rightly says, Narendra appears as if he is carrying an unsheathed sword when he moves about.

Hard disciplines for the monk and Narendra

Narendra comes in and sits beside Thakur. He expresses his aversion to women within Thakur's hearing. He says that keeping the company of women is a serious obstacle to God-realization.

Sri Ramakrishna doesn't say anything; he just listens to Narendra.

Narendra continues, "I want peace. I don't even care for God." Sri Ramakrishna stares at him without saying a word. Narendra chants, "Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, the Infinite."

It is 8:00 p.m. Thakur is sitting on his bed. A couple of devotees are sitting in front of him. Surendra has come to see him after completing his office work. He brings four oranges and two flower garlands. First he gazes at Thakur and then at the devotees. He tells them what is in his heart.

Surendra (glancing at Mani and the others) — I have come from the office after finishing my work. I said to myself, 'I shouldn't stand on two boats at the same time. I had better finish my work before going there.' Today is the first day of the year[1] and it is also Tuesday[2]. Yet I didn't go to Kalighat. I thought, it would be enough to see him who is Kali Herself and who has rightly known Kali.'

Sri Ramakrishna smiles a little.

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[1] Vaishakh
[2] An auspicious day for worshipping the Divine Mother

Surendra — I have been told that one should take flowers and fruits when one visits the guru or a sadhu. That is why I have brought these things. I have spent money for you; God alone sees into one's mind. There are some who feel uncomfortable when they have to spend even a pice for the sake of God. And there are some who do not mind spending a thousand rupees. God sees the devotion in a devotee's heart and accepts the offering.

Thakur nods his agreement that Surendra is right. Surendra adds, "I couldn't come to see you yesterday, the last day of the year[1]. But I decorated your picture with flowers."

Sri Ramakrishna tells Mani by a sign, "Oh, what love and devotion!"

Surendra — I bought these two garlands for you on my way here. They cost four annas.

Almost all the devotees have left. Thakur asks Mani to gently massage his feet and to fan him.

[1] Sankranti

Appendix

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna's first monastery – dispassion and spiritual practices of Narendra and other devotees

Baranagore Math. Narendra and other devotees have gathered together after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna. Surendra's holy desire has made it possible to provide a home for them in Baranagore. It is now transformed into a monastery. Gurudeva Sri Ramakrishna is daily served and worshipped in a shrine. Narendra and other devotees have resolved not to return to worldly life. They say, "How can we return home when he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] asked us to renounce 'lust and greed'?" Sashi has taken up the responsibility of the daily worship of Thakur. Narendra is looking after his brother disciples, who look to him for guidance. Narendra has said, "We will have to practice spiritual disciplines, or it will not be possible to realize God." He, with his brother disciples, have taken up the practice of a variety of spiritual disciplines. They have initiated themselves into various austerities described in the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras* to rid the mind of any kind of backsliding in the future. In practicing spiritual disciplines, they sometimes sit alone under a tree, at other times singly in the cremation ground, and at times on the bank of the Ganges. They spend the day in repetition of the Name and in meditation, sometimes in the monastery in the meditation room. At times, they join together in joyfully dancing and singing hymns. Everybody, Narendra in particular, yearns to realize God. Sometimes he says, "Shall I starve myself to death to see God? By what means can I attain Him?"

Latu, Tarak and the Elder Gopal did not have homes to return to. Surendra rented the first monastery in their name, saying, "Brothers, establish Thakur's shrine here and we will all visit you from time to time for peace and solace." Fired with the spirit of dispassion, the young devotees soon moved in, never to return home.

Narendra, Rakhal, Niranjan, Baburam, Sarat, Sashi and Kali were the first to stay there. Subodh and Prasanna joined them after a few days. Jogin and Latu were in Vrindavan, but they joined a year later. Gangadhar frequently visited the monastery. He could not live without seeing Narendra. He introduced the arati hymn, 'Jai Shiva Omkara[1]' to the monastery. From time to time the brothers of the monastery also sang the victory chant, 'Victory to the Guru.' It was taught to them by Gangadhar as well, when he returned from Tibet. Two other devotees of Thakur, Hari and Tulsi, used to visit the monastery regularly to see Narendra and the others. After a few days they, too, stayed.

Reminiscences of Narendra and Sri Ramakrishna's love for him

Friday, 25 March 1887. M. has come with Devendra to see the brothers of the monastery. M. often comes to see them and sometimes even stays overnight. He came last Saturday and stayed for three days – Saturday, Sunday and Monday. The brothers of the monastery, particularly Narendra, are charged with an intense spirit of dispassion. That is why M. eagerly comes to see them so frequently.

It is late in the evening. M. will stay at the monastery tonight.

After dusk, Sashi lights a lamp in the shrine and burns incense, repeating the sweet name of the Lord. Taking the same incense, he goes to all the

[1] Victory to Shiva Omkara

rooms of the monastery and offers his obeisance to all the images in each room.

Sashi now performs arati. Folding their hands, the brothers of the monastery, M. and Devendra watch it and sing the arati hymn with him: Victory to Shiva Shankara, victory to Shiva Shankara! To Brahma, Vishnu and Sadashiva! Redeem, redeem, redeem, Mahadeva!

Narendra and M. are engaged in conversation. Narendra is telling M. his reminiscences of meetings with Thakur. Narendra is now 24 years and two months old.

Narendra — When I started visiting him, one day in ecstasy he said to me, 'So you have come!'

"I said to myself, 'How wonderful! He acts as though he has known me a long time.' Then he asked me, 'Do you see a light?'

"I replied, 'Yes, sir. Before I sleep, I sense a special light revolving near my forehead.' "

M. — Do you still see it?

Narendra — I used to see it frequently. Once in Jadu Mallick's dining room, Sri Ramakrishna touched me and said something to himself. I lost outer-consciousness. I remained in that intoxication for a month.

"Hearing that I was going to marry, he held the feet of the Mother of the Universe and wept. After weeping for a long time, he said, 'Mother, give a turn to this situation. Don't let Narendra sink!'

"When my father passed away, my mother and brothers didn't have enough to eat. During that time, one day I went to see him with Annada Guha.

"He said to Annada Guha, 'Narendra has lost his father. He is in great trouble. It would be good if his friends helped him with money now.'

"I was upset with him. After Annada Guha left, I asked him, 'Why did you say all that to him?' Thus rebuked, he began to weep and said, 'Oh, for you I can beg from door to door!'

"He conquered us by showering his love and affection."

M. — There is not the slightest doubt about it. His love was unconditional.

Narendra — One day when I was alone with him, he told me something – there was no one else present. Please don't tell this to anybody else.

M. — No, I won't. What did he say?

Narendra — He said, 'I cannot resort to occult powers. Let me do it through you. What do you say?' I told him, 'No. This cannot be done.'

"I used to contradict what he would say. You must have heard this from him yourself. He used to have visions of divine forms and I would say to him, 'All these are hallucinations.'

"He told me, 'Oh, I used to shout from the rooftop of the Kuthi, "Where are all you devotees? Come to me! I am about to die without seeing you

people!" The Divine Mother had told me that the devotees would come. See, everything She said is turning out to be true.'

"What could I say then? I just kept quiet."

Narendra is the abode of Indivisible[1] – Narendra's ego

"One day he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] closed the door to his room and told Devendra Babu and Girish about me, saying, 'If I tell him his true nature, he will quit his mortal frame.' "

M. — Yes, I heard that. He said it to us, too, a number of times. Didn't you once enter into such a state[2] when you were staying in the Cossipore Garden house?

Narendra — In the state I experienced, I had no body; I could only see my face. Thakur was in the room upstairs – I had the experience on the ground floor. I began to weep and said, 'What has happened to me?' The Elder Gopal went upstairs and told Thakur that I was weeping.

"When I saw him, he said, 'Now you have known, but I am keeping the key.' I asked what had happened to me.

"Glancing at the other devotees, he said, 'When he comes to know of his real Self, he will not keep his body. I am keeping him in ignorance.'

[1] Akhanda
[2] Nirvikalpa samadhi

"One day he said, 'You can see Krishna in your heart if you want.' I said, 'I know no Krishna or anyone like him.' (Narendra and M. laugh.)

"And then there is something peculiar. When I see some people or objects, sometimes I feel as if I have known them for many past lives – as if they are my acquaintances. When I went to Sarat's house on Amherst Street, I said to him, 'I feel as though I have known this house completely. The passages in the house and the rooms, I feel that I have known for many days.'

"If I did something of my own free will, he (Thakur) would never say anything to me. Did you know that I was a member of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj?"

M. — Yes, I knew it.

Narendra — He knew that girls also used to visit the Brahmo Samaj. A man cannot meditate when there are girls around, so he would criticize such a practice. But he would not say anything to me.

"But one day he said, 'Don't tell Rakhal that you are a member of the Samaj. He will then want to become a member too.' "

M. — You have greater will power. That is why he didn't forbid you.

Narendra — I have attained this state of mind after having faced so many trials and tribulations! Master Mahashay, you haven't had to face such troubles in life. I now think that without facing

trials and tribulations, one cannot resign oneself [to the will of God], attain absolute dependence on God.

"But how soft and lacking in ego you are! What humility! Would you please tell me how I can have humility?"

M. — About your ego, Thakur said, 'Whose ego is it after all?'

Narendra — What does that mean?

M. — A gopi friend[1] of Radhika told her, 'You have become proud. That's why you were rude to Krishna.' Another gopi friend said, 'Yes, it is true that Radhika is proud. But what is she proud of? She is proud that Krishna is her Lord. Krishna himself gave this pride to her.' This is what Thakur meant – that the Lord Himself has given you this ego so He can get a lot of work done through you.

Narendra — But I shout repeatedly from every corner that I have no troubles.

M. (smiling) — Yes, please shout to your heart's content. (Both of them laugh.)

Now the conversation turns to other devotees – to Vijay Goswami and others.

Narendra — He said about Vijay Goswami, 'He is knocking at the door.'

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[1] Sakhi

M. — In other words, he has not been able to enter the room yet.

"But Vijay Goswami said to Thakur at Shyampukur, 'I saw you in Dhaka in this form, in this very body.'

"You were there when he said this."

Narendra — Devendra Babu and Ram Babu will both renounce the world – they are trying very hard. Ram Babu says privately that he will give up the world after two years.

M. — After two years? After making provision for his sons and daughters perhaps.

Narendra — He might rent out his house and buy a small one for himself. Others will arrange his daughter's marriage and so forth.

M. — Isn't Gopal in a nice state of mind?

Narendra — What do you mean?

M. — He goes into such deep ecstasy – while chanting the name of God, the hair on his body stands on end and he sheds tears of joy.

Narendra — Does one become great by going into ecstasy?

"How much greater personalities are Kali, Sarat, Sashi and Sarada compared to Gopal! How great is their renunciation! Gopal does not accept him (Sri Ramakrishna), does he?"

M. — Even he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] said that Gopal didn't belong to his intimate circle of devotees. But I noticed that he had great love and devotion for Thakur.

Narendra — What did you notice?

M. — On my first visit to Dakshineswar, after the devotees had left Thakur's room, I saw Gopal when I came out of the room. With folded hands he was kneeling on the red brick-dust path before Thakur, who was standing there. The moon was shining brightly. It was on the red brick-dust path to the north of the northern veranda of Thakur's room. No one else was there. It seemed to me that Gopal had taken refuge and Thakur was reassuring him.

Narendra — I didn't see it.

M. — Thakur used to say now and then, 'Gopal is in the state of a paramahamsa.' But I also remember well that Thakur forbade him to visit women devotees. He cautioned him a number of times about this.

Narendra — Well, he told me, 'If Gopal is in the state of a paramahamsa, why does he keep money with him?' He also said, 'He doesn't belong to my inner circle of devotees. They who are my own will regularly visit me.'

"That is why he used to be cross with Babu. He was in the constant company of Gopal and didn't visit Thakur frequently enough.

"He told me, 'Gopal has attained spiritual perfection – perfection achieved suddenly. However, he doesn't belong to this intimate circle. Had he been my own, why did I not weep in yearning to see him?' Some people are claiming him as an incarnation of Nityananda. But Thakur said on several occasions, 'I am indeed Advaita, Chaitanya and Nityananda – all three in one receptacle.' "

Chapter II

Thakur instructs Narendra to teach mankind

Two devotees are sitting in Kali Tapasvi's room in the monastery. One of them is a householder, the other a monk. They are the same age – twenty-four or twenty-five. They are talking when M. arrives. He plans to stay in the monastery for three days.

Friday, 8 April, Good Friday. Time about eight o'clock. M. enters the room and then goes to Thakur's shrine to pay his obeisance. Later, he meets Narendra, Rakhal and other devotees. Then he comes and sits in this room, talking to both the devotees and listening to their conversation. The householder devotee has the desire to renounce family life. The brother of the monastery is trying to dissuade him.

The Devotee who has Renounced — Please finish the little karma that remains to be done. If you attend to it for a little while, it will end.

"A person was told that he would go to hell. He asked a friend what hell was like. The friend got a piece of chalk and began to draw hell on the ground. As soon as he had finished drawing it, the fellow rolled over it and said, 'I have now reaped my actions of living in hell.'

The Householder Devotee — I don't like worldly life. Oh, how happy you are here!

The Devotee who has Renounced — Why do you talk so much about it? Go out and enjoy the world to your fill.

Sashi performs worship in Thakur's shrine after nine o'clock.

It is about eleven o'clock. The brothers of the monastery return, after a dip in the Ganges. They put on clean cloths and enter the shrine one by one to pay obeisance to Thakur and to meditate.

After food has been offered to Thakur, the brothers of the monastery sit down to eat it. M. eats with them.

It is now twilight. Arati is performed after incense is burnt. Rakhal, Sashi, the Elder Gopal and Harish are sitting in the 'Demons' room[1]'. M. is also there. Rakhal asks that great care be taken while keeping Thakur's food.

Rakhal (to Sashi and the others) — One day I took my meal before Thakur ate. Looking at me, he said, 'I can't even look at your face! Why did you do such a thing?' I began to cry.

The Elder Gopal — Once at Cossipore I breathed heavily on his food. He said, 'This food cannot be eaten.'

M. is pacing the verandah upstairs with Narendra. They are talking about a number of things.

[1] The brothers of the monastery call themselves *danas* and *daityas* (ghosts and demons) and the room where they meet they call 'the room of the danas,' or the 'demons' room'

Narendra says, "You know very well that I didn't accept anything."

M. — Are you talking about the forms of God?

Narendra — In the beginning I didn't accept many of the things he said. One day he said to me, 'Then why do you come here?'

"I told him, 'I come here to see you, not to listen to your words.' "

M. — What did he say?

Narendra — He was very happy.

The next day, Saturday, 9 April 1887. After offering food to Thakur, the brothers of the monastery eat and then rest awhile. Narendra and M. sit along together under a tree in the garden to the west of the monastery and talk. Narendra tells M. the story of his meeting Thakur. Narendra is twenty-four, M. is thirty-two.

M. — You remember your first meeting with him very well, don't you?

Narendra — Yes. I met him in his room at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. I sang these two songs that day –

Song –

O my mind, return to Your abode.

Why are you wandering aimlessly in a foreign land – this world – in the guise of a foreigner?

The five senses[1] and the elements[2] are alien to you – none is your own.

Entangling yourself in the love and affection of strangers, why are you forgetting your near and dear One?

Take the path to Reality and light the lamp of intense love for God for a moment.

Preserve sacred wealth carefully and secretly.

The robbers – greed and infatuation – can rob you of your wealth.

O mind, guard yourself most carefully with sama[3] and yama[4].

The company of sadhus and the Name are like an inn on the road. Take rest there when you tire on the way.

If you lose your way, ask the residents of the inn for the directions.

If, on the path, you come across an image of fear, call on the King with your heart and soul.

On that path, the King wields great authority. Even Yama (God of death) fears His regime.

Song –

Will my life end in vain? O Lord, day and night I fervently gaze down the path of hope.

You are the Lord of the three worlds. And I am a beggar and an orphan.

How can I say to You to come and reside in my heart?

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[1] Form, taste, smell, sound and touch
[2] Earth, water, fire, air and ether
[3] Control of the mind
[4] Self-restraint. Patanjali cites five yamas or restrains. They are: (1) abstinence from injury in any form; (2) truthfulness; (3) continence; (4) non-stealing and non-covetousness; and (5) abstinence from possessiveness, accepting only what is absolutely necessary (ahimsa, satya, brahmacharya, asteya, aparigraha).

I keep the doors of the cottage of my heart open at all times.

Pray, come here once and bring peace to it.

M. — What did Thakur say after hearing the song?

Narendra — He went into an ecstatic mood. He asked Ram Babu and others, 'Who is this boy? He sang so beautifully!' Thakur asked me to come again.

M. — Where did you meet him the next time?

Narendra — At Rajmohan's house. And then again at Dakshineswar. When he saw me on that visit, he began to chant a hymn of praise for me, absorbed in ecstasy. Finishing it, he said, 'Narayana, You have come down in this body for me!'

"But please don't tell this to anybody."

M. — What else did he say?

Narendra — He said, "You have come down in a human body for my sake. I had said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, how can I go down to earth? With whom shall I talk? Mother, how can I live on earth without associating with pure devotees who have renounced 'lust and greed'?' " He also said, "You came here and woke me up one night. You said to me, 'I have come.' " I knew nothing of the sort. I was in deep sleep in my Calcutta house.

M. — In other words, you were present as well as absent at the same time – like the Lord is both with form and formless.

Narendra — But please don't tell this to anyone.

Thakur directs Narendra to teach mankind

Narendra — He transmitted spiritual power[1] to me at Cossipore.

M. — Is that when you used to meditate under the tree before a lighted fire – at the Cossipore garden house?

Narendra — Yes. I asked Kali to hold my hand for awhile. Kali said, 'What a shock traveled through my body when I touched you!'

"Promise that you won't tell this to anybody. Let it remain between us."

M. — There is a special reason for transmitting power to you. You will accomplish great work. One day he wrote on a piece of paper, 'Naren will teach humanity.'

Narendra — But I told him that I would do no such thing.

"He said, 'Your very bones will do it.' He made me responsible for Sarat. He has now developed

[1] Shakti

great yearning for God. His kundalini[1] has awakened."

M. — May dead leaves not now choke It. Thakur used to say – you perhaps remember – that fish make holes in the lake to rest in. When dead leaves accumulate in them, the fish can't stay there.

Narendra, the Abode of Indivisible

Narendra — He used to call me Narayana.

M. — I know he called you Narayana.

Narendra — During his illness, he would not let me pour water for washing his hands after evacuation.

"At Cossipore, he said, 'The key is with me. He will give up his body when he comes to know his real Self.' "

M. — Wasn't that the day you went into that state[2]?

Narendra — At the time I felt I had no body, that I only had a face. I was studying law at home to prepare for my examination. Suddenly it came to me, why was I doing all that?

M. — Was Thakur at Cossipore then?

Narendra — Yes. I came out of the house like a crazy person. He asked what I wanted. I said, 'I

[1] Spiritual energy lying dormant at the base of the spine
[2] Nirvikalpa Samadhi

would like to remain in samadhi.' He said to me, 'You are a man of very low intelligence! There is something beyond samadhi. Samadhi is much lower.'

M. — Yes, he would say, 'Vijnana is higher than jnana' – like going up and down a ladder after reaching the roof.

Narendra — Kali talks of jnana all the time. I scold him, saying, 'Why talk about knowledge? First let your love and devotion for God ripen and mature.'

"He told Tarak Babu at Dakshineswar, 'Spiritual emotion[1] and devotion[2] are by no means the last thing.' "

M. — Please tell me what else he said about you.

Narendra — He had such great faith in my words that when I said to him, 'The forms of gods and goddesses that you see are all hallucinations,' he went to the Divine Mother and asked Her, 'Mother, Narendra said all these things. Are they all delusions of the mind?' Afterwards he told me, 'The Divine Mother has said that all of them are true.'

"He said – perhaps you can remember – 'Hearing you sing, (placing his hand on his heart) what is here inside begins to steadily listen to it – like a snake hissing and raising its hood when it hears the snake charmer.'

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[1] Bhava
[2] Bhakti

"But Master Mahashay, though he said so many nice things about me, what have I attained spiritually?"

M. — You are now dressed as Shiva, so you don't have to touch money. Do you remember Thakur's tale?

Narendra — Please tell me.

M. — A quick-change artist was playing the role of Shiva in someone's house. The master of the house where he went offered him a rupee. He didn't accept it. He went home, removed Shiva's dress, and came back to ask for the rupee. The family asked him, 'Why didn't you accept it before?' He said, 'I was then playing the role of Shiva – a sannyasin – I couldn't touch money.'

Hearing this, Narendra laughed for a long time.

M. — You are now in the role of a physician. The whole responsibility is on your shoulders. You have to make men of all the brothers of the monastery.

Narendra — The spiritual disciplines that we practice are in accordance with his teachings. How strange that Ram Babu should taunt us about them. He says, 'We have seen him. What need is there to practice more spiritual disciplines now?'

M. — Let everyone act according to his belief.

Narendra — But he (Thakur) asked us to carry out spiritual practices.

Now Narendra talks more of Thakur's love.

Narendra — How much he pleaded with the Divine Mother for me! We had nothing to eat – after the death of my father. We were passing through extremely tough times in the house. At that time he prayed to the Divine Mother to give me money.

M. — I know. You told me about that.

Narendra — We didn't get the money. Thakur said, 'The Divine Mother says that coarse grain and cloth can be arranged – only rice and lentils can be granted.'

"He entertained so much love for me – yet if an impure idea came to my mind, he would immediately know about it. When I used to wander about with Annada, I sometimes associated with impure people. Then, when I went to see him, he would not take food from my hand. His hand would rise a little to take it and then stop. During his illness his hand reached close to his mouth, but not farther than that. He then said, 'You have not yet attained.'

"Many times I become skeptical about the existence of God. At Baburam's house, I felt that nothing exists – that no God, or anything like Him, exists."

M. — Thakur would say that he, too, used to have such moods at times.

Both of them are silent. M. says, "Blessed you all are! You think about Him day and night." Narendra

replied, "But I can't see Him! I don't yet have the desire to give up my body!"

It is evening. Niranjan has returned from holy Puri dham[1] a few moments ago. The brothers of the monastery and M. express joy to see him. He begins to tell them about his visit to Puri. Niranjan is 25 or 26 years old. After the evening worship, some of them are meditating. Since Niranjan has returned, many of them go and sit in the bigger room (the room of the Demons) to talk. At nine in the evening, Sashi offers food to Sri Thakur and puts him to bed.

The brothers of the monastery sit for their evening meal with Niranjan. They have chapati[2], a vegetable and some zaggery for their dinner. And then they have a little prasad of farina pudding.

[1] Place of pilgrimage
[2] Flat whole wheat bread

Section I

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple with Rakhal, Prankrishna, Kedar, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

At Dakshineswar with Prankrishna, M., and others

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees in his room at the Kali Temple. He remains intoxicated day and night with ecstatic love for God – with an intense love for the Divine Mother.

A mat is spread on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna comes and takes his seat on it. In front of him are Prankrishna and M. Rakhal is also in the room. Hazra is sitting outside on the southeastern verandah.

It is winter, the month of Pausha. Thakur has wrapped himself in a moleskin shawl. It is Monday at eight o'clock on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Agrahayana, 1 January 1883.

A number of devotees belonging to Thakur's inner circle have now come in contact with him. For more than a year Narendra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, Balaram, M., Baburam, Latu, and others have been visiting him regularly. Ram, Manomohan, Surendra, and Kedar had come a year earlier.

Almost five months ago Thakur had visited Vidyasagar's Badurbagan house. Two months ago he went with Keshab Sen on a pleasure trip by steamer to Calcutta. They were accompanied by Vijay and some Brahmo devotees.

Prankrishna Mukherji lives in Calcutta's Shyampukur locality. His ancestral home is in the village of Janai. He is a high government exchange officer who supervises auctions. Since he had no child from his first wife, he married a second time, with the former's consent. The second wife has given birth to a son. Prankrishna has great love and devotion for Sri Ramakrishna. Because he is rather stout, Thakur sometimes calls him "the fat brahmin." He is very good-natured. Some nine months ago, Thakur accepted his invitation to visit his home with the devotees. Prankrishna had prepared various dishes and sweets to offer him.

Thakur is sitting on the floor. Close to him is a basket of jilipis brought by a devotee. Thakur breaks off a piece and eats it.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Prankrishna, smiling*): "You see, I repeat the name of the Divine Mother, so I get all these things to eat. (*Laughter*.)

"But She doesn't give gourd and pumpkin. She gives the fruit of amrita, immortality – divine knowledge, intense love for God, discrimination, and dispassion."[1]

A young boy six or seven years old enters the room. Sri Ramakrishna is childlike. Just as a child conceals sweets from another child lest he should eat them, Thakur behaves in the same childlike manner. He covers the small basket of jilipis with his hand to conceal it and then pushes it aside.

Though Prankrishna is a householder,[2] he discusses Vedanta. He says, "Brahman is real and the world illusory. I am indeed He – So 'ham."

1. Jnana, prema, viveka, and vairagya.
2. Garhasthya.

Thakur says to him, "Life depends on food in the Kaliyuga. The path of devotion enjoined by Narada[1] is best suited to this age.

"God is a matter of the heart. How can He be held devoid of any feelings of the heart?"

As he is covering the sweets with his hand to conceal them, like a child, Thakur merges into samadhi.

Chapter II

In the domain of ecstasy and vision of divine forms

Thakur is in samadhi for a long time; he remains absorbed in ecstasy. His body does not move, his eyes are fixed. One is not sure if he is breathing.

He exhales a long breath, as if returning to the domain of the senses.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Prankrishna*): "God is not just formless. He has form too. You can behold His form. You can have the vision of His wondrous divine form through feeling, through love, through devotion for Him.[2] The Divine Mother reveals Herself in various forms."

Vision of Gauranga – Divine Mother in the form of Rati's mother

"I saw the Divine Mother yesterday. She wore an ochre garment with an unstitched hem. She talked with me for some time.

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1. Naradiya bhakti: self-surrender and loving devotion to God.
2. Bhakti.

"On another day She came to me in the form of a Muslim girl. She had the sectarian holy mark[1] on her forehead, and She was naked – a girl six or seven years old. She walked with me and joked and chatted like a child.

"When I was at Hriday's house, I had the vision of Gauranga. He wore a black-bordered cloth.

"Haladhari used to say, 'God is beyond being and non-being.' I went to the Mother and said, 'Mother, Haladhari says this. So are Your forms illusory?' The Mother came to me in the form of Rati's mother and said, 'You must remain in an ecstatic state.'[2] I told Haladhari what She said.

"Time and again when I forget Her command, I suffer. I broke my tooth when I was not in that state. So I will remain in an ecstatic mood until I hear a divine command directly or have a different experience. I'll follow the path of love for God. What do you say?"

Prankrishna: "Yes, sir."

Why does an incarnation of God entertain devotion? – it is Rama's will

Sri Ramakrishna: "But why should I ask you about it? There is someone within me who does all this through me. Sometimes I used to go into a divine mood when I could not be at peace without offering worship.

"I am the machine and He is the operator. I do as He makes me do. I speak as He makes me speak.

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1. Tilak.
2. Bhava.

"Ramprasad, the poet, says:

I sail my boat in the ocean of the world.

I rise with the tide and subside with the ebb.

"During a storm a dry leaf is sometimes blown onto a clean surface and sometimes into a gutter. The wind carries it where it wills.

"The weaver said, 'It was by Rama's will that a robbery took place. It was by Rama's will that the police arrested me. And it was by Rama's will that I was set free.'

"Hanuman said, 'O Rama, You are my only refuge,[1] I surrender to You. Bless me that I may have pure love[2] for Your lotus feet and grant that I may never be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya.'

"A bullfrog, at the point of death, said to Rama, 'Rama, when I'm seized by a snake, I shout for Your help, "Rama, protect me!" But since I'm dying now by Rama's own arrow, I can only stay silent.'

"Before, I used to see God with these physical eyes, the way I see you. Now I behold visions in ecstasy.[3]

"After realizing God, one develops the nature of a child. One acquires the nature of Him on Whom one meditates. God's nature is like that of a child. Just as a child builds a house, breaks it down, and then rebuilds it in play, in the same way God creates, preserves, and dissolves. Just as a child is

1. Sharanagata.
2. Shuddha bhakti.
3. Bhava.

not subject to any guna,[1] He too is beyond the three gunas of sattva, rajas, and tamas.

"That's why a paramahamsa keeps five or ten children with him – to absorb their nature."

A young man between twenty and twenty-two years old has come from Agarpara. Whenever he comes, he takes Thakur, by a sign, to a solitary corner and whispers his thoughts to him. He has only recently begun visiting Thakur. Today he is sitting on the floor near Sri Ramakrishna.

Feminine attitude[2] and conquest of lust – guilelessness and God-realization

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the young man*): "You can change your nature by imitating something. If you cultivate a feminine nature, you gradually slay enemies like lust. Then you begin to act just like a woman. Men who play the role of women in a religious theatrical performance,[3] begin to brush their teeth like women and talk like women when they bathe.

"Please come again, either on Saturday or Tuesday.

1. One of three types of universal energies: sattva, rajas and tamas.
2. Prakriti bhava.
3. Yatra.

(*To Prankrishna*) "Brahman and His Power[1] are one and the same. If you don't believe in His Power, the world becomes illusory for you. I, you, hearth and home, and the family – all of them become illusory. It is because of the Primordial Energy that the world stands firm. A framework can't be made without bamboo poles. You can't even make a beautiful image of Durga.

"A person can't attain spiritual awakening and realize God without getting rid of worldliness. Worldly desire leads to hypocrisy. God cannot be realized unless one is guileless at heart.

> Let go of cleverness and hypocrisy, and be sincerely devoted to God.
>
> Embracing service, worship, and self-surrender, you will easily attain Ragurai.[2]

"People who are engaged in worldly activities – in office work or some business – should also follow the path of truth. Truthfulness is the spiritual austerity in the Kaliyuga."

Prankrishna: "'On this spiritual path, one should speak the truth, control the senses, serve others unceasingly, remain steadfast, and be a refuge to others.'[3] This is what the Mahanirvana Tantra says."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, one must internalize all these qualities."

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1. Shakti.
2. A name for Rama.
3. asmindharme maheśi syāt satyavādī jitendriyaḥ।
paropakāranirato nirvikāraḥ sadāśayaḥ।।

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna's attitude in ecstasy akin to Yashoda's

Sri Ramakrishna goes to the smaller cot and sits down. Filled with God-consciousness, he looks at Rakhal.[1] In an ecstatic mood he becomes overwhelmed with maternal affection as he gazes at him. The hair on his body stands on end. Is he seeing Rakhal as Yashoda used to see baby Krishna?[2]

Thakur merges again into samadhi. The devotees sit speechless with wonder as they watch his marvelous state of God-consciousness.

Coming down a little to normal consciousness, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Why am I inspired at the sight of Rakhal? The more one advances towards God, the less one sees of His glories and splendour. A spiritual aspirant first beholds the vision of a deity with ten arms. There is a greater representation of splendour in this image. Then there is a vision of a two-armed deity – no longer holding weapons and missiles. Still later is the vision of Gopala. There is no show of power, only the form of a little child. Beyond that there is only divine light."

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1. Later Swami Brahmananda.
2. Gopala.

The state of brahmajnana after attaining samadhi – reasoning and attachment given up

"After realizing God and communing with Him in samadhi, all reasoning and discrimination disappear.

"How long does one reason? As long as there is the consciousness of plurality. You reason as long as you are aware of the world and its embodied beings, 'I' and 'you.' Attaining true knowledge, you become silent. Trailanga Swami[1] is like that.

"Haven't you seen a feast when brahmins are invited? The feast starts with a great uproar. As their stomachs are filled, the noise lessens. When curds with sugar drops are served, there is just the sound of 'sup sup' – no other sound is heard then. And when the feast is over, they go to sleep – that is samadhi. Then there is no sound at all.

(*To M. and Prankrishna*): "Most people talk about the knowledge of Brahman, but their minds are preoccupied with lower worldly things – home and hearth, money, name and fame, and sense pleasures. As long as you stand at the foot of the monument[2] you see carriages, horses, English men and women, and so on. But when you climb to the top of the monument, you see the vast expanse of sky and ocean. Then you don't enjoy the sight of buildings, carriages, horses, and people – they all appear to be so many ants.

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1. Trailanga Swami was a famous monk in Benares who had taken a vow of silence. Sri Ramakrishna met him on his second pilgrimage there.
2. Ochterloney Monument in Calcutta.

"On attaining the knowledge of Brahman, attachment to the world and enthusiasm for 'lust and greed' vanishes. You attain perfect peace. A piece of burning wood produces a crackling sound and gives out heat. When it is consumed and has turned to ash, all sound ceases. As soon as you get rid of attachment, the restlessness for 'lust and greed' vanishes. Finally you attain tranquility.

"The nearer you come to God, the more tranquility you feel. Peace, peace, profound peace. The nearer you approach the holy Ganges, the cooler you feel. A dip in it is even more soothing.

"The world, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles[1] – these exist because God exists. Give up God and nothing remains. Adding zeroes to the digit *one* increases the number. But if you remove the one, the zeroes have no value."

Is Sri Ramakrishna hinting at his own state in his next words to be gracious to Prankrishna?

Sri Ramakrishna's state – the 'I of a devotee' after attaining the knowledge of Brahman

"After attaining the knowledge of Brahman – merging in samadhi – some people come down to a lower plane and live with the 'I of knowledge,' or

1. The twenty-four categories or cosmic principles enunciated in the Samkhya Philosophy are: mahat, cosmic intelligence; buddhi, the discriminating faculty; ahamkara, the sense of ego; manas, perceiving mind; chitta (mind-stuff), the recording faculty or memory; five organs of sense-perception (hearing, touch, sight, taste, smell); five organs of action (hands, feet, speech, organ of excretion, organ of generation);l five subtle elements (tanmatras – the potential of sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell), which, in differing combinations produce the gross elements (mahabhutas – ether/akasha/space, air, fire, water, and earth).

the 'I of devotion.' When the market shuts down, some people stay there of their own sweet will – for example, some like Narada, who retained the 'I of knowledge' to teach people.

"Even if only a little attachment to the world remains, one cannot realize Him. Just a little fibre sticking out from a thread keeps it from passing through the eye of a needle.

"One who has attained God retains only the appearance of passions like lust and anger – they're like a burnt string. There is the shape of a string, but it is blown away by a mere puff.

"God is seen when the mind is completely rid of attachment. Whatever rises in a pure mind is the voice of God. Pure mind is the same as pure intellect, and it is also the same as pure Atman. Except for God, there is nothing pure.

"Only by realizing God does one go beyond dharma and adharma."[1]

Saying this, Thakur sings a song of Ramprasad in his celestial voice.

> Come, O mind, let us go for a walk to Kali, the wish-fulfilling tree,[2] and gather there the four fruits of life.[3]
>
> Of your two wives, Worldliness[4] and Dispassion,[5] take only Dispassion along, and ask her eldest son, Discrimination, for the truth about Reality.[6]

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1. Virtue and vice, righteousness and unrighteousness.
2. Kalpataru.
3. Four fruits: Dharma (virtue), artha (wealth), kama (legitimate desires), and moksha (liberation).
4. Pravritti.
5. Nivritti.
6. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section II, Chapter VI.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna in the mood of Radha

Thakur is sitting on the southeastern verandah of his room. Prankrishna and other devotees are with him. Hazra is also sitting on the verandah. Laughing, Thakur says to Prankrishna:

"Hazra is not an insignificant man. If one finds the big dargah[1] here [referring to himself], Hazra is a small dargah." (*All laugh.*)

Navakumar comes to the door of the verandah. At the sight of the devotees sitting there, he leaves. Thakur says, "The image of egotism."

It is about half past nine. Prankrishna salutes Sri Ramakrishna and takes his leave. He is going to his house in Calcutta.

In Thakur's room a renunciate sings a song to the accompaniment of a single-stringed instrument:[2]

Nityananda's ship is here.

Catch hold if you want to cross over.

Six handsome angels ever guard it,

Their backs and chests masked by shields.

Opening the main portal, they dole out precious jewels.

He sings another song:

Build your house now, for torrential rains will soon approach. Be prepared. Take ginger water;[3] be up and doing to construct it.

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1. Burial place of a Muslim saint, considered sacred.
2. Gopiyantra.
3. Ginger helps in digestion.

When the month of Shravana[1] arrives, you'll not be able to see.

Bamboo and thatch will rot, and you will not be able to lay a roof.

With a gust of wind, the thatch will fly away, along with its frame,

Leaving a gaping hole.

You will look agape, and you will leave.

Once more he sings:

In what mood are you repeating Hari's name, while roaming about Nadia in pauper's garb, though you yourself are Hari?

I cannot comprehend why you have assumed this attitude and such behavior.

Thakur is listening to the songs when Kedar Chatterji enters and salutes him. He is in his office clothes, and wearing a cloak and a pocket watch and chain. Whenever he hears about God, his eyes fill with tears. He is a very loving soul and cherishes the attitude of the gopis of Vrindavan.

Seeing Kedar, Thakur is instantly inspired with the divine sport at Vrindavan. In a mood of ecstatic love, he stands up and sings, addressing Kedar:

Tell me, friend,[2] How far is that grove where my Shyamasundar is?

I cannot walk much farther.

Singing the song in the attitude of Sri Radha, Thakur enters into samadhi – he stands still like a

1. A time of incessant downpour during which visibility is very low.
2. Sakhi; gopi friend of Radha in Vraja and female lover of the Lord.

portrait. Tears of joy flow from both corners of his eyes.

Kedar kneels before him and, touching Thakur's feet, sings a hymn:

> I bow to Brahman-Consciousness, the primal seed of the universe, abiding in the lotus of the heart,
>
> Who, without attributes, rests in undifferentiated repose, known only to Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh,
>
> Who is attained only by yogis in the depth of meditation,
>
> Who removes the fear of life and death and is the essence of Knowledge and Truth.

After some time, Thakur returns to normal consciousness. Kedar was going to work in Calcutta from his home in Halishahar when he stopped to visit the Dakshineswar Kali Temple to see Thakur. After a little rest, he leaves.

While Thakur talks to the devotees, midday approaches. Ramlal brings Sri Ramakrishna a plate of Mother Kali's prasad. He eats the prasad facing south. Like a child, he takes a little of everything.

After eating, Thakur rests awhile on the smaller cot. Later the Marwari devotees[1] arrive.

Chapter V

Yoga of practice[2] – two paths: that of discrimination and that of loving devotion to God

It is three o'clock. The Marwari devotees sit on the floor and ask Thakur a few questions. M.,

1. Devotees from the Burrabazar district of Calcutta.
2. Abhyasa Yoga.

Rakhal and several other devotees are seated in the room.

A Marwari devotee: "Sir, what is the way?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are two paths: the path of discrimination and the path of fervent love for God.[1]

"Discrimination means differentiating between the real and the unreal. The only real or eternal Substance is God and everything else is unreal or impermanent. Only the magician is real, his magic is illusory. One must discriminate in this way.

"Discrimination and dispassion.[2] Differentiating between the real and the unreal in this manner is discrimination. Dispassion means a distaste for worldly things. This does not come about all of a sudden. It has to be practiced daily. To begin with, you have to renounce 'lust and greed' in the mind. Then, God willing, you can renounce them externally as well as internally. It is not possible to ask Calcutta people to renounce everything for the sake of God. You have to say to them, 'Renounce these mentally.'

"One is able to renounce the attachment to 'lust and greed' by the yoga of practice. The Gita says this. Practice brings extraordinary strength to the mind. Then you don't find it difficult to subdue the senses, to control passions like lust and anger. For instance, a tortoise doesn't bring out its limbs once

1. Anuraga.
2. Viveka and vairagya.

it has drawn them inside its shell, even if you cut it into four pieces with an axe."

The Marwari devotee: "Sir, you said that there are two paths. What is the other one?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is the path of ardent love for God. Weep for Him with a yearning heart, in solitude or in a secret corner, and cry to Him, 'Grant me Your vision!'

> Cry out with yearning, O mind, and see how Mother Shyama can withhold Herself from you![1]

The Marwari devotee: "Sir, what is the meaning of worshiping a form of God? And what is the meaning of God without form or attributes?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Just as you are reminded of your father when seeing his photograph, similarly, by continuously worshiping an image of God, you will have revealed to you in a flash His real nature.

"Do you know what the form of Reality is like? Just like bubbles rising on an expanse of water. Different forms arising in the subtle space of Consciousness,[2] in the Great Space[3] of Consciousness. An incarnation of God is one of such forms. As for the divine play of an incarnation, well, it's the sport of the Primal Energy."[4]

---

1. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section I, Chapter V.
2. Chidakasa.
3. Mahakasa.
4. Adyashakti.

Learning and scholarship – Who am I? I am none other than You

"What is there in learning and scholarship? You can attain God by calling upon Him with a yearning heart. Knowledge of different kinds is not essential.

"Religious teachers need to know many things; for killing others, you need a sword and a shield. To kill yourself, even a needle or a nail-knife will do.

"Who am I? When you try to discover that, you find God. Am I flesh or bone or blood or marrow – or am I the mind or intellect? Through such reasoning you ultimately see that you are none of these – 'not this, not this.'[1] The Atman cannot be touched or grasped. It is without attributes and qualities.[2]

"But according to the path of loving devotion, God has attributes. Krishna is Consciousness and His abode is Consciousness. Everything is Consciousness."

The Marwari devotees salute Sri Ramakrishna and take their leave.

Evening worship at Dakshineswar Temple

It is dusk. Thakur is watching the Ganges. A lamp is burning in his room. He chants the name of the Divine Mother and, sitting on the smaller cot, meditates on Her.

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1. Neti, neti.
2. Nirupadhi.

In the temple, arati is being performed, and people strolling in the panchavati or on the embankment hear the sweet tones of the gong from a distance. The flood tide on the river flows northward with a soft murmuring sound. The music of the arati mingled with its murmur makes even a sweeter sound. Surrounded by such an atmosphere, Thakur sits intoxicated with love for God. Everything is sweet, the heart is filled with sweetness. Sweet, sweet, sweet.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple with Rakhal, Ram, Nityagopal, Choudhury, and Others

Chapter I

Practicing spiritual discipline in a solitary place – philosophy – God-realization

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room with the devotees after the midday service. It is 25 February 1883.

Rakhal, Harish, Latu, and Hazra are living with Thakur these days. Ram, Kedar, Nityagopal, M., and other devotees, including Choudhury, have arrived from Calcutta.

Choudhury has recently lost his wife. He has visited Thakur many times to attain peace of mind. He has four university degrees and is employed as a government official.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ram and other devotees*): "Rakhal, Narendra, and Bhavanath are ever-perfect.[1] They have been spiritually awake since birth. They've assumed human bodies only to teach others.

"There's another class of devotees – those who are perfected by God's grace.[2] All of a sudden God's

1. Nityasiddha.
2. Kripasiddha.

grace descends on them and immediately they have His vision and spiritual wisdom. It is like a room which has been lying dark for a thousand years; the very moment a light is brought in, it is lit up. It is not lighted little by little.

"Those who are householders should practice spiritual disciplines. They should go to a solitary place and call upon God with a yearning heart. (*To Choudhury*) One cannot attain God by learning and scholarship.

"What can one comprehend of God by reasoning? Everyone must do whatever brings loving devotion to His lotus feet."

Bhishma Deva in tears – victory and defeat – divine eyes and the Gita

"Infinite are God's glories. How much can you grasp? Can one ever understand the ways of God?

"Bhishma Deva, who was one of the eight Vasus, even he began to shed tears lying on a bed of arrows. He said, 'How strange! The Lord [Sri Krishna] is a constant companion of the Pandavas, and yet there is no end to their trials and tribulations.' Who can understand God's ways?

"A person thinks, 'I have practiced a little prayer and austerity, so I have won.' But victory and defeat lie in God's hands. I saw a prostitute dying in the Ganges and retaining consciousness[1] to the end."

Choudhury: "How can one see God?"

1. It is considered by Hindus a sign of great spiritual merit and pious living.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not with these eyes. God grants divine eyes, and then you have His vision. The Lord gave divine eyes to Arjuna in order to reveal His Universal Form.

"Your philosophy is mere calculating and speculation. It only reasons. You cannot attain God that way."

Ahetuki bhakti[1] – the main thing is to acquire zealous love and devotion for God

"If you have loving devotion – zealous love and devotion – God cannot remain unmoved.

"How great is God's fondness for devotion! It can be likened to a cow's fondness for fodder mixed with oil cake. She just gobbles it down.

"Fervent love[2] and selfless devotion to God, pure love for its own sake – that's what Prahlada had.

"You may visit a rich man just because you like to see him. When you're asked if you'd like a favour, you reply, 'Sir, I want nothing at all. I come just to see you.' This is called ahetuki bhakti. You ask God for nothing – only to love Him.

"Saying this, Thakur begins to sing:

> Though I[3] am not loath to grant liberation,[4] pure love I hesitate to give.
>
> Whoever wins pure love surpasses all, is adored by all;
> Such a one triumphs over the three worlds.

---

1. Spontaneous love for God.
2. Raga bhakti.
3. Sri Krishna.
4. Mukti.

Listen, O Chandravali,[1] I shall tell you of pure love: One may gain liberation, but devotion is rare indeed.

Out of love alone did I become King Bali's doorkeeper in the netherworld.

Only in Vrindavan can pure love be found.

None but the cowherd boys and milkmaids know its secret.

Out of love alone I dwelt in Nanda's house;

Taking him as My father, I carried his burden upon My head.

"The fundamental thing is to acquire passionate love[2] for God. And along with this, you must develop discrimination and dispassion."[3]

Choudhury: "Sir, is it not possible to succeed without a guru?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sat-chit-ananda Himself is the Guru.

"After one has practiced spiritual disciplines on a corpse[4] and is about to attain the vision of the chosen deity,[5] the guru appears and says, 'See, here is your ideal.' And then the guru merges into it. The guru and the chosen deity are one and the same. The guru makes you hold the thread that leads to God. Spiritual aspirants take the 'vow of the Infinite,'[6] but perform the worship of Vishnu. In Him are the 'infinite' forms of God."

---

1. A gopi of Vrindavan.
2. Raga bhakti.
3. Viveka and vairagya.
4. Shava sadhana.
5. Ishta.
6. Anantavrata.

Harmony of religions according to Sri Ramakrishna

(*To Ram and other devotees*) "If you ask which form of God should be meditated upon, well you should meditate upon that form you like best. But you must keep in mind that all forms of God are one and the same.

"You must have malice toward none of the forms of God. Shiva, Kali, and Hari – all are indeed only different forms of one and the same God. Blessed is he who knows even one deity.

"Shiva on the outside, Kali in the heart, and Haribol on the lips.

"The body does not survive without a trace of lust, anger, and so forth. You should try to minimize them.

(*Thakur points to Kedar*) "He's right. He not only accepts the Absolute, but also God's divine sport. On the one hand, there is the Absolute and on the other, gods – even divine incarnations."

Kedar said that God had incarnated Himself in Thakur's body.

The sannyasin and woman – women devotees

Pointing at Nityagopal, Thakur says to the devotees: "He's in a very nice mood."

(*To Nityagopal*) "Don't go there too often – you may go once in a while. She may be a devotee, but she's also a woman. Do be cautious.

"There is a very strict rule for a sannyasin. He must not even see the picture of a woman. This doesn't apply to householders.

"Even if a woman is a great devotee, it's not right to associate with her too much. Even if a sannyasin has conquered his passions, this rule must be followed for teaching others.

"Seeing a sadhu renounce sixteen annas,[1] others will learn to renounce. Otherwise, they will sink. A sannyasin is a world teacher."

Thakur and the devotees rise and stroll about. M. stands before the picture of Prahlada and looks at it thoughtfully. Thakur had said that Prahlada's love was absolutely natural.[2]

1. A figure of speech meaning "one hundred percent" (sixteen annas make one rupee).
2. Ahetuki bhakti.

Section III

At Balaram's House with Narendra, Rakhal, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna enjoys devotional songs with Narendra and other devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees in the room northeast of the parlour in Balaram's house. It is about one o'clock. Narendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal, Balaram, and M. are with him.

It is Saturday, 7 April 1883, twenty-fifth day of Chaitra, and Amavasya, the day of the new moon. Thakur arrived at Balaram's house in the morning and had his midday meal there. Narendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal, and a few other devotees had also been invited and dined with him. Thakur often says to Balaram, "Feed them. It will bring you the same merit as feeding a number of holy men."

Some days ago Thakur had gone to Keshab's house to see the play *Nava Vrindavan*. Narendra and Rakhal had accompanied him. Narendra had also acted in the performance, and Keshab had played the role of Pavhari Baba.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra and other devotees*): "Keshab was acting the part of a sadhu and sprinkling the water of peace – something that I did not like. Sprinkling the water of peace after a theatrical performance!

"Another person (Ku Babu) played the part of Sin. It's not right to play such a role. One should not commit sin; one should not even feign it."

Narendra is not feeling well, but Thakur wishes very much to hear him sing. He says, "Narendra, everybody is asking for you to sing."

Narendra sings to the accompaniment of the tanpura.

Sing, O bird, nesting in the depth of my heart.

Sing, O bird, who are perched on Brahman's wish-fulfilling tree.

Sing of the glories of All-pervading God.[1]

Eat the ripe fruits of righteousness, wealth, fulfillment, and liberation.[2]

Sing the name of Atmaram,[3] the delight of life. Repeat His name.

Sing, O bird of life, forever in my heart.

Call on Him like the thirsty chatak bird. Sing and be not idle!

He sings another song:

O Brahman, joy of the universe, the light supreme,

God without beginning, Lord of the universe, Soul of the soul.

He sings again:

O King of kings, reveal Yourself to me.

At Your feet I dedicate my soul and my life,

Seared by the fire of this world,

1. Vibhu.
2. Dharma, artha, kama, and moksha.
3. The Divine Self.

And a heart stained with wrongful acts.

O compassionate Lord, entangled in maya, I live as one who is dead.

Revive me by Your life-giving glance.

He sings another song:

On the salver of the sky blaze two lamps, sun and moon.

And yet another:

In the firmament of wisdom, the moon of divine love rises full.[1]

Narendra now stops and, at Thakur's request, Bhavanath sings:

O Compassionate One, who but You is my friend?

Who else remains a friend in happiness and sorrow; who else can assuage the pain of my misdeeds?

This sea of the world is full of peril; who but You can take me safely across?

Whose grace but Yours can calm the raging storm of my passions?

Who but You pours out the water of peace to extinguish the burning torment of my soul?

And when all others have forsaken me, who but You embraces me in my dying hour?

Narendra (*smiling*): "This fellow (Bhavanath) has given up fish and betel-leaf."[2]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhavanath, smiling*): "Well, why is that? What's wrong with fish and betel leaf? They're not harmful. Giving up 'lust and greed' is the real renunciation. Where is Rakhal?"

---

1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section I, Chapter II.
2. Unnecessary luxuries.

A devotee: "Sir, Rakhal is asleep."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "A person went to see a theatrical performance,[1] carrying a mat under his arm. Seeing that there was still a lot of time before the play was to begin, he spread the mat on the floor and went to sleep. He woke up to find that the play was over. (*General laughter*.) Taking the mat under his arm, he went back home." (*Laughter*.)

Ramdayal is very sick. He is lying in bed in another room. Thakur goes to the doorway and inquires about him.

Panchadashi – Vedanta scripture and Sri Ramakrishna – worldly man and discussion on scriptures

It is about four o'clock. Thakur is sitting in the parlour with Narendra, Rakhal, M., Bhavanath, and some other devotees. A number of Brahmo devotees are among them. Sri Ramakrishna talks with them.

A Brahmo devotee: "Sir, have you read the Panchadashi?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "At first one should hear books like that and reason them out. But later:

> Cherish the beloved Mother Shyama in your heart.
>
> O mind, may you and I alone behold Her, and let no one else intrude.[2]

"One should hear the scriptures in the early stages of spiritual practice. But after attaining God,

---

1. Yatra, a religious play.
2.. For the complete song refer to Section IX, Chapter I.

there's no lack of spiritual knowledge. The Divine Mother provides it more and more.

"When learning to write, you have to spell out every word, but later you can write fluently.

"You have to be up and doing while melting gold. You have to hold the bellows in one hand, the fan in the other, and the pipe in your mouth till the gold is melted. When the gold is melted, you pour it in the mould and you can sit down in peace.

"Simply studying the scriptures is not much help. Living in the midst of 'lust and greed,' you can't understand the real significance of the scriptures. Attachment to the world keeps spiritual knowledge from you.

> Though I learned many poems and dramas with great delight,
>
> I have forgotten them all in my love for Krishna.[1] (*All laugh*.)

Thakur now talks about Keshab with the Brahmo devotees.

"Keshab has both yoga and bhoga – he performs spiritual practices but enjoys worldly pleasures as well. He lives as a householder, but his mind is turned towards God."

A devotee talks about a university convocation, saying, "I saw any number of people there. It was a forest of human beings!"

---

1. Ramakrishna is making a play on words. He refers to Krishna by the word *kala*, which means "black" or "deaf." That is why the devotees laugh.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Seeing big crowds, I'm inspired with the thought of God. Had I seen that gathering, I would have been overwhelmed with spiritual feeling."

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna at the Nandan Bagan Brahmo Samaj with Rakhal, M., and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Sight of the shrine inspires Sri Ramakrishna – Sri Radha seized with the madness of ecstatic love

Sri Ramakrishna has arrived at the Brahmo Samaj temple in Nandan Bagan, accompanied by Rakhal, M., and a few other devotees. He is talking with the Brahmo devotees. It is about five o'clock.

Kashisvara Mitra's house is in Nandan Bagan. He was a retired sub-judge and a member of the Adi Brahmo Samaj who used to worship the Lord in a big hall on the second level of his house. Now and then he would invite devotees for a festival. After his death, his sons Srinath, Yajnanath, and others continued to hold celebrations on a few occasions in the same manner as their father had done. It is they who have earnestly invited Thakur here.

After arriving, Thakur at first sits in the drawing-room on the ground floor. Gradually, Brahmo devotees arrive and gather there. Rabindra (Tagore) and other members of the Tagore family are present. When asked to go to the worship hall, Thakur and the devotees go upstairs to the second level. Thakur takes his seat there. A dais has been set up on the eastern side of the hall and a piano placed in the southwest corner. Many chairs are placed in the north part of the room, to the west of a door leading to the women's quarters. The worship will begin in the evening. Bhairava Bandopadhayaya of the Adi Brahmo Samaj,

along with one or two devotees, will sit at the dais and perform the worship.

It is summer, 2 May 1883, Wednesday, the 10th day of the dark fortnight of the month of Chaitra. Many of the Brahmo devotees are strolling around the big courtyard below or on the verandah. Janaki Goshal and a few others come to the worship hall, wishing to sit near Sri Ramakrishna. They want to hear him talk about God. When Thakur enters the room, he bows before the altar and then takes a seat. He says to Rakhal, M., and others:

"Narendra once asked me, 'What good is there in bowing before the shrine of the Samaj?'

"At the sight of a shrine, I'm reminded of Him. I feel divine inspiration. God is present wherever people talk about Him. One feels the presence in all the holy places of pilgrimage. Such places remind one of God.

"A devotee went into an ecstatic mood at the sight of a babul tree. It reminded him that the same wood is used for making the handles of axes used in Lord Radhakanta's garden.

"Another devotee had such loving devotion for his guru that he became overwhelmed with divine emotion to see a resident from his guru's neighbourhood.

"Srimati (Radha) would become inspired with Krishna at the sight of a cloud or blue clothing[1] or a picture of Krishna. She was so filled with yearning for him that she would cry like a mad woman, 'Where are you, my Krishna?'"

1. Krishna's body was dark blue.

Goshal: "Madness isn't good."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you mean? Is this like the madness born of worrying about worldly things that makes you unconscious? This state of madness comes after meditating on God. Haven't you heard of the madness of love for God[1] and the madness of knowledge?"[2]

The way: to love God and to turn around the six enemies[3]

A Brahmo devotee: "How can one find God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "By developing love for Him. You must think constantly that God alone is real and everything else is of a fleeting nature.

"The Ashwattha tree alone is permanent. Its fruit lasts but a few days."

The Brahmo devotee: "Lust and anger are the real enemies. What can we do about them?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Turn the six enemies around – towards God.

"Have *lust* for union with the Atman.

"Show *anger* to those who are an obstacle in the way to God. Have *greed* to attain Him. If you have to say, 'Me and mine,' say it in relation to Him – as, for example, 'My Krishna or my Rama.' If you have *pride*, let it be like the pride of Bibhishana who said, 'I have bowed to Rama. This head shall never bow to anybody else.'"

1. Premonmada.
2. Jnanonmada.
3. Lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and envy.

The Brahmo devotee: "If everything is really being done by Him, you're not responsible for your sins."

Free will – responsibility

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Duryodhana said: 'O Hrishikesh,[1] I act as You, seated within my heart, make me act.'

"If you have the right kind of faith – that God alone is the Doer and you do nothing, you can't commit a sin. The person who knows how to dance well never takes a wrong step.

"But unless you're pure in heart, you don't even have the faith that God exists."

Thakur glances at the people gathered in the worship hall and says, "It's very good to gather like this now and then to meditate on God and sing His name and glories.

"But the love[2] of worldly people for God is momentary, drying up like drops of water falling on a hot iron. They don't last long."

Worship of the Brahmos and Sri Ramakrishna

The worship is about to begin. The large worship hall is full of Brahmo devotees. Several of the Brahmo women take their seats on chairs to the north of the room, holding music books in their hands.

They sing Brahmo songs to the accompaniment of piano and harmonium. There is no end to

1. An epithet of Krishna.
2. Anuraga.

Thakur's joy to hear the music, which is followed by an invocation, a prayer, and then the worship. The acharyas[1] sitting on the platform recite mantras from the Vedas.

You are our Father, grant us right understanding. We bow to You. Pray do not destroy us.

The Brahmo devotees chant in unison with an acharya:

Om! Brahman is infinite truth and knowledge.

Immortal and blissful, it glitters.

Brahman is peace, all-good, and one without a second.

It is pure, untouched by sin.

Now the acharyas sing a hymn of praise:

Om! We bow to the real, the cause of the universe.

We bow to pure consciousness, the refuge and support of all.

The religious teachers now pray, reciting another prayer:

Lead us from the unreal to the Real and from darkness to Light,

Lead us from death to immortality and reach us through and through.

O Rudra, protect us always with Your compassionate face.

Thakur becomes absorbed in ecstasy when he hears these hymns. Now an acharya reads a paper.

1. Religious teachers.

Sri Ramakrishna, without anger and full of supreme bliss – ocean of motiveless grace

The worship is over. Preparations are underway to serve luchis and sweets to the devotees. Most of the Brahmo devotees are enjoying fresh air in the courtyard below and on the verandah.

It is 9 p.m. Thakur has to return to the Dakshineswar Temple. The hosts are so busy attending to their invited guests that they completely forget to take care of him and his party.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Rakhal and others*): "Why, no one is paying any attention to us!"

Rakhal *(angrily*): "Sir, let us leave this place and return to Dakshineswar."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Oh, angry man! Who will pay the carriage fare of three rupees and two annas? Such stubbornness won't get you anywhere. You have no money and you're simply getting angry! Besides, where shall I eat so late at night?"

After quite some time, they hear that the leaf plates have been laid. All the devotees are asked to sit at the same time. Thakur, Rakhal, and others join the crowd and return to the second storey to eat. They find no place to sit in such a crowd. With great difficulty they find a place in a corner for Thakur to sit.

The spot is not clean. A brahmin woman cook serves vegetable curry. Thakur doesn't feel like eating it. He eats luchi with a pinch of salt and some sweets.

Thakur is an ocean of compassion. The hosts are young. How could he be annoyed with them for not showing him the proper respect? If he had left without eating anything, it would have been unlucky for them. Besides, they had arranged the feast in the name of God.

After eating, Thakur gets into a carriage. Who will pay the fare? The hosts are nowhere to be found. Later Thakur relates this incident of the carriage fare to the devotees with humor: "Someone went to the hosts to ask for the carriage fare. At first he was ignored. But finally, with great difficulty, they scraped up three rupees. He was not given the two annas! The hosts said, 'This should certainly be enough.'"

Section V

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple with Rakhal, Ram, Kedar, Tarak, M., and other Devotees

Chapter I

At Dakshineswar Temple – worship of Thakur's holy feet

After the evening worship in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna stands before the image of the Divine Mother. He fans her with a chamara[1] for some time.

It is summer, Friday, 8 June 1883, the third day of the bright fortnight of the month of Jaishtha. (Some incidents that happened on the new moon day[2] were recorded in Volume II, Section V of the *Kathamrita*.) After dusk Ram, Kedar (Chatterji), and Tarak arrived from Calcutta in a carriage. They have brought flowers and sweets for Thakur.

Kedar must be about fifty years old. He is a great devotee. As soon as there is talk of God, his eyes are filled with tears. He used to visit the Brahmo Samaj and then the Kartabhaja and several other new religious sects. At last he has taken refuge at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. He holds a government accountant's job. His home is in the village of Halishar near Kanchdapara.

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1. Fan made from the tail of a yak, used in Hindu ritual worship.
2. Amavasya.

Tarak[1] is about twenty-four years old. He had married but his wife died after only a few days. His home is in the village of Barasat. His father is a spiritual aspirant of a high order and has visited Sri Ramakrishna a number of times. After the death of Tarak's mother, his father married a second time.

Tarak frequently visits Ram at his house. He often comes to visit Thakur with Ram and Nityagopal. He works in an office these days but his attitude is always one of indifference to worldly things.

Sri Ramakrishna comes out of the Kali Temple and lies prostrate on the platform in salutation to the Mother.

He sees Ram, M., Kedar, Tarak, and the other devotees standing there.

Affection for Tarak – Kedar and 'lust and greed'

He touches Tarak's chin affectionately. Indeed, he is very happy to see him.

Thakur sits on the floor of his room in an ecstatic mood. He stretches his legs out before him. Ram and Kedar decorate his feet with various kinds of flowers and garlands. Thakur is in samadhi.

Kedar has the attitude of a new devotee. He holds the big toe of Sri Ramakrishna, believing that by doing so, he will receive power from Thakur. Returning somewhat to the normal state, Thakur says, "Mother, what can he do to me by holding my toe?" Kedar humbly folds his hands.

1. Later Swami Shivananda.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Kedar, in the state of ecstasy*): "Your mind is attracted to 'lust and greed.' What use is it just to say that your mind does not dwell in them?

"Go forward. There is more after the sandalwood forest. A silver mine, a goldmine, and then diamonds and jewels. You've attained a little divine inspiration – don't think you've achieved everything."

Thakur again begins to talk to the Divine Mother, "Mother, please take him away."

Kedar says to Ram, his throat dry with fear, "What is Thakur saying!"

God-incarnate and his intimate disciples

Seeing Rakhal, Thakur is again absorbed in ecstasy and addresses him: "I have been here many days! When did you come?"

Is Thakur hinting that he is an incarnation of God and Rakhal is his intimate disciple, a companion of his inner circle?

Section VI

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, Ram, M., Bhavanath, and Other Devotees at the Panihati Festival

Chapter I

Thakur in the joy of devotional songs – is he Gauranga?

Sri Ramakrishna is dancing amidst a kirtan group on the crowded main road during the festival at Panihati. It is about one o'clock, Monday, 18 June 1883, the thirteenth day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of Jaishtha.

People stand around Sri Ramakrishna in rows to watch him during devotional singing. He dances intoxicated with divine love. Some people wonder whether Gauranga has again incarnated himself. The sound of the Lord's name swells from all sides like ocean waves. Flowers are raining from all directions, and it appears as if 'Hari is being looted.'[1]

Navadvip Goswami was proceeding toward the Raghava temple singing the Lord's name all the way. Suddenly Thakur shot into the kirtan group with the speed of an arrow and began to dance.

It is the 'Festival of Flattened Rice'[2] of Pundit Raghava. It is celebrated every year on the thirteenth day of the lunar month in the bright fortnight. This festival was first celebrated by Raghunath Das. Thereafter, Raghava Pundit celebrated it every year. Nityananda said to Raghunath Das, "Oh, you thief!

1. A Bengali expression meaning to scatter before a crowd something to be picked up.
2. Chinra Festival.

You just come running from your home and steal the taste of divine love without any of us knowing it. I am going to punish you today. Celebrate a festival of flattened rice and serve the devotees."

Thakur visits the event almost every year. Today he came with Ram and other devotees. Ram had gone from Calcutta to Dakshineswar with M. in the morning. They had met Thakur, saluted him, and then taken their prasad meal on the northern verandah. Thakur went to Panihati by the same carriage in which Ram had come from Calcutta. Rakhal, M., Ram, Bhavanath, and one or two other devotees were also in the carriage. One of them sat on top.

The carriage traveled along the Magazine Road before coming to the Chanke Main Road (trunk road). On the way Thakur cuts many jokes with the young devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna in mahabhava[1] at the Panihati festival

As soon as the carriage reaches the venue of the Panihati festival, Ram and the other devotees are amazed to see Thakur, who had been in such a joyous state in the carriage, suddenly get down and shoot forth like an arrow. After looking for him for a long time, they found him dancing among the kirtan group of Navadvip Goswami and going into samadhi every now and then. Navadvip Goswami carefully supported him when he was in samadhi so that he would not fall down. Devotees on all sides were shouting the name of Hari and throwing flowers and sweet confections[2] at his feet. They were pushing each other to have a view of him.

1. The highest manifestation of divine love.
2. Batasas.

Thakur dances in a semiconscious state. Returning to full consciousness, he sings:

> Behold, the brothers have come! The two who shed tears while chanting Hari's name.
>
> They, who weeping, make others weep; they, who in ecstasy dancing, make the world dance;
>
> They, who receiving the world's blows, offer Hari's love.
>
> They are Kanai and Balai of Vraja, who would steal butter from the gopis' pots;
>
> Who, indifferent to caste, embrace the lowest of the lowly;
>
> Who, themselves inebriated, inebriate others;
>
> Who chant Hari's name, though they are none other than Hari Himself.
>
> They, who redeemed Jagai and Madhai and distinguish not friend from foe,
>
> These two brothers, Gaur and Nitai, have come to redeem humanity.

Everyone dances with Thakur, intoxicated with divine love and feeling that Gaur and Nitai are dancing in their presence. Thakur sings again:

> Behold, the whole of Nadia trembles under the waves of Gauranga's love!

The wave of devotees singing the kirtan advances toward the Raghava Temple. Dancing all the way and having circumambulated the temple, they bow to the images of Radha-Krishna. Now the wave of people moves toward the temple of Radha-Krishna which was established by the babus of Gangakul.

Some of the singing party enter the temple of Radhakanta, but the majority are unable to enter.

They push each other aside, trying to peep inside the doorway.

Dancing in the Radha-Krishna temple courtyard

Thakur dances again in the courtyard of Radha-Krishna. He is fully intoxicated with the joy of the kirtan. He goes into samadhi every now and then, flowers and sweets falling at his feet from all sides. Time and again the name of Hari is raised in the courtyard. The same sound, reaching the main road, is echoed by a thousand voices. Passengers on the boats sailing the Ganges[1] listen wonderstruck to the chanting, like ocean waves, of Hari's name. They themselves begin to chant, "Haribol, Haribol."

Thousands of men and women assembled at the festival think to themselves that Sri Gauranga himself must assuredly have manifested in this great saint. One or two feel that he is none other than Gauranga.

Several people have assembled in the small courtyard. The devotees bring Sri Ramakrishna out of the courtyard very carefully.

Sri Ramakrishna in Mani Sen's drawing room

Thakur comes with the devotees to Mani Sen's drawing room and takes a seat. The same Sen family is in charge of serving Sri Radha and Krishna in the temple at Panihati. It is also this family who arranges the great festival every year and who invites Thakur.

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1. Bhagirathi.

After Thakur has rested for a while, Mani Sen and his spiritual preceptor, Navadvip Goswami, take him to another room where he is served prasad. A little while later Ram, Rakhal, M., Bhavanath, and other devotees are taken to a room where they take their seats. The gracious loving Lord of the devotees, Sri Ramakrishna, stands up, full of joy, and feeds devotees.

Chapter II

Instructions to Navadvip Goswami

Mahabhava and ecstatic love of Gauranga, his three states of consciousness

It is afternoon. Thakur is seated in Mani Sen's drawing room with Rakhal, Ram, and other devotees. After prasad and feeling refreshed, Navadvip Goswami enters the drawing room and sits beside Thakur.

Mani Sen offers to pay Thakur's carriage fare. Thakur, who is sitting on a couch in the drawing room, says, "Why would these people (Ram and other devotees) accept the carriage fare from you? They earn money."

He then talks with Navadvip Goswami about God.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Navadvip*): "When love and devotion for God matures, one experiences ecstasy.[1] It is followed by mahabhava. After mahabhava

1. Bhava.

comes ecstatic love[1] and then the attainment of the goal (God-realization).

"Gauranga would experience mahabhava and ecstatic love for God.

"When one feels ecstatic love, one not only forgets the world but one's own body which is so dear. Gauranga experienced this ecstatic love. Seeing the ocean and thinking it was the Jamuna, he jumped in.

"An ordinary person does not experience either mahabhava or ecstatic love – he goes only as far as ecstasy.[2] Gauranga used to experience all three states of consciousness. Am I right?"

Navadvip: "Yes, sir. The inmost state, the state of semi-consciousness, and the conscious state."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He would remain in samadhi during the inmost state. In the state of semi-consciousness, he could only dance, and in the outward conscious state he would sing the name and glories of God."

Navadvip brings his son and introduces him to Thakur. His son is a young man and studies scriptures. He salutes Thakur.

Navadvip: "He studies holy books at home. It used to be very difficult to get a copy of the Vedas in this country. Max Müller translated them and printed them. That's how people are able to read them now."

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1. Prema.
2. Bhava.

Scholarship and scriptures – try to understand the essence

Sri Ramakrishna: "Too much study of the scriptures brings more harm than good.

"You should know the essence of them. After that the holy book is not needed.

"Having understood the essence, you should dive deep to attain God.

"The Divine Mother has told me that the essence of the Vedanta is that Brahman is the reality and the world an illusion. The essence of the *Gita* is what you get after pronouncing the word *Gita* ten times – in other words, *tyagi*, *tyagi* [a man of renunciation]."

Navadvip: "It doesn't exactly become *tyagi,* it becomes *tagi*. But both words convey the same meaning. From the root *tag* you have *taga,* and adding the suffix *i*, it becomes *tagi*. Both *tyagi* and *tagi* have the same meaning."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The essence of the Gita is: O man, renounce everything and practice spiritual disciplines to realize God."

Navadvip: "But how can we make our minds willing to renounce?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You who are goswamis serve the deity. You can't afford to renounce family life. If you do, who will carry out the worship and service of the deity? You must renounce mentally.

"God Himself has kept you in the household to set an example for mankind. Resolve a thousand times and still you will not be able to renounce

family life. He has given you such a nature that you are bound to carry out the affairs of the world.

"Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, 'What do you mean, you will not fight? Even if you wish otherwise, you will not be able to desist from fighting this war. Your very nature will compel you to fight.'"

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi – yoga and bhoga of Goswami

When Thakur says, "Sri Krishna said to Arjuna," he passes into samadhi. His body immediately becomes perfectly still; he does not even blink. It is not possible to perceive if he is breathing or not. Navadvip Goswami, his son, and the devotees watch him, speechless with wonder.

Returning somewhat to normal, Thakur says to Navadvip: "Yoga and bhoga! You belong to the line of goswamis who strive for union with God and at the same time enjoy worldly pleasures.

"Now pray to God – pray sincerely – only this prayer: 'O Lord, I don't want the glories of Your world-bewitching maya, I want You alone!'

"He is present in all elements and beings, no doubt. But do you know who a real devotee is? He who dwells in Him; he whose mind, heart, and soul have been merged in Him."

Thakur has now returned completely to the normal state of consciousness. He says to Navadvip: "Some people say that the state (of samadhi) I pass into is a disease. But I ask, can one be unconscious while contemplating Him whose Consciousness has made the whole world conscious?"

Mani Sen says goodbye to the visiting brahmins and Vaishnava devotees. He offers to each of them a rupee or two, according to his status. He offers five rupees to Thakur, but Sri Ramakrishna says: "I cannot accept money."

Mani Sen insists.

Thakur then says, "In the name of your guru, please do not offer me anything!" Mani Sen still offers the money. Thakur anxiously asks M., "Must I accept it?" M. objects severely, saying, "Certainly not. By no means."

Mani Sen's people give the money to Rakhal on the pretext of buying mangoes and sandesh.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I have refused the money in his guru's name. I am free now. Rakhal has accepted it. It is now his responsibility."

Sri Ramakrishna boards the carriage with the devotees to return to the Dakshineswar temple.

Meditation on formless God and Sri Ramakrishna

Mati Seal's shrine is on the way. Several times Thakur had said to M., "We will go together to see Mati Seal's lake and I can teach you how to meditate on the formless God."

Thakur has a bad cold. Even so, he goes inside the shrine with the devotee. In this shrine Gauranga is worshiped.

It is a little before dusk. Thakur and the devotees salute the image of Sri Gauranga by lying prostrate on the ground.

Now they go to the lake in the eastern part of the temple garden and enjoy the view of the lake and the fish. People do not harm the fish here. As soon as they throw puffed rice and other food to the fish, a swarm of big ones comes to eat it. Then, free from all fear, they swim and play in the water joyfully.

Thakur says to M., "Look at these fish swimming joyfully in the ocean of Blissful Consciousness.[1] Be like these fish."

1. Chidananda.

Section VII

Sri Ramakrishna as Guru at Dakshineswar with Intimate Disciples

Chapter I

Listening to the life of Prahlada puts Thakur into ecstasy – he condemns cohabiting with one's wife

Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the floor in his room at Dakshineswar, listening to Ramlal reading the life of Prahlada from the Bhaktamala. It is about eight o'clock.

It is Saturday, 15 December 1883, the first day of the dark fortnight of Agrahayana. Mani is on retreat with Thakur in Dakshineswar. Seated near Thakur, he is listening to the narration of the life of Prahlada. Rakhal, Latu, and Harish are in the room. Some devotees are seated, while others are moving about. Hazra is on the verandah.

Thakur goes into ecstasy while he listens to Prahlada's life. When Hiranyaksha was killed by Narasimha,[1] Brahma and the other gods saw his frightful aspect and heard his mighty roar. Fearing that such anger might lead to the dissolution of the world,[2] they sent Prahlada to him. Like a child, Prahlada chanted a hymn of praise to the deity who, filled with love for devotees, licked Prahlada's body affectionately. With deep emotion, Thakur exclaims, "Ah, ah! What love for the devotee!" As he

1. Vishnu in His incarnation as man-lion.
2. Pralaya.

says this, he goes into bhava samadhi. His body is motionless, and tears of intense love fall from the corners of his eyes.

When Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy is over, he goes to his smaller cot and sits there. Mani sits on the floor at his feet. Thakur talks with Mani, expressing his anger and disgust for those treading the path of God while at the same time cohabiting with their wives.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Are you not ashamed of yourself! You have children and you still cohabit with your wife. This is the conduct of an animal! Have you no aversion to saliva, blood, excreta, urine? Whoever contemplates the lotus feet of God sees even the most beautiful woman as ash from a cremation fire. To enjoy a body which will not last and which contains all kinds of impurities – worms, pus, phlegm and so on! Don't you feel ashamed of yourself?"

Thakur is intoxicated with love for God – worship of Mother Kali

M. sits still, hanging his head from the harsh rebuke. Sri Ramakrishna adds, "When a person gets even a drop of God's ecstatic love, 'lust and greed' become so insignificant! When you get a drink sweetened with sugar candy, how can you care for one mixed with molasses? When you pray to God with a yearning heart, when you chant His name and glories incessantly, you gradually develop that kind of love for Him."

Saying this, Thakur is intoxicated with ecstatic love and dances around in his room, singing:

Who is chanting the name of Hari on the bank of the Ganges?

Is it Nitai, the bestower of love, who has come?

Who but he can bring peace to the soul?

It is now about ten o'clock. Ramlal has ended the daily worship of Mother Kali in the temple. Thakur goes to the temple, accompanied by Mani. Entering the shrine, Thakur sits on the worshiper's seat. He offers a flower or two at the feet of the Mother, and placing a flower on his head, he meditates. Then he sings a hymn of praise to the Divine Mother:

I have heard, O Consort of Shiva, Your fear-dispelling name and have laid on You my burden. Save me as You will.[1]

Returning from the temple, Thakur sits on the southeast verandah of his room. It is about ten o'clock. The offering of food to the deities and their worship has not yet been performed. Thakur takes some butter and fruits which had been offered earlier to Mother Kali and Radhakanta. Rakhal and other devotees also have some.

Rakhal is sitting near Thakur. He is reading Smile's *Self Help*, about Lord Erskine.

Work without expectation of any reward – a man of knowledge reads no scriptures

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What does he say?"

M.: "That Lord Erskine used to perform his duties without the expectation of any reward. The book is about selfless work."

1. For the complete song refer to Volume III, Section IV, Chapter II.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Then it is very good. But the mark of a man of perfect knowledge is that he doesn't keep a single book with him. For instance, Sukadeva. All knowledge was on the tip of his tongue.

"Holy books, scriptures, contain sand mixed with sugar. A holy man takes only the sugar, leaving the sand. A holy man takes only the essence."

Is Thakur alluding to his own state by referring to Sukadeva to make the devotees understand?

Vaishnavcharan, the singer, arrives and sings the kirtan, "Subol Milan."

After a while Ramlal brings prasad for Thakur on a tray. After eating it, Thakur rests for some time.

M. spends the night in the nahabat. Whenever the Holy Mother came to Dakshineswar to serve Sri Ramakrishna, she would stay there. For many months now she has been living in Kamarpukur.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, Latu, Mukherji of Janai, and other devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the western circular verandah with Mani. In front of them the Ganges is flowing southward. Close by are flowering oleander, bela, jasmine, rose, and poinciana. It is about ten o'clock.

It is Sunday, 16 December 1883, the second day of the dark fortnight of Agrahayana.

Thakur sings as he gazes at Mani:

O Mother Tara! You will have to take me across for I have taken refuge in You.

I am like a bird in a cage.

I have committed wrongdoings beyond number.

I am bereft of spiritual knowledge, and like a cow that has lost its calf,

I wander to and fro, drowning in maya's spell.

Earnest longing like Sita's – thoughts on Rama

"But why? Why should I be like a bird in a cage? For shame!"

While talking, Thakur goes into ecstasy, his body and mind still, his eyes shedding tears. After some time, he prays, "Mother! Make me like Sita. Grant that I may absolutely forget everything – body, organ of generation, hands, feet, and breasts – may I not be aware of any of these. My only thought should be: Where is Rama?"

Is Thakur inspired with Sita to make Mani realize how much yearning is needed to attain God? Sita was mad for Rama. She lived for him and centered all her thoughts on him. She had forgotten and was oblivious of the body, which is so dear to everyone.

It is four o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is again sitting in the room with the devotees. Mukherji of Janai has come. He belongs to the same gotra (sub-caste) as that of Prankrishna. With him is a Brahmo friend well versed in the scriptures. Mani, Rakhal, Latu, Harish, Jogin, and other devotees are also present.

Jogin[1] is a member of the Savaran Choudhury family of Dakshineswar. Almost every afternoon he comes to visit Thakur and goes home at night. Jogin has not yet married.

Mukherji (*after saluting Sri Ramakrishna*): "It is a great joy to meet you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "God is present within everyone; all have the same gold within. It is only that with some there is a greater manifestation; in the worldly-minded the gold lies buried under so much dirt."

Mukherji (*laughing*): "Sir, what is the difference between worldly and otherworldly?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "While practicing spiritual disciplines, one must renounce, saying to oneself, 'Not this. Not this.' After attaining God, one realizes that God Himself has become everything.

"When Ramachandra felt dispassion for the world, Dasharatha approached Rishi Vasishtha Deva in great anxiety and asked for his help in dissuading Rama from renouncing family life. Rishi Vasishtha went to Ramachandra and found him in a sad mood, feeling deep dispassion for the world. Vasishtha said, 'Rama, why do you want to renounce worldly life? Is the world outside God? Let's discuss this.' Rama then saw that the world was also made of the same Supreme Brahman. So he kept quiet.

"Butter comes out of the same substance that makes buttermilk. It belongs to the substance to which buttermilk belongs, as buttermilk belongs to

1. Later Swami Yogananda.

the substance to which butter belongs. When you have churned buttermilk assiduously to take out the butter (that is, attained Brahmajnana), you see that both butter and buttermilk exist together – where there is butter, there is also buttermilk. As long as one feels that Brahman exists, then living beings, the world, and the twenty-four cosmic principles also exist."

How to attain knowledge of Brahman

"One cannot tell what Brahman is from words. Everything has become polluted through human speech. No one has been able to say what Brahman is. Thus It has not been polluted. I said this to Vidyasagar. He was very pleased to hear it.

"The knowledge of Brahman cannot be attained when there is the least trace of worldliness. It is only possible when the mind is completely rid of 'lust and greed.' Parvati said to Giriraj, 'Father, if you want the knowledge of Brahman, seek the company of holy men.'"

Is Thakur saying that the knowledge of Brahman is not possible if a worldly person or a sannyasin lives amidst 'lust and greed'?

Fall from yoga – living in the world after attaining knowledge of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna, addressing Mukherji, continues: "You have wealth and riches. Even then you call on God. This is very good. The Gita says that the one who falls from yoga is reborn as a devotee in a rich family."

Mukherji (*laughing, to his friend*): "One fallen from yoga is reborn in the house of the prosperous."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "If God wills, He can keep a man of spiritual knowledge in the world. The world and all living beings have come into existence at His will. His will prevails."

Mukherji (*laughing*): "Why does He will? Does He lack anything?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "What's the harm in it? Water remains water whether it is still or in waves."

Are the world and its living beings illusory?

"It is the same snake, whether it is coiled up and motionless or slithering along in an undulating manner.

"A gentleman remains the same individual whether he is working or sitting still.

"How can you leave out the world and the living beings? If you do that, it loses its full weight. A bel fruit weighs much less when its skin is peeled off and its seeds taken out.

"Brahman is free from attachment to anything. Air carries both good and bad smells, but it remains unaffected. Brahman and His Power are not separate from each other. The world and its creatures have been created by the same Primal Power."

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1. Bhagavad Gita 6:41.

The way to attain samadhi: weep for God – path of love and path of meditation

Mukherji: "Why does one fall from yoga?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is a saying, 'When I was in my mother's womb, I was in union with God. Coming into the world, I have eaten its dirt. The midwife has cut the umbilical cord, but how am I to cut the cord of maya?

"'Lust and greed' is maya. One attains union with God when the mind is rid of these two. The Atman, the Supreme Soul, is the magnet. The embodied soul is like a needle. When the former pulls the latter, it results in union. But if the needle is covered with dirt, the magnet can't pull it. When, however, the dirt is removed, it is drawn again. You have to clean yourself of the dirt of 'lust and greed.'"

Mukherji: "How can we do this?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Weep for God with a longing heart. The water of your tears will wash off the dirt. And then the magnet can pull it. Only then will you attain union with God."

Mukherji: "Oh, wonderful!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you can weep for God, He grants His vision. And you attain samadhi. Perfection in yoga is samadhi. When you weep, suspension of breath[1] occurs by itself. Samadhi comes after that.

"And then there is the practice of meditation. Shiva manifests especially in the Sahasrara.

1. Kumbhaka.

Meditate on Him. The body is like a saucer, and the mind and intellect are like water. In this water, the sun of Sat-chit-ananda is reflected. By meditating on that reflected sun, one has the revelation of the real sun through God's grace."

Associate with holy men and give the power of attorney to God

"People living in the world need the constant company of the holy. It is necessary for everyone. Even a sannyasin must associate with holy men. But with householders the disease is chronic. They have to live amidst 'lust and greed' all the time."

Mukherji: "Yes, sir. Their disease is chronic."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Give your power of attorney to God. Let Him do what He likes. You just cry to Him longingly, like a kitten. Wherever a mother cat places her kitten is all right. Sometimes she places it on a bed, sometimes she takes it to the kitchen."

A beginner studies the scriptures – spiritual practice leads to realization of God

Mukherji: "It is good to read the Gita and such holy books."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How will it help to just read, or listen to holy books? Someone may have heard of milk, someone else have seen it, another may have drunk it. You can have the vision of God, you can even talk to Him.

"The first stage is that of a beginner. He studies and listens to the reading of scriptures. The next is that of the aspirant who calls on God, who meditates and thinks about Him and sings His

Name and glories. Next, one becomes perfected[1] and knows God intuitively.[2] In the last stage one attains God's vision and becomes the most perfect of the perfected.[3] This was the state of Chaitanya Deva. He was at times in the attitude of a mother toward her child[4] and at other times that of a beloved."[5]

In amazement Mani, Rakhal, Jogin, Latu, and other devotees listen to this talk on the highest truth, rarely heard even by gods.

Now Mukherji and his friends take their leave. They salute and then stand up. Thakur also stands up out of respect for them.

Mukherji (*smiling*): "Why should you have to stand up or sit?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What is the harm? Water is water whether it is still or moving. A leaf plate thrown away is carried wherever a wind storm carries it. I am the instrument, God is the operator."

1. Siddha.
2. Bodhebodha.
3. Siddha of siddhas.
4. Vatsalya.
5. Madhura.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna's realization and the inner meaning of Vedanta – non-dualism and qualified non-dualism[1] – is the world an illusion? – identity of the Undifferentiated and the differentiated

Mukherji from Janai has left. Mani is reflecting that according to the philosophy of Vedanta everything is like a dream. Would it be true, then, that the embodied soul, the world, and oneself are illusory?

Mani has studied the Vedanta, and he has also read a little Hegel and other German scholars which are an indistinct echo of Vedanta. But Sri Ramakrishna does not reason like feeble human beings. The Mother of the Universe has revealed[2] everything to him. Mani thinks about this.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna talks to him alone on the western circular verandah. Before them the Ganges is flowing south with a gurgling sound. It is cold. The sun is still visible in the southeastern sky. He whose life is full of the Veda, whose words are the Vedas, he through whom God speaks, whose sweet words inspire the hearer to internalize the true import of the Veda, the Vedanta and the Bhagavata, this very person, an ocean of motiveless grace, is speaking as guru.

Mani: "Is the world illusory?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why should it be an illusion? What you are talking about is only a matter of philosophical reasoning.

"In the very beginning when a person discriminates 'Not this, not this,' it is perceived that Brahman is not living beings, or the world, or the

1. Advaitavada and Vishishtadvaitavada.
2. Through transcendental perception, God-vision.

twenty-four cosmic principles – that all these are like a dream. Then comes reversal.[1] That is, one has gone up to the Absolute and now comes down to the phenomenal universe. Then the perception is that God Himself has become the universe and all living beings.

"You climb to the roof by the stairs. As long as you are conscious of the roof, you are aware of the stairs. The person who is aware of the high is also aware of the low.

"But after you have climbed to the roof, you see that the material of which the roof is made – bricks, lime, and brickdust – has also been used for making the stairs.

"It is like the bel fruit illustration that I have given.

"He to whom the Absolute (the Unchangeable) belongs is the same as He to whom the phenomenal (the ever-changing) universe belongs.

"'I-ness' simply does not go away. As long as there is the awareness that 'I am a pot (the body),' there are the individual soul and the universe. When one attains God, one realizes that God

1. Consciousness has an eternal pulsation, outward and inward. Evolution is the outward movement of Consciousness, resulting in the manifestation of the universe; involution is the reversal or inward movement of Consciousness in which all names and forms dissolve back into the unity of the Absolute. M. says in his *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Part I: "You go backwards to the Supreme Being and your personality becomes lost in His personality. You then retrace your steps. You get back your ego (personality) and come back to the point where you started, only to see that the world and your ego or self were involved in the same Supreme Being."

Himself has become the living beings and the universe. Just reasoning about this is of no help at all.

"Shiva has both states of mind. When immersed in samadhi, in mahayoga, he is absorbed in the joy of the Self.[1] When he comes down from this state, he retains a little 'I-ness.' Then he dances, chanting, 'Rama, Rama.'"

Is Thakur alluding to his own state by describing the state of Shiva?

It is dusk. Thakur chants the names of the Mother of the Universe and meditates on Her. The devotees also go to solitary places to meditate on their ideals. Vesper services begin and arati is performed in Mother Kali's Temple, in Sri Radhakanta's temple, and in the twelve temples of Shiva.

Today is the second day of the dark fortnight. The moon appears at nightfall. Under its light, the temple spires, the surrounding trees and creepers, and the Ganges to the west of the temple gain a wonderous beauty. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room. Mani is sitting on the floor. Thakur again discusses the question which Mani had raised earlier.

Visions of Consciousness everywhere – the treasurer writes a letter to Mathur

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Why should the world be an illusion? These words are only a matter of reasoning. After realizing God, you realize that He Himself has become the universe and its living beings.

1. Atmarama.

"The Divine Mother showed me in the Kali Temple that it is She who has become everything. She showed me that everything is filled with divine consciousness – the image, the altar, the water vessels,[1] the door frame, the marble floor – all was divine consciousness.

"Whatever I saw in the room was filled with the essence[2] – the essence of Sat-chit-ananda.

"I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali Temple. But even within him I saw the splendour of Her Power.

"That is why I fed a cat luchis[3] that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I saw that She had become everything – even the cat. The treasurer wrote a letter to Mathur Babu to tell him that the priest[4] was feeding a cat with the food to be offered to the deity. Mathur Babu knew the state I was in. He replied, 'Let him do what he likes. Say nothing to him.'

"When you have attained God, you see correctly that He Himself has become the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles.

"But what happens when God completely wipes out 'I-consciousness' cannot be described in words. As Ramprasad says in one of his songs, "Only You know whether You are good or I am good." I sometimes get in this state too.

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1. Kosha and kushi.
2. Rasa.
3. Fried bread.
4. Bhattacharya.

"When you reason, you see it one way. But when God reveals it to you, you see it in quite a different way."

Chapter IV

The goal of life is God-realization – the way is intense love

The next day is Monday; it is eight o'clock. Thakur is seated in his room. Rakhal, Latu, and other devotees are also there. Doctor Madhu has arrived. He is sitting close to Thakur on his small cot. Doctor Madhu is a wise old man. He often comes to see Thakur when he is not feeling well. He is a very witty man.

Mani enters the room, salutes, and takes his seat.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Love of Sat-chit-ananda is the main thing."

Thakur's vision of Sita – Gauri Pundit's comments

"What is the intensity of this love? How can you develop love for God? Gauri used to say, 'To understand Rama, you have to be like Sita. To understand Bhagavan, you have to be like Bhagavati (the Divine Mother). You will have to practice austerities – hard austerities – the way Bhagavati did for Shiva. To know Purusha (the Supreme Lord), you have to assume the attitude of Prakriti – the attitude of a friend, of a handmaid, or of a mother.'

"I had a vision of Sita. I saw that her whole mind was given to Rama. She was oblivious to anything else – body, hands, feet, clothes, jewelry,

and so on. Her entire life was filled with thoughts of Rama. Without Rama, without having him, she felt she could not survive."

Mani: "Yes, sir. Like a mad woman."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Lovelorn! Oh, you have to be mad for God to attain Him!

"This does not happen if the mind dwells on 'lust and greed.' What joy is there in intercourse with a woman? One feels ten million times that joy from a vision of God. Gauri used to say that in ecstatic love for God all the pores of the skin on the body become mahayoni, the great sexual organ. One feels the joy of union with the Atman in every pore."

The Guru must be a perfect jnani

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must call on God with great yearning. You can hear from the lips of the guru how God can be realized.

"But only when the guru himself is a perfect man of knowledge can he show the way.

"Desires disappear when you attain perfect knowledge. You become like a child five years old. Both Dattatreya and Jadabharata had the nature of a child."

Mani: "Yes, I know about them. But there have also been so many others."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A man of knowledge is freed from all desires. Whatever little desire remains can do him no harm. When a sword touches the philosopher's stone, it turns into gold. Then it can't kill anyone. In the same way, the desire and anger

of a man of knowledge are only superficial, they are just in name. They can do no harm."

Mani: "Sir, just as you say, a man of knowledge is beyond the three gunas. He is not under the control of any of them – sattva, rajas, or tamas. These three are robbers."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must assimilate this truth."

Mani: "It seems there are not many people of perfect knowledge on earth, perhaps no more than three or four."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why do you say that? You see a number of sadhus and sannyasins in monasteries in western India."

Mani: "Sir, I can also become a sannyasin like one of them."

Hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna gazes fixedly at Mani for a few moments.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "By renouncing everything?"

Mani: "What can a person achieve without going beyond maya? If one is not able to subdue maya, what can mere sannyasa do?"

Everyone is silent for a few moments.

A devotee beyond the three gunas is like a child

Mani: "Sir, what is the love that is beyond the three gunas?"[1]

1. Trigunatita bhakti.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Having developed such devotion for God that a devotee sees everything permeated with divine consciousness: Krishna as consciousness, His abode as consciousness, the devotees as divine, everything permeated with consciousness. Only a very few devotees attain such love for God."

Doctor Madhu (*smiling*): "It is the love beyond the three gunas – that is, the devotee is not subject to any of the gunas."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes. Like a child five years old. He is not yet under the control of any guna."

After the midday meal, Sri Ramakrishna takes a little rest. Manilal Mallick comes in, salutes him, and takes his seat on the floor. Mani is also sitting on the floor. Lying on the cot, Thakur exchanges a few words with Mani Mallick every now and then.

Mani Mallick: "Did you go to see Keshab Sen?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. How is he now?"

Mani Mallick: "A little better."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I found him to be very rajasic. I had to wait a long time before I could see him."

Thakur now sits up on his bed and talks with the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna's life story in his own words – he is mad uttering, "Rama, Rama"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "I went mad repeating the name of Rama. I used to roam around

with Ramlala, the deity the sannyasin gave me. I'd give him a bath, feed him, and put him to bed. Wherever I had to go, I would take him along. I was mad, repeating, 'Ramlala, Ramlala.'"

Chapter V

Sri Ramakrishna at the foot of vilwa tree and under the panchavati

Sri Ramakrishna is talking with Mani near the vilwa tree. It is about nine o'clock.

It is Wednesday, 19 December 1883, the fifth day of the dark fortnight.

Under this same vilwa tree Thakur had practiced spiritual disciplines – a very solitary spot. To its north is the magazine and a wall. To the west willow trees rustle like a soul indifferent to the world. Nearby flows the Ganges. The panchavati can be seen to the south. There are so many trees and plants that the temples are barely visible.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "But nothing will help without renouncing 'lust and greed.'"

Mani: "But why? Rishi Vasishtha said to Ramachandra, 'Rama, you may renounce the world if the world is outside God.'"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling a little*): "That was because Ravana had to be killed. It was for this reason that Rama lived in the world and married."

Mani stands, like a log of wood, speechless.

After saying this, Sri Ramakrishna goes toward the panchavati to reach his room.

Spiritual disciplines for formless God are very difficult

Sri Ramakrishna is talking with Mani at the foot of the panchavati. It is about ten o'clock.

Mani: "Sir, isn't it possible to practice disciplines to attain the impersonal God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why is it not possible? But it is a very difficult path.[1] The rishis of olden days used to have the inner experience of God's existence[2] by practicing a great many austerities. They would feel the reality of Brahman. But how hard was their labour? They would leave their huts early in the morning, practice austerities throughout the day, and return only at dusk. Then they would have a small meal of fruits and roots.

"This kind of spiritual practice [on the formless] is not possible until one is completely rid of worldliness. The mind has to be completely free from the sense of form, taste, smell, touch, and sound. Only then is it purified. That pure mind is the same as the pure Atman. It must be absolutely free from 'lust and greed.'

"Then one has quite a different experience: 'God indeed is the doer, I am a non-doer.' One no longer thinks that without the 'I' one cannot carry on, whether in happiness or sorrow.

"A wicked fellow beat a sadhu of a monastery into unconsciousness. When he regained con-

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1. kleśo 'dhikataras teṣām avyaktāsaktacetasām ।
avyaktā hi gatir duḥkhaṁ dehavadbhir avāpyate ।। Bhagavad Gita 12:5
2. Bodhebodha.

sciousness, he was asked who was offering him milk. He replied, 'He who beat me is now feeding me.'"

Mani: "Yes, I know that story."

Steady[1] samadhi and sudden[2] samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, it is not enough to just know. You have to internalize what it means.

"Worldly thoughts prevent the mind from entering into samadhi.

"One becomes steady in samadhi when one is completely free of worldly thoughts. It is possible for me to quit the body in steady samadhi, but I still have a little desire to enjoy the love of God and the company of devotees. So I keep my mind a little on the body.

"And then there is sudden samadhi, when the scattered mind is gathered suddenly. You understand this, don't you?"

Mani: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A scattered mind suddenly becomes withdrawn. This samadhi does not last long. Worldly thoughts intrude and end it. The yogi breaks from his union with God.

"In the village [Kamarpukur] a mongoose was living in a hole in the wall. As long as it was in the hole it felt comfortable. Someone tied a brick to its tail and it was forced to come out of its hole by the pull of the brick. Every time it tried to go back into

1. Sthita.
2. Unmana.

the hole for peace, it was pulled out by the pull of the brick. Worldly thoughts divert the mind of the yogi from meditation.

"A man of the world can sometimes experience samadhi. A lotus opens at sunrise. But as soon as the sun is covered by clouds, it closes its petals again. Worldly thoughts are the clouds."

Mani: "Can't one develop both spiritual knowledge and love for God through spiritual disciplines?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "They can both be acquired through love for God. You get both. When it is needed, God Himself grants the knowledge of Brahman. Having a high spiritual ideal, a single receptacle can hold both knowledge and love of God."

Section VIII

Sri Ramakrishna in the Role of Guru at the Dakshineswar Temple with Devotees

Chapter I

Thakur in samadhi – his vision of God and state of a paramahamsa

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with Rakhal, Latu, Mani, Harish, and other devotees on the southeastern verandah of his room. The time is about nine o'clock. It is Sunday, 23 December 1883, the ninth day of the dark fortnight of the lunar month of Agrahayana.

It is the tenth day of Mani's stay with the guru.

Manomohan has come from Konnagar this morning. He will meet with Thakur, rest for a while, and then go to Calcutta. Hazra is sitting close to Thakur. A Vaishnava from Nilkantha's region sings for him, beginning with a song of Nilkantha.

He sings:

Like Krishna's, the complexion of the handsome Sri Gauranga, the dancing lover of God, is of golden hue.

This time he has incarnated in Nadia in a different guise, hiding his old marks.

He has come to destroy the deep darkness of the Kaliyuga and to manifest the joy of intense love in its surpassing brilliance.

This time he has come with three desires[1] and three tastes.[2] He has descended for the sake of all these.

The world is intoxicated by the touch of these three, particularly the delightful nectar of intense love.

This time having exchanged the blue complexion of the incarnate Krishna with Radha's golden hue, you have come.

You have ascended into mahabhava, and sattvic and lesser bhavas have melted within you**.**

While you roam about wailing in the forest for a taste of that sublime mood, the tide of that intensely longing love floods your surroundings.

You, the new sannyasi seeking holy places, now go to Nilachal and then to Kashi.

You distribute the abundance of God's love without any distinction of caste.

Says Dwija Nilkantha, How my mind longs to know when my desire to sell[3] myself at Gaur's feet will be fulfilled.

The next song is about mental worship.[4]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): "This song about mental worship sounded a bit peculiar to me."

Hazra: "It is not for a spiritual aspirant – the lamp of knowledge, the image of knowledge!"

Totapuri weeps in the panchavati – Padmalochan weeps

Sri Ramakrishna: "The song felt a bit odd. "The songs of older times are more genuine. I once sang for Totapuri in the panchavati – 'O man, get ready

1. Vanccha, wishes, desires, or longings to be pursued.
2. Asvadan, tastes in the sense of those things that are sweet or desirable.
3. Surrender.
4. Manas puja

for battle! Death has entered your house in battle array.'

"And I sang another song – 'O Mother, it is no one else's fault. I drown in the waters of the well these very hands have dug.'

"The Naked One[1] – such a jnani – did not understand the meaning of the song. And yet it brought him to tears.

"What good things were said in these songs – 'O man, meditate on Vishnu.[2] Then you will be freed from even the fear of the extremely terrible King of Death.'[3]

"Padmalochan also wept to hear me sing a song of Ramprasad. And you know what a great pundit he was!"

God vision – one and many; unity in diversity – Sri Ramakrishna and the philosophy of qualified non-dualism[4]

After his midday meal, Thakur takes a little rest. Mani is sitting on the floor. Thakur greatly enjoys listening to the sanai[5] being played at the nahabat.

Later, Thakur explains to Mani that Brahman Himself has become all living beings and the phenomenal universe.

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1. An epithet of Totapuri.
2. Narkantkari Srikanta.
3. Yama.
4. Vishishtadvaitavada.
5. A double-reed wind instrument similar to an oboe with a somewhat strident, nasal sound.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "I heard someone say that the name of God is not chanted at a certain place. No sooner did he say it than I saw that God Himself had become all living beings and the phenomenal universe.[1] It is like countless bubbles, reflections, of water. And I saw that they were like innumerable pills.

"One time when I was going to Burdwan from Kamarpukur, I ran toward a field to see how the creatures in it lived and ate. When I got there, I saw ants crawling on the ground. It seemed that every place was imbued with Consciousness."

Hazra now enters the room and sits on the floor.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I also saw flowers with different kinds of petals. Some were small, and others were large images."

While talking of these divine visions, Thakur enters into an ecstatic state. He says, "I have become! I have come!"

Saying this, he becomes absorbed in samadhi. He is absolutely motionless. After a long time, he regains a little consciousness of the outer world. He begins to laugh like a child. He paces the room, laughing.

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1. sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cātmani ।
īkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ ।। Bhagavad Gita 6:29 (The Self in all beings and all beings in the Self).

One attains the state of a paramahamsa when one is rid of grief and desire – Thakur's description of a paramahamsa under the banyan tree whom he saw while practicing spiritual disciplines

Thakur's eyes emanate a luminosity of joy after a wonderful vision. A smile plays on his face. His gaze is unfixed.

Pacing up and down, he speaks: "I saw a paramahamsa under the banyan tree. He was walking and smiling in the same way. Has my nature become like his?"

Having paced the room, Thakur goes to the smaller cot and sits down. He talks to the Mother of the Universe, saying, "Well, I don't want to know. Mother, may I only have pure love for Your lotus feet."

(*To Mani*) "This stage is attained only when one is freed from grief and desires."

Next he speaks to the Divine Mother, "Mother, You have taken away my worship. Please do not take away all my desires. Mother, a paramahamsa is a child. Doesn't a child need a Mother? You are the Mother and I am Your son. How can a child live without his mother?"

Thakur talks to the Divine Mother in a tone of voice so touching it could melt even a stone. He says to the Her, "Mother, merely the knowledge of non-dualism – I spit on that. As long as there is the feeling of 'I,' there is 'You' too. A paramahamsa is a child. Doesn't a child need its mother?"

Mani gazes in speechless wonder at this state of Thakur, which is rare even among the gods. He says

to himself, Thakur is an ocean of motiveless grace. It is for my faith, for awakening my own consciousness, and for teaching humanity that he has assumed the role of a guru and taken this state of a paramahamsa.

Mani reflects further. Thakur says, "Non-dualism, Consciousness, and Eternal Bliss."[1] That it is only after attaining the knowledge of the non-dual Reality that Consciousness is awakened. And only then does one enjoy Eternal Bliss. Thakur not only has the knowledge of the non-dual Reality, but he is ever-blissful. He is ever immersed in the joy of intense love for the Mother of the Universe; he is ever intoxicated!

Observing Thakur in this state, suddenly Hazra folds his hands and now and then says, "Blessed. Blessed."

Sri Ramakrishna says to Hazra, "But where is your faith? You are here only like Jatila and Kutila[2] who served to develop the play."

It is late afternoon. Mani is strolling alone in the temple garden reflecting on Sri Ramakrishna's wonderful state of mind. He asks himself, Why did Thakur say that you attain this state only after getting rid of sorrow and desires? Who is this Thakur in the role of a guru? Or is he the advent of God Himself appearing in human form for our sake? Thakur says that one cannot come down from jada samadhi[3] unless one is an Ishvarakoti or a divine incarnation.

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1. Advaita, Chaitanya, and Nityananda.
2. Troublemakers in the Radha-Krishna story.
3. Nirvikalpa samadhi, complete absorption, so that all sense of duality is obliterated.

Chapter II

Secret talk

Āhus tvām ṛṣayaḥ sarve devarṣir nāradas tathā ।

asito devalo vyāsaḥ svayaṁ caiva bravīṣi me ।।

[All the rishis have thus acclaimed You, as also the Deva Rishi Narada, so also Asita, Devala, and Vyasa, and now you yourself say so to me.]

– Bhagavad Gita: 10:13

The next day Sri Ramakrishna talks alone with Mani in the Jhautala. It is about eight o'clock, Monday, 24 December 1883, the tenth lunar day of the dark fortnight. It is the eleventh day of M.'s stay with Sri Ramakrishna.[1]

It is winter. The sun has just appeared in the eastern sky. West of the Jhautala the Ganges is flowing north. There has just been a flood tide. There are trees and creepers all around. Not far away one can see the vilwa tree under which Thakur had practiced spiritual disciplines. Thakur is speaking now, facing the east. Mani faces north and listens to him in all humility. To the right of Thakur is the panchavati and Hanspukur. The winter sunrise spreads like a smile over the world. Thakur talks about the knowledge of Brahman.

Totapuri's instructions to Thakur about the knowledge of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna: "God with form is as true as the formless God.

"The Naked One used to instruct me about Sat-chit-ananda Brahman. He would say that It is like

1. Prabhu, master.

an infinite ocean, with water above, below, right, and left, water everywhere – the cause, water. The water is still. There are waves when it is acting. Creation, preservation, and dissolution are its waves.

"And he would say that Brahman is where all reasoning ends. It is like camphor, which leaves no residue after it is burnt.

"Brahman is beyond speech and mind. A salt doll went to fathom the ocean. It never returned to tell its depth. It dissolved into the ocean itself.

"The rishis said to Rama, 'Rama, Bharadvaja and other rishis speak of you as an incarnation of God. But we don't say that. We worship the Shabda Brahman.[1] We don't want a human form of God.' Rama smiled, accepted their adoration, and left."

The Absolute and the phenomenal world are both true

"But the Absolute and the phenomenal belong to the same reality. As I said earlier a roof and the steps to it are made of the same material. There is divine sport as God, as gods, as human beings, and as the world. God-incarnate is His sport as a human being. You know, the sport as a human being is like water accumulated on a big roof rushing down through a drain pipe. It is the power of Sat-chit-ananda that takes its course through the pipe. Only twelve rishis, Bharadvaja and others, recognized Ramachandra as an avatar and declared him so. Not everyone can recognize a divine incarnation."

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1. Sound Brahman, referring to Om, the Impersonal.

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God? – life of Thakur from his own lips – Kshudiram's dream in Gaya – his worship by Hriday's mother – Mathur's vision of God within Thakur – possessed by Sri Gauranga in Phului Shyambazaar

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "God incarnates as a human being to teach knowledge and love of God. Well, how do you feel about me?

"My father went to Gaya. Raghuvir appeared to him in a dream and said, 'I shall be born as your son.' Seeing him in his dream, my father said to Him, 'Lord, I am a poor brahmin! How shall I be able to serve you?' Raghuvir replied, 'It will be taken care of.'

"My sister, Hriday's mother, used to worship my feet with flowers and sandal-paste. One day, touching my feet to her head, I (the Divine Mother in me) said to her, 'You will quit your body in Kashi.'

"Mathur said, 'Father, there is nothing but God within you. Your body is like an empty shell, like the form of a pumpkin outside but with no pulp or seeds inside. Once I saw you as someone walking and wearing a veil.'

"I am shown everything beforehand. Once, under the banyan tree (at the panchavati), I saw a party of singers with Chaitanya. I think I saw Balaram in it, and also you.

"I wanted to know Chaitanya's states of mind and was shown them at Shyambazaar. There were men on trees, on walls, people surrounding me day and night. For seven days I had no time even to

answer the call of nature. So I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I have had enough!' So it is all over now.

"I shall have to incarnate again. That is why I don't give full knowledge to my intimate disciples. (*Smiling*) Were I to give you complete knowledge, would you come to me so readily again?

"I recognized you[1] when I heard you read the Chaitanya Bhagavata. You are my own – the same substance, like father and son. All of you who come here are like a bunch of kalmi creeper. Pull one part and it all comes. You're related to each other like brothers. Suppose Rakhal, Harish, and others have gone to Jagannath Puri. If you also go there, will you live separately?

"You were in a state of forgetfulness until you came here. Now you will be able to know yourself. God comes down as guru to make you know yourself."

Totapuri's instructions – God in the form of the guru makes one realize one's Self

"The Naked One told me the tale of the tiger and the goats. A tigress attacked a herd of goats. Seeing it from a distance, a hunter killed the tigress. She was pregnant, so a cub was born. That cub began to grow up in the midst of goats. At first it nursed on goat's milk. When it grew up a little, it began eating grass, and it began to bleat like the goats. In due course, it grew into a big tiger, but it

1. Referring to M.

still ate grass and bleated. If any animal attacked, it would run away like the goats.

"One day a fierce tiger attacked the herd of goats. It was amazed to see a tiger in the herd, eating grass and running away with the goats. He caught hold of the grass-eating tiger, which began to bleat and tried to run away. The wild tiger dragged it to the edge of a pond and said, 'Look at your face in the water. See, your face is just like mine, pot-faced.' Saying this, he thrust some flesh into its mouth. At first the grass-eating tiger absolutely refused to eat it. But after a while, getting its taste, it began to eat. The wild tiger said to it, 'You were living with goats and eating grass like a goat! Shame on you!' The grass-eating tiger felt very ashamed.

"Eating grass – that is, living in the midst of 'lust and greed' – bleating like a goat, and running away is the conduct of ordinary human beings. To go away with the tiger means to take refuge in the guru, who awakens spiritual consciousness, and to know that he alone is one's own, one's near and dear one. To see one's true face means to recognize one's own real Self."

Thakur stands up. There is silence all around. Only the rustling of wind in the pine trees and the murmuring of the Ganges are heard. He passes the railing and begins walking with Mani through the panchavati to his room, talking with him all the while. Mani accompanies him. enchanted as though by a magic spell.

Sri Ramakrishna bows down at the panchavati

Reaching the panchavati, he stands under the foot of the banyan tree where a big branch had fallen off. Facing east, he bows to the brick platform and touches it with his forehead. This is the place where he had practiced spiritual disciplines and had wept so with a yearning heart for the Divine Mother, where he had had so many visions of the forms of God and conversations with the Divine Mother. Is it for this reason that whenever Thakur comes to this spot, he offers salutations?

After his visit to the bakultala, he comes near the nahabat. Mani is with him.

Nearing the nahabat, he sees Hazra and says to him, "Don't overeat. And give up your worry about purity and impurity. People who worry excessively about such things do not attain spiritual knowledge. Only observe the prescribed rituals that are necessary. Don't overdo it." Then Thakur goes into his room.

Chapter III

Rakhal, Ram, Surendra, Latu, and other devotees with Sri Ramakrishna

Thakur is resting after his meal. Today is 24 December and the Christmas holidays have started. Surendra, Ram, and other devotees are arriving from Calcutta.

It is about one o'clock. Mani is strolling around the jhautala alone. Standing near its railing, Harish calls out to Mani, "Thakur wants you. There is going to be a reading from the Shiva Samhita." It contains instructions on yoga and the six centres.

Mani enters Thakur's room, salutes him, and takes a seat. Thakur is sitting on his cot; the devotees are on the floor. But there is no reading of the Shiva Samhita. Instead Thakur himself speaks to them.

Ecstatic love of God[1] and sport at Vrindavan – God-incarnate and His activity as a human being[2]

Sri Ramakrishna: "The gopis had intense love for Krishna. There are two aspects of ecstatic love: '*I*-ness'[3] and '*my*-ness.'[4] 'If I don't serve Krishna, he will become sick' – this is *I-ness*. There is no feeling of God in this attitude.

"My-ness – that is feeling 'my and mine.' The gopis had such a feeling of my-ness for Sri Krishna that, lest his soles should get hurt, they laid their subtle bodies under his feet.

"Yashoda said, 'I don't know your Chintamani[5] Krishna. I only have my Gopala.'[6] And the gopis said, 'Where is my sweetheart, my Beloved?' They also did not have the feeling of his being God.

"We see young boys saying, 'My father.' If someone says to one of them, 'No, he is not your father,' he would insist that he is indeed his father.

"An incarnation of God conducts himself just like a human being. That is why it is very difficult to recognize an incarnation. Born as a human

1. Prema bhakti.
2. Nara lila.
3. Ahamta.
4. Mamta.
5. Beloved God.
6. Baby Krishna.

being, He acts just like one – the same hunger and thirst, the same disease and sorrow, even fear at times, just like a human being. Ramachandra was stricken with grief for Sita. Sri Krishna carried the shoes and wooden stool of his father Nanda on his head.

"When an actor plays the role of a holy man in the theatre, he acts just like a holy man – and not like the actor who takes the role of a king. He acts as his role demands.

"A quick-change artist played the role of an all-renouncing sadhu. Seeing him dressed that way, a gentleman offered him a rupee. He didn't accept it, but left, saying, 'No.' After he had washed and returned in his normal dress, he said, 'Now let me have the rupee.' The gentleman said, 'Only a while ago you went away saying you wouldn't take the rupee. Now you are asking for it?' The man said, 'I was playing the role of a sadhu. How could I accept the rupee then?'

"It is the same with God. When He assumes the form of a human being, He conducts Himself exactly like a human being.

"When one visits Vrindavan, one can see so many places associated with Krishna's life."

Instructions to Surendra – charity in service of devotees and telling the truth

Surendra: "I went there during the holidays. Visitors are pestered constantly for money, 'Please give a pice. Please do.' All the priests started

asking. I said to them, 'I'll be leaving for Calcutta tomorrow.' But I fled the very same day."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why did you do that? For shame! You said you would go the next day but ran away the same day. Shame!"

Surendra (*feeling ashamed*): "Here and there I saw babajis seated in the forest. They were meditating and repeating the name of God in solitude."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Did you offer anything to the babajis?"

Surendra: "No, Sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That was not right. Something should be offered to sadhus and devotees. Those who have money should offer something when they come across such persons."

Life of Thakur from his own holy lips – visit to Vrindavan in 1868 with Mathur

"I went to Vrindavan with Mathur Babu.

"As soon as I got to the Dhruva ghat in Mathura, I suddenly had a vision. I saw Vasudeva crossing the Jamuna with Krishna in his arms.

"And one evening I was strolling on the bank of the Jamuna. There were little huts on the beach. There were also big jujube trees. At dusk the cows started returning from pasture. I saw them crossing the Jamuna. They were followed by a number of cowherd boys.

"No sooner did I see them than I shouted, 'Where are you Krishna?' and I became unconscious.

"I wanted to visit the Shyamkunda and Radhakunda. I was sent in a palanquin. It was a long way. They put some luchis and jilipis in the palanquin. While crossing the meadow, I wept and said, 'O Krishna! All these places are here, but you are not! It is the same field where you used to graze cows.'

"Hriday was following me on foot. Tears fell from my eyes. I could not ask the palanquin men to stop.

"I saw in Shyamkunda and Radhakunda that the sadhus had built huts for themselves. Lest they should be disturbed by the sight of anything, they were practicing spiritual disciplines with their backs to the outside. The twelve forests are worth seeing.[1]

"I went into a deep spiritual mood when I saw the image of Bankuvihari. I tried to touch Him. I didn't feel a desire to see Govindaji a second time. In Mathura, I had seen Krishna as a cowherd boy in a dream. Hriday and Mathur Babu had the same dream."

Surendra, a devotee of the Divine Mother – union with God and enjoyment of sense objects[2]

1. There are twelve forests in the 1453-square-mile area surrounding Vraja, the scene of Krishna's play. Each is associated with a different exploit, and each is a place of pilgrimage.
2. Yoga and bhoga.

"You have both – striving for union with God and desire for enjoyment.

"There are brahmarishis, devarishis, and rajarishis. Sukadeva was a brahmarshi – he didn't keep one book with him. Narada was a devarishi, Janaka a rajarishi – he performed work without expectation of any reward.

"The devotee of the Divine Mother attains both virtue and liberation[1] and also enjoys wealth and the fulfillment of legitimate desires.[2]

"One day I saw you in a vision as a son of the Divine Mother.[3] You have both the desire for God and for enjoyment. If you didn't have them, your face would look dry."

Sri Ramakrishna meets a devotee of the Divine Mother at the bathing ghat – Nabin Niyogi's desire for God and desire for enjoyment

"A person who has renounced completely looks dry. I met a devotee of the Divine Mother at the bathing ghat. He was eating and at the same time worshiping the Divine Mother. He was like a child before his mother.

"But it's not good to have too much money. Jadu Mallick seems to be sunk in worldliness. You see, he has now become very wealthy.

"As for Nabin Niyogi, he has both desire for God and desire for enjoyment. At the time of Durga Puja

1. Dharma and moksha.
2. Artha and kama.
3. Deviputra.

both the father and the son were fanning the Mother with a chamara."[1]

Surendra: "Sir, why can't I concentrate when I meditate?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "But you remember and think of God, don't you?"

Surendra: "Yes sir. I go to sleep repeating, 'Mother, Mother.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That is very good. Remembrance and thinking of God are enough."

Thakur has taken upon himself the responsibility of Surendra. Why then should he worry?

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna's instruction on union with God – Shiva Samhita

After dusk Thakur sits with his devotees. Mani is seated on the floor with them. The topic of conversation is yoga and the six centres of consciousness. The Shiva Samhita deals with them.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ida, pingala, and sushumna. All the lotuses are in the sushumna and are formed of consciousness. Think of a tree made of wax. It has branches, twigs, and fruit all made of wax. The kundalini power resides in the bottom, four-petalled muladhara lotus. The Primal Power dwells in all bodies in the form of Kundalini. It is like a sleeping snake coiled up. 'You have been fast asleep, coiled up in Your abode of muladhara.'

1. A fan made from the tail of a yak.

(*To Mani*) "In the path of Bhakti Yoga, the kundalini awakens rapidly. One cannot realize God unless the kundalini wakes up. Sing with full concentration, in solitude, without the knowledge of others:

> Waken, O Mother Kundalini! You are the very image of Bliss Eternal.
>
> You have been fast asleep, coiled up in Your abode of muladhara.

"Ramprasad perfected himself by his songs. If you can sing with a longing heart, you realize God."

Mani: "Sir, by experiencing these only once, one has no more distress of mind."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah! You no more have distress. Yes indeed.

"I would like to tell you a few important things about yoga."

Everything indeed is done by the guru – spiritual practice and spiritual perfection – Narendra born spiritually perfect

"You know, a mother bird doesn't peck the egg till the chick inside has developed. She breaks it open just at the right time.

"A little spiritual practice is necessary, however. Everything is done by the guru, but in the end he makes the disciple practice a little. When you fell a big tree, you have to step away from it a little when it is nearly cut through. Then it falls by itself with a great crash.

"When a canal is cut from a river to bring water to the fields, the farmer stands aside when the

canal is about to join the river and only a little cutting remains. Then the earth itself gets soaked and falls of itself, letting the water flow into the canal.

"When you get rid of ego and limitations[1] you realize God. When you get over the feeling of being a learned man, the son of a certain person, of being wealthy, famous, and so on, you realize God.

"Only God is real, all else is ephemeral. The world is transitory. This is called discrimination. Without discrimination, the mind does not assimilate spiritual instructions.

"By practicing spiritual disciplines, you attain perfection by His grace. Of course some effort is necessary, but it ultimately ends in realization of God and attainment of bliss.

"A pot of gold lies buried at a certain place. Hearing about it, a man quickly runs there and starts digging. He continues to dig, sweating with the effort. After digging a long time he hears a sound 'tan' at the stroke of the spade. He throws away the spade and looks for a vessel. Seeing the pot, he dances with joy.

"Then he takes the pot out and turns it upside down. Gold coins fall into his hand and he counts them. It is such a joyful experience – seeing, touching, enjoying! Isn't that true?"

Mani: "It is, sir."

Thakur is silent for a while and then he resumes speaking.

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1. Adjuncts.

Who are my very own? – instruction about fasting on ekadashi[1]

"Those who are my very own will come to me even if I reprimand them.

"Ah, look what a fine nature Narendra has! In the beginning, he used to say anything he liked about Mother Kali. Getting irritated one day, I said to him, 'Rascal, don't come here again!' He went out quietly and began to prepare a smoke. He who is one's own does not become annoyed even when scolded. What do you say?"

Mani: "True, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Narendra is born perfect. He has faith and single-minded devotion[2] to the formless God."

Mani (*laughing*): "Whenever he comes, he creates excitement."

Thakur laughs, full of joy: "True, he does create commotion."

The next day is Tuesday, 25 December, the 11th day of the dark fortnight. It is about eleven o'clock. Thakur has not been served his meal yet. Mani, Rakhal and other devotees are in his room.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "It is good to observe the ekadashi. It purifies the mind a great deal and develops love and devotion for God. Do you think so?"

Mani: "Yes, sir."

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1 The eleventh day of the lunar month.
2. Nishtha.

Sri Ramakrishna: "But it's all right to have milk and puffed rice,[1] don't you think?"

1. Khil.

Section IX

At the Dakshineswar Temple with Rakhal and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar temple with Rakhal, Ram, Kedar, and other devotees – conversation on brahmajnana with a Vedantist sadhu

Sri Ramakrishna is getting into a carriage to visit the Kali temple at Kalighat. He will first stop at Adhar Sen's house, from where Adhar will accompany him. It is Saturday, 29 December 1883, the new moon day.[1] It is about one o'clock.

The carriage is standing near the northern verandah of Thakur's room. Mani approaches the door of the carriage.

Mani (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Sir, may I go with you?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why?"

Mani: "I would like to visit my house in Calcutta."

Sri Ramakrishna (*with concern*): "Must you go? You are all right here."

Mani wants to go home for just a few hours, but Thakur is not in favour of it.[2]

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1. Amavasya.
2. M. has been staying with Thakur for two weeks, since 14 December, and intends to stay longer. Sri Ramakrishna is not in favour of his breaking his retreat with a visit home.

It is Sunday, 30th December, the first day of the bright fortnight of the month of Pausha. The time is about three o'clock.

While Mani is strolling alone under a tree, a devotee comes and tells him that Thakur wants to see him. Thakur is sitting with devotees in his room. Mani salutes him and takes his seat on the floor with the devotees.

Ram, Kedar, and others have come from Calcutta. A Vedantist monk is with them. Thakur had met him the day he went to see Ram's garden. The monk had been sitting alone on a cot under a tree in the adjacent garden. Ram has now brought him to see Thakur, at Thakur's request. The monk had also expressed a desire to see him.

Thakur talks happily with the monk. He has made him sit close by, on the smaller cot. They are speaking in Hindi.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you feel about all this?"

Monk: "It is all like a dream."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Brahman is real and the world unreal.[1] Is that not so? Well, what is Brahman like?"

Monk: "Sound itself is Brahman – the anahata sound."[2]

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1 The reference is to Shankara's dictum "Brahma satyam jagat mithya…." According to Shankara, what is real (satyam) is eternal and unchanging, and what is unreal or false is ephemeral and changing (mithya).

2. Unstruck, a sound produced on its own without two objects being struck together; Om as the first movement of Shiva-Shakti heard in higher states of meditation.

Sri Ramakrishna: "But my dear, there is something which is indicated by the sound. Isn't that so?"

Monk: "That itself is both the expresser and the expressed."[1]

Hearing this, Thakur goes into samadhi. Motionless, he sits like a picture. The monk and devotees witness this state in speechless wonder. Kedar says to the sadhu, "Look, sir. This is called samadhi."

Thakur slowly returns to the conscious plane and talks to the Mother of the Universe: "Mother, I want to be normal. Please don't make me unconscious. I want to talk to the sadhu about Sat-chit-ananda. Mother, I want to enjoy myself talking about Sat-chit-ananda!"

The monk sits speechless watching and listening to all this. Thakur says to him, "Now do away with your 'I am He'.[2] Let us enjoy 'I' and 'You.'"

> Is Thakur saying that as long as there is the feeling of 'I' and 'You,' there is the Divine Mother as well, so let's come and enjoy ourselves with Her?

After some time, when the conversation ends, Thakur strolls in the panchavati. With him are Ram, Kedar, M., and some others.

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1. vācyavācakabhedena tvameva parameśvara: "O Supreme Lord, You are distinguished as vachaka, the signifier, and vachya, the object signified" – Adhyatma Ramayana.
2. So 'ham.

Sri Ramakrishna instructs Kedar – renunciation of the world

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What did you think of the sadhu?"

Kedar: "He has dry knowledge. Just like a pot that's been put on the fire but no rice has been put in it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's true, of course. But he has renounced the world. Whoever has renounced the world has progressed a good deal.

"He is in an earlier stage. All your achievements are of no account unless they lead to the realization of God. Nothing else is appealing when one is intoxicated with ecstatic love. Then:

Cherish the beloved Mother Shyama in your heart.

O mind, may you and I alone behold Her, and let no one else intrude.

Leaving behind all passions, anger and such vices, come, O mind, and let us behold her in solitude,

Taking with us only the tongue, that it may call on Her now and then, repeating, "Mother, Mother!"

O mind, allow neither baseness nor enticement to draw near, but let the eyes of knowledge, ever alert, keep watch.

Kedar sings another song of the same mood as that of Thakur:

O gopi friend! How can I open my heart to you? I am not allowed to speak.

Without a kindred soul to share my grief, I am about to die.

He who is one's own can be known by the look in his eyes.

Such a one is rare who swims on the wave of ecstasy, immersed in bliss.

Such a one can ride its crest.

Thakur has returned to his room. It is four o'clock, and Mother Kali's temple is open. He goes there, taking the monk with him. Mani accompanies them.

Entering the temple, Thakur prostrates before the Divine Mother with full devotion. The monk folds his hands, bows his head, and salutes the Mother repeatedly.

Sri Ramakrishna: "My dear sir, what do you think of the Mother?"

Monk (*with devotion*): "Kali is the supreme power."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Kali and Brahman are identical, are they not?"

Monk: "As long as the mind is outgoing one must accept Kali. As long as the mind goes out, one feels there is good and bad, and one has likes and dislikes.

"Certainly names and forms are illusory, but as long as the mind sees the outside world, one must renounce 'lust.' One has to distinguish between what is good and what is not in order to instruct others in the beginning. Otherwise, there would be corruption."

Thakur returns to his room, talking with the sadhu on the way.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Did you see the sadhu bow before Kali?"

Mani: "Yes, sir."

The next day, Monday, 31 December. The time is about four o'clock. Thakur is seated in his room in the company of devotees – Balaram, Mani, Rakhal, Latu, Harish, and others.

Mere words of knowledge – Thakur rebukes Haladhari

Thakur says to Mani and Balaram:

"Haladhari had the attitude of a jnani. He studied the Adhyatma Ramayana, the Upanishads, and similar scriptures day and night. And he would look with disdain when someone talked about the forms of God. Once when I took a little food from the leaf-plates of beggars, he said, 'How will you be able to get your sons married?' I said, 'What do you mean, you rascal? Am I going to have children? To hell with your study of the Gita and the Vedanta.'

"Just see, on the one hand he says that the world is an illusion, and on the other, he meditates in the Vishnu temple with nose turned up in disgust!"[1]

It is dusk. Balaram and the other devotees have left for Calcutta. Thakur is meditating on the Divine Mother in his room. After some time, the sweet sound of arati emanates from the temples.

It is about 8 p.m. Thakur is in an ecstatic mood and talking to the Divine Mother in a sweet voice. Mani is sitting on the floor.

1. He professes to be a Vedantist who has gone beyond duality, but his behavior shows otherwise.

Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta

Thakur is chanting the sweet sacred name, "Hari Om, Hari Om, Hari Om." He says to the Divine Mother, "O Mother, don't make me unconscious with the knowledge of Brahman. I don't want knowledge of Brahman, Mother. I want to enjoy myself! I want to be merry!"

Then he says, "I don't know Vedanta, Mother. And I don't want to know it! Having attained You, the Veda and the Vedanta remain so far below."

"O Krishna! I say to you, 'Eat this, take this, my child.' And I shall say, 'Child, you have assumed a human body for my sake.'"

Chapter II

Path of knowledge and discrimination – path of devotion and knowledge of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room. It is about 8 p.m., Wednesday, 2 January 1884, the fifth day of the bright fortnight of Pausha. Rakhal and Mani are in the room. It is the 21st day of Mani's stay with Sri Ramakrishna.

Thakur has forbidden Mani to reason.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Rakhal*): "It is not good to reason too much. First God, then the world. Attain Him and then you will know about His world as well.

(*To Rakhal and Mani*) "When you talk to Jadu Mallick, you will know how many houses, how many gardens, and how many government securities he has.

"That is why the rishis asked Valmiki to repeat the word *mara*. It has a special meaning. 'Ma' means God and 'ra' means the world – first God, and then the world."

The sacred word *mara* and Krishnakishore

"Krishnakishore said, '*Mara* is a sacred mantra since rishis gave it. 'Ma' means God and 'ra' means the world.'

"So, like Valmiki, in the beginning one should call on God secretly, in a solitary place, weeping with a mind full of yearning, renouncing everything else. A vision of God is the first thing that is necessary. Reasoning about the scriptures and the world come after that."

Thakur weeps while on the road – Mother, strike a thunderbolt to my tendency to reason, 1868[1]

(*To Mani*) "So I say to you, don't reason any more. I came from the pine grove just to say this to you. Reasoning too much causes harm in the end – ultimately you become a person like Hazra. I used to walk around alone at night, weeping and saying, 'Mother, strike my tendency to reason with a thunderbolt!'"

"Say you won't reason any more."

Mani: "No, sir, I shall not."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Everything can be attained by love for God alone. Those who want the knowledge of Brahman will have it if they continue on the path of love.

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1. Referring to an incident that took place in 1868.

"Can there be any dearth of spiritual knowledge if God grants His mercy? In Kamarpukur they weigh paddy by pushing forward more paddy as soon as the first heap is done. The Divine Mother pushes forward heaps of spiritual knowledge."

Padmalochan's devotion to Thakur – Thakur's prayer in the panchavati during his days of spiritual practices

"When you have realized God, scholars and the learned appear like mere straw. Padmalochan said, 'What does it matter if I go with you to the meeting in the fisherman's house? With you I can even go and eat at the house of a person who cremates the dead.'[1]

"Everything can be achieved through love for God. When you can love Him, you feel no lack of anything at all. Karttika and Ganesha were sitting beside Bhagavati (their mother). She was wearing a necklace of jewels round her neck. The Mother said, 'I will give this necklace to one who goes around the universe first.' Immediately, without losing a second, Karttika set out on his peacock. Ganesha, on the other hand, went slowly round his mother and saluted Her. Ganesha knew that the Mother contained the whole universe within Herself. Pleased with Ganesha, She put the necklace around his neck. After a long time Karttika returned and saw his brother sitting there wearing the necklace.

"I wept and cried to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please make me understand what the Vedas and the Vedanta contain. Please tell me what is in the

1. Both fisherman and cremation men are low-caste Hindus.

Puranas and the Tantras.' She made everything known to me, one by one.

"She made everything known. She has shown me so much!"

Thakur's visions while practicing spiritual disciplines: Shiva and Shakti, heaps of human skulls, guru the pilot, the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda

"One day Shiva and Shakti were revealed to me everywhere, the union of Shiva and Shakti. Everything – human beings, birds and beasts, plants and creepers, everything – had Shiva and Shakti within! The union of Purusha and Prakriti!

"And one day I was shown a heap of human heads as high as a mountain. There was nothing else. I was seated alone in their midst.

"And another time I was shown a vast ocean. I went to measure it as a salt doll. As soon as I tried, through the grace of the guru, I became a stone. I saw a ship. Immediately I boarded it. The guru was the pilot. (*To Mani*) Do you call on Sat-chit-ananda, who is the guru, every morning?"

Mani: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The guru was the pilot. I saw then that 'I' was one thing and 'you' another. Then I jumped into the ocean and became a fish. I saw that I was swimming joyfully in the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda.

"These are all very secret mysteries. How much can you understand by reasoning? You achieve everything when God Himself reveals them to you. Then you lack nothing."

Chapter III

Meditation under the bel tree during the days of spiritual practice, 1859-61 – renunciation of "lust and greed"

Sri Ramakrishna visits his birthplace – registration of Raghuvir's land, 1879-80

Thakur has been served his midday meal. It is about one o'clock, Saturday, 5 January. It is the 23rd day of Mani's stay.

After eating, Mani is in the nahabat. He suddenly hears someone call his name three times. He comes out and sees Thakur calling him from the long verandah north of his room. Mani goes to him and salutes.

Thakur talks with Mani on the southern verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna: "How do you meditate? I used to have clear visions of different forms under the bel tree. One day I saw silver coins, a shawl, a plate full of sandesh, and two women. I asked my mind, 'O mind! Do you want any of these?' The sandesh looked to me like excrement. One of the women had a big nose ring. I could see both their insides and outsides – guts, urine, faeces, flesh, bones, and blood. My mind did not want any of these. It remained attached to the lotus feet of God alone.

"Think of a scale, with its lower and upper needles. The mind is the lower needle. I was always in fear that my mind would move away from the upper needle (God). But a person sat beside me with a trident in his hand. He threatened to attack

me if the lower needle moved away from the upper one.

"You cannot succeed unless you renounce 'lust and greed.' I renounced three things: land, wife, and money.[1] I went to the village to get some land registered in the name of Raghuvir. I was asked to sign the deed. I did not. I didn't think of the land as mine. I was shown great respect as the guru of Keshab Sen. I was given mangoes – but I couldn't take them home. A sannyasin must not hoard.

"How can one expect to realize God without renouncing? If one thing is lying under another, how can you reach it without removing the one on top?

"One must call on God without expecting any reward. But when one worships God with the intention of fulfilling desires, it finally becomes selfless. Dhruva practiced austerities to get a kingdom, but he realized God. He said, 'If one comes across gold while picking up glass, why leave it there?'"

Sri Ramakrishna and compassion, charitable acts – Chaitanya Deva's act of charity

"God can be realized only when one has acquired sattva.

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1. bhikṣuaḥ sauvarṇādīnāṁ naiva parigrahet।
yasmād bhikṣurhiraṇyaṁ rasena dṛṣṭaṁ ca sa brahmāhā bhavet।
yasmād bhikṣurhiraṇyaṁ rasena spṛṣṭaṁ ca sa paulkaso bhavet।
yasmād bhikṣurhiraṇyaṁ rasena grāhyaṁ ca sa ātmahā bhavet।
tasbhād bhikṣurhiraṇyaṁ rasena na dṛṣṭaṁ ca spṛṣṭaṁ na grāhyaṁ ca। (paramahaṁsopaniṣat)

"Charitable acts of the worldly are generally motivated. This is not good. One should act without expectation of any reward – but it is very difficult to work selflessly.

"If God reveals Himself to you face to face, will you pray to Him to grant you a boon to build reservoirs, roads, bathing steps, dispensaries, hospitals, and so forth? When you are in the presence of God, such desires are left behind.

"Does that mean that an act of compassion or of charity is of no use?

"No, it is not that. If you have money and you see someone suffering, you should help him with it. A jnani, a man of knowledge, says, 'Give. Give something to him.' But he feels, 'What can I do? God alone is the doer, everyone else is a non-doer.'

"Stricken by sorrow over the troubles of others, saintly people show the way to God. Shankaracharya retained the ego of knowledge to teach humanity.

"The gift of spiritual knowledge and love for God is higher than the gift of food. Therefore, Chaitanya Deva disseminated bhakti even among outcastes.[1] The body is prone to sorrow as well as happiness. You have come here to eat mangoes. Eat them and leave. Spiritual knowledge and love for God are what is needed. God alone is the substance, all else is nothing."

1. Chandalas.

Does free will exist? Sri Ramakrishna's dictum

"Indeed, it is God who does everything. You may say that implies that people may commit sin. That is not true. A person who truly feels that God is the Doer and he a non-doer cannot take a false step.

"What the English (westerners) call free will is also given by God.

"If God had not given free will, sin would have increased. If God had not given the feeling that I am responsible for my own actions, there would be much more sin.

"But those who have realized God know that free will is only an appearance. In fact, He is the operator and I am an instrument. He is the driver and I am the car."

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna, the guru – he cries and prays for devotees

It is four o'clock. Rakhal and a few other devotees are listening to Mani's singing.

He sings:

> Lying prostrate a hundred times outside the room, he then enters slowly.

Rakhal goes into an ecstatic mood when he hears the song.

After some time Sri Ramakrishna goes to the panchavati. Baburam,[1] Harish, and Rakhal are with him.

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1. Later Swami Premananda.

After a while Mani arrives.

Rakhal: "He has made us happy by singing such sweet songs today."

Sri Ramakrishna, passing into a divine mood, sings:

O friend! I am revived on hearing Krishna's name.

(*To Mani*) "Sing songs like this: 'All the friends sat together. O, Radha was quite well only a moment ago. Perhaps her ecstatic mood has suddenly disappeared.'"

Then he adds, "And what else? Just live with love for God and devotees."

Conversation between Radha and Yashoda – Sri Ramakrishna's relatives

"When Krishna went to Mathura, Yashoda came to Radha. Radha was absorbed in meditation. When it was over, she said to Yashoda, 'I am the Primal Power. You may ask me for a boon.' Yashoda said, 'What other boon can I ask? Let me be able to serve Him with body, mind, and speech. Let me be able to see God's devotees with these eyes, to meditate on Him with this mind, and to sing God's name and glories with my tongue.'

"But those who are highly developed spiritually can even do without the company of devotees. At times they don't have a liking for the company of devotees. The lime of whitewash won't stick to a mother of pearl surface. In other words, this is the state of a person who sees God both within and without."

Returning from the pine grove, Thakur says to Mani under the panchavati, "You have a feminine voice. Can you practice singing such songs as this: 'Friend, how far is that wood where my Shyama Sundara is …'?

(*To Mani, looking at Baburam*) "See, those who are my own have become strangers – Ramlal and other relatives seem no longer to be my near and dear ones. And those who were strangers have become my relatives. Just see how I say to Baburam, 'Go and answer the call of nature. Now go and wash your face.' The devotees have indeed become my own."

Mani: "True, sir."

Thakur practiced spiritual disciplines in the panchavati in 1857-58, before the state of madness for God – Consciousness as Power[1] and Consciousness as Self[2]

Sri Ramakrishna (*glancing at the panchavati*): "I used to sit in the panchavati [and practice spiritual disciplines]. In course of time I became mad for God. That, too, passed away. Kala (time) indeed is Brahman. She who sports with Kala is Kali. She is the Primal Power. She even moves the immovable."

Saying this, Thakur sings:

Wondering about Her mystery, my mind is overwhelmed at the thought of Her who removes the fear of death.

At Her feet lies Mahakala, Death Himself, and I wonder why She should be so black.

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1. Chitsakti.
2. Chidatma.

"Today is Saturday. Please visit Mother Kali's temple."

Approaching the bakul tree, Thakur says to Mani, "Chidatma and Chitshakti. Consciousness as Self is the male aspect of God[1] and Consciousness as Power the female aspect.[2] Sri Krishna is Consciousness as Self, and Radha Consciousness as Power. Each one of the devotees is an individual form of that Consciousness as Power.

"The devotees should think of themselves as companions or as servants. This is the important thing."

Thakur goes to the Kali temple when it is dusk. He is pleased to see Mani meditating on the Divine Mother there.

Thakur weeps before the Mother of the Universe for the devotees – blessing the devotees

The arati has been performed in all the temples. Thakur is seated on his wooden cot in his room, meditating on the Mother of the Universe. Only Mani is there, seated on the floor.

Thakur is in samadhi.

After some time, he returns to normal consciousness. He is now filled to the brim with divine feeling. He talks to the Divine Mother lovingly, like a baby insisting demands on its mother. He says in a piteous tone of voice, "Oh Mother, why have You not revealed Your form to me, Your world-bewitching form! I have entreated

1. Purusha.
2. Prakriti.

You so many times, but You don't listen to my entreaties! You only do as you want."

The tone of voice he uses would melt even a stone.

Thakur again talks to the Divine Mother.

"Mother, I want faith. Let that rascal reason disappear. You reason seven times, but it disappears at once. I want faith – faith in the words of the guru, the faith of a child! A mother says to her child, 'There is a ghost,' and the child fully believes that there is indeed a ghost. The mother says, 'There is a bugbear there,' and the child fully believes it. The mother says, 'He is your elder brother.' He believes more than a hundred percent that he is indeed his brother. I want faith!

"But Mother, why should the devotees be blamed? What else can they do? It is necessary to reason once before you accept anything. See how much I implored him the other day, yet nothing happened. And today, so suddenly –"

Thakur weeps and prays to the Divine Mother in a sorrowful tone, his voice choked with emotion.

How amazing! He is crying before the Divine Mother for the sake of devotees!

"Mother, please fulfill the desires of those who come to you. Don't make them renounce completely. Well, do what you like in the end.

"Mother, if you keep him [referring to M.] in the world, please reveal Yourself from time to time. Otherwise, how will he live? How will they be encouraged, Mother, if You don't reveal Yourself

every now and then? But after that, do what you like."

Sri Ramakrishna is still absorbed in an ecstatic mood when he suddenly says to Mani, "Look here, you have already reasoned enough. No more of it. Promise that you will not reason any more."

Mani folds his hands and says, "I will not."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have done enough reasoning. When you came in the beginning, I told you your spiritual ideal. I know everything about you."

Mani (*gratefully*): "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Hearing that you had children, I reprimanded you. Now go home and live with them. Show them that you are their very own. But know in your heart that you are not their own, nor are they yours."

Mani keeps silent. Thakur continues to speak.

Sri Ramakrishna: "And love your father. Since you have now learned to fly, will you be able to salute before him?"

Mani (*folding his hands*): "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What more can I say to you? You know all this. Understand it?"

Mani keeps silent.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you understand all this?"

Mani: "Sir, I understand only partially."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You understand well enough. Rakhal is staying here, and his father is pleased."

Mani folds his hands but does not say anything. Sri Ramakrishna adds, "What you are thinking will also happen."

With devotees in the joy of song – Divine Mother and earthly mother – why does God play as a human being?

Thakur has now returned to normal consciousness. Rakhal and Ramlal are in the room.

Thakur asks Ramlal to sing. Ramlal sings:

Who is this woman who lights up the battlefield?[1]

He sings another song:

Dancing, deep-dark like the darkest storm-cloud over the field of battle,

She looks like a freshly bloomed lotus, floating on a blood-red sea.

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Divine Mother and the earthly mother. She who pervades everything, becoming the entire universe, is the Divine Mother. She from whom you are born is the earthly mother. I used to merge into samadhi repeating, 'Mother, Mother.' It is as though I would pull the Mother of the Universe toward myself, the way a fishermen throws a net and drags it for some time. Then many big fish are caught in the net."

Gauri Pundit's words – Kali and Gauranga are one and the same

"Gauri said, 'One gains true spiritual knowledge when one realizes that Kali and Gauranga are one and the same.' That which is Brahman is indeed

1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section XX, Chapter II.

Shakti (Mother Kali). In human form She is Gauranga."

> Is Thakur suggesting that the Primal Power has come in the human form as Sri Ramakrishna?

At Thakur's behest, Ramlal sings of the divine sport of Sri Gauranga:

> In Keshab Bharati's hut what did I behold? The exquisite, bright form of Sri Gauranga, his eyes streaming with tears of love![1]

And again:

> The wave of Gaur's love has touched my body.[2]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "He who is the Absolute is also the phenomenal world. His divine sport is for the sake of devotees. A devotee can love Him only when he can be seen in human form. Then alone is he able to love Him as a brother or sister, father or mother, or son or daughter.

"For the love of the devotee, He comes down as a human being to enact His play."

1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section XII.
2. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section XVI, Chapter I.

Section X

With Rakhal, Latu, M., Mahima, and Others at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna injures his arm – while in samadhi he talks to the Mother of the Universe

Sri Ramakrishna is living in the same room at the Dakshineswar temple. It is three o'clock on Saturday, 2 February 1884, 20th of Magha, 1290 B.Y., the sixth day of the bright fortnight.

One day when Thakur was going alone to the pine grove, he fell near the railing in an ecstatic mood. A bone of his left arm was dislocated and caused him severe pain. M. has now brought him a splint, a pad, and bandages from the devotees in Calcutta.

Rakhal, Mahimacharan, Hazra, and some other devotees are in the room. M. comes in and prostrates before Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Hello. Have you been ill? Are you all right now?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): "Tell me, brother, why this happened when 'I am the instrument and you the Operator?'"

Thakur is seated on his wooden cot, listening to Mahimacharan talk about his visits to places of

pilgrimage. The visits took place twelve years before.

Mahimacharan: "I saw a brahmachari in the Sikrol garden in Benares. He said he had been there for twenty years. But he didn't know whose garden it was. He asked me, 'Sir, do you work in an office?' I replied, 'No.' Then he asked, 'Then are you a wandering holy man?'

"I saw a sadhu on the bank of the Narmada. He was chanting the Gayatri mentally. The hair on his body stood on end. Then he chanted the Gayatri and Om out loud in such a way that it thrilled everyone sitting near and made their hair stand on end."

Thakur has the nature of a child. Feeling hungry, he asks M., "Well, what have you brought?" He looks at Rakhal and goes into samadhi.

When the samadhi is over and he returns to normal consciousness, he says, "I shall eat jilibi. I want some water to drink."

Weeping like a child, he says to the Mother of the Universe, "Brahmamayi, why have you done this to me? My arm hurts badly!" (*To Rakhal, Mahima, Hazra, and the others*) "Will my hand be cured?"

The devotees console him as they would a child, "Why not? It will surely get well."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Rakhal*): "It's not your fault, even though you're here to look after me. Even if you had gone with me, you wouldn't have gone as far as the railing."

Sri Ramakrishna in the mood of child – 'a million salutations to the knowledge of Brahman'.

Thakur again becomes absorbed in a deep spiritual mood. He says, "Om, Om, Om, Mother! What am I saying? Please Mother, don't make me unconscious by giving me the knowledge of Brahman. I am only a child – easily afraid. I want Mother! A thousand farewells to the knowledge of Brahman! Give it to those who want it. O, All-Blissful Mother! The All-Blissful Mother!"[1]

Thakur weeps as he says loudly, "The All-Blissful Mother, the All-Blissful Mother!" Then he says:

> This is the grief that weighs on my heart: though You, my Mother, are here and I am wide awake, thieves of passion rob my house.[2]

Thakur then says to the Divine Mother, "What wrong have I done, Mother? Have I done anything wrong? It is You who do everything, Mother. I am an instrument, You are the Operator."

(*To Rakhal, smiling*) "Take care that you also don't fall. Don't be full of pride and hurt yourself."

Thakur again says to the Divine Mother: "Am I crying because of the hurt? No, it's just that:

> This is the grief that weighs on my heart: though You, my Mother, are here and I am wide awake, thieves of passion rob my house.

1. Anandamayi.
2. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section XX, Chapter V.

Chapter II

How to call upon God: yearn for Him

Sri Ramakrishna now laughs and talks like a child, just as a child sometimes laughs and plays even though seriously ill. He talks to Mahima and the other devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you have not realized Sat-chit-ananda, you have done nothing – nothing at all, my dear sir.

"There is nothing like discrimination and non-attachment.

"The love of worldly people for God is only momentary, transient like a drop of water falling on a hot plate. Seeing a flower, he may say, 'Ah, how wonderful is God's creation!'

"Yearning for God is essential. When a son bothers his parents for his inheritance, the parents consult one another and give him his share in advance. When you are earnest, God is sure to listen. Since He has created us, we certainly have a share in His house. He is our Father and Mother. We can force Him. 'Reveal Yourself to me or I will cut my throat with a knife!'"

Thakur is teaching the devotees how to call on the Divine Mother: "I used to pray to the Divine Mother this way, 'O, All-Blissful Mother, reveal Yourself to me if You are indeed there.'

"And at times I would say, 'Come, O Lord of the humble, Lord of the Universe,[1] I am not outside the

1. Jagannath.

universe. Lord, I am without knowledge, without spiritual discipline, without love and devotion. I know nothing. Be kind and reveal yourself to me.'"

Speaking in the most touching tone of voice, Thakur teaches the devotees how to call on God. When they hear these touching words, their hearts melt. Tears fall from Mahimacharan's eyes. Noticing this, Thakur adds:

> Cry out with yearning, O mind, and see how Mother Shyama can withhold Herself from you![1]

Chapter III

Devotees from Shivapur and the power of attorney – Dr. Madhu

Devotees from Shivapur have arrived. Having made great effort to come such a distance, Sri Ramakrishna cannot remain silent. He talks to them about very important things.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the Shivapur devotees*): "God alone is the reality, all else is ephemeral. Take the case of the owner of a garden. God and His splendour. People only see the garden. How many want to find out who the owner is?"

A devotee: "Sir, what is the way?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Discriminate between what is real and what is unreal. Reflect constantly on this: God alone is the reality, all else is ephemeral. Call on Him with yearning."

A devotee: "But, sir, where is the time?"

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1. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section I, Chapter V.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Those who have time should practice meditation and chanting of God's name. Those who cannot do so should bow down to God very lovingly and with respect, both morning and evening. God is the ruler within the heart, He understands what people of the world have to do. You have no time to call on Him. Therefore, you must give Him the power of attorney. If you do not realize Him, if you do not see Him, you have not achieved anything."

A devotee: "Sir, seeing you is the same as seeing God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Never say that again. The waves belong to the Ganges, the Ganges doesn't belong to the waves. Unless you rid yourself of the idea, 'I am a big man – I am so and so,' you cannot realize God. Level the hill of your 'I' by drenching it with the water of love for God."

Why family life? – when desire for enjoyment is over, one feels yearning for God and realizes Him

A devotee: "Why has He kept us in the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "To keep the creation going. That is His will. That is His maya. God has bewitched us with 'lust and greed.'"

A devotee: "Why has He bewitched us? Why does He will this?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "If He granted the bliss of God even once, no one would live a householder's life. And that would lead to the end of creation.

"Rice is stocked in big bags in a warehouse. So that rats don't find the rice, the grain dealer keeps

some puffed and sweetened rice in a husking pan. The rats like the sweetened rice and eat it through the night. They don't look for the bagged rice.

"But look, you can make fourteen times the volume of one seer of rice with puffed sweetened rice. How great is the bliss of God compared to the joy of 'lust and greed!' Contemplating His beauty, even the beauty of Rambha and Tilottama[1] appears like ashes from a fire."

A devotee: "Why don't we develop that yearning to realize God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A person doesn't feel yearning for God until the desire for enjoyment is over. Until the desire for 'lust and greed' is satisfied, a person doesn't remember the Mother of the Universe. A child busy playing doesn't look for his mother. When his play is over, he says, 'I want to go to my mother.' Once Hriday's son was playing with a pigeon. He was calling out to it, 'Come here, tee tee!' As soon as he had enough of playing, he began to cry. A stranger came by and said, 'Come, I'll take you to your mother.' The boy even climbed on the man's shoulders to be taken.

"Those who are born perfect[2] don't have to go through the householder's life. They are already free from the desire for enjoyments since their birth."

1. Two beautiful celestial dancing girls.
2. Nityasiddhas.

Dr. Madhu arrives – Madhusudana and the importance of God's name

It is five o'clock. Dr. Madhu has arrived. He is going to put Thakur's hand in a splint and bandage it. Thakur laughs like a child and says, "Here is the Madhusudana[1] of this world and also of the next."

Dr. Madhu (*smiling*): "I am burdened carrying the weight of my name."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Why? Is the name insignificant? There is no difference between God and his name. When Satyabhama was weighing the Lord against gold and jewels in a scale, it didn't balance. But when Rukmini put the tulsi leaf with the name of Krishna written on it, lo, it balanced!"

The doctor is going to tie the splint on Thakur's hand. A bed is made on the floor. Thakur, laughing, lies down on it. He chants, "Radha is in her last stage. Vrinde says, who knows what else is going to happen?"

The devotees sit around Sri Ramakrishna, who sings:

> All the gopi friends of Radha sat together on the lake shore.

Thakur laughs. So do the devotees. When the splint has been tied, Thakur says: "I don't have much faith in doctors from Calcutta. Sambhu was delirious, but the doctor (Dr. Sarbadhikari) said, 'This is nothing – it is only the medicine that makes you feel groggy.' Just after that, Sambhu died."[2]

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1. A name of Krishna.
2. Shambu Mallick died in 1877.

Chapter IV

Instruction to Mahimacharan

Evening arati has been performed in the temples. Soon after, Adhar arrives from Calcutta and prostrates before Thakur. Mahimacharan, Rakhal, and M. are in the room. Hazra comes in and out of the room.

Adhar: "How are you?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "Look how I have hurt my arm. (*Smiling*) How could I feel?"

Adhar sits on the floor with the devotees. Thakur says to him, "Please stroke my hand."

Adhar, seated toward the north of the smaller cot, strokes Sri Ramakrishna's feet instead. Thakur talks to Mahimacharan.

The important thing is spontaneous love for God[1] – know your own real Self

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): "Love for God that wells up spontaneously from the depths of the soul – it would be very good if you could practice that.

"I want none of these – liberation, name and fame, wealth, or recovery from disease. I only want You. This is selfless love. Many people go to visit a rich gentleman and ask for things. If there is one who doesn't want anything from him but has only come out of love, that person gets any amount of love from him.

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1. Ahetuki bhakti.

"Prahlada had unselfish love. His love for God was pure and motiveless."

Mahimacharan says nothing. Thakur adds, "Well, I'm going to tell you something that you will agree with. Just listen. According to Vedanta, one has to know one's own real Self. But this isn't possible without first renouncing 'I-ness.' This 'I' is like a stick which appears to split water into two parts: I am one and You are another.

"On attaining samadhi, 'I-ness' disappears and one has the inner consciousness[1] of Brahman.

> Perhaps some of the devotees are asking themselves, Has Thakur attained the knowledge of Brahman? If he has attained it, why is he using the word *I*?

Thakur continues, "You must renounce the 'I' which says, 'I am Mahima Chakravarty, a learned man.' However, there is no harm in the 'I of knowledge.' Shankaracharya retained the 'I of knowledge' to teach mankind.

"Unless you are very cautious about 'lust,' you cannot attain the knowledge of Brahman. For this reason, it is difficult for one who leads a worldly life. However clever you may be, you will get a black stain on your body if you live in a room of lampblack. In the company of a young woman, even a man without desire develops a feeling of passion. "But there is no harm if a man of knowledge[2] cohabits with his wife occasionally. Discharge of semen is just like other eliminations – defecation,

1. Bodhe bodha.
2. Jnani.

urine, and so on. After answering the call of nature, a person forgets all about it.

"It is like eating half a sweetmeat![1] (*Mahima laughs*). It is not so harmful for a householder."

Difficult rules for sannyasin and Sri Ramakrishna

"But it is very wrong for a sannyasin. The sannyasin must not even look at a picture of a woman. For sannyasins, keeping the company of women is like swallowing spit already spat out.

"A sannyasin must not sit near women and talk with them, even if they are extremely devout. He should not talk with them even though he may have controlled his passions.

"A sannyasin must renounce both lust and gold. Just as he must not look at the picture of a woman, he must not touch gold – money. Having money near is bad in itself. With money comes keeping accounts, worry, pride of wealth, and anger at others. You are looking for the sun and, lo, it is covered by clouds!

"That's why when a rich Marwari wanted to deposit money with Hriday for our use, I said, 'No. Not even this. Clouds will arise wherever there is money.'

"Why such difficult rules of conduct for a sannyasin? They are there for the instruction of humanity as well as for his own good. Even if a sannyasin lives unattached, having controlled his

1. Sri Ramakrishna is referring to a sweetmeat made of cheese.

senses, he should renounce 'lust and greed' in order to teach mankind.

"People will muster the courage for renunciation only if they see the one hundred percent renunciation of a sannyasin. Then only will they endeavour to renounce 'lust and greed.'

"If a sannyasin doesn't impart this instruction of renunciation, who else will?"

Janaka and others entered worldly life after realizing God – the rishi and eating pork

"One should lead a householder's life only after attaining God. It is like keeping butter in water after it has been churned. Janaka led the life of a householder only after attaining the knowledge of Brahman.

"Janaka wielded two swords: one of spiritual knowledge and the other of action. A sannyasin renounces work. Thus he wields only one sword, that of knowledge. Householders who are men of knowledge, like Janaka, can eat both the fruit off a tree and fruit on the ground. They can serve holy men and entertain guests as well. I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I don't want to be a dry sadhu.'

"After attaining the knowledge of Brahman, one doesn't discriminate about food. The rishis who had attained the knowledge of Brahman and experienced the bliss of Brahman could eat any food, even pork."

Four stages of life [ashramas] – the essence of yoga and Sri Ramakrishna

(*To Mahima*) "Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of yoga: Karma Yoga and manoyoga – union with God through work and union through mind.

"There are four stages of life: brahmacharya (celibate student life), garhasthya (family life), vanaprastha (life of retirement, non-attachment, and contemplation of God) and sannyasa (complete renunciation). Work is necessary in the first three stages of life. Although a sannyasin carries a staff, a water pot, and a begging bowl and may perform daily Vedic duties,[1] his mind is not attached to them. He is not conscious of them; his mind is attached only to God. A few sannyasins attend to daily duties only to teach mankind. If a householder or a person of the other stages of life can perform work without expectation of any reward, he attains union with God through such work.

"In the case of a paramahamsa like Sukadeva and others, all work falls off – such actions as worship, repetition of the name, offering of water to the deities,[2] and daily evening prayer.[3] In this state there is union with God in the mind alone. Such a person performs work outwardly at times for the instruction of mankind. But his mind remains always in remembrance and contemplation of God."

1. Nityakarma.
2. Tarpana.
3. Sandhya.

Chapter V

Thakur hears Mahimacharan's reading of the scriptures and goes into samadhi

The conversation continues to about 8 p.m. Thakur asks Mahimacharan to chant some verses from the scriptures. Mahimacharan takes a book and chants the first verse of the Uttara Gita concerning the Supreme Brahman:

He, Brahman, is one – partless, stainless, and beyond the ether.

Without beginning or end, unknowable by mind or intelligence.

In due course, he chants the seventh verse from the third chapter.

Fire is the deity of brahmins;

the deity of sages is in the heart;

for people of average intelligence, the deity is the image;

and for the great yogi who perceives oneness, the deity is everywhere.

When Mahimacharan chants the phrase "for the great yogi who perceives oneness, the deity is everywhere," Thakur suddenly rises from his seat and goes into samadhi. His arm is still bound with splints and bandages. The devotees are wonder-struck as they watch this great yogi of similar vision.

He stands in this way for quite some time before returning to normal consciousness and resuming his seat. He asks Mahimacharan to chant the verses about love for God. Mahima chants from the Narada Pancharatra:

If God is worshipped with devotion, what is the need for austerities?

If He is not so worshipped, what again is the use of austerities?

If Hari is both inside and outside, what need is there of austerities?

And if He is not there, what is the use of austerities?

If you worship Hari, what need is there of austerities?

And if you do not, what is the use of austerities?

So, O brahmin, detach yourself, dear boy.

What is the need of austerities?

Go at once to Shankara, the ocean of Knowledge.

Attain the deep devotion for Hari, of which the Vaishnavas speak.

From Him you'll learn how to love the Lord. Such love has been spoken of by Vishnu's worshipers,

A love that never fails, a love that like a sword cuts asunder the fetters of this world.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah! Ah!"

Vessel and the universe – You are Knowledge and Bliss Absolute – not I, not I

Hearing these verses, Thakur is again about to go into ecstasy and controls it only with difficulty. Now a passage from the Yatipanchaka is chanted:

I am She, the Divine Mother, the embodiment of consciousness, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, who is the Self of the universe, in whom this appearance of the moving and unmoving is seen, being the play of Her mind.

Hearing, "I am She, the embodiment of consciousness," Thakur laughs, "What is in the vessel[1] is also in the universe."[2]

Now he recites the Six Stanzas on Nirvana from the Nirvana Ashtakama.

> Om, I am neither the mind, the intellect, the ego, nor the mind-stuff,
>
> Nor I am the ears, the tongue, the nostrils, the eyes.
>
> I am neither the sky nor earth nor fire nor air.
>
> Neither am I ether, sky, nor the earth; neither heat nor air.
>
> I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

Whenever Mahimacharan repeats, "I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!" Thakur says with a smile:

"Not I, not I – You, You, You are pure Knowledge and Bliss!"

Mahimacharan reads the description of the six spiritual centers from the Jivanmukti Gita. He says that he himself had witnessed the death of a yogi in the state of yoga at Benares. He describes the terrestrial and aerial mudras.[3] He also talks about sambhavi, when one wanders about aimlessly.

His earlier story – Thakur hears narration of the Rama Gita from sadhus

Mahima: "The Rama Gita has many beautiful things to say."

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1. Bhanda.
2. Brahmanda.
3. Bhuchari and khechari mudras, expressions of particular states of consciousness or yogic awareness.

Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "You are a confirmed Vedantist to talk so much of the Rama Gita. How many books like it the sadhus used to read here!"

Mahima reads the description of Om:

> It is like an unceasing flow of oil, like the long peal of a bell.

Then he reads about the characteristics of samadhi:

> The man established in samadhi sees the upper region filled with Atman, the nether region filled with Atman, the middle region filled with Atman. He sees all filled with Atman.

Adhar and Mahimacharan salute Sri Ramakrishna and leave.

Chapter VI

State of intoxication – guilelessness and telling the truth

The next day is Sunday, 3 February 1884, 21st day of Magha, 1290 B.Y., the seventh day of the bright fortnight of Magha. Thakur is seated on his cot after the midday meal. Worried when they heard of his injury, Ram, Surendra, and some other devotees have come from Calcutta. M. is seated near Sri Ramakrishna, who has his hand in a splint. He talks with the devotees.

His earlier story – state of divine inebriation, stay in Janbazar – guilelessness and telling the truth

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "The Divine Mother has kept me in such a state that I can't hide anything. It is the state of a child.

"Rakhal doesn't understand. Lest anybody should notice it and then talk ill of me, he covers my arm by wrapping a cloth around my body. He took Doctor Madhu aside and told him all about it. Then I shouted, 'Where are you, Madhusudana? Come and see, I have broken my arm!'

"I used to sleep in the same bedroom with Mathur Babu and his wife.[1] They loved me and looked after me as if as I were their child. I was in a state of divine inebriation at that time. Mathur Babu would say, 'Father, do you hear what we say?' I would say, 'Yes, I do.'

"Suspecting her husband of something, Mathur's wife said, 'If you go anywhere, Bhattacharya Mahashay (Sri Ramakrishna) will accompany you.' Once he went to a certain place and made me sit downstairs. Returning in half an hour, he said, 'Come on, Father, let's go to the carriage.' When his wife questioned me, I told her exactly what had happened. I said to her, 'Look, we went by carriage. He made me sit downstairs, and he went upstairs alone. Returning in half an hour, he said to me, "'Come on, father! Let's go.'" She figured it out as well as she could.

"A partner of Mathur's estate used to take cart-loads of cauliflower and fruits from the temple garden to his home. When the other partners asked me, I told them all this exactly."

1. Sejo Ginni.

Section XI

With Rakhal, M., Manilal, and Others at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Why is Thakur impatient? He instructs Mani Mallick

Thakur is resting after the midday meal while Mani Mallick sits on the floor of the room. Thakur's arm is still in a splint. M. enters, salutes him, and then sits on the floor near Mani Mallick. It is Sunday, 24 February 1884, 13th of Phalgun, 1290 B.Y the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "How did you come?"

M.: "Sir, I came by carriage to Alambazar and then walked from there."

Manilal: "Oh, you are sweating!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "This makes me think that all my experiences are not fantasies. If that were so, why would 'Englishmen'[1] take so much trouble to come here?"

The topic of conversation is now about Thakur's injured arm and how he is feeling.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sometimes I get impatient because of my arm. I show it to one person after another and ask if it will heal. Rakhal gets angry. He doesn't understand my condition. Sometimes I say to myself, let him leave me if he likes. But then I ask the Divine Mother, 'Where will he go, Mother?

1. Anglicized men.

Where will he go to be scorched and burnt in the fire of the world?'

"I had this childlike impatience before. I used to show my pulse to Mathur Babu and ask him, 'Brother! What am I suffering from?'

"Well, where is my faith in God if I did this? When I was going to Kamarpukur in a bullock cart, some men with long sticks came up. They looked like dacoits.[1] I began to chant the names of God. I chanted Rama, then I chanted Durga, then Om Tat Sat, hoping that one would be helpful.

(*To M.*) "Tell me, why am I so impatient?"

M.: "You're always in samadhi. You have kept a little of your mind on the body for the sake of the devotees. That is why you sometimes become impatient to save it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. I only have a little of my mind on the body, and that for the sake of the devotees and to enjoy the love of God."

Proposal to visit an exhibition – talk about Thakur's visit to the zoo

Manilal Mallick is talking about an exhibition.

Thakur's eyes are filled with tears to hear about a beautiful image of Yashoda with the baby Krishna in her arms. He is inspired by Yashoda's embodiment of maternal love and thus weeps.

Manilal: "You are not well, or you could visit the exhibition in the maidan of the fort."

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1. Highwaymen.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and others*): "I won't be able to see everything even if I go. I might lose consciousness just seeing one thing that is special. I wouldn't be able to see anything more than that. Once I was taken to the zoo. I went into samadhi when I saw a lion, the vehicle of the Mother Goddess. How could I see the other animals? I only saw the lion and then came back. That's why Jadu Mallick's mother first said that I should go to the exhibition and then, on second thought, said, 'No, No.'"

Mani Mallick has been a member of the Brahmo Samaj for many years. He is about sixty-five years old. Thakur is teaching him according to his nature.

His earlier life story – visit to Jai Narayan Pundit – Gauri Pundit

Sri Ramakrishna: "Jaynarayan Pundit was a very liberal person. I visited him once and liked his attitude. His sons were all wearing boots. But he said, 'I shall go to Kashi.' He finally did so. He lived in Kashi and he died there.[1]

"When you get old, it's good to leave the household and devote yourself to contemplating God. What do you think?"

Manilal: "Yes. I don't like the problems of the world."

1. Sri Ramakrishna had met the pundit for the first time in 1869. Pundit Jai Narayan (1804-1873) visited Kashi in 1869.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Gauri used to worship his wife with offerings of flowers. All women are different manifestations of the Divine Mother.

(*To Manilal*) "Please tell that story of yours."

Manilal (*laughing*): "Several people were going across the Ganges in a boat. One among them, a pundit, talked very highly of his learning. 'I have studied various scriptures – the Vedas, the Vedanta, and the six systems of philosophy.' He asked someone, 'Do you know the Vedanta?' The man replied, 'No, sir.' 'Do you know Samkhya and Patanjali?' He said, 'No, sir.' 'Have you no philosophy at all?' 'No,' again.

"The pundit was talking proudly of himself, and the other man was sitting there silent. Just then a terrible storm arose. The boat was about to sink. The man asked the pundit, 'Revered sir, do you know how to swim?' The pundit said, 'No.' The man replied, 'I don't know Samkhya and Patanjali, but I do know how to swim.'"

God alone is the substance, all else is unsubstantial – hitting the target

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What is the use of knowing many scriptures? All you need is to know how to cross the river of the world. God alone is the real substance, all else is unsubstantial.

"While Arjuna was aiming at the target, Drona asked him, 'What are you seeing? Do you see the kings?' Arjuna said, 'No.' 'Do you see me?' 'No.' 'Do you see the tree?' 'No.' 'Do you see the bird perched

on the tree?' 'No.' 'Then what do you see?' 'Only the eye of the bird.'

"He who only sees the eye of the bird can hit the target.

"He alone is clever who sees that God alone is the real substance and all else is unsubstantial. What is the need for any other information? Hanuman said, 'I don't know much about the date or the position of the planets. I only contemplate Rama.'

(*To M.*) "Buy a few fans to use here.

(*To Manilal*) "Please visit his (M.'s) father. Inspiration comes from seeing a devotee."

Chapter II

Advice to Manilal and others – God's manifestation as a human being

Sri Ramakrishna is seated on his bed. Manilal and other devotees are sitting on the floor, listening to Thakur's sweet words.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "A deep change is coming over me since I hurt my arm. Now I only like God's manifestation as a human being.

"The Absolute and the phenomenal.[1] The Absolute is the indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

1. Nitya and lila.

"The divine play, or the phenomenal, is play as God, play as deities, play as human beings, and play as the universe."

You are Sat-chit-ananda – instruction by Vaishnavcharan – Thakur watches the *Ramlila*

"Vaishnavcharan used to say, 'One attains the highest knowledge after having the faith that God sports as a human being.' I didn't listen to him then. Now I see that he was right. Vaishnavcharan liked pictures of men expressing tenderness and love.

(*To Manilal*) "It is God who manifests in the form of a human being. He Himself has become Mani Mallick. The Sikhs teach: You are Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

"Sometimes, seeing a glimpse of his real self, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, a man becomes speechless with wonder. He begins to swim in joy. It is just like suddenly coming across a near and dear relative. (*To M.*) Just as it happened to me the other day in the carriage when I saw Baburam – and you were also in the carriage.

"When Shiva sees his own real self, he dances around exclaiming, 'What am I! What am I!'

"The Adhyatma Ramayana also talks about this. Narada said, 'O Rama! All men are your forms, and all women are Sita's.'

"When I saw the actors in the *Ramlila*, I felt as if Narayana (the Lord) Himself was dwelling in their various forms. I felt that the real and the imitations were the same.

"Why do people worship young virgins?[1] All women are different forms of the Divine Mother, but She manifests Herself more in pure, unmarried girls."

Why is Thakur impatient with his injury? – his state as a child and a devotee

(*To M.*) "Why do I become impatient when I'm ill? The Mother has kept me in the state of a child. A child depends entirely on its mother."

Sri Ramakrishna is photographed in the Radhabazar by Surendra – A.D. 1881

"I was taken to the Radhabazar for a photograph. I was supposed to go to Rajendra Mitra's house that day and was told that Keshab Sen and others would be there. I had planned to talk about a few important things but forgot them all when I went to Radhabazar. I said, 'Mother, You please speak. What can I say?'"

His earlier story – Koar Singh – Ramlal's mother – worship of the unmarried girl

"I don't have the disposition of a man of knowledge. A man of knowledge thinks very highly of himself. He says, 'How can I be ill?'

"Koar Singh said, 'You are still concerned with your body.'

"This is my nature: my Divine Mother knows everything. She would talk in Rajendra Mitra's house. Only Her words are 'real words.' A thousand

1. Kumari puja.

pundits are struck dumb before the knowledge of Saraswati.[1]

"The Divine Mother has kept me in the state of a devotee, in the state of a vijnani. That is why I make jokes with Rakhal and others. If I were in the state of a jnani, I couldn't do this.

"I see in this state that the Divine Mother alone has become everything. I see Her everywhere.

"I saw in the Kali Temple that the Divine Mother had become everything – even the wicked, even the brother of the Bhagavata pundit.

"I was about to reprimand Ramlal's mother but couldn't do it. I saw her as a form of the Divine Mother. I see the Divine Mother in virgins. That is why I worship them.

"My wife strokes my feet. I salute her afterwards.

"You salute me by touching my feet. Who could touch my feet when Hriday was here? He wouldn't let anyone touch them.

"The Divine Mother has kept me in the state of seeing God in everything. That is why I return your salutations.

"You see, I can't exclude even a wicked person. A tulsi leaf may be dry or small, but it can still be used for the worship of God."

1. The Goddess of knowledge and learning.

Section XII

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, Ram, Nitya, Adhar, M., Mahima, and Other Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Why is Sri Ramakrishna restless in illness? – the state of a vijnani

After the midday meal Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with Rakhal, Ram, and some other devotees. He is not completely recovered; his arm is still in a splint. It is Sunday, 23 March 1884, the 11th day of Chaitra, 1290 B.Y.

Though Sri Ramakrishna himself is not well, he has created a mart of joy in his room. Groups of devotees visit him, delighted with his incessant talk about God. Sometimes there is devotional singing and other times they watch Thakur in wonder as he enjoys the bliss of Brahman in samadhi.

Narendra's marriage: Narendra, the leader

Ram: "Narendra is going to be engaged to R. Mitra's daughter. Mr. Mitra says he will give a lot of money."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "He may become a leader in society, or something like that. Wherever his path leads, he will prove his worth."

Thakur does not allow the topic of Narendra to continue.

(*To Ram*) "Well, why do I get so restless when I'm ill? First I ask one man how I can get well, then I ask another.

"Do you know what the fact is? One should either believe everyone or no one.

"God Himself has become the doctor or medic. That's why you have to put your faith in all of them. If you simply think of doctors as humans, you won't have faith in them."

His earlier story – illness of Sambhu Mallick and Haladhari

"Sambhu was seriously ill. Dr. Sarbadhikari examined him and said, 'It is due to the heat of the medicine.'

"Haladhari put out his hand so that the doctor could feel his pulse. The doctor said, 'Let me see your eyes. Oh! You have an enlarged spleen.' Haladhari said, 'I have nothing of the sort!' But Dr. Madhu's medicine is good."

Ram: "It's not the medicine that heals, but it does help nature to cure."

Sri Ramakrishna: "If medicine doesn't do any good, why does opium stop diarrhea?"

About Keshab Sen – printing Thakur's talks in the *Sulabh Samachar*

Ram is talking about Keshab's death.

Ram: "You were right, 'A gardener exposes the roots of a superior rose plant so that the roots can absorb the dew to make the plant grow rapidly.' The words of perfected man have borne their fruit."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do I know, my dear? I didn't calculate when I said it. It is you who say so."

Ram: "The Brahmos have gotten something printed about you (in the *Sulabh Samachar*)."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "Printed! What's this? Why do they print now? I just eat, drink, and make merry. I don't know anything else.

"I asked Keshab Sen, 'Why do you print anything about me?' He said, 'So people will visit you.'"

Instruction to mankind by the power of God – the wrestling match of Hanuman Singh

(*To Ram and others*) "A man hasn't the power to instruct mankind. One cannot subdue ignorance without the power of God.

"Two people wrestled – Hanuman Singh and a Punjabi Muslim. The Muslim was physically very strong. He ate a lot of meat and ghee on the day of the match and for fifteen days before it. Everyone thought he'd win. Hanuman Singh, on the other hand, clad in a dirty cloth, had eaten sparingly but had chanted the name of Mahavir.[2] On the day of the wrestling match, he kept a complete fast. Everyone thought he'd surely lose. But he won. The one who had been eating heavily for fifteen days lost.

"What is the use of publishing in papers? Whoever teaches mankind derives strength from

1. Brahmo magazine.
2. A name for Hanuman, the patron deity of wrestlers.

God. Besides, one cannot teach without having renounced."

His childhood – Sri Ramakrishna listens to the scriptures recited by sadhus at the home of the Lahas in Kamarpukur

"I am a most stupid person." (*All laugh.*)

A devotee: "Then how is it that so much of the Vedas and the Vedanta and other things come out of your mouth?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "During my childhood I could understand what the sadhus read at the Lahas' in Kamarpukur, but I would miss a little. If a pundit comes and speaks to me in Sanskrit, I can understand him. But I can't speak Sanskrit myself."

Is learning the goal of life? – the ignorant and God's grace

"The goal of life is to realize God. While aiming his arrow, Arjuna said, 'I can see nothing but the eye of the bird. I don't see the kings or the trees, not even the bird.'

"It is enough to realize God. It doesn't matter if you know Sanskrit.

"God grants His grace not only to pundits, but also to the ignorant if they long for Him. A father has equal love for all his children.

"Say a father has five sons. One or two call him 'baba' while some call him 'ba,' and some 'pa,' those who can't pronounce the whole word. Does the father love those more who call him 'baba' than the

ones who say 'pa?' The father knows that they are little children and can't pronounce *baba* correctly."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna's mind drawn to God's play as a human being

"My state of mind has been changing since I broke my arm. It is becoming drawn toward God's play as a human being. God Himself is playing as a human being.

"If God can be worshiped in a clay image, why can't He be worshiped as a man?

"The ship of a merchant sank near Ceylon.[2] He swam to the shore and was brought to Bibhishana on his orders. 'Ah! He looks like my Ramachandra! The same human form.' Saying this, Bibhishana was filled with exuberant joy. Dressing him with fine clothes and jewels, Bibhishana worshiped him, waving holy lights before him.

"When I heard this story for the first time I felt such great joy, I could not express it."

His earlier story – Vaishnavcharan – about Kartabhaja in Phului Shyambazar

"When I asked Vaishnavcharan, he said, 'The mind goes quickly to God when one accepts the beloved as one's chosen ideal.'[3] If someone asks, 'Whom do you love?' 'A certain person.' 'Then take him as your chosen ideal.' I said to those at Shyambazar near Kamarpukur, 'I have a different

1. See Max Muller's Hibbert Lectures [regarding the origin and growth of the conception of God historically and anthropologically].
2. Sri Lanka.
3. Ishta.

way. I look upon all women as the Divine Mother.' I have seen that those who talk big lead immoral lives. When the women asked me if they could attain liberation, I said, 'Yes, you will if you have single-minded devotion to one man, taking him as God.'"

Ram: "Perhaps Kedar Babu visited the Karta-bhaja sect."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He collects honey from many different flowers."

Haladhari's father – my father – ecstasy in Vrindavan at seeing cows return home

(*To Ram, Nityagopal and others*) "When you have one hundred percent faith that so-and-so is your chosen ideal, you realize God – you have His vision.

"People used to have great faith. What faith Haladhari's father had!

"He was going to his daughter's house. Seeing beautiful flowers and bel leaves, he gathered them for offering to the family deity, and he walked five or six miles[1] back to his home.

"There was a performance of the *Ramlila*.[2] Kaikeyi asked Rama to go into exile. Haladhari's father had gone to see the play. He stood up immediately and went up to the person who was playing Kaikeyi, exclaiming, 'You vile wretch!' He wanted to burn the actress's face with an oil lamp.

1. Two or three kosas.
2. A theatrical performance about the life of Rama.

"After taking his bath, he would stand in the water and chant, 'Raktavarṇaṁ caturmukham,'[1] then meditate, tears flowing down his cheeks.

"When my father walked on the road wearing wooden slippers, the shopkeepers would respectfully rise from their seats. They would say, 'See, there he comes.'

"When he would go to the Haldarpukur for his bath, other people would not have the courage to bathe at the same time. They would first find out if he had left after his bath.

"When he would repeat, 'Raghuvir, Raghuvir,' his chest would become very red.

"It was the same with me. When I saw the cows return from pasture in Vrindavan, my body would become red from ecstasy.

"People in those days had intense faith. I've heard people say that the Lord used to dance in the form of Kali when the devotees clapped!"

The hatha yogi of the panchavati

A yogi lives in the panchavati hut these days. Ramprasanna, the son of Krishnakishore of Ariadaha, and many others are devotees of this hatha yogi. But his opium and milk cost twenty-five rupees a month. Ramprasanna came to Thakur and said, "So many devotees come to you. Perhaps you could ask them to give something for the hatha yogi."

1. Invocation of the Deity as red-hued with four faces.

Thakur asks a number of devotees to go to the panchavati and see what kind of person the hatha yogi is.

Chapter II

Advice to Thakur Dada and Mahimacharan

Thakur Dada comes in with a couple of friends and salutes Thakur. He is about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old and lives in Baranagore. He is the son of a brahmin pundit and practises the recital of scriptural and mythological stories.[1] He is saddled with family responsibilities. He had disappeared for some days in a mood of dispassion. Even now he practices spiritual disciplines.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Have you come on foot? Where do you live?"

Thakur Dada: "Yes, sir. I live in Baranagore."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What has brought you here?"

Thakur Dada: "Sir, I have come to see you. I pray to God. Why then do I sometimes become restless? Three or four days pass joyfully. Why do I feel so restless later?"

The mechanic – faith in the mantra – a devotee of God – two signs of knowledge

Sri Ramakrishna: "I understand. There are teething problems. Things aren't fitted right yet. A mechanic adjusts the machine so the cogs of the wheels fit together smoothly. Even so, it sometimes gets stuck a little somewhere."

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1. Kathakhatta.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Have you been initiated with a mantra?"

Thakur Dada: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you have faith in the mantra?"

A friend of Thakur Dada says that he can sing well. Thakur asks him, "Please do sing a song." Thakur Dada sings:

I shall live as a yogi in a cave of Love's mountain.

I shall sit absorbed in yoga beside the spring of bliss.

I shall gather the fruit of truth and satisfy my hunger for knowledge.

I shall worship the lotus feet of God with the flowers of dispassion.

I shall not go to the well for water to quench the thirst of separation,

But shall draw the water of peace to fill the vessel of my heart.

Climbing to the heights of ecstasy, I shall drink the holy water that has bathed Your feet. I shall laugh and weep and dance and sing!

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah! What a beautiful song! 'The spring of bliss! The fruit of truth! I shall laugh and weep and dance and sing!'

"You sing so beautifully. What more do you need? You have to face happiness and sorrow in worldly life. It is natural to feel restless once in a while. When you live in a room full of soot, you can't avoid its stain."

Thakur Dada: "Please tell me what I should do now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Chant the name of Hari morning and evening, clapping your hands, 'Haribol, Haribol, Haribol.'

"And come again when my arm is healed a little."

Mahimacharan comes in and salutes Thakur.

(*To Mahima*) "Oh, he sang a very special and beautiful song! Do please sing it again."

Thakur Dada again sings: "I shall live as a yogi in a cave of Love's mountain."

When the song ends, Thakur says to Mahimacharan, "Please recite that verse – the one about devotion to Hari."

Mahimacharan recites a verse from the *Narada Pancharatra*:

> If God is worshipped with devotion, what is the need for austerities?
>
> If He is not so worshipped, what again is the use of austerities?
>
> If Hari is both inside and outside, what need is there of austerities?
>
> And if He is not there, what is the use of austerities?[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "Chant that one, too: 'From Him, learn how to love the Lord.' Mahimacharan chants:

> Desist, O my child, desist from further austerities.
>
> Hasten at once to Shiva, the ocean of divine knowledge.
>
> From Him, learn how to love with that pure love extolled by the lovers of God,

1. For the complete song refer to Section X, Chapter V.

A love that, like a sword, cuts asunder the fetters of the world.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Shankara will grant love and devotion to God."

Mahima: "The Eternal Shiva[1] is free from all bondage."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Shame, hatred, fear and suspicion – all these are bonds. What do you say?"

Mahima: "Yes, sir. Also secrecy and feeling embarrassed when praised."

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are two signs of spiritual knowledge. First, a firm understanding. One may have to face a thousand pains and sorrows, a number of catastrophes and obstacles, yet one remains steady, like the anvil in a blacksmith shop which receives so many hammer blows. Second is perseverance, inner strength: if lust and anger can hurt me, I shall immediately renounce them. When a tortoise pulls its limbs inside, it doesn't put them out again, even if you cut it into four pieces."

Deep dispassion, mild dispassion, and momentary dispassion

(*To Thakur Dada and others*) "There are two kinds of dispassion, deep and mild. Mild dispassion is slow, like a slow beat on the tabla. Deep dispassion, on the other hand, is like the sharp edge of a razor. It cuts the bondage of maya in two at once.

1. Sadashiva.

"A farmer was trying to cut a channel from the lake to his field for some days, but the water did not reach his field. He had no strength of mind. But another farmer resolves after three or four days that he will see to it that the water gets to his field that day. He postpones his bath, even eating. The whole day he labours hard, and in the evening water comes gurgling into his field. Oh, what joy! Then he returns home and says to his wife, 'Now let me have some oil. I'm going to have my bath.' Having taken his bath and eaten his dinner, he sleeps peacefully.

"A wife said to her husband, 'So-and-so has developed great dispassion, but you have attained nothing at all.' The man who had attained dispassion had a number of wives. He was giving them up one by one.

"The husband of the woman was just then going to take his bath. He had a small towel on his shoulder. Her said to his wife, 'Silly woman! That man won't be able to renounce the world. It can't be done little by little. But I can renounce. Just see. Here I go!'

"Without making any arrangements for his family, he left home as he was, with the towel on his shoulder. This is known as intense dispassion.

"There is another kind of dispassion. It's called monkey renunciation. A householder burned by the fire of worldly life puts on gerua and goes to Kashi. For many days there is no news about him. At last a letter is received, 'Please don't worry. I have found work here.'

"There are always burning problems in family life: your wife may be stubborn, you may be earning only twenty rupees a month, you have no money to celebrate your son's rice-eating ceremony,[1] you may have no means to send your boys to school, your home may be dilapidated, the roof may be leaking and you can't afford to get it repaired.

"That is why, when the boys visit me, I ask about their guardians or relatives.

(*To Mahima*) "Why do you need to give up family life? What troubles sadhus have to face! A wife said to her husband, 'Why do you want to renounce the family? You would have to beg alms from eight different houses. Instead, you get food from just one house. Isn't that better?'

"A sadhu may have to go out of his way six miles[2] to find a free meal. I've seen sadhus returning from Jagannath. They've had to leave the main road and take a detour to find an eating place.

"It's nice if you can fight from a fort. There are great disadvantages to standing in the open field and fighting from there. And dangers! Bullets may hit you.

"But for spiritual knowledge you must retire to a solitary place for few days. Then you can return to worldly life. Janaka lived a worldly life after attaining knowledge. You can live anywhere after attaining knowledge. Then nothing matters."

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1. Annaprasana.
2. Three kosas.

Mahimacharan: "Sir, why is man bewitched by things of the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Because he lives among them without having realized God. You don't get bewitched after realizing Him. A moth doesn't like darkness any more once it has seen light."

Unbroken continence, restricted continence[1] and God-realization – difficult rules for the sannyasin

"One has to observe strict continence to attain God.

"Sukadeva and people like him were men of absolute and unbroken continence.[2] They never discharged semen.

"There are others who have discharged semen earlier but now conserve it.[3] A person conserving semen for twelve years builds up a special power. He develops a new nerve of mental power.[4] When this nerve develops, one remembers everything, can know everything.

"The discharge of semen dissipates a person's strength. But there is no harm in nocturnal emission. That semen is from food. After discharge, a man retains enough to succeed. But he must not have intercourse with a woman.

"What remains after nocturnal discharge is very refined. The Lahas stored pots of molasses[5] with holes in the bottom. After a year it was found that

1. Udharva reta and dhairya reta
2. Udharva reta.
3. Dhairya reta.
4. Medha nadi.
5. Gur.

the molasses had turned into crystals, like sugar candy. Whatever liquid there was had come out through the holes.

"A sannyasin must completely renounce woman. However, there is no harm in your already having been involved.

"A sannyasin mustn't even see the picture of a woman. An ordinary person can't do this. Do re me fa so la ti. One can't stay long on ti.

"It is very harmful for a sannyasin to discharge semen. He has to be very careful not to even look at a woman. Even if she is a devotee, he must leave that place. Even to see the picture of a woman might cause the discharge of semen in a dream, if not in his waking hours.

"Even if a sannyasin has mastered his senses, he should not talk with a woman, as an example to mankind. Even if she is a devotee, he must not talk with her very long.

"A sannyasin is like one observing a waterless fast on the eleventh day of the lunar month.[1] There are two other kinds of fasts on the eleventh day: One, when one may eat fruits; and the other, when one eats fried luchi. (*All laugh.*) With the fried luchi, maybe you also have two chapattis soaked in milk. (*All laugh.*)

(*Smiling*) "You can't keep an absolutely waterless fast of the eleventh day of lunar month."

1. Nirjala ekadeshi.

His earlier life – Krishnakishore's ekadashi – Rajendra Mitra

"I saw Krishnakishore eating luchis and vegetable curry on an ekadashi day. I said to Hriday, 'Hridu, I'd like to observe Krishnakishore's ekadashi!' (*All laugh*.) I did it for a day. I ate till my stomach was full. The next day I couldn't eat a thing." (*All laugh*.)

The devotees who went to see the hatha yogi have returned. Sri Ramakrishna says to them, "Well, how did you find him? You measured him with your own yardstick, didn't you?"

Thakur noticed that hardly any of the devotees was willing to offer a rupee to the hatha yogi.

Sri Ramakrishna: "One doesn't like a sadhu he has to give money to.

"Rajendra Mitra earns eight hundred rupees a month. He had been to the kumbhamela in Prayag. I asked him, 'What kind of sadhus did you see at the mela?' Rajendra replied, 'I didn't come across one real sadhu. I noticed one, but even he accepted money.'

"I say to myself that if sadhus are not given any money how will they eat? You don't have to make any offering here; that's why people come here. I say to myself, 'Oh, how they love their money! So let them keep it.'"

Thakur rests for a while. One of the devotees is sitting on the north end of the smaller cot, gently stroking his feet. Thakur whispers to him, "He who is formless also has form. You must also accept God's forms. When an aspirant meditates on the

form of Kali, he has the vision of Kali. But later he finds that the form has merged into the Indivisible. He who is indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute is also Kali."

Chapter III

Mahima's scholarship – Mani Sen, Adhar, and the meeting

Thakur is on the western circular verandah talking about the hatha yogi with Mahima and others. Ramprasanna is the son of Krishnakishore, the devotee. That is why Thakur is fond of him.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ramprasanna just goes around doing nothing, like a vagabond. The other day he came here and sat down but didn't say a word. He just pressed his nostrils doing pranayama. He was given some refreshments, but he didn't eat them. Another day I called him and made him sit here. He sat with one leg over the other and a foot toward the Captain. I weep at his mother's sorrow.

(*To Mahima*) "He [meaning Ramprasanna] asked me to tell you about the hatha yogi. His expenses are six annas and two pice a day. But he wouldn't ask for it himself."

Mahima: "But who would listen if he himself asked?" (*Thakur and others laugh.*)

Going into his room, Thakur sits down. Mani Sen, whose home is in Panihati, has come with a couple of friends. He asks about Thakur's fractured arm. One of his companions is a doctor.

Thakur is under the care of Dr. Pratap Majumdar. Mani's doctor friend does not approve of his treatment. Thakur says to him, "But Pratap is not a fool. Why do you talk about him this way?"

Just then, Latu[1] exclaims that the medicine bottle has broken.

Hearing about the hatha yogi, Mani (Sen) says, "What is a hatha yogi? 'Hath' [hot] means that it is warm."

Thakur later talks to the devotees about Mani Sen's doctor, "I know him. I told Jadu Mallick that this doctor of his was absolutely useless. He is even less intelligent than the other doctor."

Sri Ramakrishna talks with M. privately

It is not yet evening. Seated on his cot, Thakur is talking with M., who sits facing west on the foot rug near the cot. In the meantime, Mahimacharan is on the semi-circular verandah, facing west and discussing the scriptures loudly with Mani Sen's doctor. Thakur hears this from his seat and says to M. with a little smile, "He is delivering himself. This is rajas. A rajasic person wants to show off his learning and lecture to others. But sattva makes a person introverted, wanting to hide himself. But Mahima is an excellent person. He shows so much enthusiasm and takes such delight in talking about God."

Adhar comes in, salutes Sri Ramakrishna, and sits near M.

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1. Later Swami Adbhutananda.

Adhar Sen, about thirty years old, is a deputy magistrate. His home is in Banetola of Sobhabazar in Calcutta. He has been coming to see Thakur almost daily for quite some time, in the evening after working hard in his office the whole day. However, he hasn't visited Thakur for a few days.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Hello! Why haven't you been here for such a long time?"

Adhar: "I got involved in so much work! I had to attend conferences and school meetings."

Sri Ramakrishna: "So you forgot everything because of school meetings."

Adhar (*humbly*): "Sir, it was all hidden away inside. How is your arm?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Just look, it is not yet healed. I'm taking Pratap's medicine."

After a while, Thakur suddenly says to Adhar, "Look, all this is impermanent – all these meetings, schools, and offices. God is the only reality, and all else is unreal. You must worship Him alone with your whole mind."

Adhar is silent.

"Everything else is transitory – the body now is and then is no more. You mustn't hesitate to call upon Him.[1]

"You don't have to renounce everything. Live in the world like a tortoise. A tortoise moves around, feeding itself in the water, but it keeps its eggs on the dry bank. Its whole mind is where its eggs are.

1. Adhar died just a few months later.

"Captain has developed a beautiful disposition. When he sits down for worship, he looks like a rishi. Besides, he performs the arati with lighted camphor and the hymns and holy text beautifully. When he rises after the worship, his eyes are swollen with emotion, as if ants have been biting them. And he devotes himself to studying sacred texts such as the Gita and the Bhagavata. Once I spoke a couple of English words and he was cross with me. He said, "English-educated people are irreverent."

After a while Adhar says very humbly, "You haven't visited our house for a long time now. It's as if the sitting room smells and there is darkness everywhere."

Hearing these words of the devotee, Thakur's affection rises like a wave in the sea. He stands up suddenly and, full of emotion, blesses Adhar and M., touching their foreheads and hearts. Full of affection, he says, "I look upon you as Narayana. You are indeed my own."

Mahimacharan comes into the room and sits down.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): "What you were saying about men of continence is correct. One cannot hold these spiritual teachings without conserving semen.

"Someone said to Chaitanya Deva, 'You give the devotees so much instruction. Why aren't they able to make much progress?' He replied, 'They squander it all by intercourse with their wives. That's why they're not able to hold on to spiritual

instruction.' If you fill a leaky pail with water, the water trickles out little by little."

Mahima and the other devotees remain silent. After a while Mahimacharan says, "Please pray to God for us, that we may develop that power."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Be careful even now. It is difficult to dam water in the rainy season,[1] and a lot of it has already flowed out. But you can stop it now by raising a dam."

1 Month of Ashada.

Section XIII

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple with Vijay, Kedar, Rakhal, Surendra, and Other Devotees on His Birthday

Chapter I

With Vijay and other devotees in the panchavati on his birthday

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the platform around the old banyan tree in the panchavati with Vijay, Kedar, Surendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal, and many other devotees. He is facing south. Some of the devotees are sitting on the platform; most of them are standing around below it. It is about one o'clock on Sunday, 25 May 1884; 13th of Jaishtha 1291 B.Y., the first day of the bright lunar fortnight.

Thakur's birthday falls on the second day of the bright fortnight in the month of Phalgun but has not yet been celebrated because of the injury to his arm. Now that he is much better, the devotees will celebrate it today. Sahchari, an elderly, well-known kirtan singer, will sing.

Not finding Thakur in his room, M. goes to the panchavati and finds the devotees smiling and enjoying themselves. He does not see Thakur sitting under the tree on the platform though he is standing in front of him. He asks, "Where is he?" Hearing this, everybody laughs loudly. Suddenly seeing Thakur, he awkwardly bows down to pay his respects. He finds Kedar Chatterji and Vijay

Goswami sitting on Thakur's left on the platform. Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to M.*): "See how I have united them?"

Thakur had brought a madhavi creeper from Vrindavan and planted it in the panchavati in 1868. Since then it has grown quite large. Young boys are climbing on it and swinging from it. Thakur looks at them happily and says, "They are like young monkeys. They don't give up even when they fall." Surendra is standing below the platform. Thakur asks him affectionately, "Why don't you come up here? You can dangle your feet from here."

Surendra climbs up and sits down. Seeing Bhavanath dressed in a shirt, Surendra says, "Tell me, are you going to a foreign land?"

Thakur laughs and says, "Our 'foreign land' is God." He talks to the devotees about various things.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sometimes I used to throw away my dhoti and roam around naked. One day Sambhu said to me, 'I see why you go around naked. It's comfortable. I tried it once myself.'"

Surendra: "When I return from the office and take off my shirt and the long coat I say, 'Divine Mother, how many bonds you have tied me with!'"

Surendra's office – worldly life, the eight bonds, and the three gunas

Sri Ramakrishna: "Eight bonds bind man: shame, hatred, fear, pride of caste, suspicion, and secretiveness are all bonds.[1]

1. The Tantric scriptures list eight bonds or fetters: shame (lajja), hatred or contempt (ghrana), fear (bhaya), pride of caste, rank or

Thakur sings:

This is the grief that weighs on my heart: though You, my Mother, are here and I am wide awake, thieves of passion rob my house.[1]

Then he sings:

In the world's bustling marketplace, O Shyama, You fly kites that soar on the wind of hope, held fast by maya's string.[2]

"'Maya's string' means wife and son. By rubbing the string with the paste of sensuousness, the string has become hard. Sensuousness means 'lust and greed.'

There follows another song:

One comes to this world to play dice. I came with great hopes.

But hope is in itself only a broken state.

First I got the piece marked five, and age after age the twelve, the eighteen, and the sixteen.

Divine Mother, last of all I got the unripe twelve piece, and I got ensnared by the five and six-mark pieces.

Six and two equal eight, six and four make ten. O Divine Mother, I have no control over these.

I won neither honour nor fame in this game, which I have been playing all through the night until dawn.

"The piece marked 'five,' that is the five elements. To get ensnared in the 'fives' and 'sixes' means to fall under the control of the five elements

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race (jati), hesitation or suspicion (shanka), secretiveness (jugupsa), pride of family, ancestry, or lineage (kula), and pride of good conduct, character or piety (shila).

1. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section II, Chapter V.
2. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section II, Chapter V.

and the six passions. To play tricks with the six piece means not to fall under the control of the six enemies. To deceive the 'three' piece means to be beyond the three gunas.

"Sattva, rajas, and tamas, the three qualities of nature, have brought mankind under their control. They are like three brothers: if there is sattva, it can call on rajas; and if there is rajas, it can call on tamas. All three gunas are thieves. Tamas destroys, while rajas binds. Sattva, though it frees from the bonds, cannot take one to God."

Vijay (*smiling*): "Sattva is also a thief, isn't it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It can't take one to God, but it does show the way to Him."

Bhavanath: "Oh, what wonderful words!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, it is a very lofty thought."

The devotees are very happy hearing these words.

Chapter II

Thakur advises Vijay, Kedar, and others about 'lust and greed'

Sri Ramakrishna: "'Lust and greed' are the cause of bondage. 'Lust and greed' mean worldliness. In fact it is 'lust and greed' that keep one from seeing God."

Saying this, Thakur covers his face with a hand towel and says, "Can you see me now? This is a veil.

When the veil of 'lust and greed' is removed, one attains consciousness-bliss.[1]

"Just see. Whoever has given up the joy of a wife has renounced the joy of the world. God is very near to this person."

Some of the devotees are standing, others are sitting, as they silently listen to these words.

(*To Kedar, Vijay, and others*) "He who has given up the pleasure of women has given up the pleasures of the world. This 'lust and greed' is truly the veil. You show off such big moustaches, and you are still immersed in it. Tell me truly. Search your mind and see if it isn't so."

Vijay: "Sir, it is true."

Kedar remains silent. Thakur continues.

"I see everybody under the control of women. I went to Captain's house. After visiting him, I was to go to Ram's house. So I said to Captain, 'Please give me the carriage fare.' Captain asked his wife. She is like him. She just said, 'What's the matter, what's the matter?' At last Captain said, 'They (Ram and others) will pay for it.' And he has the Gita, the Bhagavata and the Vedanta within him! (*All laugh.*)

"A man puts all his money in the hands of his wife to manage and then says, 'I have such a simple nature that I can't keep two rupees with me.'

"A manager has a number of positions open in his office, but he doesn't appoint a candidate.

1. Chidananda.

Someone said to the applicant, 'Contact Golapi and you will get a job. Golapi is the manager's mistress.'"

His earlier story – visit to the fort – women and the 'sloping path'

"Men don't understand how far down they have gone.

"When I went to the fort in a carriage, I thought we'd come by an ordinary path. Later I found out we'd come down four storeys. It was a sloping path. A person possessed by a ghost doesn't know that he is possessed. He thinks he's quite all right."

Vijay (*smiling*): "If you bring an exorcist, he can get rid of the ghost."

Sri Ramakrishna does not respond to this. He only says, "It is the Lord's will."

He continues to talk about women.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Whoever I ask says that his wife is good. No man has a bad wife. (*All laugh*.)

"Those who live amidst 'lust and greed' aren't able to understand because of their inebriation. Chess players often don't know if a move is right until the game has continued for some time. But onlookers from a distance can see and understand the game better.

"Woman is the embodiment of maya. In his hymn in praise of Rama, Narada said, 'O Rama, all men that are, are parts of you; and all women are parts of Sita, the embodiment of maya. I ask for no other boon: only grant that I may have pure love for

Your lotus feet and that I may not be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya.'"

Advice to Girindra, Nagendra, and others

Surendra's younger brother, Girindra, and his nephew, Nagendra, and others have arrived. Girindra works in an office; Nagendra is studying law.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girindra*): "I say to you not to get attached to worldly life. You see, Rakhal understands what is knowledge and what is ignorance. He can discriminate between the eternal and the transitory. Now I say to him, 'Go home. You can come here off and on and stay a day or two.'

"Live amicably with one another. Only then will you feel good and be happy. A religious theatrical performance[1] is good and brings joy to the audience when the musicians sing with one voice.

"Keeping most of your mind in God, attend to worldly work with the rest of it.

"A sadhu keeps seventy-five percent of his mind in God and twenty-five percent in worldly work. A sadhu is very alert about words of God. If you step on the tail of a snake, it reacts furiously. It feels more hurt in the tail."

Sahchari sings in the panchavati – suddenly it is cloudy and stormy

Going to the jhautala, Thakur talks about the umbrella to Gopal[2] of Sinthi. Gopal says to M., "He

1. Yatra.
2. Later Swami Advaitananda.

has asked me to put the umbrella in his room." A kirtan has been arranged in the panchavati. When Thakur has come and taken his seat, Sahchari sings. Devotees are gathered, some sitting and others standing.

Yesterday was Saturday, the new moon day[1] of the month of Jaishtha.

Now and then clouds cover the sky. Suddenly a storm arises. Thakur returns to his room with the devotees. It is decided that the kirtan will continue there.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Gopal of Sinthi*): "Tell me, have you brought the umbrella?"

Gopal: "No, sir. I forgot it listening to the music."

The umbrella is lying in the panchavati. Gopal hurriedly goes out to get it.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I am not as absent-minded as that.

"Rakhal gave the date of an invitation as the eleventh, though the actual date was the thirteenth.

"And Gopal – he belongs to a herd of cows. (*All laugh*.)

"You know the story about the goldsmiths. One of them says Keshab, another says Gopal, the third says Hari, and another Hara. The meaning of Gopal is a 'herd of cows.' (*All laugh*.)

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1. Amavasya.

(*Referring to Gopal, Surendra says merrily*) "Where is Krishna?"

Chapter III

Thakur enjoys devotional singing with Vijay and other devotees – Sahchari sings of Gauranga's sannyasa

A woman kirtan singer sings of Gauranga's sannyasa, adding improvisations now and then:

A sannyasin will not look at a woman, for it is against the sannyasin's rule.

The sannyasi, come to remove the sorrows of all created beings, will not look at a woman.

Otherwise, the coming of Gauranga as God's incarnation would be in vain.

Listening to these words of Gauranga's renunciation, Thakur stands up and goes into samadhi. The devotees immediately put garlands around his neck. Bhavanath and Rakhal hold Thakur to keep him from falling. Thakur faces north. Vijay, Kedar, Ram, M., Manomohan, Latu, and other devotees stand in a circle around him.

Is Gauranga himself celebrating a festival of singing the Lord's name with devotees?

Sri Krishna is indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute; He is also the universe and all its creatures; He is finite as well as the all-pervading Spirit in the form of the universe[1]

Thakur is slowly coming out of samadhi. He now talks with Sat-chit-ananda Krishna. Now and then he says the word Krishna, but sometimes is unable

1. Virat.

to pronounce it. He says, "Krishna, Krishna, Krishna. Sat-chit-ananda." I can't see Your form these days. Now I see You both within and without. You are the living beings, the universe, the twenty-four cosmic principles. You are everything. You are the mind, the intellect, everything. The salutation hymn to the Guru says:

> Salutations to the Guru who makes it possible to realize Him who pervades this entire universe of the moving and the unmoving.[1]

"You are indivisible. Yet You pervade this entire universe of the moving and the unmoving. You are the container and also the contained. Krishna is life, Krishna is mind, Krishna is intellect, and Krishna is the Self. O Govinda, my life breath, my life."

Vijay is also in an ecstatic mood. Thakur says to him, "What, dear sir, have you too become unconscious?"

Vijay (*humbly*): "No, sir."

The singer continues, singing "The intense love for God that makes one blind!" As soon as she adds an improvised line, "O friend of my life, I keep You within my heart," Thakur again goes into samadhi. His injured arm rests on Bhavanath's shoulder.

When Sri Ramakrishna returns a little to normal consciousness, the singer adds another improvised line, "Why so much pain for one who has renounced everything for You?"

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1. Vishveshvara Tantra 2.

Thakur salutes her. He is seated while he listens to the music and occasionally goes into ecstasy. Now the musician stops singing, and Thakur speaks.

Forgetting the body and the world in ecstatic love – Thakur dances with the devotees and goes into samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay and other devotees*): "What is ecstatic love?[1] He who has developed intense love for God, like Chaitanya, forgets the world. He also forgets the body, which is so dear to all."

What happens when one has ecstatic love for God is explained by Thakur through a song:

> When will dawn that day when tears stream from my eyes as I repeat Lord Hari's name?
>
> When will dawn that day when worldly desires disappear from my heart?
>
> When will dawn that day when my body thrills and my hair stands on end?
>
> When will dawn that day?

Thakur now stands up and begins to dance. The devotees dance with him. Thakur pulls M. by the arm and makes him join the dancing group.

Sri Ramakrishna again goes into samadhi, while dancing. He then stands motionless like a picture. Kedar sings a hymn to break his samadhi:

> I bow to Brahman-Consciousness, the primal seed of the universe, abiding in the lotus of the heart,

1. Prema, intense love for God.

Who, without attributes, rests in undifferentiated repose, known only to Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh,

Who is attained only by yogis in the depth of meditation,

Who removes the fear of life and death and is the essence of Knowledge and Truth.

Gradually the samadhi breaks. Thakur sits down and chants: "Om Sat-chit-ananda! Govinda! Govinda! Govinda! Yogamaya! Scripture, devotee, and God in one."[1]

Thakur takes the dust of the place where the kirtan was sung and the devotees danced.

Chapter IV

The difficult vow of the sannyasin – sannyasins and instruction to mankind

Thakur is sitting on the semicircular verandah overlooking the Ganges. Vijay, Bhavanath, M., Kedar, and other devotees are with him. Now and then he repeats, "Ah, Krishna Chaitanya."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay and other devotees*): "The Lord's name has been chanted so much in this room; devotional songs have been sung with so much zest."

Bhavanath: "And there have been talks on renunciation."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah, what feeling!" He begins to sing:

Gaur is dispensing the nectar of love, pouring out pitcher after pitcher of divine ecstasy, love never ceasing.

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1. Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan.

The sweet Nitai summons them all; the beloved Gaur, too, bids them come.

Shantipur[1] is near drowning, flooded with love!

(*To Vijay and others*): "The song says this beautifully: the sannyasin must not look at a woman, for this is his rule. What a high ideal!"

Vijay: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Others learn from a sannyasin's example. That's why there is such a strict rule of conduct. A sannyasin should not even look at a picture of a woman. Such a strict rule!

"A black goat is sacrificed as an offering to the Divine Mother. But if it has the slightest blemish, it is rejected. The sannyasin, of course, must not have intercourse with women, but he must not even talk to them."

Vijay: "The younger Haridas spoke to a woman devotee. Chaitanya Deva gave him up."

His earlier story – Marwari's offering of money to Sri Ramakrishna and Mathur's offering him a piece of land

Sri Ramakrishna: "'Lust and greed' for a sannyasin is like the odour of a goat in the body of a beautiful woman. Her beauty is useless if she smells like that.

"A Marwari wanted to put some money in my name. Mathur also wanted to transfer some land to my name. I could accept neither.

"The rules of conduct for a sannyasin are very difficult indeed. When one puts on the guise of a

1. A town in Nadia District.

sannyasin or sadhu, one has to conduct himself exactly like a sadhu or a sannyasin. It's like in the theatre: the person who plays the king acts like a king, and the one who takes the role of his minister acts just like a minister.

"Once an impersonator was acting like a sannyasin who had renounced. Gentlemen offered him a small bag of money, but he said no and went away. He didn't even touch the money. But a little later, he came back, washed and dressed in his own clothes. Then he said, 'Let me have what you were offering me.' When he dressed like a sadhu, he couldn't touch money. Now he would accept even four annas.

"But in the state of a paramahamsa one becomes like a child. A five-year-old does not distinguish between a man and a woman. Even so, the paramahamsa has to be careful to set a good example."

Why was Keshab Sen not able to teach people?

Keshab Sen was associated with 'lust and greed.' It hindered his teaching of humanity. That is what Thakur is saying.

Sri Ramakrishna: "He (Keshab) – do you understand?"

Vijay: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He (Keshab Sen) tried to take care of both the worldly and the spiritual. So he couldn't achieve very much."

Why did Chaitanya Deva renounce the world?

Vijay: "Chaitanya Deva said to Nityananda, 'Nitai, if I hadn't renounced the world, people would not be helped. They would all want to live a worldly life. Nobody would try to give his whole mind to the lotus feet of God by renouncing 'lust and greed.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Chaitanya Deva renounced the world to set an example.

"A sadhu renounces 'lust and greed' for his own good. And then even when he has become detached, he must not allow a woman or gold near him, to set an example. A man of renunciation, the sannyasin, is a world teacher. Just seeing him gives spiritual awakening."

It is almost evening. The devotees are gradually leaving, after offering their salutations. Vijay says to Kedar, "This morning while I was meditating, I saw you. I wanted to touch your body but I found no body there."

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple with Surendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal, Latu, M., Adhar, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Character of Baburam, Rakhal, Latu, Niranjan, Narendra, and others

It is evening. Sri Ramakrishna is seated in his room with the devotees at the Dakshineswar temple, chanting the name of the Mother of the Universe and meditating on Her. Rakhal, Adhar, M., and couple of other devotees are there.

It is Friday, 20 June 1884, the twelfth day of the dark fortnight of Jaishtha. The Car Festival will begin in five days.

After some time the arati begins in the various temples and Adhar goes to watch. For Mani's education, Thakur is talking happily with him about the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, does Baburam want to continue his studies? I said to him, 'Continue your studies to set an example.' After Sita was set free, Bibhishana refused to accept the throne. Rama said, 'You must become king for the benefit of the ignorant. Otherwise, they will say, "Bibhishana served Rama, but what did he gain?" They will be happy to see that you have gained the kingdom.'

"The other day I saw that Baburam, Bhavanath, and Harish have a feminine nature.

"I saw Baburam as a goddess, with a necklace around his neck and female companions with him. He has received something in a dream. His body is pure. He'll have to do only a little, and he will succeed.

"You know what's happening? I'm finding it difficult to take care of my body. It would be good if he would come and live here. The nature of these boys is changing. Noto (Latu) remains on a high plane of spiritual emotion. Gradually he's going to merge with God.

"Rakhal is developing such a nature that I myself have to serve him. He isn't of much service to me.

"Where are any other youngsters like Baburam and Niranjan?[1] I feel that if others come, they'll just get instruction and leave.

"But I don't force Baburam to come here; it could create problems at home. (*Smiling*) When I say, 'Why don't you come,' he has a nice reply, 'Why don't you make me come?' When he sees Rakhal, he weeps, saying he is so happy here.

"Rakhal lives here now like a son of the house. I know he won't be attached to the world now. He says, 'All those things appear so tasteless to me.' His wife came here. She's fourteen years old. From here she went to Konnagar. They asked him to go

1. Later Swami Niranjanananda.

too, but he didn't. He said, 'I don't enjoy such fun and frolic.'

"How does Niranjan appear to you?"

M.: "He is handsome."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, not just his face. He's also simple and guileless. One can easily realize God if he is guileless. Spiritual instructions work faster in a guileless heart. It is like a well-tilled field without stones or pebbles. The moment a seed falls on the ground, it germinates. And it quickly bears fruit.

"Niranjan won't marry. Don't you think it is 'lust and greed' that bind a person?"

M.: "Sir, they do."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What use is it to give up tobacco and betel leaf? Giving up 'lust and greed' is the real renunciation.

"I saw in a vision that, though he worked in an office, he would not be touched by it. He works for his mother's sake. There's no harm in that.

"A clerk is jailed. He is bound, chained, and later set free. Will he dance with gusto after being released? No, he again takes to clerkship. You don't wish to have a paid job, but you have to provide for your family. If you didn't, what would happen to them?"

Mani: "I can leave if someone takes responsibility for them."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, that's true. But for now do both this and that, the worldly and also the spiritual."

Mani: "It takes great luck to be able to renounce everything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That is certainly true. But it depends on inborn tendencies.[1] A little work still remains in your case. When you have completed that, you will feel peace. You will be released. A patient is not easily discharged once he has entered a hospital – only when he is cured.

"Two classes of devotees come here. One class says, 'O Lord, please save me!' The other class, who belong to the inner circle, don't say this. They will succeed by only knowing two things, 'One, who I am,[2] and then who they are – that is, what their relationship with me is.'

"You belong to the latter class. Otherwise, how could you do so much –"

Narendra, Rakhal, and Niranjan have masculine natures[3] – Baburam and Bhavanath have feminine natures[4]

"Bhavanath and Baburam have feminine natures. Harish wears a woman's cloth when he goes to bed. Baburam says, 'I like that attitude.' That is why they've met each other. Bhavanath also has that attitude. On the other hand, Narendra, Rakhal, and Niranjan have masculine natures.

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1. Samskaras.
2. Referring to himself.
3. Purusha bhava.
4. Prakriti bhava.

Significance of the broken arm – Sri Ramakrishna and occult powers

"Well, what does breaking my arm mean? Once before I broke a tooth in a state of ecstasy. This time it was my arm."

Seeing that Mani is silent, Thakur himself answers.

"My arm broke to rid me completely of my I-ness. I can no longer find 'I' within me. Looking for I, I find only Him. Until one is completely rid of I-ness, it is not possible to attain Him.

"Look at the chatak bird. It lives on land, but see how high it flies!

"Captain says I haven't gained occult powers because I eat fish.

"Sometimes I tremble at the thought that I might attain such powers. If I had them, this place would have turned into a hospital. People would be coming here begging, 'Please cure us.' Are occult powers good?"

M.: "No, sir. You yourself have said that if one possesses even one of the eight occult powers, it is impossible to realize God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You are right. Only people of low intelligence want occult powers.

"If you ask a favour of a rich man, he no longer respects you. He doesn't allow you to ride in the same carriage with him. And even if he does, he doesn't let you sit near him. So the best is selfless

love for God[1] that rises unbidden out of the depths of the soul.[2]"

God without form is true, and so is God with form – the home of a devotee is Thakur's meeting place

"Well, what do you say, are God without form and God with form both true? One can't fix the mind on the formless God for long. So God assumes form for the devotee.

"Captain said something beautiful, 'A bird flies very high. But when it gets tired, it comes to the branch of a tree to rest. God with form after God without form.'

"I'll have to visit your home once. I saw in a vision that Adhar's house, Surendra's house, and Balaram's house are all meeting places for the devotees.

"But I'm neither happy nor sad if they don't come here."

Merriment with devotees is the magic of magician – Chandi – grace of God

M.: "Sir, why should that not happen? Whoever feels happiness also feels sorrow. You are beyond both happiness and sorrow."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. And I see it all as a magician and his magic. Only the magician is real; all his magic is ephemeral, like a dream.

"I realized this when I listened to a recitation of the Chandi. First I heard that the demons

1. Nishkama bhakti.
2. Ahetuki bhakti.

Shumbha and Nishumbha were born, and shortly after I heard that they were dead."

M.: "Sir, once I was going with Gangadhar to Kalna, by steamboat. The steamboat collided with another boat carrying twenty or twenty-five passengers. It sank, along with all the people. It all disappeared like the foam churned up by a steamer's waves.

"Tell me, does a person watching a play have compassion for others? Does he feel any responsibility? Without some feeling of doership, compassion is not possible, is it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He sees all these things at the same time: God, maya, living beings, and the universe.[1]

"He sees that maya (vidyamaya and avidyamaya), living beings, and the universe exist, and yet do not exist. As long as one is conscious of 'I,' he is conscious of others. But once it is cut through with the sword of spiritual knowledge, nothing at all exists. Then even the 'I' becomes the magic of the magician."

Mani contemplates this. Sri Ramakrishna says, "You know what it's like? It's like cutting through a flower's twenty-five layers of petals in one stroke."

"Feeling you are the doer! Rama! Rama![2] Sukadeva and Shankaracharya kept their ego of knowledge. It is not man's compassion; that belongs

1. Ishvara, maya, jiva, and jagat.
2. *Rama! Rama!* means "good heavens!"

to God. Compassion is the ego of knowledge – and He Himself has become the 'I of knowledge.'"

Very secret talk – Kali and Brahman – jurisdiction of Primal Power, Kalki avatar

"You may watch a thousand tricks of magic, yet everything is under God. You cannot escape. You are not independent. Indeed, you have to do what He makes you do. One attains the knowledge of Brahman only when His Primal Power dispenses it. Then you can witness the play of the magician. Otherwise not.

"As long as you have even a little consciousness of 'I,' you are under the jurisdiction of the Primal Power – and unable to set yourself free.

"The play of an incarnation of God is the play of the Primal Power. It is by Her power that the avatar incarnates as a human being. Thus alone does an incarnation work; it is all by the power of the Divine Mother.

"Whenever someone would ask for money from the former treasurer of the Kali Temple, he would say, 'Come back in two or three days. Let me ask the proprietor.'

"At the end of the Kaliyuga, God will incarnate Himself as Kalki[1] – a brahmin's son who knows nothing. But suddenly he will be given a horse and a sword."

1. The tenth and last incarnation of Vishnu, who is yet to come.

Keshab Sen's mother and sister – Bhuvanmohini, the wet-nurse

Adhar returns from the arati. Bhuvanmohini, a wet-nurse, sometimes comes to see Thakur. He cannot eat the food brought by everyone.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Adhar and others*): "Bhuvan came to see me. She brought twenty-five Bombay mangoes, sandesh, and rasagollas. She asked me if I would eat a mango. I said, 'My stomach is heavy today.' And truly today my stomach is uncomfortable after eating only a little kichuri and sandesh.

"Keshab Sen's mother and sister came here. So I danced a little. What else could I do? I had to entertain them. They have suffered great bereavement."

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Balaram's House on the Day of the Return Car Festival[1]

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna and the harmony of religions

Sri Ramakrishna is a picture of bliss, sitting with an assembly of devotees in Balaram's parlour, talking with them.

Today is the day of the Return Car Festival, Thursday, 3 July 1884, the tenth day of the bright fortnight of Ashada. Balaram maintains a shrine for Sri Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe, in his home, where he performs daily worship. He also has a small cart. That is why he has invited Thakur on the occasion of the Return Car Festival. The small cart will be drawn on the second storey quadrangular verandah of the outer house. On 25 June, last Wednesday, the day of the Car Festival, Sri Ramakrishna had been invited to the home of Ishan Mukherji[2] in Thanthania. That same evening, at the home of Bhudhar on College Street, he had met pundit Shashadhar for the first time. Three days ago, last Monday, Shashadhar had met him for a second time at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar.[3]

At Thakur's behest, Balaram has invited Shashadhar to his house today. The pundit explains Hindu

1. Ratha yatra.
2. See *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita,* Volume I, Section XI.
3. See *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita,* Volume III, Section IX.

religious ideas to people. Is this why Sri Ramakrishna is so eager to transmit power to him?

Thakur is talking with the devotees. Sitting close to him are Ram, M., Balaram, Manomohan, some young devotees, and Balaram's father. Balaram's father is an extremely devout Vaishnava who lives most of the time alone in Vrindavan in a garden house he built himself. There he supervises the worship of Krishna.[1] He spends all his time in Vrindavan in the service of the deity. Sometimes he studies devotional literature like *Chaitanya Charitamrita*. Other times he takes a devotional book and copies it. Yet at other times he sits and makes garlands of roses or invites Vaishnavas and serves them. Balaram has written his father a number of letters, inviting him to Calcutta to visit Thakur. The topic of conversation that Thakur is having with the devotees is that all religions have something sectarian in them, particularly the Vaishnavas – people of different sects fight among themselves and don't know how to harmonize.

Thakur talks about religious harmony with Balaram – the Bhaktamala, the Bhagavata – his earlier story – fanaticism of Vaishnavcharan and denouncing Shaktas before Mathur

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram's father and other devotees*): "One holy book of the Vaishnavas is the Bhaktamala. It is a beautiful book. It contains nothing but stories about devotees. But it is one-sided. It goes so far in one place as to make the Divine Mother[2] adopt a Vishnu mantra.

"Once I praised Vaishnavcharan a lot and asked Mathur Babu to invite him to his house. Mathur was very hospitable to him – silver plates for the

1. Shyamasundara.
2. Bhagavati.

refreshments. And what did Vaishnavcharan say to Mathur Babu but that without a Krishna mantra nothing would help! Now Mathur Babu is a devout worshiper of the Divine Mother of the Universe. His face reddened. I nudged Vaishnavcharan.

"I think you can find such things in the Srimad Bhagavata also. Such as that without a Krishna mantra it is as difficult to cross the ocean of the world as it is to try to cross a mighty ocean by holding a dog's tail. All sects talk highly of their own sects alone.

"Shaktas also try to disparage Vaishnavas when they say, 'Sri Krishna is the pilot of the river of the world; he alone can take one across.' To this Shaktas reply, 'Of course this is true. Will the supreme Mother, empress of the universe,[1] row one across Herself? She has engaged this Krishna to do the job.'" (*All laugh*.)

His earlier story – Thakur's visit to his birthplace in 1880[2] – arrogance of Vaishnava weavers of Phului Shyambazar – Thakur's advice on harmony

"What arrogance people show because of their beliefs! There are weavers in my village and in Shyambazar and other places, most of them Vaishnavas. They talk very big. They say, 'Which Vishnu do they worship? The Vishnu who preserves! We don't touch him.' Or 'Which Shiva?

1. Rajarajeshvari.
2. Sri Ramakrishna visited his birthplace for the last time in 1880. During this journey he, together with Hriday, paid a gracious visit to Phului Shyambazar and performed kirtan there with the devotees Natwar Goswami, Ishan Mallick, Saday Babaji, and others.

We accept Atmarama Shiva, the Atmarameshwar Shiva.' One of them says, 'Tell me which Hari you worship.' Thereupon another says, 'No, why should we? Let someone else answer.' They work at weaving and talk so big."

Dogmatism of Rati's mother, the attendant of Rani Katyayani

"Rati's mother – the attendant of Rani Katyayani, a member of Vaishnavcharan's group – was a bigoted Vaishnava. She used to visit here frequently. Her devotion for God was unusual. But as soon as she saw me eating Mother Kali's prasad she ran away.

"He alone is a real person who has harmonized. Most people are single-minded. But I see all these as one. Shaktas, Vaishnavas, and Vedantists worship the same one Reality. He who is formless also has forms. All are only His different forms.

> Brahman without attributes is my father, and God with form is my mother.
>
> Whom shall I blame? Whom shall I worship? The pans of the scale are of equal weight.

"The Tantra also speaks of the same Being as the Vedas. The Puranas also speak of the same Being – Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. The Absolute belongs to the same as the phenomenal belongs.

"The Veda says, 'Om Sat-chit-ananda Brahman.' The Tantra says, 'Om Sat-chit-ananda Shiva – Shiva only, only Shiva.' The Purana says, 'Om Sat-chit-ananda Krishna.' The Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras talk of the same Sat-chit-ananda. And

the Vaishnava scriptures also say that Krishna Himself has become Kali."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna in the state of a paramahamsa – like a child and like a madman

Thakur goes to the verandah for a while and then returns to his room. As he was going out, he was saluted by Vishwambar's daughter, who is six or seven years old. When he returns to his room, she talks to him. She is with some boys and girls her own age.

Vishwambar's daughter (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "I saluted you, but you didn't pay any attention."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What? I didn't notice."

The girl: "Then wait. Let me salute you again. Please stop. I want to salute your other foot too."

Thakur sits down laughing and, bending his head to the ground, salutes the girl. He asks her to sing a song, but she replies, "I swear, I do not know how to sing." When Thakur insists again, she says, "Should one be pressed after swearing?" Thakur enjoys the little girl's company and sings a song to her. First he sings a light song, and then he sings:

> Come, let me braid your hair. What will your husband say when he visits you?

The children and the devotees laugh when they hear the song.

Thakur's earlier story – visit to his birth place – character of the child Shivaram[1] – Durga Puja at Hriday's house in Sihore – Thakur worships his own phallus in a state of divine intoxication

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "The nature of a paramahamsa is just like that of a five year old child. He sees everything full of consciousness.

"Once when I was in the countryside (in Kamarpukur), Ramlal's brother, Shivaram, was four or five years old. He was chasing a grasshopper on the bank of a pond. The leaves were moving. Lest they rustle, he said to them, 'Hush! I want to catch a grasshopper.' One day during a windstorm with torrential rain and flashes of lighting, he would try to open the door and go out. When I scolded him he didn't go out, but he kept peeping out at the flashes of lighting and saying, 'Uncle, they're striking flints again!'

"A paramahamsa is like a child. He doesn't see the difference between a relative and a stranger. He doesn't have ties of worldly relationships. One day he[2] asked me, 'Are you my father's younger brother,[3] or the husband of my father's sister?'[4]

"Like a child, a paramahamsa isn't aware of his whereabouts. He sees everything as Brahman. He doesn't know where he is going or on what path he is proceeding. Ramlal's brother (Shivaram) went to

1. Ramakrishna's nephew, Ramlal's younger brother. He was born on 30 March 1866, 18th Chaitra, 1272 (B.Y.), the full moon day of Holi. Thakur visited his birthplace when he was three or four years old, in 1869-70.
2. Referring to Shivaram, Ramlal's younger brother.
3. Chacha.
4. Phupha.

Hriday's house to see the Durga Puja. From Hriday's house he wandered away all by himself. Seeing a four-year old child, a passer-by asked him, 'Where have you come from?' He couldn't say. He only said, 'Hut.' That is to say, from a house where the worship of the image was being performed. When he was questioned further, 'From which home did you come?' he could only say, 'Elder brother.'

"And then sometimes a paramahamsa gets into a state of divine madness. When I was in that state, I would worship my own phallus as the Shiva lingam. It was worship of the living lingam. I would fasten a pearl around it! I can't do that now."

Sri Ramakrishna meets a madman of perfect knowledge after the dedication of Dakshineswar temple in 1855

"A little while after the dedication of the Dakshineswar Temple a mad fellow came. He was a man of perfect knowledge.[1] His shoes were torn and he was holding a potted mango sapling. After a dip in the Ganges, he performed no worship or devotions but ate whatever he had tied in the corner of his cloth. Next he went to the Kali Temple and began to chant holy verses of praise. The temple reverberated with them. Haladhari was in the shrine at the time. The madman wasn't given food to eat at the guest-house, but it didn't upset him. He gathered up the discarded leaf plates and ate the remnants of food on them. This was where the dogs came to eat. He pushed away the dogs and

1. Purna jnani.

helped himself to the food. The dogs didn't seem to mind. Haladhari followed him and asked who he was and if he was a man of perfect knowledge. His reply was, 'Yes, I am a perfect jnani. Now keep quiet!'

"When I heard all this from Haladhari my heart trembled in my chest. I held tightly to Hriday. I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother! Will I also be put in this state?' We went to see him. He spoke words of wisdom, but when others came, he acted crazy. When he left, Haladhari accompanied him for quite some distance. When they passed the gate, he said to Haladhari, 'What more can I tell you? When you see no difference between the water in this gutter and the water in the Ganges, know that you have reached perfect knowledge.' Saying this, he walked away quickly."

Chapter III

Practicing spiritual disciplines is more essential than learning

With the devotees seated close by, Sri Ramakrishna is talking with M.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What do you think of Shashadhar?"

M.: "Sir, he is a good man."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He's intelligent, isn't he?"

M.: "Yes, Sir. He's a real scholar."

Sri Ramakrishna: "According to the Gita, one who is respected and accepted by many has the

power of God within. But there's a little work he has yet to do.

"What use is mere scholarship? Some austerity is necessary. One has to practice some spiritual disciplines."

His earlier story – spiritual practices of Pundit Gauri and Narayan Shastri – meeting with Keshab at the Belgharia garden in 1875 – arrival of Captain in 1876-77

"Gauri Pundit practiced spiritual disciplines. When he chanted a hymn to the Divine Mother,[1] scholars would seem to be no more than earthworms.

"Narayan Shastri also was not just a pundit; he also practiced spiritual disciplines.

"Narayan Shastri studied continuously for twenty-five years. For seven years he studied the Nyaya system of philosophy. Even then he would go into ecstasy repeating, 'Hara, Hara.' The king of Jaipur wanted to make him his court pundit, but he didn't accept the position. He often came and stayed at Dakshineswar. He had a great desire to go to the Vasishtha Ashrama to practice austerities. He would often tell me about wanting to go there. I forbade him. He said, 'Who knows when I may die? When will I perform spiritual practices? The pot may crack at any time.' When he persisted, I let him go.

"I hear from some that Narayan Shastri has quit his body. Perhaps he received a slap from Bhairava while practicing austerities. And there

1. Ho re re niralamba lambodara.

are others who say, 'He is alive. We have just seen him off in a train.'

"Before meeting Keshab Sen, I asked Narayan Shastri, 'Please go once and see what kind of person he is.' After visiting Keshab, he returned and said, 'That fellow is perfect in japa.' He knew astrology and said, 'Keshab Sen has a good destiny. I spoke to him in Sanskrit and he talked in Bengali.'

"Then I went with Hriday and met him in the Belgharia garden house. As soon I saw him, I said, 'He has cast off his tail. He can now live in water as well as on dry land.'

"Keshab sent three Brahmos to the temple to examine me. Prasanna was one of them. They were to watch me day and night and then report to Keshab. They were with me at night in my room. They constantly repeated, 'Compassionate One' and said to me, 'You should follow Keshab Babu. It will benefit you.' I told them, 'I believe in God with form.' Even then they kept on repeating, 'Compassionate One, Compassionate One!' Then a mood came over me. I said, 'Leave this place.' I didn't let them stay in my room at all. They went out and slept on the verandah.

"When Captain saw me for the first time, he also stayed the night."

Michael Madhusudana[1] and conversation with Narayan Shastri

"Michael visited here when Narayan Shastri was present. Dwarika Babu, Mathur's eldest son, had brought him. A lawsuit was in the offing with the owners of the magazine[2] next door so the proprietors of the temple had brought Michael to the garden to seek his advice.

"There is a big room next to the [temple] office. I saw Michael there. I asked Narayan Shastri to talk to him. Michael couldn't speak well in Sanskrit and kept making mistakes. So they talked in the vernacular (Bengali).

"Narayan Shastri asked, 'Why did you give up your religion?' Pointing to his belly, Michael said, 'I had to give up because of this.'

"Narayan Shastri said, 'What conversation can I have with one who gives up his faith for the sake of the stomach?' Madhusudana then said to me, 'Please tell me something.'

"I said, 'I don't know why, but I don't feel like saying anything. It is like somebody is shutting my mouth.'"

'Lust and greed' can deprive a pundit of his intelligence – worship and rituals of a worldly person

Choudhury Babu was expected to pay a visit to Thakur.

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1. Madhusudan 1824-1873: A poet born at Sagardari who lived in England from 1862 to 1867 and was a convert to Christianity. He met Thakur sometime after 1868.
2. Ordnance storehouse.

Manomohan: "Choudhury won't be coming. He said he was expecting a Bengali (Shashadhar) from Faridpur, so had dropped the idea of coming."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How mean! He has the arrogance of learning. On top of that, he has married a second time. He considers the world an insignificant earthen bowl."

Choudhury holds an M.A. He developed great dispassion on the death of his first wife, when he would visit Thakur often at Dakshineswar. He has married a second time and is now earning three to four hundred rupees a month.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Attachment to 'lust and greed' robs a person of understanding. When Haramohan came to see me for the first time, he had good signs. I would long to see him. He must have been seventeen or eighteen then. These days when I invite him, he doesn't turn up. He is living in a separate house now with his wife. He used to live with his maternal uncle and was fine. He had no problems of running a household then. Now, having established a new home, he has to go daily to the market for his wife. (*All laugh*.) The other day he came to Dakshineswar. I said to him, 'Go away. Leave this place. I don't feel like touching you.'"

Kartabhaja Chandra (Chatterji) has arrived. He is sixty or sixty-five years old. He recites verses of the Kartabhaja sect quite fluently. He goes to gently stroke Thakur's feet, but Thakur doesn't let him touch his feet. He says laughingly, "Now you are acting prudently."

Sri Ramakrishna goes to Balaram's inner apartments to see Lord Jagannath. The women of the family are anxious to see him in their quarters.

Now Thakur returns to the parlour, smiling. He says, "I changed my clothes that I used in the toilet and then went for the darshan of Jagannath. I offered some flowers.

"The worship, japa, and austerities of worldly people are only for the moment. Those who know nothing but God repeat His name with every breath. Some unceasingly chant the name of Rama, or Om Rama mentally. People who follow the path of knowledge also repeat 'So 'ham' (I am He). The tongues of some people are always moving.

"Indeed there must be constant remembrance and contemplation of God."

Chapter IV

Balaram's house – Shashadhar and other devotees – Thakur in samadhi

Shashadhar enters the room with one or two friends. They salute Thakur and sit down.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Like friends of the bride, after arranging the bridal bed, we are awake and awaiting the bridegroom's arrival."

The pundit laughs. The devotees have gathered together. Balaram's father is there, as well as Dr. Pratap. Thakur talks about various things.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shashadhar*): "There are signs of spiritual knowledge. The first is a serene

nature. The second is absence of pride. You have both these signs.

"There are other signs in a man of knowledge, too. In the company of a sadhu, he is a man of renunciation; when at work, he's like a lion – for example, while lecturing. He's full of humour in the company of his wife, witty as a pundit. (*The pundit and others laugh.*)

"The vijnani has a different disposition. For example, Chaitanya Deva acted like a child, or like a madman, or an inert object, or a ghoul.

"There are, again, in the state of a child, adolescent as well as youthful moods. In the state of an adolescent, he is full of fun, but when he teaches others, he has the strength of a young man."

Pundit: "What kind of love is necessary to realize God?"

Shashadhar and talk on the principles of love and devotion – burning faith is needed – humility of the Vaishnavas

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are three kinds of bhakti, depending on one's nature: the sattva of bhakti, the rajas of bhakti and the tamas of bhakti.

"In sattvic bhakti, only God knows about it. Such a devotee loves God secretly, perhaps meditating under his mosquito net without anyone knowing about it. When one develops the purest sattva,[1] – sattva of sattva – the vision of God is very near, just as at dawn one knows that there will be no more delay for the sun to rise.

1. Vishuddha sattva.

"Those who have rajasic bhakti have a desire for people to see that they are devotees. They perform the worship with sixteen items. They go into the temple wearing pure silk. They wear a rudraksha rosary round their necks. The rosary has pearls and here and there gold rudrakshas.

"The tamas of bhakti is devotion like an attack of dacoits. Dacoits are armed with weapons while committing dacoity and have no fear even of eight police officers. They shout, 'Kill, rob!' Like mad people they shout, 'Hara, Hara, Hara; Vyom, Vyom! Victory to Kali!' They have immense strength of mind, and burning faith.

"Shaktas have this kind of faith. 'Why, I have once chanted the name of Kali, the name of Durga. I have once chanted the name of Rama. How can I be touched by sin?'

"Vaishnavas have a very meek and humble disposition. They only tell the rosary (*Thakur looks at Balaram's father*) and weep and sob, 'O Krishna, Be merciful to me! I am pitiable, I am a sinner.'

"One should have such burning faith as to be able to say, 'I have taken God's name, how can there be any sin in me?' Imagine a person repeating the name of God day and night, yet calling himself a sinner!

"While talking, Thakur becomes intoxicated with ecstatic love and sings:

> Mother, can I but die with Durga's name upon my lips,
>
> I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end you cannot refuse to rescue me.

Should I have killed a brahmin or a cow, or destroyed a child in the womb, or indulged in drink, or slain a woman,

For all those heinous deeds I care not in the least; still may I aspire to Brahman.

Shashadhar begins to weep listening to the song. Thakur sings another song:

In Shiva's company the Mother is ever lost in ecstasy;

Though drunk with the wine of bliss, She reels but does not fall.[1]

Now Vaishnavcharan, Adhar's professional musician, sings:

O my tongue, always repeat the name of Durga.

Who else can save you from danger but She?

O Mother, You are the heaven, the earth, and the nether world.

From You have sprung Hari, Brahma, and the twelve Gopalas.

You are the ten great Powers,[2] and the ten Incarnations.[3]

This time You must take me across!

You are the moving and the unmoving, the gross and the subtle.

You are creation, preservation, and dissolution;

You are the source of the universe.

You are the Mother of the three worlds and their saviour.

You are the Power of all and You are Your own Power too.[4]

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1. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section XIV, Chapter III.
2. The ten Mahavidyas, or aspects of Shakti, personified as Kali, Tara, Tripurasundari, Bhuvanesvari, Chinnamasta, Bhairavi, Dhumavati, Bagalamukhi, Matangi, and Kamala.
3. The ten incarnations of Vishnu.
4. For complete song refer to Volume II, Section XVIII, Chapter II.

Hearing these few lines of song, Thakur goes into ecstasy. When the song ends, he himself begins to sing:

O Mother Shyama! Yashoda would make You dance when she called You her precious blue jewel!

Where have You hidden that form, O terrible Shyama?

Vaishnavcharan now sings devotional songs about the meeting with Subol.[1]

When the musician adds his own line, 'I say, one cannot pronounce Dha without Ra,' Thakur goes into samadhi.[2]

Shashadhar sheds tears of love.

Chapter V

The Return Car Festival – Thakur and the devotees sing devotional songs and dance in front of the chariot

Thakur comes out of samadhi. The song is over. Shashadhar, Pratap, Ramdayal, Ram, Manomohan, some young boy devotees, and others are also present. Sri Ramakrishna says to M., "Please poke him." That is, he wants someone to ask something of Shashadhar.

Ramdayal (*to Shashadhar*): "The scriptures speak of the form of Brahman as an imagination. Who does the imagining?"

Pundit: "Brahman Himself. It is not the imaginings of a human being."

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1. Subol Milan, one of Krishna's companions.
2. *Dha* and *Ra* are the reversal of *Radha*, to whom the songs of Subol relate.

Dr. Pratap: "But why? Why does Brahman imagine?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why not? He doesn't consult anybody before He does anything. It is His pleasure. He is self-willed.[1] Why should we care to know the reason why God does it? You've come to the orchard to eat mangoes, so eat them. If you begin to count the trees, how many thousands of branches and how many hundreds of thousands of leaves – what use are all these calculations? Futile reasoning and discussions do not yield the truth."

Dr. Pratap: "So should we not reason anymore?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must not argue or reason for no purpose. However, you must reason about what is Real and what is unreal, what is permanent and what is impermanent. You must reason in times of passion, anger, or grief."

Pundit: "That's different. It's called reasoning by discrimination."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, discriminating between what is Real and what is unreal." (*All are silent*.)

(*To the Pundit*) "Formerly, great men used to visit."

Pundit: "Do you mean rich people?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, great scholars."

Meanwhile the little chariot is brought to the outer verandah of the second storey. Lord Jagannath, Subhadra, and Balaram are adorned with flowers and garlands of different kinds. They

1. Icchamaya.

are also bedecked with jewelry and clad in new yellow apparel. Balaram worships in the sattvic way, without any pomp or show. People outside don't even know that the Car Festival is being celebrated in the house.

Thakur and the devotees go to the front of the cart. It will be pulled down this very verandah. Holding the string of the cart, Thakur pulls it for a while and then begins to sing:

> Behold, the whole of Nadia trembles under the waves of Gauranga's love!

Again he sings:

> Behold, the brothers have come! The two who shed tears while chanting Hari's name.[1]

Sri Ramakrishna dances, and the devotees dance with him, singing. Vaishnavcharan, the musician, joins the group in dance and music.

In no time the verandah is filled with people. The women view this ecstatic celebration from a nearby room. It looks as if Sri Gauranga Himself, intoxicated with the love of Hari, is dancing in Srivas's home with his devotees. The pundit and his friends also watch the song and dance in front of the chariot.

It is not yet evening. Thakur returns to the sitting room and sits down with the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the pundit*): "This is called the joy of devotional song.[2] Worldly people are

1. For the complete song refer to Section VI, Chapter I.
2. Bhajanananda.

engrossed in the joy of the senses,[1] the joy of 'lust and greed.' Through worship, His grace descends. One attains God's vision and then enjoys the bliss of Brahman."[2]

Shashadhar and the devotees listen to Thakur without uttering a word.

Pundit (*humbly*): "Sir, what kind of yearning for God is needed for such a blissful state of mind?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When your heart pants for His vision. The guru said to the disciple, 'Come here. Let me show you what kind of yearning is needed to attain God.' Saying this, the guru took him to a pond. He pushed his head under water and held him there. When he let him up, he asked the disciple, 'How did your heart feel?' The disciple said, 'My heart was panting for breath.'"

Pundit: "Yes, yes. That's it! Now I understand!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Love of God – that is the essence. Love and devotion for God. Narada said to Rama, 'May I have pure love for Your lotus feet. And may I never be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya.' Ramachandra said, 'Ask for another boon.' Narada said, 'I want nothing else. I only want to have love and devotion for Your lotus feet.'"

The pundit is about to leave, and Thakur asks a devotee, "Please bring a carriage for him."

Pundit: "No, sir. I'll just walk."

---

1. Vishyananda.
2. Brahmananda.

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "How can that be? You, even Brahma fails to find in meditation."

Pundit: "I had no particular reason to leave. But I have to perform my evening devotions."

Sri Ramakrishna in the state of a paramahamsa – renunciation of duties – sweet chanting of God's name

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Divine Mother has taken away from me sandhya and such ritualistic worship. They purify the body and the mind. I am not in that state now."

Saying this, Thakur hums the lines of a song:

> When will you lie down happily between your wives, Purity and Defilement? When you see no difference between these two, then shall you see the Divine Mother Kali.[1]

Shashadhar salutes Thakur and departs.

Ram: "I went to see Shashadhar yesterday, as you asked me to."

Sri Ramakrishna: "When did I ask you to do that? But it's good that you went."

Ram: "The editor of a newspaper (*The Indian Empire*) has run you down."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What does it matter?"

Ram: "Listen what else. After hearing me, he wouldn't let me go. He wanted to hear more about you."

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1. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section II, Chapter VI.

Dr. Pratap is still sitting there. Thakur says to him, "Come to Dakshineswar. Bhuvan (the wet-nurse) says she'll pay the carriage fare."

It is evening. Thakur is chanting the name of the Mother of the Universe. And he repeats the names of Rama, Krishna, and Hari. The devotees listen without uttering a word. His chanting of the name is sweet, as if raining honey. Today Balaram's house seems to have become Navadvip – Navadvip outside and Vrindavan inside.

Thakur will go back to Dakshineswar tonight. Balaram takes him to the inner apartments to serve him refreshments. This gives the ladies an opportunity to see him.

Seated in the sitting room, the devotees await him as they sing devotional songs together. Thakur returns and joins in the singing. The singing goes on:

My Gaur is dancing,

Dancing with the devotees to the kirtan in Srivas's courtyard.

His lips repeating "Haribol,"

He glances at Gadadhar.

From reddened eyes, Gaur's tears stream incessantly onto his golden body.

Thakur adds his own lines:

Brother, the darling of Shachi is dancing to the kirtan.

My Gaur is dancing;

This Gaur, my life-breath, is dancing.

Section XVI

Thakur at the Dakshineswar Temple with M., Rakhal, Latu, Balaram, Adhar, Devotees from Shivapur, and Others

Chapter I

Conversation on the essence of yoga with the Shivapur devotees – kundalini and piercing of the six centres

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple after the midday meal. It is about two o'clock.

A group of bauls from Shivapur and devotees from Bhawanipur have arrived. Rakhal, Latu, and Harish are now living with Thakur. Balaram and M. are also in the room.

It is Sunday, 3 August 1884, the twelfth day of the bright fortnight, the second day of the Swing Festival.[1] The previous day Thakur had visited Surendra's house. Shashadhar and other devotees had met him there.

Thakur addresses the devotees of Shivapur

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "You cannot achieve union with God when the mind dwells on 'lust and greed.' The mind of an ordinary person remains in the centres of awareness located at the genital, anal, and naval regions.[2] It takes a lot of

1. Jhulan Yatra.
2. Svadhishthana, muladhara, and manipura chakras.

effort in spiritual discipline for the kundalini to awaken. There are three nerves – ida, pingala, and sushumna. And in the sushumna are six lotuses, the lowest being the muladhara. Then there are svadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddha, and ajna. These are the six spiritual centres.

"When the kundalini awakens, after it has crossed the lotuses of muladhara, svadhisthana, and manipura, it reaches the anahata lotus located at the heart. It stays there. The mind is then withdrawn from the three lower centres of anus, sex organ, and navel; it attains a spiritual consciousness and sees a light. The aspirant is speechless with wonder and exclaims, 'What is this! What is this!'

"Having pierced six centres, the kundalini reaches the lotus of sahasrara and unites with it. When the kundalini reaches there, the aspirant passes into samadhi.

"According to the Vedas, these centres are called bhumis or planes. There are seven planes. The heart is the fourth, and the lotus at anahata is twelve-petalled.

"The vishuddha centre is the fifth plane. When the mind reaches there, the heart yearns only to talk of God and to hear about Him. This centre is located in the throat. It has a sixteen-petalled lotus. The person whose mind has reached this centre feels great pain to hear any worldly talk, such as talk of 'lust and greed.' When he hears such talk, he gets up and leaves the place.

"After this comes the sixth plane, the ajna centre of two petals. When the kundalini reaches there, one has the vision of God's form. But there is still a thin screen of separation. Like a lantern, the light can't be touched because of a glass barrier.

"Then one reaches the seventh plane, the thousand-petalled lotus. When the kundalini reaches there, samadhi comes about. The Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute Shiva resides at the sahasrara. Here He unites with Shakti – it is the union of Shiva and Shakti.

"When the mind reaches the sahasrara, one becomes absorbed in samadhi. In this state all awareness of the external disappears, and the person cannot preserve his body. If milk is poured into his mouth, it runs out. If one remains in this state, one dies in twenty-one days. A ship cannot return after it has entered the 'black waters.'

"But ishvarakotis,[1] such as incarnations of God, can come down from this state of samadhi. Since they like to live with devotees and enjoy love for God, they can descend from this state. God keeps the 'I of knowledge,' the 'I of devotion' in them to teach mankind. Their state of mind is like the swift movement of a boat, racing up and down between the sixth and the seventh planes.

"Some people, of their own will, retain the 'I of knowledge' after attaining samadhi. But this ego is a mere appearance. It is just like a line drawn on the surface of water.

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1. Eternally free and perfect souls.

"Hanuman, having realized God both with form and without, retained the 'I of a servant.' Narada and others – Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana, Sanatkumara – also retained the 'I of a servant' or the 'I of a devotee' after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. They are like big steamships which not only cross the ocean but also carry others to the opposite shore."

Is Thakur thus describing his own state?

A paramahamsa – believers in the formless God and God with form – Thakur's love for God after attaining knowledge of Brahman – union of the Absolute and the phenomenal

He says:

"A paramahamsa may believe either in God with form or the formless God. Trailanga Swami is an example of one who believed in the formless God. They care for their own good alone; they're satisfied with their own realization.

"Those who believe in God with form, even after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, live with love for God in order to teach mankind. It is like pouring water from a full pitcher into others.

"All the spiritual practices they have performed to realize God, they tell others about to help them. People dig wells for water with great effort, using spades and baskets. Some of them throw the spades and other tools into the well itself after it is dug, thinking, What use are they now? But some put the tools on the edge of the well so they may be of benefit to others.

"There are some who eat mangoes and then secretly wipe their mouths. There are others who eat and also share the mangoes with others. They work for the benefit of mankind and to enjoy the bliss of God. 'I want to eat sugar.'

"The gopis attained the knowledge of Brahman, but they didn't want the knowledge. They preferred to enjoy themselves with God – as mother and child,[1] as His beloved,[2] or as a handmaid of God."[3]

Thakur in the joy of devotional song – chanting the name of Gauranga and of the Mother of the Universe

The devotees from Shivapur are singing to the accompaniment of a gopi yantra.[4] In the first song was the line, "We are sinners, pray save us."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "It is the beginner's attitude to repeat God's name out of fear. Please sing songs about the realization of God, songs of joy. (*To Rakhal*) What a beautiful song they were singing the other day in Nabin Niyogi's house, 'Be intoxicated with the wine of Hari's name.'

"It is not good to talk only of restlessness and worries. Rather, one should be happy and become intoxicated chanting His Name."

The devotees from Shivapur: "Won't you sing a song, sir?"

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1. Vatsalya bhava.
2. Madhura bhava.
3. Dasi bhava.
4. A single-stringed musical instrument.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What shall I sing? All right, I will when I feel like it."

After a while Thakur begins to sing. His gaze turns upward.

O Bharati, give me a loincloth. I wish to go to Vraja disguised as a beggar.

He sings another song:

The wave of Gaur's love has touched my body.[1]

And another:

Come, O friend, and behold the fair one's beauty!

See Gauranga, anointed with precious ornaments, glowing red!

At the very sight, one is overwhelmed with ecstasy.

Vrishabhanunandini is indeed a great mason and Bhangada a great artisan.

And still another:

Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty.[2]

After chanting the name of Gauranga, he chants the name of the Divine Mother.

Thakur sings again:

Can everybody gain the treasure of Mother Shyama?

This foolish mind does not know how priceless this inherited treasure is.

Even with all his penance, indeed rare is Shiva's vision of Her.

Only when the mind is intoxicated, can one attain the crimson feet of the Divine Mother.

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1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section XVI, Chapter I.
2. For the complete song refer to Section XXI, Chapter VI.

And again:

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight to the blue lotus flower of Mother Shyama's feet.[1]

And yet again:

What a machine Mother Shyama has built!

What a machine Mother Kali has made!

In this machine, three and a half cubits high, what pranks She plays!

She Herself residing within pulls the cord and makes it move.

The machine thinks it moves by itself, knowing not who its operator is.

But the machine who knows it is She will be a machine no more.

And Mother Shyama will Herself be tied with the cord of love.

Chapter II

Thakur in samadhi and his conversation with the Mother of the Universe – essence of ecstatic love

While singing this song, Thakur goes into samadhi. The devotees gaze at him in silence. After a while, coming down to a semi-conscious state, Sri Ramakrishna talks to the Divine Mother.

"Mother, please come down here from above (from the sahasrara). You torment me! Please sit quietly!

"Mother, as are one's tendencies acquired in past births, so is one fated in this one. What can I

1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section II, Chapter VII.

say to them? Nothing is achieved without discrimination and dispassion.

"There are different kinds of dispassion. What is called 'monkey renunciation' is one of them. It is the dispassion a person feels after being tormented by the fire of the world. It doesn't last long. Real dispassion is when a person possesses everything, lacks nothing, but it all appears to be unreal.

"This non-attachment doesn't happen all of a sudden. It comes in its own time. It's good to hear spiritual talk, because when the right time comes, then one will remember and think, 'Oh, I heard about that.'

"And there is something else. When a person hears about spiritual matters, desire for worldly enjoyment slowly decreases. To get rid of intoxication, rice-water has to be taken little by little. One gradually overcomes the state of intoxication. There are very few people who are fit for spiritual knowledge. The Gita says, 'Scarcely one out of thousands strives for perfection; of those who strive, even among the perfected, scarcely anyone truly knows Me.'

A Tantrik devotee: "Manuṣyāṇāṁ sahasreṣu kaścid yatati siddhaye."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "The more the attachment to the world disappears, the more knowledge one will gain. *Attachment* means attachment to 'lust and greed.'"

1. The devotee quotes in Sanskrit the first half of a verse from the Bhagavad Gita, 7:3, which states that out of many thousands of men, perhaps only one endeavours for perfection.

Company of holy men, faith,[1] single-minded devotion,[2] love for God,[3] bhava, mahabhava, and prema

"Not everyone experiences ecstatic love. Gauranga did. An ordinary human being can experience ecstasy – this far and no farther. Only ishvarakotis – for example, incarnations of God – attain ecstatic love. When one attains this intense love for God, not only does he feel that the world is an illusion, but he forgets the body, which is so dear to everyone.

"A Persian book (by Hafiz) says: Under the skin there is flesh; under the flesh there is bone; within the bone there is marrow; and within that there are many other things – but underlying all these is ecstatic love.[4]

"A person becomes soft and tender-hearted through ecstatic love. In this intense love for God, Krishna's body is bent three times.[5]

"Such intense love acts as a cord to bind Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.[6] Then whenever you want to see Him, you only have to pull the cord. Whenever He is called, He appears.

"When love for God matures, one experiences ecstasy. In the state of ecstasy, one becomes speechless contemplating Sat-chit-ananda. An ordinary human being can only go that far. But

1. Shraddha.
2. Nishtha.
3. Bhakti.
4. Prema.
5. Tribhanga: Krishna playing the flute, bent at neck, waist, and knees.
6. Sat-chit-ananda.

when ecstasy matures, one experiences maha-bhava, prema. It is like the difference between an unripe mango and a ripe one.

"Pure love of God alone is the essential thing. Everything else is illusion.

"When Narada recited a hymn of praise, Rama told him to ask for a boon. Narada asked for pure love for God. And he added, 'Rama, may I never be enchanted by your world-bewitching maya.' Rama said, 'That's all right. Ask for another boon.' Narada replied, 'I want nothing else, only love and devotion.'

"How can you develop such love for God? Initially, you have to associate with the holy. By keeping their company, faith in God comes. With faith, single-minded devotion develops. Then you don't want to hear anything but talk about God. And you'll wish to work for Him alone.

"Single-minded devotion is followed by love for God. Then ecstasy, mahabhava, and prema – and then one attains the goal.

"Only incarnations of God and the like attain mahabhava and prema. The knowledge of worldly people and devotees is not like the knowledge of an incarnation of God. The knowledge of the worldly can be likened to the light of a lamp; it only lights the inside of the room. This knowledge only helps a person in eating and drinking and running household affairs – looking after the body, bringing up children, and so forth.

"The knowledge of a devotee is like the light of the moon. He can see both the inside and the

outside of a room with its light – but not a very small object lying at a distance. On the other hand, the knowledge of incarnations is like the light of the sun. They can see inside, outside, the small, and the large, everything.

"The mind of worldly people is like turbid water; it can only be cleaned by pouring a cleansing agent[1] in it. Discrimination and non-attachment are cleansing agents."

Now Thakur talks to the devotees of Shivapur.

The need for hearing about God – 'the proper time' – normal state of Thakur

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ask if you have any questions."

A devotee: "Sir, we have listened to everything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's good to hear – but nothing happens before the proper time.

"How can quinine help a patient who is running a high fever? It should be administered after the fever mixture has been given and the bowels have moved – when the fever has subsided. But, of course, some people are cured naturally; they get well even without taking quinine.

"When going to bed, a child said, 'Mother, please wake me up when I need to go to the bathroom.' His mother said, 'Child, I won't have to wake you. The urge itself will wake you up.'

"I see some people coming here with devotees in a boat. They don't like to hear about God. They

1. Nirmali: a rare kind of nut that precipitates dirt in water.

poke their friend, asking, 'When are you leaving? When are you going?' When the friend doesn't rise, however much pressed, they say, 'All right, I'll go and wait for you in the boat.'

"Those who are born as human beings for the first time need to enjoy the things of the world. Spiritual awakening does not come until a lot of work has been done."

Thakur is going to the jhautala. He speaks to M. on the semicircular verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Well, what do you think of my state of mind?"

M. (*smiling*): "Sir, outwardly you are very simple, but within you are deep. It is very difficult to understand you."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes. Just as people see only the surface of a floor. They don't know what lies below its surface."

At the bathing landing of the chandni, Balaram and other devotees are getting on a boat bound for Calcutta. It is four o'clock. It is ebb tide, and a southern breeze decorates the surface of the Ganges with a necklace of ripples.

Balaram's boat sails toward Baghbazar. M. watches it for a long time, until it disappears from view. Then he returns to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna comes down from the western verandah, on his way to the jhautala. There are beautiful clouds in the northwest. Thakur says, "Is it going to rain? Please bring the umbrella." M. brings it. Latu accompanies him.

Thakur has reached the panchavati. He says to Latu, "Why are you looking so unwell?"

Latu: "I can hardly eat anything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Is that the only reason? The weather isn't good. And maybe you meditate too much."

Thakur now talks to M.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "You must do this. Please ask Baburam to come and stay here for a day or two when Rakhal goes away. Otherwise, I shall feel unhappy."

M.: "As you wish. I'll tell him."

One can realize God when one is simple and guileless at heart. Thakur asks if Baburam is simple at heart.

Sri Ramakrishna beholds a beautiful sight in the jhautala and panchavati

Thakur is returning from the jhautala, passing along its southern side. M. and Latu stand under the panchavati to the north and watch him.

Behind Thakur, newly arisen clouds beautify the sky, their reflection darkening the water of the Ganges.

> Thakur approaches, as if the Lord Himself had assumed a human form and come to the mortal world for the welfare of the devotees. He strolls on the bank of the Ganges, the destroyer of all sins, having emerged from Lord Hari's lotus feet. It is as if the Lord Himself is present. Is that why the trees, creepers, bushes, garden paths, shrines, images of the

gods, attendants, door-keepers, and every particle of dust feel so sweet?

Chapter III

Nabai Chaitanya, Narendra, Baburam, Latu, Mani, Rakhal, Niranjan, and Adhar

Thakur comes into his room and sits down. Balaram has brought some mangoes, and Thakur says to Ram Chatterji, "Please take some mangoes for your son." Nabai Chaitanya is also in the room, dressed in a red dhoti.

Thakur is speaking with Hazra on the long northern verandah. The topic of their conversation is the harital ash[1] that a brahmachari has given to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna: "The medicine the brahmachari gave me suits me very much. The man is correct."

Hazra: "But the poor fellow has gotten caught up in worldly life. What can he do? Nabai Chaitanya has come from Konnagar. But even though he's a householder, he's dressed himself in a red dhoti."[2]

Sri Ramakrishna: "What can I say? I see that God Himself has taken the forms of everyone. So, I'm not able to say anything critical to anyone."

Thakur comes back into his room and then talks with Hazra about Narendra.

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1. Yellow orpiment, a compound of sulfur and arsenic.
2. A householder traditionally wears white.

Hazra: "Narendra has gotten entangled in a lawsuit again."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He doesn't believe in Shakti. When a person has taken a human body, he must accept Shakti."

Hazra: "He says, 'If I accept it, everyone will accept it. So how can I?'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's not good to go that far. He has now come under the jurisdiction of Shakti. Even a judge has to stand in the witness box if he gives evidence.

(*To M.*) "Have you seen Narendra?"

M.: "Not recently, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do meet him and bring him here in a carriage."

(*To Hazra*) "Well, what is his relation with this place [meaning himself]?"

Hazra: "He will receive help from you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And Bhavanath? Would he come here so often if he didn't have good tendencies?[1]

"And Harish and Latu – they're always meditating. What do you think about that?"

Hazra: "What is the sense in only meditating? It would be better if they rendered you personal service."

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1. Samskaras.

Sri Ramakrishna: "That will come about. Perhaps some others will come to take their place."

Different instructions to Mani – Sri Ramakrishna's simple and natural state[1]

Hazra goes back to his room. There is still time before evening worship, and Thakur sits in his room, talking privately with Mani.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Tell me, are people attracted by what I say in ecstasy?"

Mani: "Yes sir, a lot."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do they think of it? Do they feel anything when they see the state of ecstasy?"

Mani: "We feel that there is knowledge, intense love for God, and dispassion all in the same person. And on top of that, simplicity and guilelessness. So many ships have sailed through the depths of your consciousness, but you are natural and so simple! Not many people can understand it, but a few are attracted by that state alone."

Sri Ramakrishna: "According to the Ghoshpara sect, God is called 'sahaja,' or 'simple.' They say you can't recognize the Simple without being simple yourself."

Sri Ramakrishna and pride and egoism – "I am an instrument and You are the operator"

1. Sahajavastha.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Well, do I have any ego?"

Mani: "Yes, you have a little. To preserve your body and to enjoy love for God – and for the devotees, to impart spiritual knowledge to them. You have kept it by praying for it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I haven't kept it. It is God who has kept it in me. Tell me, what happens when I'm in the state of ecstasy?"

Mani: "You said earlier that when the mind rises to the sixth plane, you see forms of god. Later, when you speak, your mind comes down to the fifth plane."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is God who does all this. I know nothing."

Mani: "That is why you attract people so much."

Why so many scriptures? – all religions are true – Sri Ramakrishna and the reconciliation of contradictory scriptures

Mani: "Sir, there are different opinions in the scriptures. According to one Purana, Krishna is considered pure consciousness[1] and Radha the power of consciousness.[2] According to another Purana, Krishna is said to be Kali, the Primordial Energy."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Devi Purana says this. According to it, Kali Herself has become Krishna.

1. Chidatma.
2. Chitshakti.

"That might be true! God is infinite, and so are the paths to reach Him."

Mani sits silently for a while after hearing this.

Mani: "Now I understand. It's like what you say about climbing to the roof. The aim is to reach the roof by any way we can – by rope, bamboo, or any other means."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is God's grace that you have understood this much. It's not possible to become free from doubt without His grace.

"The important thing is somehow to develop love for God. What is the use of knowing different paths? If you can gain love for Him by treading one particular path, you have achieved everything. It is only by developing love for Him that you can attain Him. Later, if there is a need, God will make you understand everything. He will show the other paths. It's enough just to develop love for God. What is the need to reason and discuss various ideas? You have come to eat mangoes. Eat them. What need is there to count how many branches and leaves there are? Hanuman's attitude is, 'I don't know the date, the day of the week, or the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rama.'"

Renunciation of the world and God-realization – should the devotee save, or be 'satisfied with whatever comes of its own accord'?

Mani: "I now desire for my work and duties to be reduced to a large extent so I can give a lot of my mind to God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah! What else can be needed! But a man of knowledge can live unattached in the household."

Mani: "But sir, a special power is needed to live unattached."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, that's true. But perhaps you wanted a worldly life. Krishna dwelt in Radha's heart, but when she wanted, his divine sport was enacted in human form.

"Now pray that all this work and duties may be reduced.

"Besides, renunciation from the heart is enough."

Mani: "Mental renunciation is for those who can't renounce outwardly. For people of a high class, there is complete renunciation – renunciation in the heart as well as external renunciation."

Thakur is silent. Then he continues the discussion.

Sri Ramakrishna: "How did you like what I said about renunciation?"[1]

Mani: "Yes, I did like it, sir."

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1. Vairagya.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What does dispassion mean? Let me hear it from you."

Mani: "It not only means renunciation of worldly life. It means love for God together with dispassion for the world."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you are right.

"You do need money in worldly life, but you mustn't be anxious and worry too much about it. You must be content with whatever comes of its own accord[1] – this is very good. Don't worry too much about saving for the future. Those who surrender their mind and soul to God, those who are His devotees and have taken refuge in Him, don't worry too much about saving. As they earn, so they spend – from one side it comes, and out the other it's spent. This is what is called accepting what comes of its own accord. It is mentioned in the Gita."

Conversation about Haripada, Rakhal, Baburam, Adhar, and others

Thakur is talking about Haripada, who had visited him the other day.

Mani (*smiling*): "Haripada knows how to relate stories of the gods. He chants the life of Prahlada and the story of Sri Krishna's birth very melodiously."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Really! The other day, I looked into his eyes. They were unsettled. I asked him if he practiced a lot of meditation, but he sat

1. Yadṛcchālābha, Bhagavad Gita 4:22.

with his head down. I said to him, 'You mustn't practice to extremes.'"

It is evening. Thakur chants the name of the Divine Mother and meditates upon Her.

After some time, evening worship with the waving of lights starts in the shrines. It is the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of Shravana and the second day of the Cradle Festival. The moon is shining, bathing the temple, the surrounding courtyard, and the garden in its light. It is eight in the evening. Thakur is seated in his room with Rakhal and M.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Baburam says, 'Worldly life – it's dreadful!'"

M.: "What is he saying? What does Baburam know of household life?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, undoubtedly that's true. Have you seen Niranjan? He is completely guileless."

M.: "Yes, sir. He is very attractive. And how expressive his eyes are!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not only his eyes – everything. He told me that they were going to get him married. To that, he said, 'Why do you want to drown me?' (*Laughing*) But people say what pleasure they have, sitting in the company of their wives after a hard day's work."

M.: "Certainly they do, those who are so inclined. (*Smiling, to Rakhal*) We are being examined with a leading question."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "A mother says, 'I will feel great relief if I can find a shade tree[1] for my son. He will rest in its shade after being burnt by the fire of this world.'"

M.: "Sir, there are different kinds of parents. A spiritually illumined father doesn't give his sons in marriage. If he does, he must be well liberated indeed!" (*Thakur laughs.*)

Adhar and M. visit the Kali temple – Adhar talks about the sacred Chandranath and visit to Sitakunda

Adhar Sen arrives from Calcutta and salutes Thakur by prostrating. After sitting for a short time, he goes to the Kali Temple for Kali's darshan. M. visits Kali with him. Then he comes to the portico[2] of the temple and then goes and sits on the bank of the Ganges. The river sparkles in the moonlight as the flood tide has just begun to rise.

> Seated alone, M. meditates on the wonderful life of Thakur, his amazing state of samadhi and repeated ecstasies, and his intense love for God; his unceasing talk about God, his genuine love for the devotees, his childlike nature – he thinks of all these things. He says to himself, Who is he? Has God Himself come down in a human body for the sake of His devotees?

Adhar and M. return to Thakur's room. Adhar had been in Chattigram on a business trip. He is talking now about his visit to sacred Chandranath and the Sitakunda.

Adhar: "I saw tongues of fire burning in the water of Sitakunda."

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1. A wife.
2. Chandni.

Sri Ramakrishna: “How does that happen?”

Adhar: “There is phosphorous in the water.”

Ram Chatterji comes into the room. Thakur praises him to Adhar, saying, “As Ram is here, we don’t have to worry. He finds Harish, Latu, and others at mealtime. Sometimes they are sitting alone in different places meditating. It is Ram who finds them and takes them to eat.”

Section XVII

Thakur with Narendra and Other Devotees at Adhar's House

Chapter I

Thakur in the joy of devotional singing with Narendra and other devotees – in samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with devotees in the parlour on the second storey of Adhar's home. Narendra, the two Mukherji brothers, Bhavanath, M., Chunilal, Hazra, and other devotees are seated near Thakur. It is about three o'clock, Saturday, 6 September 1884, 22nd day of Bhadra, 1291 B.Y., the first day of the dark fortnight.

The devotees salute Sri Ramakrishna. After M. has saluted him, Thakur says to Adhar, "Isn't Doctor Nitai coming?"

Preparations are being made for Narendra to sing. A tanpura string snaps as it is being tuned, and Thakur says, "My, what you have done!" Now Narendra tunes the banyas. Thakur says, "Your banya tuning is like a slap on the cheek."

They talk about different kirtans. Narendra says, "There is no regular beat or rhythm in kirtan songs. That's why they're so popular. People love them."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you saying! There is such feeling of compassion in them – that's why people like them."

Narendra sings:

Sweet is Your name, O refuge of the lowly.[1]

He sings another song:

Will my days just pass in vain, O Lord?[2]

Day and night my eyes are on the path of hope.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to Hazra*): "He sang the same song when he visited me for the first time."

After Narendra sings a couple of songs more, Vaishnavcharan sings:

O Hari, how shall I know You now?

O Bankura, living in Mathura, clad in royal splendour and riding elephants,

Have you forgotten the grazing of cows? Have you forgotten us?

Do you remember how you stole butter in Vraja?

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sing this song: 'O my vina, play Hari, Hari.'"

Vaishnavcharan sings:

O my vina[3], sing Hari, Hari!

Without Hari's holy feet, you will not gain the Supreme Truth.

The name of Hari destroys all sorrows. Chant 'Hare Krishna, Hare.'

By Hari's grace, I shall have no worldly distress.

O Vina, sing but once the name of Hari. There is no haven but His name.

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1. For the complete song refer to Section XIX, Chapter III.
2. For the complete song refer to Volume III, Appendix, Chapter I.
3. A stringed instrument.

The servant, Govinda, says, 'In vain my days have passed. May I no longer drift on the world's shoreless ocean.'

Thakur occasionally goes into samadhi – he dances

Listening to the song, Sri Ramakrishna becomes absorbed in ecstasy and exclaims, "Ah, ah! Chant Hari, Hari."

While saying this, he passes into samadhi, surrounded by devotees who watch him. The room is full of people.

The kirtan singer stops this song and begins a new one.

The beautiful and youthful Gauranga of golden hue dances best.

When he sings the line, "Drifting away in the flood of intense love for Hari," Thakur stands up and begins to dance. Then he sits down and, stretching his arms out, improvises: "O, utter the name of Hari once."

Thakur becomes overwhelmed with emotion as he improvises. Bending his head, he goes into samadhi. In front of him is a bolster on which he rests his head. The musician sings another song:

What other wealth is there in the world except the name of Hari?

Sweetly sing, "Madhai."

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare.

Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

Another song follows:

My Gaur dances singing Hari's name,

My Gauranga dances amid a mountain of gold.

Gold anklets sweetly jingle on his red feet.

Dear Narahari, remain beside Gauranga.

His body made of Radha's love lies in dust.

To his left Advaitananda, to his right Nityananda,

And in the middle dances my Lord Chaitanya.

Thakur rises and dances while he improvises: "Oh, let us become intoxicated with intense love for God."

Watching the wonderful dance, Narendra and the other devotees cannot remain still. They all join Thakur in the dance.

Thakur now and then goes into samadhi while dancing. Then he becomes completely withdrawn and does not utter a word; his whole body is still. The devotees dance in a circle around him.

After a while, Thakur regains partial consciousness, like Chaitanya Deva used to do. And then he dances with the strength of a lion. But even then there is no word on his tongue – he is nearly mad with love for God!

Whenever he returns to partial consciousness, he continues to improvise lines for the song.

Today Adhar's parlour has become Srivasa's courtyard.[1] Many people gather on the road when they hear the chant of Hari's names.

After dancing with the devotees for a long time, Thakur again sits down. Still in an ecstatic mood,

1. Srivasa Pundit was a close companion of Sri Chaitanya Deva. It was at his house that Sri Chaitanya and his associates used to have sankirtan all night long.

he asks Narendra, "Please sing that song: 'O Mother, make me mad with Your love.'"

At Thakur's behest, Narendra sings:

O Mother, make me mad with Your love.[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "And also: 'In the sea of the bliss of consciousness.'"

Narendra sings:

The waves of ecstatic love for God rise on the sea of the bliss of consciousness.

The sweet play of intense bliss[2] has overwhelmed me.

All has become one in the great union.[3]

All divides and distinctions of time and space have disappeared.

Now raising your arms in the inebriation of bliss, with the mind sing Hari's name.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "And that song: 'In the firmament of my soul.' No, it's too long, isn't it? Well, please sing a little slowly."

Narendra sings:

In the firmament of wisdom, the moon of divine love rises full.[4]

Sri Ramakrishna: "And that one: 'The wine of the name of Hari.'"

Narendra sings:

O my mind, be drunk with the wine of divine love;

Rolling on the ground, weep and chant the name of Hari...

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1. For the complete song refer to Section XIX, Chapter III.
2. Mahabhava.
3. Mahayoga.
4. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section I, Chapter II.

Thakur improvises, adding lines to the song:

Be drunk O my mind, with intense love for God, and weep, chanting, 'Hari, Hari.'

Drunk with ecstasy, weep and chant Hari's name.

Thakur and the devotees rest for a while. Narendra whispers to Thakur, "Will you please sing that song once?"

Sri Ramakrishna says, "My throat is a little sore."

After a while, he asks Narendra, "Which one?"

Narendra: "'Your world-enchanting beauty.'"

Thakur slowly sings:

Who has brought Gaur to Nadia,

Gaur whose beauty enchants the world?

His face, hidden by tresses of hair,

Shines like lightning amidst the clouds.

Bring him near that I may glimpse the Lord.

He sings another song:

O gopi friend,[1] I have not found Shyama.[2]

How can I find any joy at home?

Could Shyama but be the tresses of my hair,

I would lovingly braid it with bakul flowers.

I would carefully braid my Keshava-hair.[3]

Shyama is black, and black is my hair; black would be one with black.

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1. Sakhi.
2 "The Dark One," a name of Krishna.
3 Keshava: a name of Krishna.

Could Shyama but be my nose ring, He would ever grace my face,

And know the tender touch of my lips.

But why, O friend, should I dream of what never can be?

Why should Shyama be away from me?

Could Shyama be my bracelets, He would ever adorn my arms.

I would walk shaking my arms and jingling my bracelets.

Wearing the bracelets of Shyama, O friend, I would walk down the royal road.

Chapter II

Insight in the state of ecstasy – invitation to Narendra and others

The singing has ended. Thakur talks with Narendra, Bhavanath, and other devotees. Smiling, he says, "Hazra danced."

Narendra (*smiling*): "Yes, sir. A little."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "A little?"

Narendra (*smiling*): "His paunch danced and also another thing."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "It dances by itself. You don't have to move it; it moves on its own." (*All laugh*.)

The conversation now turns to the invitation to Thakur by the man in whose home Shashadhar now resides.

Narendra: "Will the master of the house provide food?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I hear he doesn't have a good character, that he's a scoundrel."

Narendra: "That's why, when you met Shashadhar for the first time, you didn't drink water from the glass touched by his host. How did you know he had a bad character?"

His earlier story – at Sihore in Hriday's house with Hazra and a Vaishnava

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Hazra knows of another instance. It was at Hriday's house in Sihore."

Hazra: "He was a Vaishnava. He went with me to visit him [Sri Ramakrishna]. As soon as he came in and sat down, he [Sri Ramakrishna] turned his back on him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "We heard afterwards that he acted lewdly toward his maternal aunt. (*To Narendra*) At first you used to say that my states were only hallucinations."

Narendra: "What can I say? Now I have seen so much. It all tallies."

Narendra means to say that when Thakur is in ecstasy, he can see the inside and outside of a person. He has confirmed this a number of times.

Sri Ramakrishna on caste of devotees

Adhar has made great preparations for serving Thakur and the devotees. He now invites them to eat.

Thakur says to Mahendra and Priyanath, the two Mukherji brothers, "Aren't you coming to eat?"

They humbly ask to be excused.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "They are doing everything else. But now hesitating about eating?

"A woman's father-in-law was named Hari and her husband's elder brother, Krishna. Now the name of Hari had to be chanted, but she wouldn't say Hare Krishna. Instead, she repeated:

> Phare Phrishta phare Phrishta, Phrishta, Phrishta Phare Phare.
>
> Phare Rama, Phare Rama, Rama Rama Phare Phare.

Adhar is a goldsmith by caste. That is why some brahmin devotees are initially hesitant to eat in his house. But later, when they see that Sri Ramakrishna himself eats there, they give up this wrong notion.

It is about 9 p.m. Thakur has joyfully eaten his meal with Narendra, Bhavanath, and other devotees.

Now he comes to the parlour to rest. Preparations are being made for his return to Dakshineswar.

The Mukherji brothers have arranged for a kirtan at Dakshineswar tomorrow, Sunday, for Thakur's enjoyment. Shyamdas, a professional musician, will sing. Ram studies devotional music from him at his home.

Thakur asks Narendra to come to Dakshineswar the next day.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Will you come tomorrow?"

Narendra: "I'll try."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You can eat there if you like.

"M. can also eat there. (*To M.*) Are you over your illness? Are you on a diet?"

M.: "No, sir. I shall be there."

Nityagopal is in Vrindavan. Some days ago Chunilal returned from there. Thakur gets news of Nityagopal from him.

Thakur is ready to return to Dakshineswar. M. salutes him, touching Thakur's feet with his forehead.

Thakur says to him affectionately, "Do come."

(*To Narendra and others, affectionately*): "Narendra, Bhavanath – please come."

Narendra, Bhavanath, and other devotees salute him by prostrating. They all return home, their minds recalling Thakur's wonderful singing and dancing with the devotees during the kirtan.

It is the first day of the dark fortnight of the month of Bhadra. The moon shines brightly in the night, as if laughing. Sri Ramakrishna proceeds towards Dakshineswar in a carriage with Bhavanath, Hazra, and other devotees.

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna with Ram, Baburam, M., Chuni, Adhar, Bhavanath, Niranjan, and Other Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Life of Thakur in his own words – beliefs of the Ghoshpara and Kartabhaja sects

Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the smaller cot in his room at the Dakshineswar temple with devotees. It is about eleven o'clock. He has not yet been served the noon meal.

Yesterday, on Saturday, Thakur paid a visit to Adhar Sen's house with the devotees. He made everyone happy by celebrating the Lord Hari's name through devotional singing. Today Shyamdas will perform kirtan. Many devotees are assembling to witness Thakur's joy in devotional singing.

The first to arrive are Baburam, M., the brahmin from Srirampur, Manomohan, Bhavanath, and Kishori. Then Chunilal, Haripada, and others come, followed by the Mukherji brothers, Ram, Surendra, Tarak, Adhar, and Niranjan. Latu, Harish, and Hazra are now staying at Dakshineswar. Ramlal is the priest in Mother Kali's temple, and he looks after Thakur. Ram Chakravarty is the priest in the Vishnu temple. Today is Sunday, 7 September 1884 ; 23rd Bhadra, 1291 B.Y., the second day of the dark fortnight of Bhadra.

After M. has saluted Thakur, Sri Ramakrishna says to him, "Hasn't Narendra come?"

Narendra could not come that day. The brahmin from Srirampur has brought a book of songs by Ramprasad. Now and then he reads some of the songs to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the brahmin*): "My dear, do continue reading."

Brahmin: "Put on clothes, Mother – "

Sri Ramakrishna: "Stop! Songs like this are absolutely useless. Read only those songs that inspire love and devotion for God."

Brahmin: "Who can know what Kali is? Even the six philosophies cannot reveal Her."

Thakur's sympathetic friend – the paramahamsa, the baul, and the sai

Yesterday at Adhar's house I felt a pain in one of my legs when I was in ecstasy. That's why I take Baburam with me. He is a sympathetic soul.

Saying this, Thakur sings:

How can I tell you, O friend, what is in my heart?

I am forbidden to speak.

I cannot live without a kindred soul.

Such a one can be recognized from the look of his eyes.

Rare indeed is such a soul who swims in bliss on a tide of intense love.

The man of the heart trades in love.

Where can one find a man of the heart,

Who carries under his arm only a tattered rag?

He says not a word, but travels on the high road.

A man of the heart only walks along the higher path.

"The bauls sing songs like this. And they also sing songs like this one:

Wait, O wandering monk, with your water-pot![1]

Stand and let me behold your beauty.

"According to Shaktas, a perfected soul[2] is called a kaul. In the Vedanta, he is called a paramahamsa. The Vaishnava bauls call him a sai. 'There is none greater than a sai.'

"When a baul attains perfection, he is known as a sai. For him there is no distinction – half of his necklace is made of cow-bones and the other half of the sacred tulsi plant.

"Hindus call him Nir and Muslims call him Pir."

Alekh (the incomprehensible) – about the spiritual current – spiritual centre – the function of syrup – taking the pot off

"A sai calls the Ultimate Reality 'Alekh.' In the Vedas it is called Brahman; the sais call Him Alekh, the incomprehensible. They say of the individual soul that Alekh comes and Alekh departs. That is to say, the individual soul comes from the unmanifest and then merges back into it.

"The Bauls ask, 'Do you know about the wind?'

1. Kamandalu, or water pot of a wandering ascetic, a symbol of renunciation and purification.
2. Siddha.

That is, about the rising of the spiritual current[1] within the ida, pingala, and sushumna, when the kundalini is awakened.

"They ask, 'In which centre[2] are you?' The sixth centre is the sixth centre of consciousness.

"If he says that he is in the fifth, it means that his mind has risen to the vishuddha spiritual centre.

(*To M.*) "There is the vision of the formless God then. As the song says."

Saying this, Thakur chants: "Within the petals of this lotus lies hidden a secret, subtle space. Passing beyond it, one beholds the world dissolve."

His earlier story – arrival of the Bauls and followers of the Kartabhaja and Ghoshpara

"A baul once came here. I asked him, 'Has your syrup been refined? Is the pot down from the fire?' The more you boil syrup, the more refined it becomes. First you have sugarcane juice. Then it turns into molasses, then into jaggery,[3] and then sugar, then sugar candy; last of all are sugar balls. It becomes refined more and more only gradually.

"When should the pot be taken down? In other words, when will spiritual practices end? They will end when the senses are conquered. Senses are loosened the same way a leech drops off when lime is applied to it. Though one might live with a

1. Mahavayu.
2. Pitha.
3.Gur, the stage in the refinement of sugar in which it is moist and dark brown.

woman, one does not engage in intercourse with her.

"Many of these people conduct themselves according to the Radha Tantra. They practise spiritual disciplines with the five basic elements – earth, water, fire, air, and ether – through the use of excrement, urine, menstrual flow, and semen. It is a very dirty practice, like entering a home through the toilet.

"One day when I was eating in the courtyard, a man of the Ghoshpara sect came. He asked, 'Are you eating, or are you feeding someone else?' The meaning was that the person who attains spiritual perfection sees that God dwells within.

"Those who perfect themselves in this sect call people of other sects 'bound souls.'[1] They don't talk in the presence of people of different views, saying, 'There are strangers here.'"

His earlier story – visit to his birthplace. In Shari Pathar's house with Hriday

"I saw a woman of this belief in my native village – Shari (Saraswati) Pathar. People of this sect eat in each other's houses, but they won't take a meal in the homes of people of other sects. The Mallicks ate at Shari Pathar's house, but they didn't eat at Hriday's. They say that these people are 'bound souls.' (*Laughter*.)

"One day when I was taking a stroll, I went to her house with Hriday. She had a beautiful tulsi

1. Jiva.

garden. She offered parched rice with urad lentils. I ate some. Hriday ate a lot – then he felt sick.

"They call the state of perfection[1] natural (sahaja). There is a class of people who go around saying, 'sahaja, sahaja.' They mention two characteristics of this state of sahaja: one, the body no longer has the 'smell of Krishna'; two, a bee will sit on a lotus but will not sip its honey. That there is no 'smell of Krishna' means that all divine feelings are within and there are no outward signs, not even the name of Hari on his lips. And the meaning of the second is that there is no attachment to women – one has acquired mastery over the senses.

"They don't like worship of the deity in an image or the like. They want a living person. That is why they are known as Kartabhaja, that is, those who adore and worship [bhaja] the spiritual preceptor [karta] – the guru – as God Himself."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and the harmony of religions – why all scriptures and all religions are true

Sri Ramakrishna: "You see how many doctrines there are? Every belief is a way to reach God. Innumerable are the beliefs and paths."

Bhavanath: "Then, what is the way for us?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have to hold on to one of the paths tightly. To reach the roof, you can climb brick steps. You can also climb a bamboo ladder or

1. Siddha.

a ladder made of rope. Also a piece of rope or a piece of bamboo will take you up. But if you place your foot first on one path and then on another, your effort will be in vain. You have to hold tightly to one. If you want to attain God, you have to take one path resolutely.

"And you should think of all religions as so many paths. You must never entertain the idea that your path is correct and all others are false. You must have no feeling of malice toward other beliefs."

To which path do I belong? The beliefs of Keshab, Shashadhar and Vijay

"So, to which path do 'I' belong? Keshab used to say, 'You have the same path as we do – you are gradually accepting the formless God.' Shashadhar used to say, 'You belong to us.' Vijay (Goswami) also used to say that I belonged to his path."

Is Thakur saying that since he has reached God by treading all the paths, he knows all of them? And that people of all religions will come to him and find peace?

Thakur goes toward the panchavati with M. and one or two other devotees. He wants to wash his face. It is twelve o'clock. The flood tide is about to begin. Hearing about it, Thakur waits for a while on the path to the panchavati.

Essence of bhava and mahabhava – Thakur watches the tides on the Ganges

Thakur says to the devotees, "What a wonderful thing the flood and ebb tides are!

"But notice this – they only occur in the river when it is near the sea. Away from the sea, the current flows only in the one direction. What does this mean? Dwell on that fact. Only those who are very near to God experience divine emotions and love for God. One or two (ishvarakotis) may have mahabhava, intense love for God, and so on.

(*To M.*) "Well, why are there flood and ebb tides?"

M.: "Western astronomy says that they are caused by the pull of the sun and the moon."

M. draws figures on the ground to show the movements of the earth, the moon, and the sun. Looking at them for a moment, Thakur says, "Oh, stop! It makes my head reel."

As they are talking, the flood tide rises. Soon the sound of the rising waters begins to be heard. Striking the bank near the temples, the flood flows toward the north.

Thakur watches the tide fixedly. Noticing a boat in the distance, he suddenly exclaims like a child, "Look, look! What's going to happen to that boat?"

While they are talking, Sri Ramakrishna and M. come to the foot of the panchavati. Thakur places his umbrella on the platform. He now talks about Narayan, whom he looks upon as the very manifestation of Narayana (the Lord Himself). He is very fond of him. Narayan is a student.

Instructions to M. – right use of money – his concern for Narayan

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Have you noticed Narayan's nature? He can associate with everybody – with the old as well as the young. This isn't possible without some special power. Besides, everybody loves him. Is he really so simple and guileless?"

M.: "Yes, sir. He appears to be very guileless."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Does he visit you?"

M.: "Yes, sir, he did come once or twice."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Would you give him a rupee, or should I ask Kali about it?"

M.: "Very well, sir. I'll give him one myself."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Very good. It's good to give to those who love God. That's the right use of money. What good is spending everything in worldly pursuits?"

Kishori[1] has children, but he doesn't earn much – not enough to meet his needs. Thakur says to M., "Narayan was telling me that he would find work for Kishori. Do remind him of it."

M. is standing in the panchavati. Thakur returns from the jhautala after a while. He says to M., "Please ask someone to spread a mat outside my room. I'll be back soon. I'd like to lie down for a while."

Reaching his room, Thakur says, "None of you remembered to bring the umbrella back. (*All*

1. M.'s brother.

laugh.) A scattered mind doesn't notice something even if it is nearby. A fellow went to a friend's house to light some charcoal for his tobacco. And he was holding a lantern in his own hand!

"Another fellow, looking everywhere for his hand towel, found it on his own shoulder!"

Thakur's midday meal – Baburam and other intimate companions

The prasad of Mother Kali is brought for Thakur. It is about one o'clock. After eating he wants to rest for a while, but the devotees remain sitting in the room. When they are told, they go outside. Harish, Niranjan, and Haripada will go to the dining room to have their midday meal. Thakur says to Harish, "Please take some amsattva (a thin cake made of mango juice) for yourself."

Thakur rests for a while. He says to Baburam, "Baburam, please come sit near me." Baburam answers, "I am preparing betel leaf."

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Leave it. Don't make the betel leaf."

While Thakur rests, a number of devotees sit under the bakul tree in the panchavati – the Mukherji brothers, Chunilal, Haripada, Bhavanath, and Tarak. Tarak has just returned from Vrindavan. The devotees listen to him talk about Vrindavan. He was there with Nityagopal.

Chapter III

Thakur in the joy of devotional singing – dancing with devotees

Thakur has rested for a while. Shyamdas begins singing songs relating to episodes in Mathura.

First he sings:

Lord, the joy of seeing You…

And then:

The lake of happiness seemed to them[1] as dry as the desert.

The chatak bird dying of thirst gazes at the clouds.

Thakur goes into an ecstatic mood, hearing about Radha's state of separation from Krishna. He is sitting on the smaller cot while Baburam, Niranjan, Ram, Manomohan, M., Surendra, Bhavanath, and other devotees sit on the floor. But the music has not yet picked up rhythm.

He asks Nabai Chaitanya of Konnagar to sing. Nabai is Manomohan's uncle.[2] Having retired with a pension, he practices spiritual disciplines and devotional singing[3] on the bank of the Ganges at Konnagar. He often visits Thakur.

Nabai sings in a loud voice. Leaving his seat, Thakur begins to dance. Immediately Nabai and the devotees begin to dance and sing the kirtan in a circle around him. The kirtan atmosphere becomes

1. The gopis of Vrindavan.
2. Nabai is the younger brother of Manomohan's father.
3. Sadhan and bhajan.

intense with spiritual fervour. Even Mahimacharan begins to dance with Thakur.

Thakur returns to his seat when the kirtan ends. After repeating Hari's name, he repeats the name of the All-Blissful Mother. He is absorbed in divine emotion and repeats the name of the Divine Mother. He begins to sing of Her, his eyes turned upward.

He sings:

O Mother, who are Bliss itself, do not deprive me of Your bliss…

Again he sings:

As is one's meditation, so is his heart moved by love.

As one feels, so does he gain. The root of all is faith.

If the mind can dip into the reservoir of nectar that is Mother Kali's feet,

Then worship and oblations,[1] sacrifices and rituals are of no avail.

And again:

O Mother Tara, this world is Your madhouse!

What shall I say of Your virtues?

Giving up Your elephant you ride on a bull like one depraved. Willfully you cast aside Your jewels and pearls and put on a garland of skulls.

Unmindful of others, You roam the cremation grounds.

Says Ramprasad, You must lead me beyond my wanderings in this maze of the world.

And again:

1. Homa.

Why go to Gaya, Ganga, Prabhas, Kashi, or Kanchi, if I can breathe my last chanting Kali's name?

Of what use are rituals for one who utters Kali's name at dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his footsteps, never catching up.

Charity, vows, and almsgiving no longer appeal to Madan's mind. His worship alone is surrender at the Mother's blessed feet.

Lord Shiva Himself, the God of Gods, with all His powers, sings Her praises. Who, then, can conceive of the power of Her holy name?

Then he sings:

Dwell, O my mind, within yourself,

And enter no one else's house.

If you search within yourself,

You will find there all you seek.[1]

He sings:

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight to the blue lotus flower of Mother Shyama's feet.[2]

And once more he sings:

Cherish the beloved Mother Shyama in your heart.

O mind, may you and I alone behold Her, and let no one else intrude.[3]

Thakur stands up while singing this song. He is nearly intoxicated with intense love for the Divine Mother. He repeats again and again the words 'the revered Mother Shyama,' as though for the benefit of the devotees.

1. For the complete song refer to Section XII, Chapter IX of Volume I
2. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section II, Chapter VII.
3. For the complete song refer to Section IX, Chapter I.

He appears intoxicated, as though he has drunk too much wine. He dances now as he sings:

> Is my Mother really black? The Naked One, in her blackness, lights up the lotus of my heart.

Noticing that Thakur is staggering while he is singing, Niranjan goes up to him to hold him. In a sweet voice, Thakur stops him, saying, "Don't touch me, you rascal." Seeing Thakur dancing, the devotees rise to their feet. He grasps M.'s hand and says, "Dance, you rascal!"

Mahima, the Vedantist, in the company of Thakur – dancing during the kirtan, and Thakur's joy

Thakur sits on his bed. He is filled with divine intoxication.

When the ecstasy subsides a little, he says, "Om, Om, Om, Om, Om, Om, Kali." And then he says, "I want a smoke." Most of the devotees are standing. Mahimacharan fans Thakur as he stands.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please sit down, all of you. (*To Mahima*) Please recite something from the Vedas."

Mahimacharan recites "Victory to Jajjman" and so forth. And then he recites a verse from the Mahanirvana Tantra.

> Om, I bow to You, the true origin of the universe.
>
> I bow to You, the support of all the universe, whose essence is pure Consciousness.
>
> I bow to You who are non-dual, the One, the liberating truth.
>
> I bow to the eternal Brahman, all-pervading and beyond all qualities.

You alone are the refuge; You alone are worthy of adoration.

You are truly the cause of the universe, the Creator, the Preserver, the Destroyer.

You are whole and beyond all thought,

Most frightening of all that is frightening, most terrible of all that is terrible,

The purifier of the pure, the goal of all creatures.

You are the Ruler of those in high places,

The Chief of chiefs, the Protector of protectors.

We meditate on You and sing hymns in Your praise.

We bow to You, the witness of the universe.

You are the vessel that takes one across the sea of life, the self-existent divinity, the refuge of all. We take shelter in You.

Thakur listens to the verse with folded hands. When it is over, he salutes devotedly. The devotees also salute.

Adhar arrives from Calcutta and salutes Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "We had fun today! Mahima Chakravarty is beginning to agree with us. Didn't you see his joy in the recitation of Hari's name?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Mahimacharan is interested in the path of knowledge. Today he has chanted the name of Hari and even danced during the kirtan. Thakur is very happy about it.

It is almost evening. Most of the devotees bow to Thakur and take their leave, one by one.

Chapter IV

Worldliness[1] or non-worldliness[2] – Adhar's job – admiration of the worldly and taking a job under them

It is evening. The lamplighter has lit the lamps in the long southern verandah and the western semi-circular verandah. In Thakur's room the lamp has already been lit and incense burnt. Soon the moon rises. The temple courtyard, the garden path, the bank of the Ganges, the panchavati, and the tops of trees are all flooded with moonlight.

Thakur is sitting on his bed, repeating the name of the Divine Mother and meditating upon Her.

Adhar comes in and sits down. M. and Niranjan are also in the room. Thakur talks with Adhar.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, my dear, you have come now. How much kirtan and dancing we had! The kirtan was by Shyamdas, Ram's music teacher. But I didn't like it very much. I felt no desire to rise from my seat and dance. Later I came to know about him. Gopidas' substitute told me, 'He has as many mistresses as I have hair on my head.' (*All laugh.*) Did you get the job?"

Adhar is a deputy magistrate with a salary of three hundred rupees a month. He had applied for the vice chairmanship of the municipality of Calcutta, which paid a salary of one thousand

1 Pravritti: inclination to outer enjoyment.
2. Nivritti: inwardness of the mind.

rupees a month. Adhar had met many prominent people of Calcutta to get this job.

Non-worldliness is better – to adore worldly people of poor understanding to get a job

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and Niranjan*): "Hazra said, 'Please pray to the Divine Mother a little so Adhar can get the job.' Adhar also asked me. I prayed to the Mother a little: 'Mother, he comes to see You very often. If it's all right, let him get the job.' But I also said: 'Mother, what poor understanding he has! Instead of asking for knowledge and devotion, he asks You for things like this.'

(*To Adhar*) "Why do you associate so much with people of poor understanding? You have seen so much and heard so much! To read the seven sections[1] of the Ramayana and yet ask whose wife Sita was! Such-and-such Mallick is a man of low intelligence. He arranged for a service boat when I planned to go to Mahesh. And when we reached his home, he asked Hriday, 'Hriday, have you arranged for the carriage?'"

Adhar: "One has to do all this to run a household. You haven't forbidden me from doing that."

About the temple treasurer asking Thakur to sign a receipt for his monthly salary when his state of madness for God was over

Sri Ramakrishna: "Indeed, desirelessness is good, not worldliness. After that state of mine, I

1. Kanda.

was called by the treasurer to sign a receipt for my salary, like all the others. I told him, 'I can't do that. I'm not asking for any salary. Give it to someone else if you want.'

"I'm only the servant of the Lord. How can I be the servant of anyone else?

"Noticing that I would be late for my meals, Mallick engaged a brahmin cook for me – for only one rupee a month. I was embarrassed. I had to run to the kitchen as soon as he called for me. It would have been different if I could have gone there of my own will.

"Worshipping people of mean intelligence! Such things do happen in household life – and much more."

His earlier story – Thakur's prayer after his state of divine intoxication – contentment

"When I attained that state and saw how the affairs of the world are run, I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please change the direction of my mind right now.' No more food from the beautiful lady. I cry after taking it. No more, no more of it."[1] (*All laugh.*)

Childhood story – about seeing the deputy magistrate, Ishwar Goshal, in Kamarpukur

"Go on with the job that you are doing now. People hanker after a salary of fifty or a hundred rupees. You are receiving three hundred. I saw a deputy magistrate in the village of Kamarpukur,

1. A Bengali remark about distasteful cooking by a sweet lady. Sri Ramakrishna was referring to not having to flatter rich people.

Ishwar Goshal. He wore a turban on his head. People trembled at his sight. I saw him when I was a child. Is being a deputy such a small thing, my dear?

"Go on serving him whom you are serving now. Service to one person soils the mind and you are seeking service under so many!"

Condemns service – Sambhu and Mathur's love and regard for money – Narendra as headmaster

"Once a woman felt attracted to a Muslim. She invited him to talk to her. The Muslim was a holy person. He said that he wanted to urinate and would go and get his piss pot. The woman said, 'You can do it here. I can give you a piss pot.' He said, 'That won't do. I will use the same piss pot to which I have already been exposed. I don't want to be immodest before a new piss pot.' Saying this, he left. The woman came to her senses. She understood that the piss pot meant a paramour."

Narendra has fallen on very difficult days after his father's death. He is looking for a job to feed and support his mother and brothers. For a few days he had worked as headmaster in Vidyasagar's Bowbazar school.

Adhar: "Well, would he accept a job?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, he would. He has his mother and brothers."

Adhar: "Well, Narendra can manage with fifty rupees. He can manage with a hundred, too. Will Narendra not try for a hundred?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Worldly people have great regard for wealth. They think there's nothing like money. Sambhu said, 'This is my desire – to place all this wealth at His feet when I depart.' Does God need worldly wealth? He wants spiritual knowledge, love, discrimination and dispassion.[1]

"When the jewelry was stolen from the temple, Mathur Babu said, 'O Bhagavan, could You not guard Your own jewelry? Goddess Hamseshwari protected hers so well!'

Difficult rules of conduct for sannyasins – Mathur's suggestion of gifting some land

"Mathur Babu said that he would transfer a piece of land to my name. I overheard it when I was in the Kali temple. Mathur Babu and Hriday were in consultation. I came out and said to Mathur Babu, 'Look, give up this idea. It would be very harmful to me.'"

Adhar: "There may not have been more than six or seven people like you since the beginning of creation!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why do you say that? There have surely been men of renunciation.[2] People come to know of them only when they have renounced their wealth. And there are others whom the world does not know. Are there not such people in western India (Punjab and United Provinces)?"

Adhar: "I know one such person in Calcutta, Devendra Tagore."

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1. Jnana, bhakti, viveka, vairagya.
2. Tyagis.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you saying! Who else has enjoyed pleasures of life the way he has? When I went to his house with Mathur Babu, I saw many small children. A physician had come and was writing out prescriptions. If the one who is a father of eight sons and some daughters will not meditate on God, who else will? The world condemns people who have enjoyed so much wealth but don't meditate on God."

Niranjan: "He repaid all the debts of Dwarkanath Tagore [his father]."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Stop this. Don't bother me anymore about it. Is he a real man who has the wherewithal and yet does not pay off the debts of his own father?

"But worldly people remain completely immersed in worldliness. Compared to them, he is a great deal better. They can learn from him.

"There is a tremendous difference between a householder devotee and a genuine all-renouncing devotee. A true sannyasin, a devotee of real renunciation, is like a bee. A bee sits nowhere else but on a flower. It drinks nothing but honey. The other – the householder devotee – is like a fly. It sits on sandesh as well as on a festering wound. He is sometimes in a fine spiritual mood and other times he is busy with 'lust and greed.'

"A real all-renouncing devotee is like a chatak bird. A chatak bird won't drink any water but rainwater when the star Svati is ascendant. The seven seas and the rivers are full of water, but it doesn't drink from them. A person of real

renunciation will not touch 'lust and greed,' nor will he keep them near him lest he become attached."

Chapter V

Chaitanya Deva, Sri Ramakrishna and name and fame

Adhar: "Chaitanya also enjoyed worldly pleasures."

Sri Ramakrishna (*surprised*): "What did he enjoy?"

Adhar: "Such a big pundit! What name and fame he enjoyed!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It may have been name and fame according to others – for him it was nothing.

"You have respect for me and so has Niranjan. It's just the same for me. I tell you the truth. It's not my desire to have a wealthy man under my control. Manomohan told me that Surendra said, 'It isn't correct that Rakhal should live with him. His family complained about it.' I said to him, 'Who is this Surendra? He has kept this carpet and pillow here and gives some money.'"

Adhar: "He gives ten rupees a month, doesn't he?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ten rupees meet expenses for two months. Some devotees live here. He gives for their support, the virtue accrues to him. What is it to me? I love Rakhal and Narendra. Do I derive any benefit from it?"

M.: "It is like a mother's love."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Even a mother does so much for her child, hoping that he will provide for her after getting a job. I love them because I see them as living Narayana – I don't just say this."

God takes on the burden of an all-renouncing devotee – 'who, precluding all else, meditates on Me'[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Adhar*): "Listen. When you light a lamp, there is no scarcity of moths. When you realize God, He provides everything. There is no dearth of anything. When He resides in the heart, many people arrive to serve.

"A young sannyasin went to beg alms at a householder's home. He was a sannyasin from birth. He knew nothing about the world. A young woman came to the door to offer him alms. The sannyasin asked, 'Mother, does this girl have an abscess on her chest?' The mother of the girl said, 'No, my child. She will bear an infant. God has given her breasts, so that the baby can drink milk from them.' The sannyasin then said, 'Why do I need to worry then? Why should I beg for alms? He who has created me will provide me with food.'

"Listen, she who has given up her all for the sake of her paramour can say, 'O rascal, I'll sit on your chest and eat.'"

Story of Totapuri – king's service to sadhus – Thakur meets the leader of Nanak's followers in their math near the Durga Temple in Kashi, in 1868

"The Naked One (Totapuri) told me that a king served food to sadhus using gold plates and

1. ananyāścintayanto, Bhagavad Gita 9:22.

tumblers. I saw in Kashi what reverence the head of the math was given. A number of very rich and wealthy Hindustani men stood there with folded hands, saying, 'At your command.'

"The right kind of sadhu, a true holy man, does not want gold plates, nor reverence. But God does not let him lack anything. He provides for everything that is necessary for realizing Him. (*Everybody keeps silent.*)

"You are a magistrate. What can I tell you? Do what you think is right. I am a fool."

Adhar (*laughing, to the devotees*): "He is examining me."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to the devotees*): "Dispassion[1] is better. Just see, I didn't sign [for receiving a salary]. God indeed is the Reality, everything else is unreal."

Hazra comes in and sits on the floor near the devotees. Hazra sometimes repeats, "So 'ham, so 'ham (I am He)." He says to Latu and other devotees, "What is the use in making offerings to God in worship – giving His own thing back to Him? One day he said the same to Narendra."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): "I explained to Latu. Who is it the devotee worships?"

Hazra: "The devotee calls upon his own self."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That is a very elevated idea. Vrindavalli said to King Bali, 'What wealth can you give to Brahman?'

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1. Nivritti.

"All spiritual practices, all chanting of His name and glories are done to realize what you are saying.

"When you see your Self within yourself you have attained the goal. It is to attain this that all spiritual practices are undertaken. The body is also to carry out spiritual practice. As long as a gold image is not cast, one needs a clay mould. When the image is made, the clay mould is thrown away. One can give up the body after God-realization.

"He is not only within – He is both within and without. The Divine Mother showed me in the Kali Temple that everything is filled with divine consciousness. The Divine Mother Herself has become everything – the deity, myself, the worship vessels,[1] the door sill, the marble floor. All is consciousness.

"It is to experience this that one calls upon Him, carries out spiritual practices – chanting His name and glories, and so on. It is for this that one practices devotion to God. These people (Latu and others) are like this – they have not yet reached such a high state. They practice love of God. Don't say 'I am He' (So 'ham) and such things to them."

The compassionate Gurudeva, Sri Ramakrishna, is protecting the devotees like a mother bird sheltering its young ones under its wings.

Adhar and Niranjan go to the verandah for refreshments, then they return. M. is sitting on the floor near Thakur.

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1. Kosha, kushi, etc.

A Brahmo boy with four university degrees – discussing and reasoning with him

Adhar (*smiling*): "We talked so much, but he (M.) didn't say even one word."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A boy of Keshab's group with four university degrees (named Varda?) laughed when he saw people arguing with me. 'What?' he said, 'To reason even with him!' I saw him again at one of Keshab's gatherings. Somehow his appearance had changed."

Ram Chakravarty, the priest of Vishnu temple, enters the room. Thakur says, "Look here, Ram. Did you talk about sugar candy with Dayal? No, there is no need for it. There have already been many discussions."

Thakur's evening meal – 'I can't eat food offered by everybody'

Thakur's evening meal is the prasad from Mother Kali – one or two luchis and a little farina pudding. He is seated on the floor to eat. M. is sitting near him. Latu is also in the room. The devotees have brought some sandesh and other sweets. Touching one piece of sandesh with his hand, Thakur says to Latu, "What rascal has brought this sandesh?" He drops it from the plate of pudding. (*To M. and Latu*) I know about it all. It was brought by one of the boys of the Anand Chatterji family, the one who visits the Ghoshpara woman."

Latu: "Shall I give you this sweet?"[1]

1. Gaja.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Did Kishori bring it?"

Latu: "Will it be agreeable to you?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes."

M. is an English-educated man. Thakur says to him, "I can't eat food offered by everybody. Do you believe this?"

M.: "Sir, I shall gradually have to believe in everything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes."

Thakur goes to the western verandah to wash his hands. M. pours water on them.

It is winter. As the moon rises, the clear sky and the water of the Ganges begin to sparkle. It is ebb tide and the Ganges is flowing south. Washing his face, Thakur says to M., "So will you give a rupee to Narayan?"

M.: "Yes, of course. Would I not?"

Section XIX

Thakur at Dakshineswar Temple with Narendra and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Go beyond both knowledge and ignorance – dry knowledge of Shashadhar

Sri Ramakrishna is resting in his room at the Dakshineswar temple after his midday meal. Devotees are with him. Narendra, Bhavanath, and other devotees have come today from Calcutta. The two Mukherji brothers, Jnan Babu, the younger Gopal, the elder Kali, and others have also arrived. Three devotees from Konnagar have come. There is news that Rakhal, who is with Balaram in holy Vrindavan, has suffered a bout of fever. Today is Sunday, 14 September 1884, 30th Bhadra, 1291 (B.Y.), the tenth day of the dark fortnight of the lunar month..

Narendra is very worried about his mother and brothers after the death of his father. He is preparing for a law examination.

Jnan Babu has received four university degrees and is a government official. He arrives between ten and eleven o'clock.

Sri Ramakrishna (*seeing Jnan Babu*): "Well, knowledge [a play on Jnan's name] has suddenly appeared!"

Jnan (*smiling*): "Sir, knowledge appears only with great good fortune."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Why, you are jnana. Why then are you in ajnana [ignorance]? Oh,

I understand, where there is knowledge, there is also ignorance. Rishi Vasishtha, though endowed with such knowledge, wept at the death of his sons. So go beyond knowledge and ignorance. The thorn of ignorance has pierced your foot. To take it out, you need the thorn of knowledge. After you have pulled it out, throw away both thorns."

The unattached householder – Thakur observes the work of the women carpenter women in his native village

"A man of knowledge says that worldly life is a veil of deception. He who is beyond both knowledge and ignorance calls it a mart of joy. He sees that God Himself has become the world and its living beings, and that He has become the twenty-four cosmic principles.

"One can live in the world after attaining God. Then one can live unattached. I have seen the carpenter women in my native village. They pound flattened rice with a pestle connected to a treadle. They push the paddy with one hand and hold a suckling child with the other. At the same time they bargain with a buyer, 'You owe me two annas. You must pay before you leave.' But seventy-five percent of their mind is on their hand, lest it should be crushed by the falling pestle.

"You should fix seventy-five percent of your mind on God and work with twenty-five percent."

Sri Ramakrishna now talks to the devotees about Pundit Shashadhar: "I saw him as one-tracked – he's only interested in dry knowledge and reasoning.

"Only that person who has matured in knowledge and has ripened his love for God, having reached the Absolute, can also dwell in the relative and then again ascend from the relative to the Absolute.

"Narada and other saints lived with love for God after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. This is called vijnana.

"Just dry reasoning! It's like a firework's rocket which shoots up into the air with a noise but falls down with a thud after sparkling momentarily. But the knowledge of Narada and Sukadeva is like a superior rocket that sparkles for some time, then goes out, but again sparkles with a new spray. Narada, Sukadeva, and others like them have intense love[1] for God. Ecstatic love is the rope for getting hold of Sat-chit-ananda."

Sri Ramakrishna at the foot of the bakul tree – becomes absorbed in ecstasy in the jhautala

After his midday meal, Sri Ramakrishna rests a while.

A few devotees are sitting on a bench under the bakul tree and talking – Bhavanath, the two Mukherji brothers, M., the younger Gopal, Hazra, and some others. Thakur is going to the jhautala. On his way there, he sits with the devotees for some time.

Hazra (*to the younger Gopal*): "Prepare a smoke for him."

1. Prema.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "You want it. That's why you ask for it." (*They all laugh*.)

Mukherji (*to Hazra*): "You have learnt a lot living with him."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "No, he has been like this since childhood!" (*All laugh*.)

The devotees watch Thakur return from the jhautala. He is in ecstasy, walking like he's drunk. When he enters his room, he returns to normal consciousness.

Chapter II

Thakur is worried about Narayan – devotees from Konnagar – Thakur in samadhi – Narendra sings

Many devotees have assembled in Thakur's room. Among the devotees from Konnagar there is a newcomer, a sadhaka who looks over fifty years old. He seems to be very proud of his scholarship. When he talks, he says, "Was there no moon before the churning of the ocean? Who will explain this?"

M. (*laughing*): "When there was no universe, where did the Mother get Her garland of skulls?"

The Sadhaka (*irritated*): "That's different."

Standing in the middle of the room, Thakur suddenly says to M., "Did he come – Narayan?" Narendra is talking with Hazra and some others on the verandah. A murmur from their discussion can be heard in Thakur's room.

Sri Ramakrishna: "He (Narendra) can talk a lot! But now he's very worried about his family at home."

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Wasn't he saying a while ago that he'd consider the trials of life as good for him? Didn't he?"

M.: "Sir, he has great strength of mind."

The elder Kali: "In what respect is he less strong?" Thakur is sitting.

A devotee from Konnagar says to him, "Sir, he (the sadhaka) has come to see you. He has something to ask."

The sadhaka is sitting with his body and head erect.

Sadhaka: "Sir, what is the way?"

Way to see God – faith in the words of the guru – when does one internalize the scriptures?

Sri Ramakrishna: "Have faith in the words of the guru. One attains God by following his words step by step. The way to reach one object is by holding the end of a thread."

Sadhaka: "Can one see God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is beyond the worldly intellect. You cannot attain Him if there is the least trace of attachment for 'lust and greed.' But He is visible to the pure intellect and pure mind – that intellect and mind which do not have the least trace

of attachment. Pure mind, pure intellect, pure Atman are one and the same."

Sadhaka: "But the scripture says, 'From where words turn back along with the mind, unable to comprehend.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Leave the scriptures out of it. Without practicing spiritual disciplines, you cannot understand the true meaning of the scriptures. What use is it to shout, 'Hemp, hemp?' Scholars quote verses from the scriptures, but what use is that? You feel no intoxication by just rubbing hemp on your body. You have to swallow it.

"What use is it to just repeat that there is butter in milk? You have to curdle the milk and then churn it. Only then do you get butter."

Sadhaka: "Churning the butter – these words are in the scriptures."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What good will it do you just to speak or listen to the words of the scriptures? You have to internalize them. The almanac says it's going to rain a certain amount, but you don't get even a drop by squeezing the almanac."

Sadhaka: "Churning butter – have you done it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Don't bother about what I have and haven't done. It's very difficult to make a person understand these things. If someone asks, 'What does ghee taste like?' the only reply is, 'Sir, ghee tastes just like ghee.'

"You have to keep the company of the holy to understand these things. You have to live with an

Ayurvedic physician[1] to know which pulse beat indicates phlegm, which bile, and which wind.[2]"

Sadhaka: "Some people become irritated living with others."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That comes after gaining knowledge, after realizing God. Doesn't a beginner need the company of the holy?"

The sadhaka keeps silent.

Sadhaka (*after a while, excitedly*): "Please tell me if you have known Him, whether you have gained His direct vision or experienced Him. Please tell me if you'd like to, but don't if you don't want to."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling a little*): "What can I say? One can only give a hint of what one feels."

Sadhaka: "Please tell us about that."

Narendra is going to sing. He says, "No one has brought a pakhavaj."

The younger Gopal: "Mahima (Mahimacharan) has one."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, there is no need to bring anything of his."

A devotee from Konnagar first sings a song in Dhrupada style.[3]

While the singing goes on, Thakur from time to time notes the sadhaka's different moods. The

1. Vaidya.
2. Kapha, pitta and vayu.
3. A style of North Indian classical music.

singer is having an intense argument with Narendra about singing and music.

Sadhaka (*to the singer*): "You are no less strong in argumentation! What is the use of such a discussion?"

Another person has joined in the discussion. Referring to him, Thakur says to the sadhaka, "But you haven't scolded him, too."

Sri Ramakrishna says to the devotees of Konnagar, "It appears that even you are not on good terms with him."

Narendra sings:

Will my days just pass in vain, O Lord?

Day and night my eyes are on the path of hope.[1]

The sadhaka closes his eyes in meditation as he listens to the song. Thakur is seated on his cot facing south. It is between three and four o'clock. From the west the sun falls on the sadhaka's body. Thakur quickly takes an umbrella and positions it to shade him.

Narendra sings:

How can I call on You with this stained and soiled mind?

Can a straw survive a flaming fire?

You are like that flaming fire, the source of all good,

And I, the sinner, am like a straw. How can I worship You?

I hear that by the glory of Your name the worst of sinners have been saved.

---

1. For the complete song refer to Volume III, Appendix, Chapter 1.

But, alas, my heart trembles when I recite Your holy Name.

My life passes by in the pursuit of habitual wrong-doing.

How can I find shelter in Your holy way?

Pray save this wretch with Your compassionate name,

Pull me up by the hair of my head; give me shelter at Your feet.

Chapter III

Instruction to Narendra and others – Vedas and Vedanta give only a faint idea

Narendra sings:

Sweet is Your name, O refuge of the lowly, raining like nectar in our ears and comforting us, O beloved of our souls!

The treasure of Your name is the abode of immortality. He who chants Your name becomes immortal.

When the nectar of Your name touches our ears, it erases in that instant the deep anguish of our hearts.

The sweet music of Your name fills the heart with sweetness. O Master of our hearts, and Soul of our souls!

As Narendra sings, "The sweet music of Your name fills the heart with sweetness," Thakur goes into samadhi. Immediately his fingers, and particularly his thumbs, become stiff. The devotees of Konnagar have never witnessed samadhi. Noticing that Thakur is silent, they prepare to leave.

Bhavanath: "Please sit down. He is in the state of samadhi."

The devotees from Konnagar sit again. Narendra sings:

I have made a seat for You in my heart, striving day and night.

O Lord of the Universe, in your mercy will you not enter there?

In ecstasy, Thakur comes down and sits on the floor beside Narendra.

In the firmament of wisdom, the moon of divine love rises full.

What a joyous sea of love has swelled up!

Victory to the Compassionate One! Victory to Him, the Compassionate One.[1]

When he hears the words, "Victory to the Compassionate One," he stands and again goes into samadhi.

After a fairly long time, Sri Ramakrishna returns somewhat to his normal state and sits down again on a mat on the floor. Narendra has finished the song. He has put the tanpura away. Still in ecstasy, Thakur says, "What is this, Mother? Please tell me. Churn the butter and place it at their mouths. They won't throw bait into the pond. Nor will they sit with a fishing rod. Someone has to catch the fish for them and give it to them. What a situation! I won't listen to any more reasoning. The rascals are forcing reason on me! What a situation! I will shake it off."

"God is beyond the Vedas and their rituals. Can you realize God by studying the Vedas and the

1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section I, Chapter II.

Vedanta? (*To Narendra*) Do you understand? The Vedas only give a faint idea of God."

Narendra again asks for the tanpura. Thakur says, "I will sing now." He is still in an ecstatic mood. He sings:

> This is the grief that weighs on my heart: though You, my Mother, are here and I am wide awake, thieves of passion rob my house.[1]

"Mother, why do You make me reason?" Again Thakur sings :

> Once for all, this time, I have thoroughly understood.
>
> From one who knows it well, I have learned the secret of contemplation, from one who came from a realm where there is no night.
>
> And now I can distinguish day from night no longer; rituals and devotions have all grown profitless for me.
>
> I've shaken off my sleep; how can I fall into slumber again? For I am wide awake in the sleeplessness of union.
>
> O Divine Mother, made one with you at last, my slumber I have lulled asleep forevermore.

Thakur says, "I am conscious." But he is still in an ecstatic mood. He sings again:

> I drink no ordinary wine, but the nectar of everlasting bliss, as I repeat "Jai Kali – to Kali, victory!"
>
> Seeing me drunk on this wine of the mind, by drunkards am I taken for a drunk.[2]

Thakur says, "Mother, I won't listen to discussions anymore."

---

1. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section XX, Chapter V.
2. For the complete song refer to Section XXX, Chapter II.

Narendra sings:

O Mother, make me mad with Your love.

What need have I for knowledge or reason?

With the wine of Your love make me drunk,

You who steal the hearts of Your devotees!

Drown me in the ocean of Your love.

Thakur smiles a little when he says, "O Mother, make me mad with Your love. You cannot attain Her by Your knowledge or reason, by discussing scripture."

He is happy to hear the Dhrupada musical airs by the singer from Konnagar. He says to him humbly, "Brother, please sing a song about the All-Blissful Mother."

Musician: "Sir, please excuse me from doing that."

Sri Ramakrishna (*folding his hands and bowing*): "No, my dear. Just one song. I can compel you."

Saying this, he sings a song referring to [gopi] Vrinda's speech from Govinda Adhikari's musical play:

Radha can surely speak out!

She has kept awake for Krishna.

She has kept awake throughout the night,

And has good reason to be piqued.

"My dear sir, you are the son of the All-Blissful Mother. She resides in every being. I shall certainly enforce my demand. A peasant said to his guru, 'I

will get the mantra from you by beating if necessary.'"

Singer (*smiling*): "Beating with a shoe!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*bowing as to the revered guru, and smiling*): "Not that far."

Then he adds, again abstracted in ecstasy, "The beginner, the aspirant, the perfect, and the perfect among the perfect! Are you perfect, or perfect of the perfect? Well, do sing."

The singer plays the notes of the melody, "Manvaran."

Enjoying the bliss of Shabda Brahman (the word as Brahman) – 'Mother, is it You or me?'

Sri Ramakrishna (*listening to the notes of melody*): "My dear sir, even this gives me joy."

The song has ended. The devotees from Konnagar salute Sri Ramakrishna and leave. The sadhaka salutes and then says with folded hands, "Holy sir,[1] may I leave?" Thakur is still absorbed in ecstasy and talking to the Divine Mother, "Mother, You or I? Do I do anything? No, no. You.

"You heard the discussion – or was it I who heard it? No, not me. It was You who heard it."

His earlier story – a sadhu teaches Thakur – a sadhu with the quality of tamas

Thakur has returned to the normal state of consciousness. He is talking to Narendra, Bhavanath, the two Mukherji brothers, and some

1. Gosain.

other devotees. The conversation turns to the sadhaka.

Bhavanath (*smiling*): "What kind of a man is he?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is a tamasic devotee."

Bhavanath: "He can quote any number of Sanskrit verses."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Once I said to someone, 'So and so is a rajasic sadhu. Why give him food and other provisions?' Another sadhu taught me not to say such things. He said, 'There are three kinds of sadhus: sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic.' Since that day, I respect sadhus of all kinds."

Narendra (*smiling*): "What? Like the elephant is Narayana, all are Narayana?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "God Himself is playing the game as both knowledge and ignorance.[1] I bow to both of them. The Chandi says, 'She is Lakshmi [good fortune] in the house of the blessed, and misfortune personified[2] in the house of the unfortunate.' (*To Bhavanath*) Is this in the Vishnu Purana?"

Bhavanath (*smiling*): "I don't know about that, sir. The devotees from Konnagar didn't understand your samadhi and got up to leave."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Then who said, 'Please stay seated'?"

Bhavanath (*smiling*): "I did."

---

1. Vidya and avidya.
2. Alakshmi.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Child, you are as good in gathering people as in making them leave."

Narendra's argument with the singer is now the topic of conversation.

Doctrine of non-resistance and Sri Ramakrishna – Thakur teaches Narendra – the tamas of sattva – the great importance of God's name

Mukherji: "Narendra didn't leave him alone."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, he didn't. One must have such grit. It is called the tamas of sattva. Should you listen to everything that people say? Should you let a prostitute do what she likes? Should you have to listen to what the prostitute says? One time Radha became sullen. A gopi friend said, 'Radha has become proud.' Brinda replied, 'Whose pride is it? It is His pride – she is proud with Krishna's pride.'"

Now the conversation turns to the great importance of chanting God's name.

Bhavanath: "I feel such relief by chanting the name of Hari."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is Hari indeed who rids us of sins.[1] Hari removes the three afflictions of the world.[2]

---

1. A name of Vishnu or His incarnation, Krishna, applied to God in personal form.
2. The three afflictions are *adhidaivika*, misfortunes caused by natural disasters or the forces of nature; *adhibhautika*, misfortunes caused by other livings beings, i.e. war, physical or verbal assault, attacks of animals, snake bites, and so on; *adhyatmika*, misfortunes arising from the harm we do ourselves by mental anguish, addictions, and self-destructive behavior.

"And Chaitanya Deva propagated the name of Hari, so it must be good. Look, what a scholar Chaitanya Deva was! Besides, he was an incarnation of God. Since he preached the name, it must certainly be good. (*Laughing*) Once some peasants were invited to a feast. They were asked, 'Would you like some hog plum pickles?' They replied, 'If the gentlemen have eaten it, give it to us too.' If they ate it, it most certainly must be good." (*Everybody laughs.*)

Thakur's desire to meet Shivanath – Mahendra's proposal to go on pilgrimage

Thakur feels a desire to see Shivanath (Shastri). He says to the Mukherji brothers: "I would like to go to see Shivanath. If I go in your carriage, there won't be the need to hire one."

Mukherji: "As you please. Let's decide on a date."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Well, would he like for me to visit? Brahmos criticize those who believe in God with form."

Mahendra Mukherji tells Thakur about wanting to go on pilgrimage.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What do you mean, my dear? The plant of love has not yet sprouted and you are leaving? Let the plant grow and develop into a tree and bear fruit. We were having a nice conversation."

Mahendra: "I feel that I should visit holy places. I'll return soon."

Chapter IV

Narendra's love and devotion for God – Thakur in the mood of Gauranga at Jadu Mallick's garden – with devotees

It is afternoon, about five o'clock. Thakur gets up from his seat. Devotees are strolling in the garden. Many of them will soon take their leave.

Thakur talks with Hazra on the northern verandah. These days Narendra often visits Annada, the eldest son of the Guhas.

Hazra: "I hear that Annada, Guha's son, is practicing difficult austerities. He lives on very little food, eating rice only once every four days."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, really? Who knows through what practice one may meet the Lord."

Hazra: "Narendra sang an agamani[1] song."

Sri Ramakrishna (*eagerly*): "How was it?"

Kishori is standing nearby. Thakur says, "Are you all right?"

Thakur is on the western circular verandah. It is winter. He is putting on a flannel shirt dyed ochre. At the same time he asks Narendra, "Did you sing the agamani?" Going down from the semi-circular verandah, he walks to the embankment of the Ganges with Narendra. M. is with them.

Narendra sings:

> Tell me, my daughter Uma, how you fared in the stranger's house.

1. A class of songs welcoming the Divine Mother, Uma, Shiva's wife, to her father's house.

The stories people tell! My heart is rent by grief.

His body smeared with ashes from the funeral pyre,

My son-in-law roams about, filled with delight!

Do you, like him, also rub your golden skin with ash?

How can a mother bear her son-in-law to beg from door to door?

This time when he comes to fetch you again, I shall say, "Uma is not here."

Thakur stands and listens to the song. He goes into an ecstatic mood standing there.

There is still a little daylight. The sun is low on the western horizon. Thakur is absorbed in ecstasy. On one side of him is the Ganges flowing north; the flood tide came some time ago. Behind him is a flower garden. And to the right the nahabat and the panchavati can be seen. Narendra stands close to him as he sings.

Now twilight has come. Narendra and other devotees salute Thakur and leave. Thakur returns to his room, recites the name of the Divine Mother, and meditates on Her.

Today Jadu Mallick has come to the adjoining garden house. He often sends word to Thakur to visit him when he is there. Today a messenger from him has come. Thakur will go. Adhar Sen, having come from Calcutta, salutes Thakur.

Thakur in Jadu Mallick's garden with devotees –in Gauranga's feelings

Thakur is about to go visit Jadu Mallick's garden. He says to Latu, "Light the lantern. Let's go."

He is going alone with Latu, but M. is present.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.)*: "Why haven't you brought Narayan with you?"

M.: "May I accompany you?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you want to go? Adhar and some others are there. All right, come along."

The Mukherji brothers were standing on the path. Thakur says to M., "Do they want to accompany us?" (*To the Mukherji brothers*) "That's nice. Come on. Then we can return quickly."

Conversation with Jadu about Chaitanya's life – about Adhar's work

Thakur goes to Jadu Mallick's parlour, a well furnished room. Lamps are shedding light in the room and on the verandah. Jadu is sitting with a couple of friends playing with some little boys. One of the kitchen help is awaiting orders. Another is fanning the company. Smiling, Jadu greets Thakur, still sitting. He acts with Thakur as if he is an old acquaintance.

Jadu is a devotee of Gauranga. He has already seen the performance about Chaitanya's life at the Star Theatre. He tells Thakur, "A new play of Chaitanya's life is being enacted. It is wonderful."

Thakur listens to the account of the play with joy and plays with one of Jadu's little sons, holding his hand. M. and the Mukherji brothers are sitting beside him.

Adhar Sen was trying to get the job of Vice Chairman of the municipal committee of Calcutta.

This post carried a salary of a thousand rupees a month. Adhar is a deputy magistrate, with a salary of three hundred rupees a month. He is thirty years old.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Jadu*): "Well, Adhar hasn't been successful in getting that job."

Jadu and his friends say, "He is still young."

After a short time Jadu says, "Please chant His name a little."

Thakur begins singing, depicting Gauranga's mood.

He sings:

My Gaur is dancing,

Dancing with the devotees to the kirtan in Srivas's courtyard.[1]

He sings:

My Gaur is a jewel of a man.

And he sings again:

Gauranga Deva casts a glance toward Vrindavan,

And from his eyes flow tears of ecstasy.

What is this, if not divine rapture?

Gauranga is an ocean of bliss.

In ecstasy he laughs, weeps, dances, and sings.

Every wooded grove he sees as Vrindavan, and the ocean as the Jamuna.

He places his head on his own feet,

For he is Gaur without, but Sri Krishna within.

---

1. For the complete song refer to Section XV, Chapter V.

And then he sings:

Why has my body become fair of complexion? Tell me, what has happened?

O friend, it is not the hour of dawn. Why has it taken on this hue before its time,

Before the time of the day's brightening?

The play of the Lord of the Dwaparayuga has not yet come to a close.[1]

Tell me, why has all this happened?

Wherever I cast my glance, the cuckoo and the peacock brightly gleam.

What has happened? Why do I see everything filled with golden light?

Perhaps Radha has reached Mathura, and that is why this body shines golden.

Radha was like a weevil,[2] so she has given her complexion to it. The limb that was dark has suddenly become golden.

Have I become Radha by thinking of her? What has happened?

Does Radharani bestow her radiant complexion on him who does not recite the Radha mantra?

I cannot tell, brother, whether I am in Mathura or Navadvip.

Mahadeva has not yet become advaita.

Why has my body turned fair-complexioned?

Balaram, the elder brother, has not yet become Nitai nor Vishakha Ramananda.

Brahma has also not become Haridas, nor Narada Srivasa, or Mother Yashoda Shachi.

---

1. Dwaparayuga: the second of the four cosmic ages (yugas).
2. Kumro poka, an insect that bores.

Why have I alone taken on this fair complexion, when Balai, the elder brother, has not become Nitai?

I think I have come to Mathura and that is why my body has become golden-hued.

I have become golden-hued though father Nanda has not yet become Jagannath, nor has Radhika become Gadadhar.

Why has my body become golden-hued?

Chapter V

Thakur's worry for Rakhal – Jadu Mallick – Bholanath testifies

As the song ends, the Mukherji brothers rise. Thakur also rises, though he is absorbed in an ecstatic mood. He comes to the verandah of the room and goes into deep samadhi as he stands there. A number of lamps have been lit on the verandah. The gate keeper of the garden is a devotee who sometimes invites Thakur to his house for a meal. While Thakur is still standing in samadhi, the gate keeper comes and fans him with a big fan.

Ratan, the garden manager, comes and bows to Thakur.

Thakur returns to a normal state. He says, "Narayana, Narayana," and then talks to him.

Thakur goes to the main gate of the temple accompanied by the devotees. The Mukherji brothers have been waiting there for him.

In the meantime Adhar has been looking for Thakur.

Mukherji (*laughing*): "Mahendra Babu [M.] has played truant to come here."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to Mukherji*): "Please keep regular contact with him and talk with him."

Priya Mukherji (smiling): "He is going to be our teacher now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The nature of a hemp smoker is that he is filled with joy to see another hemp smoker. He does not even talk to a good gentleman, but if a wandering hemp smoker comes, he may embrace him." (*All laugh*.)

Thakur proceeds west to his room by the garden path. On the way, he says, "Jadu is a great Hindu. He quotes many tales from the Bhagavata."

Mani comes to the Kali Temple, salutes, and takes some holy water.[1] Thakur arrives. They will both visit the Divine Mother.

It is around 9 p.m. The Mukherji brothers salute Thakur and leave. Adhar and M. are sitting on the floor. Thakur talks to Adhar about Rakhal.

Rakhal is in Vrindavan with Balaram. News about him had come by letter, saying that he was sick. Two or three days ago Thakur had become so worried to hear of his illness that he had cried like a child at the time of his midday meal, asking Hazra, "What is going to happen?" Adhar had written a registered letter to Rakhal but even the receipt of the letter has not yet been acknowledged.

---

1. Charanamrita.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Narayan got a letter but you have not received any reply to yours."

Adhar: "No sir, I haven't received a reply yet."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And he has written to M. as well."

They begin to talk about Thakur's seeing the *Chaitanya Lila.*

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to the devotees*): "Jadu said, 'You can see it nicely from a one-rupee seat. That's cheap!'

"Once there was talk about taking us to Panihati. Jadu said that we might take a country boat that carries a crowd of passengers. (*All laugh.*)

"He used to listen a little to spiritual talk. One devotee used to visit him quite frequently. But he is no longer seen. He always seems to have so many flatterers with him – they have misled him.

"He is very calculating. As soon as I arrive at his house, he asks, 'How much is the carriage fare?' I tell him, 'You don't have to bother about it. Just pay two and a half rupees.' Then he is silent and pays exactly two and a half rupees." (*All laugh.*)

A latrine has been built to the south of the temple. Because of it, a dispute with Jadu Mallick and the Temple authorities arose. Jadu's garden is close to it.

Bholanath, the garden clerk, has given a deposition before a judge. Perhaps because of it, he has become fearful, and he told Thakur about it. Thakur had replied, "Adhar is a deputy magistrate.

I'll ask him when he comes." Ram Chakravarty had brought Bholanath to Thakur and explained the whole matter to him, "Bholanath is afraid after giving deposition to the judge."

Thakur is worried and sits up. He asks for the whole case to be explained to Adhar. After Adhar has heard everything, he says, "There is nothing to it – just a little inconvenience." It helped rid Thakur of a deep worry.

It is dark. Adhar is about to leave. He offers his salutations.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Bring Narayan with you."

Section XX

Thakur at Dakshineswar with Mahendra, Rakhal, Radhika Goswami, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Advice to Mahendra and others – Captain's devotion to God and service to his parents

Sri Ramakrishna is in his room at the Kali temple in Dakshineswar with the devotees. It is autumn, Friday, 19 September 1884, the 4th of Ashwin, 1291 B.Y. The time is two o'clock. It is the amavasya[1] of the month of Bhadra, mahalaya.[2] Mahendra Mukherji and his brother Priya Mukherji, M., Baburam, Harish, Kishori, and Latu are there. Some are seated on the floor and the others either stand or move about the room. Hazra is sitting in the verandah. Rakhal is in Vrindavan with Balaram.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahendra and other devotees*): "I went to Captain's house in Calcutta. It was late at night when I returned.

"What a good nature Captain has! What love for God! He wears a short cloth[3] when he performs the arati – once with an earthen lamp with three wicks and then with a lamp with one light. Finally he performs arati with camphor.

---

1. New moon day.
2. The sacred day of invocation of Mother Durga prior to Her worship.
3. Short dhoti.

"He doesn't speak when he performs worship. He motioned for me to take a seat.

"While he worships, his eyes show great emotion, red and swollen as if a wasp has stung them.

"He can't sing, but he chants beautifully.

"In the presence of his mother, he sits below her, on the floor.

"His father was an officer[1] in the British army. On the battlefield, he would hold a gun in one hand and worship Shiva with the other. His servant made clay images of Shiva for him. He wouldn't even drink water before worshiping. He was paid six thousand rupees a year.

"Captain sends his mother to Kashi now and then. Twelve or thirteen people serve her there. It is a big expense. Captain knows Vedanta, the Gita, and the Bhagavata by heart.

"He says, 'The gentlemen in Calcutta conduct themselves like malechhas.'[2]

"In his early years, he practiced Hatha Yoga. That's why he strokes my head when I'm in samadhi or ecstasy.

"His wife has another deity – Gopala. This time I didn't find her so miserly. She also knows the Gita and other scriptures. What devotion they have! Whenever I sit for meals, they pour water on my hands to wash them. They even give me a wooden toothpick.

---

1. Subadar; officer in a company of native Indian soldiers.
2. Non-Hindus; a term of deprecation.

"They made a goat curry. Captain said, 'It stays good for fifteen days.' But his wife said, 'No, no. It's only good for seven days.' It was tasty. She served a little of some other dishes. Since I eat more than they do these days, she served me more.

"After eating, Captain or his wife fan me."

Jung Bahadur's sons accompany Captain to see Thakur in 1875-76 – an unmarried Nepali girl sings the *Gita Govinda* – 'I am a handmaid of God'

"They have great love for God. They show great reverence for sadhus. The people of western India (Punjab and Uttar Pradesh) have great devotion for sadhus. Jung Bahadur's sons and a nephew came here. They didn't wear their English trousers. They were somewhat in awe.

"Once a girl from his country came with Captain. She was a great devotee and hadn't married. She could sing the *Gita Govinda* from memory. Dwarika Babu[1] and his family came to hear her sing. I said, 'They want to hear you. They are good people.' While she was singing the *Gita Govinda*, Dwarika Babu began to wipe tears from his eyes. When asked why she had not married, she said, 'I am a handmaid of God. Whom else can I serve now?' Everybody respects her very much as a goddess, as the scriptures direct.

(*To Mahendra and others*) "Do you feel benefited by coming here? I would be quite pleased to hear

1. Dwarika Babu, Mathur's eldest son, died in 1877 (Pausha, 1284 B.Y.) at the age of 40. Captain first came in 1875-76, so this performance of *Gita Govinda* probably took place between 1875 and 1877.

that it helps. (*To M.*) Why do people come here? I am not much of a scholar."

M.: "Sir, when Krishna himself became cows and cowherd boys (after the original ones were abducted by Brahma), their mothers stopped going to Yashoda after they found the new cowherd boys. Even the cows followed the calves, bellowing when they heard them."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What does that mean?"

M.: "That the Lord Himself had become everything – such an attraction was generated. The mind is attracted by the presence of God."

Explanation of Krishna's sport – love of the gopis – significance of stealing their clothes

Sri Ramakrishna: "This is the attraction of Yogamaya. She casts a spell. Radhika disguised herself as Subol[1] with a calf in her arms, she was so afraid of Jatila (her sister-in-law). Jatila blessed her. When one takes refuge in Yogamaya, then even a Jatila blesses.

"The whole sport of Lord Hari is played out with the help of Yogamaya.

"The gopis, though married, felt great love for Krishna. They were madly in love with him – a woman doesn't feel so much love for her husband. If someone says to her, 'Look, your husband has come,' she replies, 'Let him. He can help himself to something to eat.' But if she hears that it is another man who is handsome and a master of wit, she will

1. Krishna's cowherd companion.

run to see him and peep at him from behind a screen.

"If the gopis had not seen him, how could their minds feel such attraction for him? This attraction is possible even by hearing about him. 'My mind is absorbed with him just by hearing his name, even without knowing him.'"

A devotee: "Sir, what is the meaning of the theft of the gopis' clothes?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The eight fetters – the gopis were rid of all the fetters except the feeling of shame. So he snapped even that bondage. All bondages are removed when one realizes God."

He who has fallen from yoga attains God after his desire for sense enjoyments is over

(*To Mahendra Mukherji and other devotees*) "Not everybody is attracted to God. There has to be a special receptivity. You have to have the right samskaras to feel such attraction. If that were not so, why should you be the only one to come here out of so many residents of Baghbazar? The ones without good tendencies don't come. The Malaya breeze turns every tree into sandalwood. But the shimul, the ashwattha, the banyan, and some others are not transformed.

"You don't lack money. When a person falls from yoga, he takes birth in a prosperous family. This enables him to renew his spiritual practices for the realization of God."

Mahendra Mukherji: "Why does a person fall from yoga?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Perhaps while contemplating God, he suddenly develops a desire for enjoyment. This craving makes him fall from yoga. In the next life he will have the same spiritual tendencies."

Mahendra: "Then what is the way out?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is no liberation as long as you nurse some desire for enjoyment. That is why you should fulfill all desires. Eat, dress, enjoy sex, and so on in time. (*Smiling*) What do you think? Should it be with your own wife or another woman?" (*M. and Mukherji laugh.*)

Chapter II

Life of Thakur told by himself – various desires of Thakur

His earlier story – first visit to the Nath's garden in Calcutta – bath in the Ganges

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's not good to have a desire for enjoyment. That's why I used to fulfill any desire which arose in my mind right away.

"When I saw some colourful sandesh at Burrabazar, I wanted to eat them. They brought them to me and I ate a lot of them, but then I got sick.

"One day in my childhood, when I was taking a dip in the Ganges, I saw a boy with a golden band around his waist. I was in the garden of the Naths. During a state of ecstasy, I felt I should also wear a band of gold. But I couldn't wear it long. When I put it on, a creeping sensation rose up inside me, a rapid, slithering movement. You see, my body had

touched gold. I had to take it off right away. If I hadn't, I would have had to tear it off.

"I also felt a craving for the parched rice-balls[1] of Dhanekhali and the fried milk sweetmeat[2] of Krishnanagar." (*All laugh.*)

His earlier story – listening to chanting of Chandi by Sambhu and Raj Narayana – Thakur serves the sadhus

"I wanted to hear the recitation of the Chandi by Sambhu. After hearing it, I wanted to hear the chanting again by Raj Narayana. I heard it, too.

"Many sadhus used to visit at that time. I felt the desire to have a separate bhandara (free kitchen) for their service. Mathur Babu complied with my wish. The sadhus were given food, fuel, and so on from that bhandara.

"Once a wish arose in my mind to wear an expensive robe made of gold thread and to smoke a silver hubble-bubble. Mathur Babu sent the new robe, hubble-bubble, everything. I put the robe on and puffed at the hubble-bubble in different ways, first this way and then another, once from above and then from below. Then I said to myself, 'O mind, this is what is known as smoking a silver hubble-bubble.' And I gave it up. I wore the robe for a little while and then took it off. I stamped on it, spat on it, and said, 'So this is an expensive robe. This robe brings rajas.'"

1. Khaichur, a round sweetmeat prepared by boiling coarsely powdered parched rice in sugar malt.
2. Sarbhaja, a sweetmeat prepared by frying milk-film.

Rakhal and Balaram in Vrindavan – Thakur's earlier story – Rakhal experiences his first ecstasy in 1881

Rakhal is in Vrindavan with Balaram. In the beginning he used to write letters praising Vrindavan. He wrote to M., "It is really a very nice place. You must come. Peacocks and peahens dance together. And there is music and dance – there is perpetual joy." After that Rakhal fell ill with a fever common to Vrindavan. Thakur was very worried when he heard about it. He took a vow to worship the Chandi for his sake. Talking about Rakhal, he said, "It was here that Rakhal first experienced ecstasy, while he was massaging my feet. A Bhagavata pundit was in the room speaking about the Bhagavata. Listening to what he was saying, Rakhal first began to tremble every now and then, and then he became perfectly still.

"He experienced ecstasy a second time in Balaram's house. He lay down in that state.

"Rakhal's spiritual ideal is God with form. He will leave a place where the formless God is mentioned.

"I made a vow to worship Chandika[1] for his sake. He has renounced his home and family and depends on me. I used to send him to his wife – he had a little desire for enjoyment left.

"He wrote to him (*pointing to M.*) from Vrindavan, 'It is a good place. Peacocks and peahens dance together. These birds have put me in a difficult situation.'

1. A form of Durga.

"He's there with Balaram. Ah, what a sweet nature Balaram has! He doesn't go to Kathar in Orissa for my sake. His brother has stopped sending him a monthly allowance saying, 'Come live here. Why are you wasting so much money there?' He didn't listen, just because he wants to see me.

"What a fine nature he has! Day and night he is busy with worship. His gardeners make garlands for the Deity. He will stay in Vrindavan for four months just to save money. He gets a monthly allowance of two hundred rupees."

His earlier story – he weeps for Narendra – Narendra's first visit to him in 1881

"Why am I so fond of these young men? The idea of 'lust and greed' has not entered their minds yet. I see them as ever-perfect.

"When Narendra came the first time, he was dressed in a dirty cloth. But looking at his face and eyes, I felt that he had mettle within. He didn't know many songs then. He sang one or two: 'O mind, return to thy abode' and 'Will my days just pass in vain, O Lord?'

"When he came, the room would be full of people, but I would talk looking only at him. He'd say, 'Please talk to them.' Then I would.

"I used to weep for him in Jadu Mallick's garden house. I was mad with longing to see him. I would hold Bholanath's hand and weep. Bholanath said, 'Sir, it's not right for you to do this for the sake of a

kayastha boy.'[1] The fat brahmin[2] one day folded his hands and said, 'Sir, he's only moderately educated. Why do you get so restless for him?'

"Bhavanath and Narendra are a twosome, they're a couple like husband and wife. That's why I asked Bhavanath to associate closely with Narendra. The spiritual ideal of both of them is the formless One."

Strict rules for sannyasins – renunciation for teaching others – Ghoshpara spiritual practices

"I forbid the youngsters from visiting with women frequently or staying long with them.

"Haripada fell into the snare of a Ghoshpara woman. She exhibits motherly affection, and Haripada is a child. He doesn't understand anything. These women act like this when they see youngsters. I hear that Haripada lies in her lap, and she feeds him with her own hands. I shall tell him that all this is not good. This motherly affection may later turn to lower conduct.

"These women carry out spiritual disciplines with men, taking them to be Sri Krishna. They say, 'He is Raja Krishna.' Their guru asks, 'Have you found your Raja Krishna?' They say, 'Yes, I have.'

"The other day that woman came here. I saw her furtive glances. Not good! Gauging her sentiments I said, 'Treat Haripada as you are doing now – and don't change your feelings.'

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1. The Kayasthas were a community noted for their adaptability to secular society. Under British rule many Kayasthas learned English and gave their children a British education.
2. A nickname for Prankrishna.

"The young men are in the stage of practicing spiritual disciplines. Their only practice now must be renunciation. A sannyasin must not even see a picture of a woman. I tell them, 'Even if a woman is a devotee, do not sit beside her and talk. Speak very briefly, while standing.' Even after attaining perfection, you have to do this. It is both for your own protection and for setting an example. When women come here, I also say to them after a while, 'Now go and visit the temples.' If they don't leave when I say this, I myself leave. Seeing me do this, others will learn."

His earlier story – visit to Phului Shyambazar in 1880 – attraction of an incarnation

"Well, you see, all these youngsters are coming here, and so are you. What does it mean? There certainly must be something here (within me). Why else would you feel attracted, why would I draw people here?

"When I was in Hriday's home in the countryside (in Sihore, near Kamarpukur), they took me to Shyambazar. I could see that they were devotees of Gauranga. It was revealed to me before I entered the village. I saw Gauranga. There was such an attraction that crowds of people came for seven days and nights. And there was only kirtan and dance. People sat on walls and some in the trees.

"I stayed at Natabar Goswami's house. There were crowds of people there day and night. I'd run away to a weaver's house in the morning, but people would gather there in no time. They'd bring

drums and cymbals. The drums would play 'takuti, takuti.' We'd have our meal at three in the afternoon.

"News went around that a man had died and come to life again seven times. Lest I should fall ill from the heat, Hriday would pull me out into the fields. But there, too, crowds gathered like rows of ants. Again the same playing of drums and cymbals: 'Takuti, takuti!' Hriday would say to them angrily, 'Have we never heard kirtan before?'

"The Vaishnava priests[1] came to create a row, thinking that we were there to take away their fees. But then they saw that I didn't touch a piece of cloth or even a thread. One of them said, 'He is a knower of Brahman.' So the gosais wanted to test me. One of them asked, 'Why doesn't he have a rosary or a holy mark on his forehead?' Another of them answered, 'The dry branch of the coconut tree has dropped off on its own.' I learned about the 'coconut branches' from there – that after one has attained knowledge of Brahman, all adjuncts fall off by themselves.

"People from distant villages would come and spend the night there. A number of women slept in the courtyard of the house where I was staying. Hriday was going out to urinate one night. They said, 'You might do it here (in the courtyard) itself.'

"I came to understand there in Shyambazar the attraction of the Divine Incarnation. When God descends to play His part, attraction is generated by Yogamaya. A spell is cast."

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1. Gosais.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and Radhika Goswami

It is almost three o'clock. Thakur has been talking to the two Mukherji brothers and other devotees. Radhika Goswami, who is about thirty years old, arrives and salutes Thakur. This is his first visit. He takes a seat.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you belong to the Advaita family?"

The Goswami: "Yes, sir."

Hearing that the goswami is a descendent of Advaita Goswami, Thakur salutes him with folded hands.

Reverence for the family of goswamis and brahmins – birth in the family of a saint

Sri Ramakrishna: "Born into the family of Advaita Goswami! Surely one inherits the qualities of one's ancestors.

"A high quality mango tree yields only high quality mangoes. (*The devotees laugh.*) No bad fruit, though there is some difference in size. Some small, others large, because of the quality of the soil. Isn't that right?"

The goswami (*humbly*): "Sir, what do I know?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Whatever you may say, people won't let you off so easily.

"A brahmin may have a thousand faults but he is revered if he belongs to the lineage[1] of Bharadvaja or Shandilya. Please narrate the tale of the falcon with conch-like markings on its wings."[2]

M. remains silent. Thakur continues.

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you have a saintly person as a predecessor, he will certainly pull you up, even if you have a thousand faults. When the Gandharvas captured the Kauravas, Yudhisthira had them liberated. He set free even Duryodhana, who had shown him so much enmity and was the cause of his exile.

"Besides, one should respect the holy garb. It reminds one of the real thing. Chaitanya Deva put religious robes on a donkey and then bowed to it.

"Why do people salute the shankhachila? When Kamsa tried to kill the Divine Mother,[3] she flew away as a falcon with conchlike markings on her wings. That's why, everyone bows to see this kind of bird."

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1. Gotra, one of forty-nine subdivisions of the brahmin caste, each the lineage of a celebrated teacher.
2. Shankhachila.
3. When the evil King Kamsa learned that a son of his sister Devaki would slay him, he imprisoned her and her husband Vasudeva. At birth Krishna was switched with the Divine Mother, who had taken the form of an infant. When Kamsa came to kill the baby, the Divine Mother transformed herself into a bird (the shankhachila) and flew away.

His earlier story – Koar Singh worships Thakur at Chanak – Thakur's loyalty to the king

"Soldiers saluted an Englishman who came to the cantonment of Chanak. Koar Singh explained to me that the country is under English rule, so one must salute an Englishman."

Thakur condemns sectarianism before the goswami – Shaktas and Vaishnavas

"Shaktas follow the Tantra while Vaishnavas follow the Puranas. It is not wrong for Vaishnavas to speak about their spiritual practices. But the followers of Tantra keep their practices secret. That's why you can't completely understand a Shakta.

(*To the goswami*) "You are good people. You do so much japa and chant the name of the Lord so much."

The goswami (*humbly*): "We do nothing great. I am worthless."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Humility is good, but there's another attitude: 'I repeat the name of Lord Hari. How can sin touch me?' People who say every day, 'I am a sinner, sinner I am; I am worthless, worthless I am,' indeed become so. What lack of faith! A person who has chanted His name so much and yet says, 'Sin, sin!'"

The goswami is amazed to hear this.

His earlier story – Thakur dresses as a Vaishnava in Vrindavan – 1868

Sri Ramakrishna: "I dressed myself in the garb of a Vaishnava in Vrindavan and wore it for fifteen days. (*To the devotees*) I used to practice the disciplines of all the different paths of religion for a few days. Only then would I feel at peace.

(*Laughing*) "I practiced them all. And I accept all paths. I accept the Shaktas as well as the Vaishnavas. And also the Vedantists. That's why people of all faiths come here. They all think I belong to their faith. I also respect the modern Brahmos.

"Somebody had a large tub with a single dye in it. But it had this wonderful quality: it would dye cloth any colour someone desired.

"One clever fellow said, 'You have to give me the dye which you used to dye their clothes.' (*Thakur and all others laugh*.)

"Why should I be one-sided? I'm not worried that people of a certain faith won't visit. It doesn't matter to me if someone comes or not. I also have no thought that a certain person should be in my control. Adhar Sen wanted me to pray to the Divine Mother so that he'd get a high position. He didn't get it. As a consequence, if he thinks in a different way about me, let him. I don't care."

His earlier story – feeling of the formless One in Keshab Sen's house – with Vijay Goswami in the school of Gadadhar from Ariadaha – Vijay's character

"And then when I went to Keshab Sen's house my attitude changed. They are always talking there

of the formless One. So I said to the Divine Mother in an ecstatic mood, 'Mother, don't come here. These people don't believe in Your forms.'"

The goswami is quiet when he hears all these words against sectarianism.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Vijay is in a very good state of mind.

"He falls on the ground when he chants, 'Hari, Hari.'

"He spends his time until four in the morning in devotional singing and meditation. He wears ochre cloth now. When he sees an image of God, he prostrates to offer his salutations.

"He went to Gadadhar's schoolhouse with me. I said, 'Here, he [Chaitanya Deva] used to practice meditation.' Immediately Vijay prostrated there.

"He again prostrated himself before Sri Chaitanya's picture."

The goswami: "And before the image of Radha-Krishna?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He fell prostrate there too. All his actions are orthodox."

The goswami: "He can now be taken into Vaishnava society."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He doesn't care much what people say."

The goswami: "But Vaishnava society would be benefited by having such a person."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He has great respect for me.

"It is difficult to find him. Today he is invited to Dacca, tomorrow to another place. He is always so busy.

"There are lots of problems in the (Sadharan Brahmo) Samaj."

The goswami: "Why, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "They say to him, 'You associate yourself with believers in God with form. You've become an idolater.'

"He is broad-minded and straightforward. Unless one is simple at heart, one doesn't receive the grace of God."

Instructions to the Mukherjis – household life – go forward – yoga of practice[1]

Now Thakur is talking with the Mukherji brothers. The elder brother, Mahendra, is in business. He has not taken service under anyone. The younger, Priyanath, used to be an engineer. He has now made some provision and no longer works. The elder Mukherji is thirty-five or thirty-six. His home is in the village of Kedati. He also has a house at Baghbazar in Calcutta.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "If you feel a little inspiration, don't rest content. You must go forward. There is more after the sandalwood trees – there are silver mines and gold mines."

Priya (*smiling*): "Sir, our legs are shackled. We can't move forward."

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1. Abhyasa yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What can shackles on the feet do? It is the mind that matters.

"You are bound or freed by the mind. There were two friends. One of them went to visit a prostitute and the other to listen to a recital of the Bhagavata. The former said, 'I am damned. My friend is listening to a recital of the story of Lord Hari and I am here in such a dirty place!' The one listening to the Bhagavata said to himself, 'I am cursed. See how my friend is enjoying himself and having fun. What a fool I am!' Just see, the first one was taken after death by the messengers of Vishnu to Vaikuntha.[1] The latter was taken to the nether world of Yama."[2]

Priya: "But the mind is not under my control."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you mean? There is the yoga of practice.[3] Practice it. You will see that your mind will go wherever you take it.

"The mind is like a freshly laundered cloth. It will get dyed red if you put it in red dye, and you can dye it blue by putting it in blue dye. Whatever colour you dye it in, it will take that colour.

(*To the goswami*) "Have you anything to ask?"

The goswami (*very humbly*): "No, sir. I've been able to see you and have been listening to all you are saying."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Now go and visit the deities in the temples.

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1. Heaven.
2. God of death.
3. Abhyasa yoga.

The goswami (*very humbly*): "Could you sing a little on the greatness of Sri Chaitanya?[1]

Thakur sings for the goswami:

Why has my body turned fair-complexioned?

Then:

Gauranga Deva casts a glance toward Vrindavan,

And from his eyes flow tears of ecstasy.

And again:

What is this, if not divine rapture?

Gauranga is an ocean of bliss.

In ecstasy he laughs, weeps, dances, and sings.

Every wooded grove he sees as Vrindavan, and the ocean as the Jamuna.

He places his head on his own feet,

For he is Gaur without, but Sri Krishna within.[2]

Advice to Radhika Goswami about harmony of religions

Thakur speaks again after the song is over.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the goswami*): "All these songs suit you (Vaishnavas). But if a Shakta or someone from the Ghoshpara sect comes, what shall I sing?

"You will find all kinds of attitudes here, for different kinds of people – Vaishnavas, Shaktas, Kartabhajas, Vedantists, as well as Brahmos.

"It is by His will that so many different religions, so many beliefs, have come into existence.

1. Mahaprabhu.
2. For the complete song refer to Section XIX, Chapter IV.

"God has given to everyone what agrees with his stomach. A mother doesn't serve rice and fish[1] to all her children. It doesn't suit everyone. So for some, she prepares fish soup.

"A person clings to the attitude which is agreeable to his nature and feelings.

"In a community festival where different kinds of people visit, images of various kinds are made. There are images of Radha-Krishna, Hara-Parvati and Sita-Rama – different images placed in different places. And you see people crowding before each one. Vaishnavas are seen standing for a long time to view Radha-Krishna, Shaktas near Hara-Parvati, and those who are devotees of Rama crowd around Sita-Rama.

"But those whose minds are not inclined toward any deity at all belong to a different class. At a community festival, they also prepare images such as a prostitute beating her paramour with a broom. People who have no deity in mind stand there with mouths agape, and the people look at them and call out loudly to their friends, 'Tell me, what are you looking at there? Come here, come here.'" (*Everyone laughs*.)

The goswami salutes and takes his leave.

1. Pulao.

Chapter IV

Thakur makes merry with the young devotees – he watches the arati of Mother Kali and fans Her with a chamara

The Mother and son talk. Why do you make me reason?

It is five o'clock. Thakur is on the western verandah. Baburam, Latu, the two Mukherji brothers, M., and some others are with him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and the others*): "Why should my mind run in a single track? These people are Vaishnavas and bigoted. They think that only their belief is correct and that all others are wrong. What I have said has gone deep into him [meaning Radhika Goswami]. (*Smiling*) An elephant needs to be goaded on the head because that's where it is sensitive."

Now Thakur begins to have fun with the youngsters.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "I don't serve them [the youngsters] only vegetarian food. I also give them a little water smelling of fish. Otherwise, why would they come?"

The Mukherjis leave the verandah to stroll for a while in the garden.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I used to practice japa – and go into samadhi. What does that mean?"

M. (*very seriously*): "That is very good, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Good! Good! But what would they (the Mukherjis) think about it?"

M.: "Why? Didn't Captain say that you are like a child? After realizing God, one becomes like a child."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That person at times acts like a child, a boy, and sometimes like an adult. In boyhood he talks nonsense. Sometimes he even uses foul language. But when he is in the state of adulthood, he teaches forcefully like a lion.

"You'd better talk to the Mukherjis and explain."

M.: "I don't have to explain. Don't they know already?"

After a few jokes with the youngsters, Sri Ramakrishna says to a devotee, "It is new moon today.[1] Please go to the Divine Mother's temple.'

The sound of arati can be heard after dusk. Thakur says to Baburam, "Come, let's go to the Kali temple." Then he and Baburam and M. go. Seeing Harish sitting on the verandah, Thakur says, "Is he again in ecstasy?"

Crossing the courtyard, they watch the arati of Sri Radhakanta for a while. Then they continue toward Mother Kali's temple. Thakur raises his arms and calls out to the Mother of the Universe, "Mother, O Mother. O, Brahmamayi!" Coming to the raised platform in front of the temple, he prostrates in salutation to the Divine Mother. The arati is being performed before the Mother. Thakur enters the shrine and begins to fan Her with a chamara.

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1 Amavasya.

The worship ends. The people who had been watching the arati all prostrate together. Sri Ramakrishna comes out of the shrine and salutes Her. Mahendra Mukherji and the other devotees also salute.

Today is new moon day, the darkest day of the fortnight. Thakur becomes fully absorbed in ecstasy, in divine intoxication. He holds Baburam's hand and returns to his room staggering like a drunkard.

The lamp-lighter has lit a lamp on the western verandah of his room. Thakur comes and sits there for some time. He chants, "Hari Om, Hari Om," and several other mantras from the Tantras.

In a little while Thakur goes and sits on his small bed, facing east. Even now he is fully absorbed in a divine mood.

The Mukherji brothers, Baburam, and others sit on the floor.

Origin of language – the philosophy of prayer

Absorbed in ecstasy, Thakur talks with the Divine Mother. He says, "Mother, that You will only do it when I speak to You – that cannot be true.

"What does talking really mean? It is just giving a hint. Someone says, 'I shall eat.' Another person says, 'Go on, I won't listen to you.'

"Well, Mother, if someone says, 'I want to eat,' doesn't he still feel hungry? It cannot be that You will listen only when I pray to You, that You will not listen when I long within. This cannot be true.

"You are what You are. Then why do I speak? Why do I pray?

"Oh, I do what You make me do.

"Oh, it is all confusion. Why do You make me reason?"

Thakur is talking to God. The devotees listen to him, speechless with wonder.

Samskaras and necessity of austerities – instruction to the devotees – service to sadhus

Now Thakur glances at the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Good tendencies of past birth[1] are essential to realize God. You have to have done something, practiced some austerities. Whether it is done in this life or in a past one.

"When Draupadi was being disrobed, the Lord appeared before her when he heard her earnest cry. He said, 'Try to remember if you have ever given a piece of cloth in charity. If you have, your modesty will be saved.' Draupadi said, 'I remember a rishi bathing in a river and his loin cloth floated away with the current. I tore off half of my cloth and gave it to him.' The Lord said, 'Then you have nothing to fear now.'"

M. is sitting on a foot rug east of Thakur's bed.

(*To M.*) "Have you understood this?"

M.: "Yes sir, about tendencies."

1. Samskaras.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please repeat what I have said. Let me hear."

M.: "Draupadi had gone for a bath –" (*Hazra enters.*)

Chapter V

Hazra Mahashay

Hazra has been living here for the last two years. He first met Thakur in 1880 in the village of Sihore near Kamarpukur. Thakur's nephew, Hriday Mukhopadyaya, the son of his cousin Himangani Devi,[1] lived there. At the time Thakur was staying at Hriday's house.

Hazra's native village is Madagod near Sihore. He has some land there. He is married and has children and other relatives. They get by somehow, though he has a debt of about a thousand rupees.

Hazra has felt dispassion since youth. He has a habit of seeking out sadhus and devotees. When he first came to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar and wanted to stay there, Thakur, already having met him in the village and seeing his devotional nature, asked him to stay and look after him.[2]

Hazra's attitude is that of a man of knowledge. He doesn't like Thakur's devotional nature and his interest in the youngsters. Now and then he thinks of

1. Daughter of Thakur's father's sister.

2. Hazra (Pratap Chandra Hazra): When he was about thirty-eight years old, Pratap left his wife and children to lead a spiritual life at Dakshineswar. Argumentative and critical of others, he nevertheless had extraordinary faith and devotion to Ramakrishna, who joked that he was there to "thicken the plot." He returned to his native village of Madagod, near Kamarpukur, where he died at the age of sixty-three or sixty-four, in the month of Chaitra, 1306 B.Y. (A.D 1900).

Sri Ramakrishna as a great soul, but at other times, he looks upon him as an ordinary individual.

He has taken a seat in the southeastern verandah of Thakur's room. There he repeats God's name on a rosary. Rakhal and other devotees do not spend as much time practicing japa, and Hazra criticizes them because of it.

He is a stickler for religious rules of conduct, which have become a sort of mania with him. He is about thirty-eight years old.

Hazra enters the room. Thakur enters a somewhat ecstatic mood and begins to talk.

Does God listen to prayers? – weep for Him, He will listen

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): "What you are doing is all right. But somehow it doesn't come together right.

"Don't find fault with anyone. Not even an insect. You yourself tell the tale of the sage Lomasha. Just as you pray for love of God, you must also pray that you may not find fault with others."

Hazra: "Does He listen if you pray for divine love?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A hundred times – if it is genuine and sincere. Does a worldly man weep for God as he does for his wife or son?"

His earlier life – the trembling of a resident of Kamarpukur over his wife's illness

"The wife of a person fell ill. Thinking that her illness was incurable, this fellow began to shake with fear and was about to fall down unconscious!

"Who does that for God?"

Hazra takes the dust of Thakur's feet.

Sri Ramakrishna (*hesitating*): "What are you doing?"

Hazra: "Shall I not take the dust of the feet of the man I live with?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Satisfy God and everyone will be satisfied! The whole world is pleased when God is pleased. When the Lord felt satisfied after eating the greens in Draupadi's pot and said, 'I am full,' all the beings of the whole world were satisfied. Indeed, they felt they had eaten more than their fill. But when the sages ate, was the whole world satisfied? Did it feel that it had eaten more than its fill?"

Thakur is saying that some work is necessary for the teaching of mankind.

His earlier story – a sadhu under the banyan tree worships his guru's sandals and a shalagram

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): "Even after attaining spiritual knowledge, one performs worship and other rituals in order to set an example.

"I visit the Kali temple and also bow before all these pictures in my room. That's why others do it.

If a habit is formed, the mind feels uncomfortable if it is not done.

"I saw a sannyasin under the banyan tree. He had placed his guru's sandals on a small carpet. And he placed a shalagram on the same carpet! He was worshipping them! I asked, 'If you have attained so much spiritual knowledge, what is the need of ritualistic worship?' The sannyasin said, 'I'm doing everything else, why not this too? I can place a flower on the guru's foot, and also on the emblem.'

"As long as one has a body, one cannot give up work. As long as there is mud at the bottom of the lake, there are bound to be some bubbles."[1]

The three stages: the scripture, the word of the guru, and spiritual practice; then one achieves the Goal

(*To Hazra*) "If there is knowledge of one, there is also knowledge of many. What help is there in mere reading of the scriptures?

"Scriptures contain sugar mixed with sand. It is very difficult to take out only the sugar. Therefore, one should hear the essence of a scripture from a sadhu or guru. After that, what is the need for scripture anymore?

"Say you've received a letter requesting five seers of sandesh and a piece of wearing cloth. If the letter is lost, you look for it anxiously. Finding it

1. It is indeed impossible for an embodied being to renounce action entirely. But he who renounces the fruit is regarded as one who has renounced (Gita 18:11).

after a long search, you read it: 'Send five seers of sandesh and a piece of cloth.' Then, you can throw the letter away. What use is it now? Your work now is to procure the sandesh and cloth.

(*To Mukherji, Baburam, M., and other devotees*) "After getting all the information, dive in. Having made sure where the pot is lying on the bottom of the pond, dive only there.

"You have to hear the essence of the scriptures from the lips of the guru and then take to spiritual practices. When you are absolutely sure what the right spiritual practice is for you, you begin to perceive God directly.

"And you can be sure of the right spiritual practice only when you dive. What use is it to sit down and reason about what you have read in the scriptures? Fools just reason about the way and then perish, because they don't dive. Let them go!

"If you say that in diving there is the fear of sharks and crocodiles – the fear of desires and anger – then rub your body with turmeric powder before you dive. They won't come near you. Turmeric powder is discrimination and non-attachment."

Chapter VI

His earlier story: Sri Ramakrishna's practice of spiritual disciplines according to the Purana, the Tantra, and the Vedanta – spiritual practices in the panchavati, under the bel tree and in the chandni – initiation into sannyasa from Totapuri in 1866

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "God made me practice various kinds of spiritual disciplines, first according to the Puranas, then according to the Tantras and also the disciplines of the Vedas. At first I practiced them in the panchavati. I planted a grove of tulsi plants, and I used to sit inside it and meditate. Sometimes I would call out with great longing, 'Mother, Mother,' or at times repeat, 'Rama, Rama.'

"When I repeated the name of Rama, I would sometimes tie a tail on my body in the spirit of Hanuman. It was a state of deep intoxication. During that time, I'd put on a silk cloth to worship. What joy was in that worship!

"The spiritual practices according to the Tantra were performed under the bel tree. At that time I could see no difference between a tulsi plant and the fruit of a sajina.[1]

"In that state, I used to eat the leftovers from the previous night's offering to Mother Durga;[2] they could have been defiled by a snake or something.

"Sometimes I would ride a dog and push fried bread into its mouth and then eat it myself. The

1. Sajina: A vegetable of the genus Moringa, appearing as sticks growing on trees, and known in English as "drumstick leaves."
2. Shivani.

whole world is Vishnu. I would rinse my mouth[1] with water fallen in puddles on the ground; I brought water from the pond and put it in the puddles to rinse my mouth with.

"One cannot have spiritual realization without destroying ignorance. So I used to assume the attitude of a tiger and eat it up.

"When I performed disciplines according to the Vedas, I became a sannyasin. I used to lie down in the chandni and say to Hriday, 'I have become a sannyasin. I shall eat in the chandni.'"

Thakur sees various divine forms during his practice of spiritual disciplines – Mother of the Universe instructs him on the Vedanta and the Gita

(*To the devotee*) "I remained on my seat resolutely and said to the Divine Mother, 'I am a fool. Pray, let me know what is in the various scriptures – in the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras.'

"The Divine Mother said, 'The essence of the Vedanta is that Brahman alone is real, that the world is illusory. He who is mentioned as Sat-chit-ananda Brahman in the Vedas is called Sat-chit-ananda Shiva in the Tantra. It is He who is known as Sat-chit-ananda Krishna in the Puranas.'

"What you hear when the word *gita* is repeated ten times is the essence of the Gita; that is, 'tagi, tagi' [renounce, renounce].

1. Perform achamana, a preliminary purification rite of ritualistic worship, sipping and sprinkling water.

"When a person realizes God, the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Purana, and the Tantra all become insignificant.

(*To Hazra*) "He is no longer able to pronounce Om. Why does this happen? I cannot utter the word Om unless I come down very far from samadhi.

"The scriptures describe various states one has after a direct vision of God. I had them all – the state of a child, of a ghoul, and of lifeless matter.

"I also used to have visions the way they are described in the scriptures. At times I would see the whole universe filled with sparks of fire. Sometimes, I saw lakes of mercury all around me, shining brightly. And sometimes I would see it as molten silver. At times, I saw, as it were, torches giving out many-coloured lights.

"All these conform to what is said in the scriptures. That was reassuring."

Sri Ramakrishna's state – union of the phenomenal and the Absolute

"And then it was revealed to me that God Himself had become the living beings, the universe, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. Climbing up to the rooftop and then coming down the stairs. It's the process of involution and evolution.

"Oh, what states I was kept in! One state would follow another like the movement of a husking machine. When one goes down, the other goes up.

"When I am in meditation, in samadhi, I see God. I also see Him when my mind comes back to the external world. I see Him on this side of the

mirror, and I also see Him on the back of the mirror."

Both the Mukherji brothers, Baburam, and other devotees listen to Thakur, amazed.

Chapter VII

His earlier story – detachment of Sambhu Mallick – takes shelter with a saintly person

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mukherji and others*): "Captain now is in the state of a spiritual aspirant.

"It isn't necessarily true that one remains attached (to the world) just by being rich. Sambhu (Mallick) used to say, 'Hridu, I sit here ready with my bundle packed.' I would say, 'What an ominous thing you are saying!' Then Sambhu would say, 'No, please say that I may go to Him, having renounced everything.'

"Devotees of God have no fear. They are near and dear to Him. He will draw them. When Duryodhana and his companions were made prisoners by the Gandharvas, it was Yudhisthira who had them released. He said, 'It would be a disgrace if our relatives remain in such difficulty.'"

Brahmins of the temple – Sri Ramakrishna preaches devotion to them

It is about 9 p.m. Both the Mukherji brothers are getting ready to return to Calcutta. Thakur gets up and strolls for a while through the room and the verandah. He hears loud singing in the Vishnu temple. Asking about it, a devotee tells him, "Latu

and Harish have joined them." Thakur says, "That's it."

Thakur goes to the Vishnu temple with the devotees. They prostrate before Sri Radhakanta.

Thakur notices that the brahmin servants of the temple, those who cook and prepare offerings for the deities and who serve it to the guests, have gathered together in a large number to sing the kirtan. Thakur stands there for a while and encourages them.

Returning to his room through the courtyard, he says to the devotees, "Look, some of these fellows wash the pots and pans, and some of them visit houses of prostitution."

Reaching his room, Thakur sits down on his cot. Those who were engaged in singing kirtan come and salute him.

Thakur says to them, "As you sweat to earn money, so you should perspire chanting Lord Hari's name, dancing and singing."

"I thought of dancing with you. But then I saw that the vegetable was seasoned perfectly – even fenugreek had been put in. (*All laugh.*) What seasoning could I add to it?

"Please come here now and then to sing Lord Hari's name."

Mukherji and others bow to Thakur and take their leave.

Their carriage comes right up to the smaller verandah north of Thakur's room. Its lights are lit.

Departure of devotees – Thakur's affection for them

Thakur is standing on the northeastern side of the verandah facing north. A devotee brings a light to show the devotees the way to the carriage.

Today is the dark new moon night, the night of Amavasya. The Ganges flows to the west of Thakur and in front is the nahabat, the flower garden, and the kuthi. The path to the main gate is to the right of Thakur.

The devotees bow their heads at Thakur's feet and then get into the carriage one after the other. Thakur says to a certain devotee, "Why don't you tell Ishan to find some work for him?"

Seeing that there are too many people riding in the carriage, creating a hardship for the horse, Thakur asks, "Aren't there too many people for one carriage?"

He remains standing. The devotees leave for Calcutta, watching Thakur's image full of love and grace for the devotees.[1]

1. Bhakta vatsala.

Section XXI

Thakur with Latu, M., Manilal, Mukherji, and Other Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Instruction to Manilal, the Brahmo, to give up dogmatism

Sri Ramakrishna is at the Dakshineswar temple with devotees.

It is Thursday, 2 October 1884, 17th of Ashwin, 1291 B.Y. – the twelfth and thirteenth day of the bright fortnight of Ashwin, two days after the Vijay Dashami day. The previous day Thakur had graced Adhar's house in Calcutta with a visit. A number of people were there – Narayan, Baburam, M., Kedar, Vijay, and others. During the kirtan Thakur danced with the devotees. [*See* Volume II of the Kathamrita.]

Latu, Ramlal, and Harish are living with Thakur these days. Ramlal is the priest of Mother Bhavatarini. Baburam stays there at times, and Hazra also lives there.

Manilal Mallick, Priya Mukherji, his relative Hari, a Brahmo devotee from Shivapur (Dari), and some Marwari devotees from 12 Mallick Street in Burrabazar are present. Gradually, some youngsters from Dakshineswar, Mahendra Kaviraj from Sinthi, and other devotees arrive. Manilal is an old member of the Brahmo Samaj.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Manilal and the others*): "It's better to salute mentally. What is the need to

touch the feet with your hand? Besides, mental salutation won't embarrass anybody.

"It isn't good to feel that only your religion is true and all others are false.

"I see that God Himself has become all – human beings, images of the deity, Shalagram.[1] In everything, I see only one. I see none else.

"Many people think that only their belief is correct and that all others are wrong, that only we have won and all others have lost. Those who have advanced a little may perhaps have been stopped for a while. But those who had lagged behind might have advanced in the meantime. In the game of golakdham, the piece may advance a great deal – but it may fail to reach the goal because one fails to throw the right dice.

"Victory and defeat are in God's hands. A person can't understand God's ways. You see, a green coconut grows high in the tree so it gets a lot of sun, yet its fruit is cool. On the other hand, a water-chestnut[2] grows in water, but its nature is to heat the body.

"Just consider the human body. The head, which is the foundation (the root), is at the top."

Sri Ramakrishna, the four ashramas and the essence of yoga – Brahmo Samaj and concentration on God with the mind[3]

Manilal: "What is our duty now?"

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1. An abstract image of Vishnu in the form of an oval stone bearing certain markings.
2. Singhara.
3. Mano yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna: "To remain united with God no matter what work you do. There are two paths: the path of karma yoga, or work, and the path of manoyoga, or mental effort.

"Householders unite themselves with God through work. There are four stages of life: brahmacharya,[1] garhasthya,[2] vanaprastha[3] and sannyasa.[4] A sannyasin has to give up working with desire[5] (i.e. hankering after health, wealth, long life, progeny, name, fame, title, and social status) but must perform his daily duties without any desire for reward.[6] Carrying a staff, begging for food, pilgrimage, worship, and japa – this work unites one with God.

"Whatever work you do, if you renounce the desire for its fruit, without craving anything, you will be united with Him.

"The other way is union with God through the mind. Such a yogi shows no outward sign. It is all within. For example, Jada Bharata and Sukadeva. There are so many others, but these two are well known. Such people don't cut their hair or beard; they let them grow naturally.

"Work falls off in the stage of a paramahamsa. Such people remember God and meditate upon Him always. Their minds ever remain united with Him.

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1. The first stage in the four stages of life according to the Vedas, that of a celibate student.
2. Married household life.
3. Detaching from family affairs and concentrating on God.
4. Renunciation of the world.
5. Kamya karma.
6. Refer to Bhagavad Gita 18:2-3.

If a paramahamsa ever performs work, it is to teach others.

"Whether union with God is achieved by work or through concentration, a person knows everything when love of God is developed.

"Through love of God suspension of breath[1] comes about by itself. When the mind is concentrated, the breathing becomes regular. Only when the mind is concentrated is the breath[2] steadied, and when the breath is steady, the mind becomes one-pointed – the intellect becomes steady. The person who experiences this isn't even aware of it."

His earlier story – prays to the Mother of the Universe during the period of spiritual disciplines – bhakti yoga

"You can achieve everything through bhakti yoga. I said to the Divine Mother, weeping, 'Mother, let me know what yogis came to know by practicing yoga, what men of knowledge have known by discrimination. Please reveal it to me.' The Divine Mother showed it all to me. When one weeps before Her with yearning, She conveys all knowledge. She has revealed to me everything that is in the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Puranas, the Tantra – all these scriptures."

Manilal: "What about hatha yoga?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Hatha yogis are sadhus who are concerned with their bodies. They practice neti, and dhauti[3] – they take care of the body only. Their

1. Kumbhaka.
2. Vayu.
3. Internal washing.

aim is to add years to their life. Day and night they serve the body – this is not good."

Mani Mallick, the worldly man, and mental renunciation – about Keshab Sen

"What is your duty? You should mentally renounce 'lust and greed.' You can't look on the world as nothing but the droppings of a crow.

"The goswamis are householders. So I said to them, 'You have the duties of worship and service to the deity. How can you renounce the world? You can't brush family life aside by calling it maya.'

"Chaitanya Deva listed the duties of householders as: compassion for living beings, service to Vaishnavas, and chanting God's holy name.

"Keshab Sen once said, 'Now he [Sri Ramakrishna] asks us to attend to both, but one day he will sting us.' But that's not true. How can I sting?"

Mani Mallick: "So please sting us."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Why? You are quite all right as a householder. Why should you renounce?"

Chapter II

A religious teacher's renunciation of 'lust and greed' - only then is he able to teach – difficult rules for the sannyasin – advice to Brahmani Lal

Sri Ramakrishna: "Those through whom God will teach mankind must renounce the world. It is essential for religious teachers to renounce 'lust and greed.' Without it, their teachings are not

accepted. It is not enough for them to renounce inwardly. They must also renounce outwardly. Only then can they teach mankind. If they don't, people will think that they are being asked to renounce 'lust and greed,' while they secretly enjoy them.

"An Ayurvedic physician[1] prescribed some medicine to a patient and said, 'Please come again another day and I will tell you about diet.' That day, there were a number of jars of molasses[2] in his room. The patient lived quite far away. He came another day. The physician said to him, 'Be careful about your diet. Molasses is not good for you.' When the patient had left, somebody asked the physician, 'Why did you cause him the trouble of coming here again, all that way? You could have said this to him the first day.' The physician laughed and said, 'There is a reason. I had some jars of molasses in my room that day. If I had asked him to give up molasses, he wouldn't have trusted me. He would have thought, He has so many jars of molasses in his room, he must surely be eating some of it. In that case it can't be so bad. Today I have hidden the jars; he will now believe me.'

"I have seen the religious teacher[3] of the Adi [Brahmo] Samaj. I hear that he has married two or three times. And that he has grown sons. Such are religious teachers! If these people say that only the Lord is real and all else is an illusion, who will believe them? You can guess very well what kind of disciples they will have.

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1. Kaviraj.
2. Gur.
3. Acharya.

"'If a guru goes to relieve himself, his disciple must at least emit gas.' If a sannyasin has renounced mentally but lives with 'lust and greed,' he can't teach. People will say that he secretly eats molasses."

Sri Ramakrishna's renunciation of gold – he returns five rupees to the physician

"Mahendra of Sinti (a physician) gave five rupees to Ramlal, but I didn't know about it.

"When Ramlal told me, I asked him, 'For whom was that money given?' He replied, 'For you.' At first I thought I should use it to pay what I owed for milk. But, my mother! I woke up in the night very disturbed. It felt like a cat was scratching my chest. I went to Ramlal again and asked if the money was for his aunt.[1] He said no. So I said to him, 'Please go right now and return it.' He returned the money the next day.

"Do you know what it's like for a sannyasin to accept money, or to be greedy? Like a brahmin widow who has lived for a long time on vegetarian food and observed celibacy taking a man of low caste as her paramour. (*Everybody is stunned.*)

"In my native village, the low caste oil woman, Bhagi Teli, had many devotees and disciples. Noticing that so many people paid respect to a shudra,[2] the landlord sent a wicked man to tempt her. He corrupted her and all her spiritual practices

1. Meaning Holy Mother.
2. Caste of laborers and servants.

and strivings ended in dust. A fallen sannyasin meets such a fate."

Faith in God[1] result of association with the holy – Keshab Sen and Vijaykrishna Goswami

"You are householders. It is essential that you keep the company of holy men. Association with them brings faith in God. How can people gain faith and love for God if holy men do not chant the name and glories of God? People respect a person when they know him to be rich; then they seek his company.

(*To M.)* "You must practice disciplines even after you attain spiritual knowledge. The Naked One[2] used to say, 'What is the use of cleaning a brass pot only once? It will get tarnished if you don't polish it.'

"I'll go to your house one day. If I know where your residence is, I can meet other devotees there. Please go see Ishan some time.

(*To Manilal*) "Keshab Sen's mother came here. The boys of her family chanted the name of the Lord. She circumambulated them clapping her hands. I saw that she was not overcome with sorrow. She came here and observed [the fast of] Ekadashi; she repeated the name of God on a rosary. I was impressed by her great devotion to God."

Manilal: "Keshab's grandfather, Ramkamal Sen, was a devotee of God. He used to sit in a tulsi grove

1. Shraddha.
2. Totapuri.

and repeat the name of God. Keshab's father, Pyarimohan, was also a devoted Vaishnava."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Unless the father is so devoted, the son could not be a devotee. Just see what a state Vijay is in. His father would lose consciousness in ecstasy when he read the Bhagavata. Vijay often stands up chanting the name of God.

"The visions (of divine forms) that Vijay has these days are all real. About God with form or the formless God, Vijay said, 'It is like a chameleon – sometimes red, sometimes blue, and then at other times green. And it may even be colourless. God is sometimes with attributes and sometimes without them.'"

Vijay is guileless – 'when one is simple and guileless at heart, one realizes God'

"Vijay is very simple at heart. You cannot realize God if you're not large-hearted and guileless.

"Vijay went to Adhar Sen's house yesterday. He felt like it was his own house and everybody who lived there was his own.

"Unless your mind is free from calculating this and that, you cannot be simple or large-hearted."

Saying this, Thakur begins to sing:

O mind, you will gain precious wealth when you become pure.

"Unless the clay is properly prepared, you cannot make a pot. If there is grit or sand in the

clay, the pot will crack. That's why a potter prepares the clay carefully.

"If a mirror is dirty, you cannot see your face in it. Unless your mind[1] is pure, your real Self cannot be seen.

"Look, where there is an incarnation of God, there is guilelessness – Nandaghosh, Dasharatha, and Vasudeva were all simple at heart.

"Vedanta tells us that unless you have a pure mind, you don't feel the desire to know God. Only in one's last birth or after practicing long austerities, does one become broad-minded and guileless."

Chapter III

Childlike state of Sri Ramakrishna

Noticing some puffiness in his legs, Thakur becomes anxious, like a child.

The physician, Mahendra of Sinti, comes in and bows to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Priya Mukherji and the other devotees*): "Yesterday, I said to Narayan, 'Please press your leg to see if it makes a dimple.' He pressed and there was one. I was saved! (*To Mukherji*) Please press your leg. See if it forms a dimple."

Mukherji: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, what a relief."

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1. Chitta, a) The mind or inner organ of consciousness in general. b) In Vedanta, the storehouse of memory.

Mani Mallick: "Please bathe in the running water of the river. Why take medicine?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, my dear sir! You have stronger blood. Your case is different. God has kept me in the state of a child.

"One day in a grassy meadow I was bitten. I had heard that if a snake bites a second time, it sucks out its poison. So I sat there putting my hand in a hole. Someone came by and asked, 'What are you doing? If the snake bites in the same place as before, it can happen, but if it bites anywhere else, it doesn't help.'

"I had heard from someone that autumn dew was beneficial. Coming from Calcutta by carriage, I stuck my head out so the mist would touch it. (*Everyone laughs.*)

(*To Mahendra of Sinthi*) "Your pundit from Sinthi is good. He is well-versed in Vedanta. He has respect for me. When I said to him, 'You have certainly studied a lot, but do give up the pride that 'I am such-and-such a pundit,' he was delighted.

"I discussed Vedanta with him."

Instructions to M., pure Self and spiritual ignorance – Mahamaya and discussion on Vedanta

(*To M.*) "The pure Atman is unattached to things of the world. Maya, or ignorance, is in it. This very maya has three qualities: sattva, rajas, and tamas. That which is pure Atman has in it these three qualities, yet it is unattached. If you throw a blue tablet into a fire, you see a blue flame.

If you throw a red tablet in it, the flame is red. But the fire has no colour of its own.

"Put a blue pill in water and the water will become blue. Then you put alum in it and it will recover its own colour.

"A butcher was carrying a load of meat when he touched Shankaracharya by chance. As soon as Shankaracharya remarked, 'Hey, you touched me!' the butcher replied, 'My lord, neither have I touched you, nor have you touched me. You are pure Self, unattached to anything.'

"Jada Bharata also said the same thing to King Rahugana.

"The pure Self is unattached, and it cannot be seen. When common salt is dissolved in water, it becomes invisible to the eye.

"That which is pure Atman is Mahakarana, the cause[1] of causes. There are the gross, the subtle, the cause, and the Great Cause (Mahakarana). The five material elements are gross. Mind, intellect and ego are subtle. Nature or the Primal Power is the cause of everything. Brahman or the Atman, the pure Self, is the cause of the cause.

"This pure Atman is our true Self. What is spiritual knowledge? Knowledge of one's real Self, and keeping the mind in it. This is knowledge of the pure Atman."

How long does one have to work?

"How long does a person have to work? As long as there is body-consciousness. That is, as long as

1. Karana.

one clings to the idea of the body being one's self. The Gita says this.[1] To cling to the idea that the body is one's own self is ignorance.

(*To the Brahmo devotee from Shivapur*) "Are you a Brahmo?"

The Brahmo devotee: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "I can recognize an aspirant of the formless God by looking at his eyes and face. Please dive a little. You don't get jewels by swimming on the surface. I accept both, God with form and God without form."

Sri Ramakrishna and Marwari devotee – individual self – mind-stuff[2]

The Marwari devotees from the Burrabazar arrive and salute Thakur. Thakur praises them.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Ah, these are great devotees. They all go to the temple, sing hymns, and have prasad. The priest they have engaged this time is well versed in the Bhagavata."

Marwari devotee: "When a person says, 'I am Your servant,' who is this 'I'?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The subtle body[3] or individual soul. The subtle body is made up of these four: mind, intellect, mind-stuff, and ego."

Marwari devotee: "Then what is the individual self?"

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1. Bhagavad Gita 18:11.
2. Chitta.
3. Linga sarira.

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is the Atman bound by the eight fetters. And what is the chitta? That which exclaims: 'Oh!'"

The Marwari – what happens after death? What is maya? – the view of the Gita

Marwari devotee: "Sir, what happens after death?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "According to the Gita, you become what you think of at the time of death. King Bharata became a deer because he thought of a deer. That is why spiritual practice is essential to realize God. If you contemplate God day and night, the same thought will come to you at the time of your death."

Marwari devotee: "Well, sir, why can't we give up attachment to things of the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "This is what is called maya. It is maya that makes you perceive the real as unreal and the unreal as real. The real, in other words, is the eternal, the Supreme Brahman. The unreal is the world, the ephemeral."

Marwari devotee: "We read holy books. Why don't we assimilate them?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What does reading do? You need to practice spiritual disciplines, austerities. Call upon God. What can repeating, 'Hemp, hemp,' do? You have to eat it.

"This world is like a thorny bush. Touch it and your hand will bleed. If you take a thorny bush and just sit before it saying, 'This bush is burning,' will it burn up? You have to light the fire of knowledge and set fire to that bush. Only then will it burn up.

"You have to work hard in the stage of practicing spiritual disciplines. Later on, the path is easy. Detach the boat from the bank and let it sail with a favourable wind."

Renounce the world of maya first – then gain spiritual knowledge – realization of God

"As long as you live inside the house of maya, as long as clouds of maya exist, the sun of knowledge does not help. When you leave the house of maya and stand outside (when you have renounced 'lust and greed'), the sun of knowledge destroys ignorance. A lens doesn't burn paper if you bring it inside the house. If you come outside with it and the rays of the sun fall on it, the paper burns. Again, if it is cloudy, the lens can't burn the paper. Only when the clouds disappear does it burn.

"Only when you stand a little away from 'lust and greed' and practice spiritual disciplines and austerities is the darkness of the mind dispelled. The cloud of ignorance and egotism is burned away. And you gain spiritual knowledge.

"Again, 'lust and greed' is the cloud."

Chapter IV

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna faints hearing that Lakshmi Narayan wants him to accept ten thousand rupees – difficult rules of sannyasin

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the Marwari devotee*): "The rules that govern the conduct of one who has renounced completely[1] are very difficult. He must

1. Tyagi.

not have the least association with 'lust and greed.' He must not touch money with his hands, and he must not allow it to be kept near him.

"Lakshmi Narayan, a Marwari and a Vedantist used to visit me often. Seeing my dirty bed sheet, he said, 'I'll invest ten thousand rupees in your name. The interest from it can be used to pay your expenses.'

"As soon as he said this, it was like I had been struck with a stick and knocked out.

"When I regained consciousness, I said, 'If you say such a thing again, please don't come here anymore. I can't touch money – or keep it with me.'

"He had a very sharp intellect. He said to me, 'You still have the idea of accepting and rejecting. In that case, you haven't yet attained perfect knowledge.'

"I replied, 'My dear, I haven't attained to that extent.' (*All laugh.*)

"Then Lakshmi Narayan tried to give the money to Hriday. I said, 'I will not let that happen. If you do that, I'll have to tell him, "Give some to this man and some to that one." And if he doesn't, I'll feel angry. Possession of money is basically bad. If you place something near a mirror, won't it be reflected in it?"

Sri Ramakrishna and the essence of liberation – Puranic path, not the Vedic, enjoined for the Kaliyuga

The Marwari devotee: "Revered sir, does one attain liberation only when he quits the body on the bank of the Ganges?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Liberation comes when one has attained spiritual knowledge. Wherever one may be, whether one dies in the cremation ground or on the bank of the Ganges, a person of spiritual knowledge will attain liberation. But the bank of the Ganges is best for a person who has not attained knowledge."

The Marwari devotee: "Revered sir, why is a person liberated if he dies in Kashi (Benares)?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When one dies in Kashi, Shiva appears before him and says, 'This form of mine is not real. I assume it for the sake of the devotee. Now look, I am dissolving into the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.' After saying this, the form disappears.

"According to the Puranas, even a pariah will attain liberation if he develops loving devotion to God. According to this belief, only chanting His name brings salvation; there is no need for sacrifices, oblations, tantric disciplines, or mantras.

"The teachings of the Vedas are different. According to them, only brahmins can gain liberation. And if the mantra is not recited properly, the worship is not accepted. One has to perform sacrifices, oblations, mantras, and tantric disciplines as prescribed."

Karma yoga is a very difficult path – bhakti yoga is enjoined for the Kaliyuga

"In the Kaliyuga where is the time to perform rituals as prescribed in the Vedas? So love for God according to Narada is enjoined for this age.

"Karma yoga is a very difficult path. Karma leads to bondage unless you can work without expectation of any reward. Besides, life depends on food. There is no time to perform all the rituals according to regulations. You can die by the time an ancient herbal medicine[1] is ready. You need to take a modern fever mixture.

"The path of devotion according to Narada is chanting His name and glories. Karma yoga is not suited to the Kaliyuga. The path of love for God is the right path."

Brahman is the very nature of existence – longing for God comes with right tendencies

Several young men from Dakshineswar village come in and pay their respects. They sit down and ask Thakur questions. It is about four o'clock.

Young man from Dakshineswar: "Sir, what is knowledge?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Lord is real and all else is unreal; knowing this is knowledge. That which is real is called Brahman. His other name is Kala (Time). That is why they say, 'O brother, how many have departed and how many have come into being in time!'

"Kali, She who sports with Kala, is the Primal Power. Kala and Kali, Brahman and Shakti, are not different.

"That Brahman, the real nature of existence, is eternal. It exists in the present, it existed in the past, and it will exist in the future. It is without

1. Dashmul pachan.

beginning or end. It cannot be described in words. The most you can say is that It is of the very nature of Consciousness and Bliss.

"The world is impermanent, Brahman is eternal. The world is like magic. The magician is real, but the magic of the magician is transitory."

Young man: "If the world is maya – is magic – why doesn't it vanish?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Because of inborn tendencies. Living in the world of maya for several births, one begins to think of it as real.

"Just listen to how powerful tendencies are. The son of a king was born into a washerman's family in his previous birth. As a prince, when he played with his companions, he would say, 'No more of these games. I'll lie down on my stomach and you beat clothes on my back and make a splashing sound."[1]

Men with good tendencies: Govinda Pal, Gopal Sen, Niranjan, Hirananda – earlier story: arrival of Govinda, Gopal and the Tagore boys, 1863-64

"A number of young men visit this place, but only a few yearn for God. They are ones who are born with good tendencies.[2] When the topic of marriage is brought up, they wince. They don't ever think about marriage. Niranjan has been saying since childhood that he won't marry.

"A long time ago (more than twenty years), two young men used to visit from Baranagore. One of

1. Indian washermen wash clothes by beating them on a stone.
2. Samskaras.

them was Govinda Pal, the other Gopal Sen. Since their childhood, their minds were on God. They would get frightened at the very mention of marriage. Gopal used to go into bhava samadhi. He would shy away from meeting a worldly person – the way a mouse feels frightened to see a cat. When the Tagore boys came to walk in the garden here, he shut the door of his room in the kuthi, lest he would have to talk to them.

"Gopal went into ecstasy in the panchavati. In that state, he touched my feet and said, 'I must leave. I can no longer live in this world. You still have a long time to live. But I must go.' I said to him, also in a state of ecstasy, 'You must come again.' He replied, 'Yes, I will come again.'

"In a few days, Govinda came. I asked him, 'Where is Gopal?' He said, 'Gopal has passed away.'

"What are the other boys involved with? How to have money, a house, a carriage, dress, and then marriage. These are their only concerns. To get married, they first look for a girl and then go to see her to make sure she's pretty.

"There's a person who criticizes me a lot. He complains that I love the young men. I certainly love those who have good tendencies, who are pure-souled, who yearn for God, whose minds are not attracted by money, pleasures of life, and so on.

"If a person is married but has love for God, he won't get attached to the world."

Hirananda, a resident of Sindh, is a Brahmo devotee. He has a B.A. degree.

Manilal, the Brahmo devotee from Shivapur, the Marwari devotees, and the young men salute Sri Ramakrishna and take their leave.

Chapter V

When does one renounce work? Thakur's promise to a devotee

It is evening. The lamplighter brings light to the southern and western circular verandahs. Thakur's room has also been lighted and incense has been burnt.

Thakur, having taken his seat, is chanting the name of the Divine Mother and meditating on Her. M., Priya Mukherji, and his relative are sitting on the floor in the room.

After meditating for some time, Thakur resumes his conversation with the devotees. There is still time before the arati service in the shrines.

Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta – Om and samadhi – Tat tvam asi – Om Tat Sat

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Of what use are rituals[1] for one who contemplates God day and night?"

He sings:

Of what use are rituals for one who utters Kali's name at dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his footsteps, never catching up.

Charity, vows, and almsgiving no longer appeal to Madan's mind. His worship alone is surrender at the Mother's blessed feet.

1. Sandhya, or worship and meditation in the morning, noon, and evening performed daily by orthodox Hindus.

"Sandhya merges in Gayatri, and Gayatri in Om.

"When just by pronouncing Om once one goes into samadhi, one has perfected himself.

"A sadhu in Rishikesh rises early in the morning and goes to stand near a big waterfall. The whole day he watches the fall and says to God, 'Oh, how beautiful you have made it! How beautiful it is! How wonderful!' He does not practice chanting of the name and other austerities. At nightfall he returns to his hut.

"What need is there to think about whether God has form or not? It is enough to weep with longing in solitude, 'O God, please show Yourself to me as You are!'

"He dwells within. That is why the Vedas say, 'Tat tvam asi (That thou art).' And He is also outside. Because of maya He appears as various forms, but in reality it is God alone who exists.

"That is why you should say 'Om Tat Sat' before you describe His forms or names.

"It is one thing to have His vision and another to read about Him in the scriptures. The scriptures only give hints about Him, so there's no need to read many of them. It's better to pray to Him in a solitary place.

"It's all right if you don't read the entire Gita. You get its essence by just repeating the word *gita* ten times – that is, *tyagi* (man of renunciation). 'O man, renounce everything and worship God.' That is the essence of the Gita."

Sri Ramakrishna watches the arati of Mother Bhavatarini and goes into ecstasy

While watching Mother Kali's arati with the devotees, Thakur goes into ecstasy. He is not able to salute Her by prostrating before Her. With great care he returns to his room with the devotees and sits down. He is still in ecstasy and talks to them in that state.

Hari, Mukherji's relative, must be eighteen to twenty years old. He is already married. For the time being he is living with the Mukherjis while he looks for work. He has great love for Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna and initiation into mantra – Sri Ramakrishna's promise to a devotee

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hari, in the same ecstatic mood*): "You must take initiation after you've gotten your mother's permission. (*To Priya*) I couldn't initiate him (Hari), though I told him I would – I don't give initiation. You continue with japa and meditation just as you have been doing."

Priya: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And I am telling you in this state of mind – you must believe me. You see, there is no pretense here. I said to the Divine Mother in this state, 'Mother, make perfect those who come here by sincere attraction.'"

Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi is sitting on the verandah with Ramlal, Hazra, and others. Thakur calls to him from his room, "Mahendra, Mahendra."

M. goes out quickly and brings the Kaviraj to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the Kaviraj*): "Please sit down and listen for a while."

The Kaviraj sits down, somewhat embarrassed, and then he starts listening to Thakur's sweet words.

Various approaches to God – Balaram's attitude – three states of Gauranga

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "God can be approached many ways.

"A loving devotee can enjoy His presence in different ways. Sometimes he thinks of Him as a lotus and himself a bee; at other times he sees Him as Sat-chit-ananda and himself as a fish.

"He may also say to Him, 'I am your dancing girl,' and then sing and dance before Him. Sometimes he assumes the attitude of a gopi friend and sometimes that of a handmaid. Sometimes he feels a mother's love for Him like Yashoda's. And then sometimes he has the attitude of a husband or a lover like the gopis.

"Balaram would sometimes think of Him as a friend and at other times he would say, 'I am Krishna's sunshade or a seat for Him to sit upon.' He served Him all different ways."

Is Thakur talking about his own state by describing that of a loving devotee? And again, when he describes the three states of Chaitanya Deva, perhaps he is giving us a hint of his own.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Chaitanya Deva experienced three states. In the innermost state, he was absorbed in samadhi, with no outer consciousness. In the semiconscious state, he would dance in

ecstasy but would not speak. When in outward consciousness, he would sing songs of devotion.

(*To the devotees*) "You people listen to all these things – but try to put them into practice. When a worldly-minded man goes to see a sadhu, he hides all worldly thoughts and worries. After leaving, he takes them out again. A pigeon eats dried peas. It seems that he has digested them but actually he retains them in his crop. You can feel them there."

Evening worship – Sri Ramakrishna and Islam – japa and meditation

"Leaving all work aside, you should call on God at dusk. The feeling of God comes to mind in darkness. Only a little while ago you could see everything. You think, Who has done all this? You know, Muslims stop all work at appointed times and offer prayers.[1]"

Mukherji: "Sir, is it good to practice japa?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, by repeating God's name, you can realize Him. When you secretly repeat His name in solitude, God's grace dawns on you, and it is followed by His vision.

"Imagine a thick log of wood lying under water. It is tied to the bank with a chain. If you proceed from one link to the next, you will at last reach the log and touch it.

"Japa is higher than worship, and meditation is higher than repetition of the name. Higher than meditation is ecstasy. Chaitanya Deva experienced

1. Namaz.

prema. When you attain prema, you have the cord to tie God with."

Hazra comes in and sits down.

Passionate love for God, Sri Ramakrishna and repetition of the name on a rosary – Narayan

(*To Hazra*) "Real love for God is passionate.[1] Ritualistic devotion[2] leaves the devotee as fast as it comes. Passionate love for God is like the self-created stone lingam rising out of the earth. It's impossible to find its source. The root of the self-born lingam goes as far as Kashi. Only incarnations of God and their apostles experience such passionate love."

Hazra: "Ah!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "One day you were doing japa. Returning from answering the call of nature, I said, 'Mother, what a small mind. He's counting beads on a rosary even after coming here.' Whoever comes here will gain enlightenment at once. He doesn't have to do much counting of beads and performing other practices like it. When you go to Calcutta, you see thousands of people counting beads, even prostitutes."

Sri Ramakrishna now says to M.: "Please bring Narayan here in a carriage. I have told him (Mukherji) about Narayan. When he comes, I want to give him some refreshments. Feeding has great meaning."

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1. Raga bhakti.
2. Vaidhi bhakti.

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna with Brahmo devotees at Nabin Sen's house in Calootola – in the joy of devotional singing

It is Saturday today, Kojagar Purnima.[1] Thakur has come to Calootola, to the house of the late Nabin Sen, the eldest brother of Keshab Sen. It is 4 October 1884, the 19th of Ashwin, 1291 B.Y.

The previous Thursday, Keshab's mother had come to invite Thakur and pressed him to come.

Thakur goes to the outer room upstairs and takes his seat. Nandalal and other nephews of Keshab, Keshab's mother, and their relatives and friends serve Thakur with great reverence. Kirtan was to be held in the room. Many ladies of the Sen families of Calootola have arrived.

Thakur is accompanied by Baburam, Kishori, and a few other devotees. M. has arrived. Sitting in a room downstairs, he is listening to the sweet kirtan of Thakur.

Thakur says to the Brahmo devotees, "The world is transitory; one must always remember death."

Now he sings:

Consider this, O mind: no one is your own. In this world you roam about in vain.

Do not forget the beneficent Mother or be ensnared in maya's net,

Think of those over whom you fret almost unto death: in death would they accompany you?

1. The night of the full moon of Ashwin in which Goddess Lakshmi is worshipped. It falls in the bright fortnight of the lunar month.

Even your beloved wife would deny you and shun your corpse as something impure.

Just for a day or two do people call you lord and master; they will cease to call you so when the master called Death arrives for you.

Thakur says, "Dive deep. What use is swimming on the surface? Giving up everything else, go to a solitary place for few days and call upon Him with one hundred percent of your mind."

Thakur sings again:

Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty, and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the gem of Love.[1]

Go seek, go seek, O mind, the blessed Vrindavan within your heart, the abode of the Lord of Love. Then in your heart the unceasing light of knowledge will ever shine.

Who is it that steers your boat over solid ground? It is your guru, says Kabir. Listen, and meditate on his holy feet.

He asks the Brahmo devotees to sing the song, "You are my all in all."

O Lord, the source of my life-breath, the essence of all essences, You are my all in all.

Besides You, there is none in the three worlds whom I can call my own.

Thakur himself sings:

Where have You hidden the form that Yashoda, making you dance, called her precious blue jewel?[2] Where have You, O Mother of gaping mouth,[3] hidden that form?

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1. Prema.
2. Nilmani.
3 Karalavadini, an epithet of Kali.

As the sun would sink in the sky, Yashoda, growing restless, would entreat You, Gopala, to come and partake of milk, cream, and butter.

She would tie Your disheveled hair into a bun,

And You would dance, bent thrice,[1] with Sridama.

The sweet jingle of Your anklets could be heard sounding to the beat of a drum, 'Ta thaiya, ta thaiya,'

Whereupon the women of Vraja would come running.

O Mother, play that sweet melody upon Your flute,

That music which caused the gopis to forget themselves and drew the cows home from pasture,

That music which turned upstream the Jamuna's flow.

Having cast off Your garland of skulls, You danced in Vraja with wild flowers adorned,

And having transformed Shiva into Balaram, you danced, relinquishing the sword and taking to the flute.

Pray dance, O Mother, in the same way, in the same form, once again.

Hearing this song, Keshab has new words composed. The Brahmo devotees sing the melody of that same song in accompaniment with the drum and cymbals:

O Mother, how great is Your love for Your children!

At the very thought of it, tears of joy stream from my eyes.

They sing again of the Divine Mother:

O Mother, as the Inner Controller![2] You are awake within, day and night.

Day and night You hold me in Your lap.

Next they sing:

1. Tribhangi, referring to a posture of Krishna.
2. Antaryamin.

O my mind! Why do you worry so, like a lowly beggar?

My Mother is Ishwari, the ruler of the universe, the all-protecting giver of spiritual perfection

Thakur now chants the names of Hari and Gauranga and dances with the Brahmo devotees. The kirtan continues with six songs:

O man, if you wish to live happily, love the sweet name of Hari …

The wave of Gaur's love has touched my body;[1]

By its thunder all heretics are crushed and the universe is submerged.

O Bharati, give me a loin cloth. I wish to go to Vraja disguised as a beggar …

Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers, are so full of compassion, O Lord!

My Gaur dances singing Hari's name.[2]

And finally:

Go, Madhai, and find out who goes there singing, 'Haribol, Haribol.'

Is it my Gaur who is going? Or is it Nitai?

They who wear gold anklets on their feet?

They with shaven heads and tattered cloths?

They who behave like madmen?

The Brahmo devotees sing again:

When will love enter me?

And then:

When will dawn that day when tears stream from my eyes as I repeat Lord Hari's name?[3]

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1. For the complete song, refer to Volume II, Section XVI, Chapter I.
2. For the complete song refer to Section XVII, Chapter I.
3. For the complete song refer to Section XIII, Chapter III.

Thakur sings in a loud voice and dances:

Behold, the brothers have come! The two who shed tears while chanting Hari's name.

They, who weeping, make others weep;

They, who in ecstasy dancing, make the world dance;

They, who receiving the world's blows, offer Hari's love.

Then he sings:

Behold, the whole of Nadia trembles under the waves of Gauranga's love!

Thakur chants the Divine Mother's name.

Don't steal away my joy, O Mother, You who are the source of all joy.

The Brahmos sing two of their own songs, first:

O Mother, make me mad with Your love.[1]

And then:

In the firmament of wisdom, the moon of divine love rises full.[2]

1. For the complete song refer to Section XIX, Chapter III.
2. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section I, Chapter II.

Section XXII

Sri Ramakrishna with Baburam, Nilkantha, M., Manomohan, and Other Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Hazra Mahashay – spontaneous love for God

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple with devotees after the midday meal. Near him are M., Hazra, the elder Kali, Baburam, Ramlal, and Hari, who is related to the Mukherjis. Some devotees are seated on the floor, others are standing. In response to the invitation of Keshab's mother, Thakur visited the Sen's Calcutta house the previous day and made everyone happy with his devotional songs.[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): "Yesterday I had a very good meal at Nabin Sen's house. It was served with great devotion."

Hazra and the knowledge of Ultimate Reality[2] – Hazra and his tendency to reason

Hazra has been living with Thakur for quite some time. He has a streak of pride, thinking that he is a jnani. He even criticizes Thakur in the presence of other people. On the other hand, he sits on an asana in the verandah and tells his beads with full concentration. He thinks of Chaitanya Deva as a

1. Accordingly, today is 5 October 1884.
2. Tattvajnana.

modern incarnation of God, but not one of great significance. He says, "It is not that God only grants pure love and devotion. He has no dearth of riches. He also grants wealth. When one attains Him, one also gets the eight occult powers." Hazra has incurred a debt on his house, about a thousand rupees, and is worried about paying it.

The elder Kali works in an office and receives a small salary. He has a family with children. He is greatly devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and often visits him, sometimes absenting himself from the office.

The elder Kali (*to Hazra*): "You go about testing people, like a touchstone, to find out which is pure gold and which is impure. Why do you run others down?"

Hazra: "Whatever remarks I make, I say in front of him."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's true."

Hazra explains the meaning of the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality.

Hazra: "Knowledge of the Ultimate Reality means the knowledge of the twenty-four cosmic principles."

A devotee: "What are the twenty-four cosmic principles?"

Hazra: "The five gross elements, the six enemies [or passions], the five organs of perception, the five organs of action, and so on."

1. Meaning Sri Ramakrishna.

M. (*to Thakur, smiling*): "He says that the six enemies[1] are included in the twenty-four cosmic principles."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Just see what he says about the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality, or tattvajnana. Notice that. Knowledge of the Ultimate Reality means knowledge of the Self. *Tat* means the Supreme self, *tvam* means the individual self. The embodied soul and the Supreme Self are one and the same. Knowing this is the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality, or tattvajnana."

After a while, Hazra rises and goes out of the room to sit on the verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "He only argues. For a moment he understands it very well, but in no time he becomes as ignorant as before.

"When I see a big fish pulling the line hard, I release it. If I didn't do that, the fish would break it. And the person holding the cord would fall into the water. That's why I don't say anything more."

Hazra, salvation, and the six divine glories[2] – selfish devotion versus motiveless love for God

(*To M.*) "Hazra says that you can attain liberation only if you are born a brahmin. I said, 'What do you mean? Liberation can be achieved by love for God alone.' Shavari was the daughter of a hunter. She, Ruhidas, and others, at whose meal time bells rang, were shudras. They attained

1. Lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride and envy.
2. Wisdom (jnana), power (shakti), strength (bala), lordship (aishvarya), valor (virya), and splendour (tejas).

liberation through love for God alone. Hazra says, 'But still…'

"He recognizes Dhruva. But not as much as Prahlada. When Latu said, 'How great a love for God Dhruva had during his childhood!' he remained silent.

"I say there is nothing higher than love for God untainted by desire. He contradicts this. A rich man is annoyed when a person comes to him asking for things. Irritated, he says, 'Here he comes!' When he comes in, the rich man says to him with irritation, 'Sit down.' He shows his annoyance. He doesn't take anybody in his carriage who demands anything of him.

"Hazra says, 'God isn't a rich person like that. Does He lack wealth that He would suffer any hardship to give it away?'

"Hazra says something else, 'When it rains, the Ganges and all the other big rivers and lakes swell with water; even pits and ponds are filled. When God's grace dawns, He grants not only love and devotion, but also wealth.'

"But this is tainted devotion. There is no desire in pure love. You want nothing from here [me], you only like to hear my talk when you meet me. My mind is also drawn to you: How is he, why hasn't he come? I have such anxiety about you.

"You want nothing, but still you love God. This is called motiveless love for God. This is pure love. Prahlada had it. He didn't want the kingdom, he didn't care for riches. He only wanted the Lord."

M.: "Hazra chats away incessantly. He isn't going to achieve anything unless he keeps his mouth shut."

Hazra's pride and fault-finding

Sri Ramakrishna: "Now and again he becomes very humble when he comes near me. But such are his stars that he soon begins to argue again. It is very difficult to get rid of pride. Cut down an ashwattha tree, and tomorrow you will see a shoot sprouting from it. As long as it has roots, the tree will sprout again and again.

"I say to Hazra, 'Don't find fault with people.'

"It is Narayana (God) who dwells in all these different forms. Even evil-doers can be worshiped.

"Just consider the worship of the Divine Mother in the form of a young unmarried girl.[1] Why worship a girl who has physical limitations and a runny nose? You do so because she also is a form of the Mother of the Universe.

"God dwells in His devotee in a special way. A devotee is the living room of God.

"The bigger the gourd, the better the tanpura you can make. It sounds better. (*Smiling, to Ramlal*) Oh, Ramlal, how did Hazra say that in Sanskrit, 'Antis bahis yadi Haris!'[2] It is like someone saying, 'Matram khatram.[3] (The mother is eating).' (*Everyone laughs.*)

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1. Kumari puja.
2. He quoted ungrammatically.
3. Ramakrishna made fun of the quote with his own outrageous Sanskrit composition.

Ramlal (*smiling*): "What is the use of austerity if God is seen inside as well as out?"[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Practice this, and repeat it to me often."

Thakur's plate is missing from his room. Ramlal and Brinde, the maid, are asking about it, "Do you know anything about the plate?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Where? I don't see it anywhere. It was here before. I saw it."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with two sadhus – Thakur's paramahamsa state

Two sadhu guests arrived today at the panchavati. They are studying the Gita, Vedanta, and some other scriptures. After their midday meal, they have come to see Thakur. He is sitting on his smaller cot. Bowing to him, the sadhus sit on a mat on the floor. M. and other devotees are also there. Thakur talks to them in Hindi.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Have you eaten?"

Sadhu: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What did you eat?"

Sadhu: "Chapattis and lentils. Would you like some?"

---

1. antarbahiryadi haris tapasā tataḥ kim.

The sadhu and work without expectation of reward – desire for love of God – Vedanta – So 'ham and the householder

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, I only eat a little rice. So, you repeat God's name and meditate. You do it without expecting any reward, don't you?"

Sadhu: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's good. Besides that, you should offer the results to God. Don't you agree?"

Sadhu (*to the other sadhu*) –

yat karoṣi yad aśnāsi yaj juhoṣi dadāsi yat ।

yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kuruṣva madarpaṇam ।।

[Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give away, whatever austerity you practice, O son of Kunti, do it as an offering to Me.]

– Bhagavad Gita 9:27

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you offer God something, you receive it back a thousandfold. So after performing all your duties, offer them to Him with water in your cupped palm, surrendering the fruit of the actions to Krishna.[1]

"When Yudhisthira was about to offer all his sins to Krishna, someone (Bhima) warned him, 'Please don't do such a thing. What you offer to Krishna, you will receive back a thousand times.' Well, one should work without expectation of any reward – renouncing all desires. Isn't it so?"

Sadhu: "Yes, sir."

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1 Reference to ritualistic worship.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, I have the desire to love God. That's not bad – actually it's good. Eating sweets isn't good – they bring indigestion – but sugar candy is beneficial."

Sadhu: "Yes, sir!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well my dear, what is Vedanta?"

Sadhu: "The six systems of philosophy comprise Vedanta."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But the essence of Vedanta is that Brahman is real and the world an illusion. I am not separate from anything, I am that same Brahman. What do you think?"

Sadhu: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But for those who live a worldly life and think they are the body, the attitude of So 'ham – I am That – is not right. The Vedanta or the Yogavasishtha is not for householders. They can indeed be harmful. The householder should live in the attitude of the master and the servant: 'O God! You are the Lord, the Master; I am Your slave, Your servant.' It's not good for those who consider themselves the body to cherish the attitude 'I am He.'"

Everyone remains silent. Thakur smiles a little, as though to himself – he rejoices in the Self.[1]

One sadhu whispers to the other, "Look, look at this. This is called the state of a paramahamsa."

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1. Atmarama.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M., looking at him*): "I feel like laughing."

Thakur laughs a little to himself, like a child.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and women – hard rules for sannyasins

His earlier story – desire to visit his father-in-law's house – meeting with Vamandas of Ulo

The sadhus leave.

Thakur, Baburam, M., Hari of the Mukherjis, and other devotees are strolling in the room and on the verandah outside.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Did you go to Nabin Sen's house?"

M.: "Yes, sir. I did go. I sat downstairs and heard the songs."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Good that you went. Your wife went too. Wasn't Keshab Sen her uncle's[1] son?"

M.: "A distant relative."

Nabin Sen and his family are related to the in-laws of a devotee.

Thakur talks to Mani privately as they stroll around.

Sri Ramakrishna: "People visit their father-in-law's house. I thought so often: I shall also marry,

1. The son of her father's younger brother.

fulfill my desire [of going to father-in-law's home], and enjoy myself. But what has happened?"

Mani: "Sir, 'If the son holds his father's hand, he can fall down. But if the father holds his hand, he cannot fall.' You yourself said so. This is exactly your state: the Divine Mother is holding your hand."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I met Vamandas of Ulo at Vishwas's house. I said, 'I have come to see you.' When I left, I heard him say, 'Good gracious, the Lord is holding him the way a tiger seizes his prey.' I was young then, rather stout, and always in divine ecstasy.

"I am very afraid of women. I feel as if a tigress is coming to devour me. I see their bodies, limbs, and even pores are very big, like those of an ogress.

"Earlier I was very frightened. I wouldn't let anybody come near me. But now, having assured myself in various ways, I see each one of them as different forms of the All-Blissful Mother.

"They are the parts of the Mother of the Universe. But they have to be renounced by a man who is a sadhu or a devotee.

"However great a devotee a woman may be, I don't let her sit near me for long. I say to her after a while, 'Go see the deity.' If she doesn't rise even after this, I go out of the room on the pretext of having a smoke.

"I find that some people don't have the least interest in women. Niranjan says, 'My mind isn't drawn to a woman in the least.'"

Hari Babu, Niranjan, Pande, a brahmin from western India, and Jaynarayan

"I asked Hari (the brother of Doctor Upen) about women. He also said, 'No, I don't feel drawn to them.'

"The mind which should have been given to the Lord – seventy-five percent of it is taken away by women. And after a son is born, almost the whole of the mind goes to the family. Then what can you give to God?

"And some get thoroughly exhausted in guarding their wives. There is an aged gate-keeper brahmin from western India, Pande. He had a fourteen year old wife. She had to live with this old man. They lived in a thatched house. People made holes in the dry leaves to peep inside. Now she has run away.

"Another man couldn't decide where to keep his wife. There was a lot of trouble at home. He was so worried. It is better not to talk about it.

"If you live with a woman, you come under her control. Worldly people stand up when asked by their wives and sit down at their bidding. They speak highly of the wife.

"I wanted to go to a certain place. When I asked Ramlal's aunt,[1] she forbade me and I couldn't go. In a little while, I said to myself, 'Oh, I don't live a householder's life. I have renounced "lust and greed," and yet this happens.' How very much

1. Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna's wife.

worldly people must be under the control of their wives."

Mani: "If you live amidst 'lust and greed,' you can't escape being scorched a little by them. You told us about a big pundit named Jaynarayan. You went to see him when he was old. Even he was putting pillows and other things out to dry in the sun."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But he had no pride of his scholarship. And, just as he had said he would, he lived his last days in Kashi, following the injunctions of the scriptures.

"I saw his sons. They were English-educated and wore English boots on their feet."

Different states of Thakur in divine intoxication

Thakur is explaining to Mani about his own state by means of putting questions to him.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I used to have a great madness for God. Why is it diminished now? But I get in that state now at times."

Mani: "You are not always in the same mood. As you said, sometimes you are childlike, sometimes like a mad man, sometimes like an inanimate object, and sometimes like a ghoul. You have all these states at times. And now and then you are in a natural state."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, like a child. And sometimes I have moods of boyhood and also of youth – I have all these states. When I give instruction, I feel like a young man.

"And in a boyish mood, I feel like playing and having fun like a boy of twelve or thirteen. That's why I joke and banter with the youngsters."

Qualities of Narayan – renunciation of 'lust and greed' is the difficult austerity of the sannyasin

"Well, what do you think of Narayan?"

Mani: "He has good signs, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A good gourd shell makes a good tanpura.

"He says to me, 'You are everything (that is, an incarnation of God).' He says that from his own comprehension. Others say, 'He is just a sadhu, a devotee of God.'

"He grasps very well what I forbid him to do. But when I told him to roll up the curtain, he didn't do it. I forbade him to do these: tie a knot, sew, roll up curtains, lock a door or a box with a key. He understood them well. All such disciplines are necessary for one who wishes to renounce. All these disciplines are for sannyasins.

"In the stage of spiritual practices, one should think of a woman as a forest fire! Or a black cobra! In the state of perfection, after God-realization, one sees woman as the All-Blissful Mother. One then looks at each as a different aspect of the Divine Mother."

Many days ago, Thakur had warned Narayan very seriously about women. He said, "Do not let the breeze from a woman's body touch you. Cover yourself with a thick sheet so the air will not touch you. And except for your mother, keep a distance of

eight cubits, or two cubits, or at least one cubit away from women."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Narayan's mother said to him about me, 'We are so charmed by the sight of him, not to speak of you, just a child.' You cannot realize God without being guileless. How guileless Niranjan is!"

Mani: "Yes, sir."

Are Niranjan and Narendra guileless?

Sri Ramakrishna: "Didn't you notice him that day in the carriage going to Calcutta? He is always the same – guileless. Usually people show one side of themselves at home and quite another outside. Narendra is worried about his family (since the death of his father). He has a somewhat calculating mind. Are all youngsters like them?"

Sri Ramakrishna in Nabin Niyogi's house – musical performance of Nilkantha

"I went today to Dakshineswar to see the musical performance of Nilkantha in Nabin Niyogi's house. The boys there are very bad. Always finding fault. First with this person, then another. At such a place, one's spiritual moods are checked.

"That day I saw Doctor Madhu shedding tears during the play. I couldn't turn my eyes away from him."

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna, Keshab and the Brahmo Samaj – instructions on harmony – universal, catholic church of Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Well, so many people are attracted here. What does it mean?"

Mani: "I am reminded of Sri Krishna's divine sport in Vraja. When he turned himself into the cowherd boys and the calves, the gopis were drawn more strongly to the cowherd boys, the cows felt more attracted to the calves."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is the attraction of God. You know how? The Divine Mother casts a spell that attracts people.

"You see, many people used to visit Keshab Sen. Not so many come here. What great respect people have for Keshab! He is known even in the West. The queen [Victoria] talked to him. The Gita also says that there is more divine power in a person who is respected by many. That many people do not visit here."

Mani: "Worldly people visited Keshab Sen."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, that is true. The worldly-minded went to him."

Mani: "Will the work done by Keshab Sen last?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why, he has written a samhita. It contains many rules of conduct."

Mani: "It is quite different from the work of an incarnation of God – for example, Chaitanya Deva."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, yes. Right."

Mani: "You have told us that Chaitanya Deva said, 'The seed I have broadcast will one day bear fruit.' A seed was placed on the cornice of a house. The house fell and that seed produced a tree."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Shivanath and his friends have also founded a samaj. Many people go there too."

Mani: "Sir, that sort of man goes there."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Yes, yes. Only worldly people go there. But not many of those who yearn for God and are trying to renounce 'lust and greed.'"

Mani: "It will really be nice if a current flows from here. Everyone will be liberated by the force of that current. What comes from here will never be one-sided."

Sri Ramakrishna and Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Vaishnavas, and Brahmos

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "I accept the ideal that anyone may have. I ask Vaishnavas to preserve Vaishnava inclinations; I ask Shaktas to preserve theirs. But I tell them, 'Don't think that only your faith is true and all else are false or wrong.' Hindus, Muslims, Christians – they are all going to the same goal by different paths. Preserving your own inclination and calling upon God earnestly, you will realize Him.

"Vijay's mother-in-law said, 'Why don't you tell Balaram and the others that it is not necessary to

worship God with form, that you can succeed by calling on the formless Sat-chit-ananda only?'

"I said, 'Why should I say such a thing to them? Besides why would they listen to me?'

"A mother has cooked fish. For one of the sons, she has made pulao. For one who can't digest well, she has prepared fish curry. One should make different forms of the same thing according to the tastes and capabilities of others."

Mani: "Yes, sir. There are different paths for different times, places, and people. But whatever path one may chose, He can be reached by calling upon Him sincerely with a pure mind. This is what you have been saying."

Hari of the Mukherji family – Sri Ramakrishna on meditation and charity

Thakur is sitting in his room. Hari, the Mukherjis' relative, M., and others are seated on the floor. An unknown person comes in and bows to Thakur, then takes a seat. Talking of him later, Thakur said, "His eyes were not good. They were yellow, like a cat's."

Hari prepares a smoke for Thakur and brings it to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*holding the hubble-bubble in his hand, to Hari*): "Let me see your palm. All these lines are very good signs.

"Now relax your hand and let me examine it. (*He holds Hari's hand in his own, as if he is weighing it*). You are still childlike. Nothing has

gone wrong yet. (*To the devotees*) By seeing a person's hand, I can tell whether he is crooked or guileless. (*To Hari*) Why, go to your in-laws' house and talk to your wife. Have a little fun with her if you like.

(*To M.*) "What do you say to that, my dear?" (*M. and others laugh.*)

M.: "Sir, if a new pot goes bad, you can't keep milk in it."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "How do you know that it has not already gone bad?"

Mahendra and Priyanath are the two Mukherji brothers. They do not work in an office; they have their own flour mill. Priyanath had been an engineer. Thakur talks to Hari about the Mukherji brothers.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hari*): "The elder brother [Mahendra] is nice, isn't he? He's guileless."

Hari: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "The younger one [Priyanath] is very miserly. He has, though, improved a lot since coming here. Once he said to me, 'I didn't know anything before.' (*To Hari*) Do they give in charity?"

Hari: "I don't see them doing anything like that. They had an elder brother – he's dead now – who was a very good man. He was engaged in charity as well as meditation."[1]

1. In Bengali, *dan* (giving) and *dhyan* (meditation).

Sri Ramakrishna and signs of the body – the student of Mahesh Nyaya Rattan

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and others*): "You can know a lot by signs on the body – whether a person will succeed or not. Crooked people have heavy hands.

"A snub nose is not good. Sambhu had a snub nose. That's why he was not totally guileless in spite of his great knowledge.

"A weak rib cage, hard bones, thick elbow joints, thin hands, and yellowish eyes like a cat's – these are not good signs.

"Thick lips like those of a dome[1] indicate low intelligence. A brahmin was here acting as priest for the Vishnu Temple. I couldn't eat the food he had touched. One day I exclaimed, 'Oh, a dome!' Later he told me, 'I live in the dome quarters. I know how to weave baskets and utensils just like the domes.'

"And there are other bad signs – a man with one eye or with a squint. But it's better to be one-eyed than to have a squint. Squint-eyed people are cruel and deceitful.

"A student of Mahesh (the late Mahesh Nyaya Rattan) said, 'I am an atheist.' He said to Hriday, 'Let's have a discussion. I am an atheist and you consider yourself a theist.' I had a good look at him then. He had eyes like a cat.

"Whether someone is good or bad is shown by the way he walks.

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1. People of a specific low caste.

"If a man's foreskin has been cut, as Muslims do, it is a particularly bad sign. (*M. and others laugh.*) (*To M., smiling*) You must see that it is a bad sign." (*All laugh.*)

Thakur is pacing the verandah. M. and Baburam are with him.

(*To Hazra*) "A person came here. I noticed that he had eyes like a cat. He asked me, 'Do you know astrology? I am in some trouble.' I replied, 'No. Go to Baranagore. You will find an astrologer there.'"

Baburam and M. are talking about Nilkantha's theatrical performance. Baburam had returned from Nabin Sen's house to Dakshineswar and spent last night here. In the morning he had seen the Nilkantha play at Nabin Niyogi's house in Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna, Mani, and contemplation in solitude – God's will – longing for Narayan

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and Baburam*): "What are you talking about?"

M. and Baburam: "Sir, we are talking about Nilkantha's musical and the song: 'Living on the bank of the river with hope at the feet of Mother Shyama.'"

While pacing the verandah, Thakur suddenly takes Mani aside and says to him, "The less people know about your meditation on God the better for you." Saying this, Thakur suddenly leaves.

He is now talking to Hazra.

Hazra: "Nilkantha told you that he would come visit you. We should send for him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No. He didn't sleep last night. It would be different if he came by God's will."

Thakur is proceeding toward the jhautala, accompanied by M. and Baburam. He asks Baburam to go and visit Narayan in his house. He thinks of Narayan as the very manifestation of God, so he is yearning to see him. He says to Baburam, "When you go, take an English textbook with you."

Chapter V

Dakshineswar – Thakur with Nilkantha and other devotees, enjoying devotional singing

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in his room. At about three o'clock Nilkantha arrives with six or seven companions. Thakur, who is facing east, gets up and goes toward the door to welcome them. They enter through the eastern door and salute him by prostrating.

Thakur goes into samadhi. Baburam is behind him; M., Nilkantha, Haran, and others belonging to the theatrical performance are in front of him. Dinanath, the treasurer of the temple, looks at Thakur from the north side of the bed. Soon the room is filled with employees of the temple garden. After some time Thakur's ecstatic mood diminishes and he sits on a mat spread on the floor. Nilkantha sits in front of him and the other devotees around.

Sri Ramakrishna (*in an ecstatic mood*): "I'm all right."

Nilkantha (*with folded hands*): "Please make me all right also."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "But you are already all right. If you add *a* to *k* it becomes *ka*. What use is there in adding another *a* to it – it will still remain *ka*. (*Everybody laughs.*)

Nilkantha: "I am entangled in worldly life."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "You have been kept in the world for the sake of others.

"There are the eight bonds. You can't get rid of them all. God keeps you bound by one or two for teaching others. You are performing this musical play. How many people benefit by seeing your love and devotion for God! If you were to give up all this, what would happen to the other performers?

"He is getting His work done through you. When you have finished it, you will not return. A housewife finishes all her domestic chores – feeds everybody, even the maids and servants – and then goes for her bath. Then even if you shout for her, she doesn't return."

Nilkantha: "Please bless me."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Going mad at separation from Krishna, Yashoda went to see Radha, who was meditating. In ecstasy, she said to Yashoda, 'I am that Primeval Power, the fundamental Prakriti. Ask me for a boon.' Yashoda said, 'What boon shall I ask? Just grant that I be able to serve Him and meditate on Him in body, mind, and speech. That

my ears may hear of His name and glories, that my hands may serve Him and His devotees, and that my eyes may see His form and His devotees.'

"Your eyes fill with tears when you recite His name. What remains for you to worry about? You have already developed love for Him.

"Knowing many things is ignorance. Knowing only One is knowledge. In other words, God alone is real and dwells in all. Talking to Him is vijnana – attaining Him and loving Him in various ways is vijnana.

"Besides, He is beyond one or two – beyond speech and mind. To go from the phenomenal to the Absolute and then return to the relative from the Absolute is called mature love for God.

"That song of yours is beautiful: 'Living on the bank of the river with hope at the feet of Mother Shyama.'

"You succeed if this happens. It all depends on God's grace.

"So you have to pray to Him. Simply sitting quietly will not do. After pleading the whole case, the lawyer says to the judge, 'This is all I have to say.' It is now all in your hands."

After a while Thakur says, "You sang so much in the morning and now you have taken the trouble of coming here. But it is all honorary – free – here."

Nilkantha: "Why?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "I understand what you mean."

Nilkantha: "I shall carry away a priceless jewel from here!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That precious jewel is already with you. What is the use of adding another *a* to *k*? If you didn't already have it, why should I have liked your songs so much? Ramprasad was a realized soul.

"An ordinary being is called manushya, or man. One whose consciousness is awakened is called manhosha, or an awakened mind.[1] You are manhosha.

"I had already planned to go to the play when I heard that you were going to sing. Just then Niyogi came to invite me."

Thakur goes to the smaller cot and sits down. He says to Nilkantha, "I would like to hear a song or two about the Divine Mother."

Nilkantha sings with his companions:

Living on the bank of the river with hope at the feet of Mother Shyama.

Next they sing:

Mahishamardini…

Listening to this song, Thakur stands up and goes into samadhi.

Nilkantha says, "He from whose locks the Ganges is flowing has Rajarajeshvari (the Supreme Goddess) residing in his heart."

Thakur dances in ecstatic love. Nilkantha and the devotees sing, encircling him, and also dance.

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1. There is pun on the word manhosha and manushya.

They sing:

Shiva, Shiva.

Thakur dances with devotees during this song as well.

The song ends. Thakur says to Nilkantha, "I want to hear the song I heard you sing in Calcutta."

M.: "Like Krishna's, the complexion of the handsome Sri Gauranga, the dancing lover of God, is of golden hue."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, yes."

Nilkantha sings:

Like Krishna's, the complexion of the handsome Sri Gauranga, the dancing lover of God, is of golden hue.[1]

When he sings, 'Drowning in the flood of ecstatic love,' Thakur again dances with the devotees. Whoever sees this superb dance will never forget it. The room is full of people, all filled with divine emotion. It has become like Srivasa's own courtyard.[2]

Manomohan goes into an ecstatic mood. A devotee of Thakur, he is related to Rakhal. A number of ladies of Manomohan's family have come with him and are watching the wonderful dance and kirtan from the northern verandah. One of the ladies there also goes into ecstasy.

Thakur sings another song:

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1. For the complete song refer to Section VIII, Chapter I.
2. Srivasa Pundit was a close companion of Sri Chaitanya. It was at his house that Chaitanya and his associates would have sankirtan all night long.

Behold, the brothers have come! The two who shed tears while chanting Hari's name.[1]

Thakur dances with Nilkantha and other devotees. He improvises the following line:

The two brothers have come intoxicated with Radha's love.

Hearing the loud music, people gather. They stand all around – on the south, on the north, and on the western semi-circular verandah. People in boats going by are also attracted by the sound of the sweet kirtan.

The singing ends. Thakur chants the name of the Mother of the Universe and says, "Bhagavata Bhakta Bhagavan [His word, His devotee, and the Lord are one]. My salutations to jnanis, salutations to yogis, and salutations to devotees."

Now Thakur goes to the western semi-circular verandah with Nilkantha and some other devotees. He sits there. It is evening, the day after the full moon of Kojagar. All quarters are lit up by the light of the moon. Thakur talks happily with Nilkantha.

What Sri Ramakrishna is – 'I' cannot be found by searching – I shall bring Chandi home

Nilkantha: "You yourself are indeed Gauranga."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What is all this? I am the servant of the servant of all. The wave belongs to the Ganges. Does the Ganges ever belong to the wave?"

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1. For the complete song refer to Section VI, Chapter I.

Nilkantha: "Whatever you may say, we see you as that [Gauranga]."

Sri Ramakrishna (*going into an ecstatic mood, sweetly*): "Brother, I search for my 'I,' but I cannot find it.

"Hanuman said to Rama, 'O Rama, sometimes I say to myself that You are the whole and I a part of you, sometimes that you are the Lord and I your servant. But when I have the knowledge of Reality I see that You are I and I am You.'"

Nilkantha: "What shall I say? Please grant us your grace."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "So many people are being taken across by you! How many people feel inspired by hearing your music!"

Nilkantha: "You are saying that I am taking them across. But please bless me that I myself may not be drowned."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "If you must drown yourself, do so in the lake of nectar."

Thakur is delighted to be in Nilkantha's company. He says to him again, "For you to come here! A person can meet you only after practicing great spiritual disciplines. But please listen to this song."

> O Giriraja, King of Mountains, my dear Ganesha is the harbinger of all blessedness.
>
> By worshiping him, Ganapati,[1] I have attained Your daughter, Haimavati.[2]

1. Ganesha.
2. The goddess Parvati.

O King of Mountains, please bring the brightly shining[1] Parvati to me.

In worship I shall invoke her under the vilva tree. And Gauri will descend here for the welfare of Ganesha.

As soon as Chandi[2] graces my house, so many songs of the Chandi[3] will be sung,

And saints and hermits and ascetics with matted locks will gather there.

"As soon as Chandi [the Divine Mother] graces the house, saints, ascetics with matted hair, and hermits will flock there."

Thakur laughs. After a while he says to M., Baburam and other devotees, "I feel like laughing and laughing. Just imagine that I should be singing for them (the musicians of the theater)!"

Nilkantha: "We have received today our reward for touring about singing."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "When a shopkeeper sells something, he sometimes offers a little extra. You sang at Nabin's and have given the little extra here." (*All laugh.*)

1. Gauri.
2. A name of the Divine Mother.
3. The Devimahatmya or Sri Durga Saptasati.

Section XXIII

Car Festival at Balaram's House

Chapter I

Purna, the younger Naren, and Gopal's Mother

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in Balaram's drawing room with the devotees. It is Monday, 13 July 1885, the first day of the bright fortnight of Ashada. It is nine o'clock.

Tomorrow the Car Festival will be celebrated. Balaram has invited Thakur for the celebration and brought him to his house. The image of Jagannath is worshiped there daily, and he has a small car which will be pulled on the verandah outside during the festival.

Thakur is talking with M. Close to them are Narayan, Tejchandra, Balaram, and many other devotees. They are talking about Purna. Purna is about fifteen years old. Thakur longs to see him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.): "Well, by what road will he come to see me? Please arrange that Dwija and Purna meet.

"I bring together two people of the same nature and same age. It has a special meaning. They both make progress. Do you see what love Purna has?"

M.: "Yes, sir. I was going by tram when he saw me from the roof of his house. He came running to see me and greeted me so eagerly!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*his eyes filled with tears*): "Ah! Ah! Because he has found me to be the contact for

spiritual illumination. Unless one has yearning for God, such conduct is not seen."

Purna's masculine nature – divine inclination – Narayana born as one's son because of austerities

"These three have a masculine nature: Narendra, the younger Naren, and Purna. But not Bhavanath. He has a feminine nature.

"Because of his high state, Purna may quit his body soon. Why retain the body after God-realization? Or the spiritual feelings within him may surge up in a few days.

"He has a divine inclination, the nature of a god. Such people don't have much fear of society. If a garland is put around his neck, sandal paste on his body, and incense burnt before him, he will go into samadhi. He will then know that God is within him, that Narayana Himself has come down in a human body. I've found this out."

His earlier story – samadhi of a brahmin girl with good signs – Mother Goddess as daughter of Ranjit

"When this state of divine intoxication came to me the first time in Dakshineswar, a brahmin lady belonging to a respectable family came. She had very good signs. As soon as a garland was put around her neck and incense burnt before her, she went into samadhi. Soon she was all joy. Tears began to stream from her eyes. I bowed to her and said, 'Mother, will I succeed?' She replied, 'Yes.'

"I want to see Purna again. But where is the opportunity? It seems that he is a part of the Divine.[1] What a wonder! Not just a tiny part, but a full sixteenth! How intelligent he is! He is so good in studies. Therefore I have hit it right.

"Narayana (the Lord) takes birth as a person's son by the power of spiritual practices. On the way to Kamarpukur, there is Ranjit Rai's big lake. The Divine Mother took birth as Ranjit Rai's daughter. Even now a fair is held there in the month of Chaitra. I've had a desire to go there – but not now.

"Ranjit Rai was a landlord there. By the power of his austerities, he obtained the Divine Mother as his daughter. He loved his daughter very much. She became so attached to him that she would almost never leave her father's company. One day, he was attending to the affairs of his estate and was very busy. The girl, in her childlike nature, continually asked him, 'Father, what is this and what is that?' The father very sweetly replied, 'Daughter, please leave me alone. I have lot of work to do.' But the girl would not leave. At last he said absent-mindedly, 'Please, get out of here.' On this pretext the girl left home. A peddler of conch-shell wares was just then passing by. She called out for him and took a pair of conch bangles. When he demanded to be paid for them, she said, 'There is money in a box in that room. Go and take it from there.' Then she left, never to be seen again. The bangle peddler went to the house and began to shout for money. Seeing that she was not at home,

1. One-sixteenth divine power (kala).

the inmates of the house came running. Ranjit Rai sent people in all directions to find her. The money owed the peddler was found in the box. Ranjit Rai was going around weeping when someone came and said, 'There is something in the lake.' They all went to the lake and saw a hand with a conch bangle raised out of the water. A moment later they could see it no more. Even now worship of the Divine Mother is performed during the festival on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra.

(*To M.*) "All this is true."

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Narendra now believes this."

"Purna was born with an element of Vishnu. I worshiped him mentally with vilwa leaves[1] but it wasn't successful. Then I offered him tulsi leaves[2] and sandal paste and it was accepted.

"God appears in many ways, sometimes as a man and sometimes in other divine forms of consciousness. One must believe in divine forms. What do you say?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Gopal's Mother has a motherly nature – she sees divine forms

Sri Ramakrishna: "The brahmin woman of Kamarhati (Gopal's Mother) sees so many visions! She lives by herself in a lone house in a garden on the bank of the Ganges and repeats God's name.

1. Traditionally offered to Shiva.
2.Traditionally offered to Vishnu.

Gopala[1] sleeps close to her. (*Saying this, Thakur gives a start.*) Not in imagination but in fact. She saw that Gopala's hands were red; he goes everywhere with her. She suckles him at her breast and talks to him. Narendra wept when he heard this!

"I also used to see many things. Now in ecstasy I don't see that many visions. My feminine nature is decreasing. Instead I am imbibing a manly attitude. That's why my spiritual feelings don't show so much outwardly. They remain within.

"The younger Naren has a masculine nature. That's why he becomes merged in meditation while repeating the name of God. He doesn't show ecstasy. Nityagopal has a feminine nature. That's why his body gets contorted in bhava. His body turns red with emotion."

Chapter II

Renunciation of "lust and greed" – Purna and others

Binode, Dwija, Tarak, Mohit, Tejchandra, Narayan, Balaram, and Atul

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, people renounce bit by bit. What about them?

"Binode said, 'I have to sleep with my wife. That makes me feel very bad.' You see, it is bad to sleep together whether you have intercourse or not. There is touching of the bodies and the physical warmth.

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1. Baby Krishna.

"What a state Dwija is in! He only sways his body and keeps is eyes focused on my face. Is that a small thing? If his whole mind becomes fixed on me, he will have achieved everything."

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God?

"So what am I? It is He. I am the machine but He is the operator. It is God's power alone in this [within himself]. That's why so many people are increasingly attracted here. Just a touch is enough to awaken them. This attraction, this pull, is the attraction of God alone.

"Tarak (of Belgharia) was returning to his home after staying there (Dakshineswar). I noticed something shining like a flame coming out of this – and following him.

"A few days after that, Tarak returned (to Dakshineswar). Then He who is in this body put a foot on his chest in the state of samadhi.

"Well, are there any more boys like these youngsters?"

M.: "That boy Mohit is quite nice. He's gone to see you once or twice. He's preparing for two university examinations. And he has great attraction for God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Maybe so. But he doesn't have a high spiritual ideal. His physical signs aren't so good. He has a puggish face. These other youngsters are of a different class.

"Taking up a body puts one in great trouble. And if one is cursed, he will have to be born another seven times. You have to live very cautiously! A

person has to take up a new body if only one desire remains."

Devotee: "And incarnations of God, when they come in a human body – do they have any desire?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "I've noticed that I haven't been able to completely rid myself of desire. When I saw a sadhu's shawl, I wanted to wear one like it. Even now I have this desire. Maybe I'll have to come again."

Balaram (*smiling*): "Will you take up a human body just for a shawl?" (*Everyone laughs.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "A person should nourish a spiritual desire. They say that when you die, you will think only of it. Sadhus keep one of the four centers of pilgrimage[1] unvisited. Many keep the Jagannath region unvisited so that at the time of death, their thoughts will be in Jagannath."

A person dressed in monastic robes enters the room and salutes. Privately he runs Thakur down, so Balaram laughs. Thakur knows the inner thoughts of people, so he says to Balaram, "Let him be. Let him say that I am a fraud."

Tejchandra's proposal to renounce the world

Thakur is talking to Tejchandra.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Tejchandra*): "I have sent for you so many times! Why don't you come? All right, so just practice meditation. If you do that, I'll be happy. I look on you as my own. That's why I send for you."

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1. Dham.

Tejchandra: "Sir, I have to go to the office. There is a lot of work to do."

M. (*smiling*): "There was a marriage in the family and he took ten days off from the office."

Sri Ramakrishna: "So! And you say you don't have time. And you say you want to renounce the world."

Narayan: "One day Master Mahashay (M.) said that the world is a wilderness."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Please tell them that story. They will benefit from it. About the disciple becoming unconscious after he takes some medicine. The guru comes and says, 'His life can be saved if someone takes this pill. He will live but the person who takes the pill will die.'

"And tell that other one, too – about the hatha yogi with a crooked body who thought his wife and other members of the family were his very own."[1]

Thakur partakes of the prasad of Sri Jagannath at noon. Service to Jagannath is performed regularly at Balaram's house. That's why Thakur says, "Balaram's food is pure." Thakur takes a little rest after the meal.

It is late afternoon. Thakur is sitting with the devotees in the same room. Chandra Babu of the Kartabhaja sect and the witty brahmin are also there. This brahmin is a joker – whatever he says makes people laugh.

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1. For the complete story refer to Volume III, Section XV, Chapter I.

Thakur talks for a long time about the Kartabhajas and their outlook on life and religion.[1]

Thakur's ecstasy – Atul and Tejchandra's brother

It is six o'clock. Girish's brother, Atul, and Tejchandra's brother have come. Thakur is in an ecstatic state. After sometime he says, "Can one be unconscious by meditating on Consciousness? Can one go mad by meditating on God? He is the very nature of all knowledge. He is eternal, pure, knowledge itself."

Are some of the visitors thinking that Thakur's brain may have been deranged by excessive meditation on God?

Go forward – Krishnadhan's humour

Thakur says to Krishnadhan, the witty brahmin, "You waste your time joking day and night about ordinary worldly things. Turn your mind towards God. A person who can keep account of salt can also account for sugar candy."

Krishnadhan (*smiling*): "Please pull me that way."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What can I do? It all depends on your own effort. It is up to your own mind to do it.

"Giving up ordinary humour, go forward to God. You can go farther and farther. The brahmachari counseled the woodcutter to go forward. When he did, he found sandalwood, then a mine of silver,

1. Rupa, swarupa, raj, bij, and pak pranali.

and then a gold mine. Going even farther, he found diamonds and jewels."

Krishnadhan: "There is no end to this road."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Stop where you find peace."

Thakur now talks about a newcomer.

"I didn't find any substance in him. He seemed worthless, like a rotten apple."

It is evening. A light has been brought in the room. Thakur meditates on the Mother of the Universe and chants Her name in a sweet voice. The devotees are sitting all around him.

The Car Festival is to be held tomorrow. Thakur will spend tonight in this house. Taking some refreshments in the inner apartments, he returns again to the large room. It is about 10 p.m. He says to M., "Please bring the hand towel from the other room."

Thakur's bed has been made in the small room. It is ten-thirty when he goes to bed.

It is summer. He says to M., "Please bring a fan." He asks him to fan him. At twelve o'clock at night, Thakur wakes up. He says, "I feel chilly. I don't need the fan anymore."

Chapter III

Thakur with devotees in Balaram's house on the day of the Car Festival

Today is the day of the Car Festival – Tuesday [14 July 1885]. Rising very early in the morning,

Thakur dances by himself repeating the name of God in a sweet voice.

M. comes in and salutes him. The devotees arrive one by one, salute Thakur, and then sit near him. Thakur is very eager to see Purna. He talks to M. about Purna.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Did you give Purna any instructions when you saw him?"

M.: "Sir, I asked him to read the *Chaitanya Charitamrita.* He is familiar with it. And I told him that you had said, 'Always hold on to the truth.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, what did he say when you told him about me, saying, 'He is God incarnate?'"

M.: "I asked him to come with me if he wanted to see a man like Chaitanya Deva."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What else?"

M.: "That you said that when an elephant goes into a small pond, the water is splashed around – that if a receptacle is shallow, his emotions overflow.

"About his giving up of fish, I asked, 'Why this? It will cause a great uproar.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's good. A person must contain emotions within."

Sri Ramakrishna and the earthquake

It is half past six in the morning. M. is going for a dip in the Ganges from Balaram's house when he feels an earthquake. He immediately returns to

Thakur's room. Thakur is standing in the drawing room with the devotees talking about it. It was rather severe. Most of the devotees are frightened.

M.: "We should have gone downstairs."

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna and the storm of Ashwin – 5 October 1864

Sri Ramakrishna: "This is the pitiable state of the house [body] one lives in. And yet people are so arrogant! (*To M.*) Do you remember the storm in the month of Ashwin?"

M.: "Yes, sir. I was very young then, nine or ten years old. I was alone in a room, and I called on God."

Surprised, M. asks himself, Why has Thakur suddenly asked about the storm of Ashwin? Sitting alone in a room, I wept profusely and prayed to God. Does Thakur know everything about it? Is he reminding me of it? Has he been protecting me as my guru since my birth?

Sri Ramakrishna: "It was very late at Dakshineswar when the storm broke. Afterward some food was cooked, but it was very late. All the trees had been uprooted. You see, this is the fate of the house one lives in!

"But after gaining perfect knowledge, one feels that dying and killing are the same. When one dies nobody dies, and when one kills nobody is killed.[1] The phenomenal belongs to the same reality as the Absolute. It is He Himself who is the Absolute in

1. nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate – Bhagavad Gita, 2:19; na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre – Bhagavad Gita 2:20.

one form and the phenomenal in another. Even if the relative is destroyed, the Absolute exists. Water is water, whether it is moving or still."

Thakur sits again in the drawing room with the devotees. Mahendra Mukherji, Hari, the younger Naren, and several other young devotees are there. Hari[1] lives alone and studies Vedanta. He is twenty-three or twenty-four years old. He is not married. Thakur is very fond of him and often asks him to visit but since he likes solitude, he doesn't come very often.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hari*): "Well, my dear, you have not been here for a long time."

Advice to Hari– non-dualism[2] and qualified non-dualism[3] – vijnana

"In one form God is the Absolute and in another He is the phenomenal. What does Vedanta say? That Brahman is real[4] and the world illusory.[5] But as long as God keeps the feeling of I-ness in a devotee, the relative is real. When He takes it away, then whatever is remains. This cannot be explained in words. As long as He has kept I-ness in you, you have to accept everything. When the sheathes of the banana tree are peeled off, there is pulp inside. When there are sheathes, there is pulp – the pulp belongs to the sheathes and the sheathes belong to the pulp. When you speak of the existence of the Absolute, you comprehend that the

1. Harinath Chattopadhyaya, the future Swami Turiyananda.
2. Doctrine of Advaita.
3. Doctrine of Vishishtadvaita.
4. Permanent.
5. Impermanent.

phenomenal exists. And when you speak of the phenomenal, you understand that the Absolute also exists.

"God has become the world, its living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. When He is inactive, He is called Brahman. When He creates, preserves, and dissolves, He is known as Shakti, or Power. Brahman and Shakti are not different from each other. Water is water whether it is still or in motion.

"You cannot get rid of the sense of 'I.' You can't say that the world and its living beings are an illusion as long as you are conscious of your 'I.' When you throw away the rind and the seeds of a bel fruit, you can't arrive at the full weight of the bel fruit.

"The bricks, lime, and brick-dust with which the roof is made also make the stairs. It is only because of the reality of what is known as Brahman that this universe and its creatures have come into existence.

"The devotee, the vijnani, accepts both God with form and the formless God. He accepts both form and formlessness. It is by the cooling effect of love for God that some of the water turns into ice. But when the sun of spiritual knowledge rises, that ice melts into the same water as it was before."

When reasoning stops, the mind is annihilated and there is the knowledge of Brahman

"As long as a person reasons with the mind, the Absolute cannot be reached. As long as you reason

with the mind, the world cannot be done away with. None of the senses of sight, taste, smell, touch, and speech can be got rid off. When reasoning stops, you attain the knowledge of Brahman. You cannot know the Atman through this mind – Atman is known only through Atman. Pure mind, pure intellect, and pure Atman are one and the same.

"Just see how much you need to be able to see an object. You need eyes, light, and also the mind – all these are needed. If one of these three is missing, you can't see an object. As long as the mind is working, how can you say there is no world, that there is no 'I'?

"When the mind is destroyed, when there is no intention and conceptualization[1] one attains samadhi, one gains the knowledge of Brahman. But in do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti – the seven notes of the scale – one cannot remain for long at ti, the highest musical note."

Advice to the younger Naren – conversation with God after attaining His vision

Glancing at the younger Naren, Thakur says, "What use is it to only know that God exists? You have not reached the end when you have seen God. You have to bring Him to your house. You have to talk to Him.

"Some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and some have drunk it. Only a few have seen the king. Only one or two can bring him to their house and entertain him."

1. Sankalpa and vikalpa.

Thakur goes for a dip in the Ganges.

Chapter IV

His earlier story – Thakur has a vision of Shiva and the golden Annapurna in the holy pilgrim city of Kashi – sees the universe in the form of a shalagram

It is ten o'clock. Thakur is talking with the devotees when M. returns from bathing in the Ganges. He salutes Thakur, and then sits beside him.

Thakur, full of divine emotion, talks about many things. During the conversation, he discusses some of his most secret visions.

Sri Ramakrishna: "When I went to Kashi with Mathur Babu, our boat passed close to the Manikarnika Ghat. Suddenly I had a vision of Shiva. I went to the edge of the boat and stood there and went into samadhi. In fear that I would fall into the river, the boatman shouted to Hriday, 'Hold him, hold him.' I saw Shiva standing at that ghat in the most profound mood. At first I saw Him standing at a distance, then I saw Him approaching me. After that, He merged into me.

"In a state of ecstasy I saw a sannyasin leading me by the hand. We entered a temple, and I had a vision of the golden Annapurna.

"God Himself has become everything. He is more manifest in some forms, however.

(*To M. and others*) "Perhaps you don't recognize the spiritual meaning of a shalagram. Englishmen don't. It doesn't matter if you believe in it or not. A

shalagram with good signs – the mark of a disc in the shape of a cow's face, and some other signs."

M.: "Sir, like a man with good physical signs has a greater manifestation of God in him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "At first Narendra called them [Ramakrishna's visions] hallucinations of the mind. Now, he accepts everything."

While talking about visions of God, Thakur passes into bhava samadhi. The devotees watch him silently. After a long time, he regains consciousness and begins to talk.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What did I see? That the universe is a shalagram. I saw your two eyes in it."

M. and the other devotees listen in amazement to this wonderful and unheard of vision. Just then another young devotee, Sarada, enters the room, salutes Thakur, and sits down.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Sarada*[1]): "Why don't you come to Dakshineswar? When I go to Calcutta, why don't you come to see me?"

Sarada: "I don't hear about your visits."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I'll let you know the next time. (*Laughing, to M.*) Make a list of these boys." (*M. and other devotees laugh.*)

1. Later Swami Trigunatitananda.

News of Purna – Thakur is very happy to see Narendra

Sarada: "My family wants me to marry. He (M.) has reprimanded us so many times about marriage."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why marry now? (*To M.*) Sarada is now in a very good state of mind. He used to seem hesitant, like a fish pulling the float of a fishing line. Now his face looks happy."

Thakur says to a devotee, "Will you please fetch Purna?"

Narendra enters. Thakur asks that refreshments be served him. He is very happy to see Narendra. He seemed to feel that he was serving the Lord Himself by feeding Narendra. Thakur is stroking his body affectionately, gently massaging his hands and feet. Gopal's Mother (the brahmin woman of Kamarhati) enters the room. Thakur had asked Balaram to send a man to Kamarhati to bring her. That is why she has come. As she enters the room, she says, "I am shedding tears of joy." Then she prostrates before Thakur in salutation.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you doing? You call me Gopala and then you salute me.

"Please go inside and cook a dish. Put a lot of ghee and spices in it so we can smell it from here." (*All laugh.*)

Gopal's Mother: "What will these people [the members of the family] say?"

Is Gopal's Mother thinking to herself that she was a newcomer and the family members could take offense?

Before going in, she says to Narendra in a touching tone of voice, "Child, have I achieved or does something remain to achieve?"

It is the Car Festival day. The offering of food and worship of Lord Jagannath had been somewhat delayed. Now, after the worship, Thakur is to be served. He goes to the inner apartments, where the women devotees are eagerly awaiting him – to see him and pay their obeisance.

Thakur had many women devotees, but he did not talk much about them to the men devotees. If someone went to visit women devotees, he would say, "Don't go to her very often. You may have a fall." Sometimes he would say, "Even if a woman rolls on the ground with love for God, you shouldn't visit her frequently." Let men and women devotees live separately. This will be good for both of them. And he would say further, "It isn't good for women devotees to practice motherly feelings[1] for men. Such an attitude could change and bring about a downfall."

Chapter V

Car Festival at Balaram's house – in the joy of devotional songs, with Narendra and other devotees

It is one o'clock. After the midday meal, Thakur comes in and sits with the devotees in the drawing room. One of them has brought Purna. Thakur says to M. joyfully, "Here he is! Purna has arrived!"

1. The attitude of Gopala toward them.

Narendra, the younger Naren, Narayan, Haripada, and others sit near Thakur and talk with him.

Free will and the younger Naren – Narendra sings

The younger Naren: "Sir, do we have free will?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Just try to find your 'I.' When you are searching for 'I,' you find Him. 'I am the instrument, You are the operator.' You know, a puppet goes into a shop with a letter in its hand. God alone is the doer.[1] Work as though you are a doer, but know that you are not.

"As long as there is any adjunct, or a limiting quality[2] to your identity, you are in ignorance. To think that you are learned, or a jnani, or wealthy, or respectable, or father, or guru – all these come from ignorance. 'I am the instrument and You are the operator,' is knowledge. Then all marks of identity are obliterated. When firewood has been fully burnt, it produces no sound. It gives no heat. Then it is all cool. Peace, peace, peace.'

(*To Narendra*) "Please sing a little."

Narendra: "I have to go home. I have lot of work to do."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, child. Why should you listen to us? One listens carefully to those who have gold in their ears. Who listens to one who only has a torn cloth? (*All laugh.*)

"You can go to the garden house of the Guhas. When I ask where you are, I often hear that you are

1. God is the puppeteer.
2. Upadhi.

at the garden house of the Guhas. I wouldn't have mentioned this, but you forced it out of me."

Narendra is silent for a few minutes. Then he says, "There are no instruments. Shall I just sing?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "My child, this is the situation here. Sing if you'd like to. This is how Balaram has arranged it.

"Balaram says, 'Please come in a boat. But if that's not possible, you may hire a carriage.' (*All laugh.*) He has given us a feast, so he will make us dance in the afternoon. (*Laughter.*) One day he hired a carriage for me for twelve annas. I asked, 'Will he take me to Dakshineswar for twelve annas?' He said, 'That's enough.' On the way one side of the carriage fell apart and dropped off. (*All laugh.*) And the horse would suddenly stop just anywhere and it wasn't possible to make it move. A number of times the coachman whipped it and it ran a little. (*Loud laughter.*) So now this evening Ram will play the drum and we will dance. But Ram has no sense of rhythm! (*All laugh.*) Balaram's attitude is: sing, dance, and make yourself happy." (*All laugh.*)

Other devotees are gradually coming back from their homes, having eaten and rested.

Seeing Mahendra Mukherji saluting him from a distance, Thakur bows to him and also offers him a salaam.[1] He says to a young devotee sitting near him, "Tell him that I salaamed. He harps on Olcott,

1. A low bow with the right palm to the forehead.

Olcott[1] all the time." Many of the householder devotees have brought their wives and other women relatives with them. They wanted to have the darshan of Thakur and watch the kirtan singing in front of the chariot. Ram, Girish, and other devotees arrive one by one. A number of youngster devotees have also come.

Now Narendra sings:

When will dawn that day when tears stream from my eyes as I repeat Lord Hari's name?[2]

He sings again:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Your formless beauty sparkles. And so the yogi meditates in a dark mountain cave.

In the lap of infinite darkness, on the waves of the great silence,[3] eternal peace and joy float without end.

Putting on the form of the Formless One, in darkness draped, O Mother, who are You seated alone in boundless bliss?

At the lotus of Your fear-dispelling feet flashes the lightning of love, while loud and earth-shaking laughter issues from Your dazzling face.

Balaram has arranged for a kirtan by Vaishnavcharan and Banwari. Now Vaishnavcharan sings.

O my tongue, always repeat the name of Durga.

Who else can save you from danger but She?[4]

After listening to the song for some time, Thakur passes into samadhi. He is standing, held

1. Col. Henry Steel Olcott, first president of the Theosophical Society.
2. For the complete song refer to Section XIII, Chapter III.
3. Nirvana.
4. For the complete song refer to Section XV, Chapter IV.

by the younger Naren. His face is lit with a smile. Gradually he becomes absolutely still. The roomful of devotees watches him silently, while the women observe him from behind a bamboo screen. It is as if Lord Narayana Himself has come down in human form for the devotees – come down to teach them how to love God.

After a long time chanting God's name, his samadhi ends. When he sits down, Vaishnavcharan again begins to sing:

O my vina, sing Hari, Hari![1]

And then:

O my vina, the day passes in vain without worshiping Lord Hari.

Banwari, another singer, sings of God's form and beauty. During the song, he repeats, "Ah! Ah!" and prostrates. Some listeners laugh, others feel irritated.

It is afternoon. In the meantime, the small car of Sri Jagannath, decorated with flags and bunting, has been brought to the verandah. Lord Jagannath, Subhadra, and Balaram have been adorned with sandal paste and decorated with jewelry and garlands of flowers. Leaving Banwari's kirtan, Thakur comes to the front of the car on the verandah. Devotees accompany him. Holding the rope, he pulls the car a little and then sings and dances ahead of it with the devotees. Improvising, he sings:

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1. For the complete song refer to Section XVII, Chapter I.

Behold, the brothers have come! The two who shed tears while chanting Hari's name,[1]

They, who receiving the world's blows, offer Hari's love.

The song concludes:

Behold, the whole of Nadia trembles under the waves of Gauranga's love!

There is singing and dancing on the verandah as the car is drawn. Hearing the loud music of the kirtan and the sound of the drums, a number of neighbors come to the verandah. Thakur is intoxicated with the name of the Lord. The devotees dance with him in an ecstasy of love.

Chapter VI

Narendra's song – Thakur's ecstatic dance

After the kirtan and dancing before the car, Sri Ramakrishna returns to the room and sits down. Mani and other devotees stroke his feet.

Full of divine feeling, Narendra sings again accompanied by a tanpura:

Come, come, O Mother, my heart's delight and doll of my soul;

So that I can constantly see You, come sit in the lotus of my heart.

Again he sings:

Mother! You are Tara,[2] though You have assumed the three gunas, You are even beyond the Limitless.

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1. For the complete song refer to Section VI, Chapter I.
2. The savior, literally "she who takes one across [the ocean of worldly existence]".

I know You are merciful to the lowly, the one who frees from all distress.

You are sandhya, You are Gayatri, You are the support of the Universe, O Mother!

You are the redeemer of yearning souls, always stealing the heart of Shiva.

In all bodies You dwell, in all worshipful beings, in that with form and without.

He sings another song:

I have made You the pole-star of my life.

Never shall I lose my way on this sea of the world.

A devotee asks Narendra if he will sing the song "O Mother, ruler of the heart! You are awake within…."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Away with you! Are you going to sing such songs now? Sing a song of joy – 'Shyama, the river of nectar.'"

Narendra sings:

Who can fathom Your various moods?

O Mother Shyama, You are the river of nectar.

Mother! Cupid flees before. Your playful glance…

Narendra becomes intoxicated with ecstasy and sings again and again:

O Brahman Absolute, the Eternal One, my Mother!

Do dance sometimes on the lotus of the heart of Kamala also.

Thakur dances, intoxicated with ecstatic love, singing, "O Brahman Absolute, the Eternal One, my Mother." After dancing for a long time, he returns to his seat. He is very happy to see

Narendra singing with such absorption in ecstasy, with tears in his eyes.

It must be around 9 p.m. Thakur is still sitting with the devotees.

He listens again to Vaishnavcharan's songs:

Like Krishna's, the complexion of the handsome Sri Gauranga, the dancing lover of God, is of golden hue.[1]

And:

O Hari, how shall I know You now?

O Bankura, living in Mathura, clad in royal splendour and riding elephants,

Have you forgotten the grazing of cows? Have you forgotten us?

Do you remember how you stole butter in Vraja?

It is now 10 or 11 p.m. The devotees are saluting Thakur in preparation to leave.

Sri Ramakrishna: "All right, you can go home now. (*Pointing to Narendra and the younger Naren*) It would be good if they both stay. (*To Girish*) Are you going to have your dinner at home? Wait awhile. What about a smoke? Oh, Balaram's servant is just like that. Ask for a smoke and he won't prepare it. (*Everybody laughs.*) But don't leave without having a smoke."

A friend wearing glasses had come with Girish. He has left after seeing and hearing everything. Thakur says to Girish, "I tell you, and also Haripal, don't force anybody to come here. Nothing happens before its time."

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1. For the complete song refer to Section VIII, Chapter I.

A devotee salutes Thakur. A little boy is with him. Thakur says affectionately, "You may now go. And this child with you." Narendra, the younger Naren, and one or two devotees will go home a little later.

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna at early dawn – sweet dancing and chanting of God's name

Sri Ramakrishna is lying on the bed in the small room to the west of the drawing room. It is 4 a.m. To the south of the room is a verandah where M. is sitting on a stool.

After a while Thakur comes out on the verandah. M. salutes him by prostrating. It is Wednesday, 15 July 1885, the 32nd day of Ashada, Sankranti.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I got up once before. Well, should I return in the morning?"

M.: "Yes, sir. The water is less choppy in the morning."

It is morning. The devotees have not yet assembled. After washing, Thakur sweetly chants the divine name. M. is near him. After some time, Gopal's Mother comes in and stands close to him. One or two other lady devotees are watching from the door of the inner apartments. It is as if the gopis of Vrindavan are watching Sri Krishna. Or the women devotees of Navadvip, intoxicated with ecstatic love, are looking at Sri Gauranga from behind a screen.

After chanting Rama's name, Thakur chants the name of Krishna: "Krishna! Krishna! Gopi Krishna! Gopi! Gopi! Krishna, the life breath of the cowherd boys. Krishna, the boy of Nanda! Govinda! Govinda!"

Now he chants the name of Gauranga:

"Sri Krishna Chaitanya Prabhu Nityananda! Hare Krishna! Hare Rama! Radha Govinda!"

Then he repeats: "The Imperceptible Pure One."[1] Saying this, he weeps. Watching him weep and hearing his touching voice, the devotees standing close also begin to cry. He weeps and says, "O, the Pure One! O my dear, come and eat. When shall I make my life blessed by feeding You? You have come, assuming a body, for my sake."

He is expressing his pain before Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe, the friend of the lowly, the friend of the world. "I am not separate from the world; my Master, be merciful to me."

Becoming intoxicated with ecstatic love, he sings:

Live joyfully chanting the name of Jagannath of Orissa.

Now he dances, singing the name of Narayana: "The Lord Narayana! The Lord Narayana! Narayana! Narayana!"

Dancing, he sings again:

O gopi friend! I have not yet found Him whose love has driven me mad.

Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva – all three are mad.

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1. Alekh Niranjan.

These three mad gods have conspired to break Navadvip.

And in the fields of Vrindavan I have seen another who is mad.

He has clad Radha in royal robes and assumed for Himself the role of a guard.

Now Thakur sits in the small room with the devotees. He is naked, like a five-year-old child. M., Balaram and one or two other devotees are sitting with him.

When does one see God's form? – secrets – seeing Narayana in pure youngsters – Ramlal, Niranjan, Purna, Narendra, Tarak of Belgharia, and the younger Naren

Sri Ramakrishna: "You can see the form of God. You can have this vision when you get rid of all adjuncts of your own identity and reasoning stops. Then a person goes into speechless samadhi. How much people talk in the theatre – of this thing and that. But as soon as the curtain rises, all discussion stops. Then a person is fully absorbed in what he sees.

"I tell you a very secret thing. Why do I love boys like Purna and Narendra so much? When I went to embrace Jagannath in a loving mood, I broke my arm. He made me understand: 'You have taken up a human body. Now live with human beings as a friend, a parent, and such other relationships.'

"When I see Purna, I now experience the same feeling that I used to have with Ramlala. I used to bathe Ramlala and feed him and put him to bed. Wherever I went, I took him with me. I would sit

and weep for Ramlala. I have the same feeling when I see these young boys. Look at Niranjan. He's not attached to anything. He takes poor people to the doctor, spending his own money. At the mention of marriage, he says, 'My God! That is a whirlpool of the Vishalakshi!'[1] I see him sitting on a light.

"Purna belongs to a high spiritual ideal of God with form – he has an element of Vishnu! Ah, what love he has!

(*To M.*) "Did you notice how he looked at you? Just like one looks upon a brother disciple, as if you were his very own. He said he'd come see me again. He said he'd meet me at Captain's house."

Many qualities of Narendra – the qualities of the younger Naren

"Narendra is of a very high spiritual ideal – the realm of the Absolute. He has a masculine nature.

"So many devotees come here but none of them is like him.

"Sometimes I sit down and calculate their natures. I see them like lotuses. Some of them have ten petals, some have sixteen, some a hundred. But Narendra is a thousand-petalled lotus.

"Others may be small tumblers or pitchers, but Narendra is a huge barrel.

"Among ponds and tanks, he is a large lake, like the Haldarpukur.

1. A stream near Kamarpukur.

"Among fish, Narendra is a red-eyed carp, others are small fish, like minnows or small white fish.

"He is a big receptacle. Many things can be kept in him. He is like a bamboo with a big hollow space inside.

"Narendra is not the slave of anything. He is not subject to any attachment or sense pleasure. Like a male pigeon. If you hold its beak, it pulls away from you. A female pigeon just stays still.

"Tarak of Belgharia can be called a red-eyed carp**.**

"Narendra is manly. That's why he sits on the right side in a carriage. Bhavanath has a feminine nature, so I tell him to sit on the other side.

"When Narendra is in a gathering, I feel strong."

Mahendra Mukherji enters and salutes. It is about eight o'clock in the morning. Haripada and Tulsiram arrive, one after the other. They salute Sri Ramakrishna and sit down. Baburam is suffering from fever and couldn't come.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and others*): "Hasn't the younger Naren come? Maybe he's under the impression I've already left. (*To Mukherji*) What a wonder! As a child, that boy (the younger Naren) would cry for the Lord when he returned from school. Is it a small thing to cry for God? And he is so intelligent. He is a bamboo with a big hollow compared to other bamboos.

"And he has given his entire mind to me. Girish Ghosh told me that the day kirtan was held at

Navagopal's house, the younger Naren was there. Asking where I was, he was not conscious of his surroundings. He began to walk over people looking for me.

"And he's not afraid that he'll be criticized at home. He stays at Dakshineswar for three nights at a time."

Chapter VIII

Deep secret of bhakti yoga – harmony of jnana and bhakti

Mukherji, Hari Babu, Purna, Niranjan, M., and Balaram

[Priyanath] Mukherji: "Hari (Hari Babu of Baghbazar)[1] was amazed at what you said yesterday. He said, 'All this is in the Samkhya philosophy, in Patanjali, and the Vedanta. He is not an ordinary person.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "But I have not read the Samkhya or the Vedanta.

"Perfect jnana and perfect bhakti are one and the same. By discriminating 'not this, not this,' all reasoning ends, leading to the knowledge of Brahman. Then one accepts again what one has renounced. You have to be careful climbing to the roof. But when you get there, you see that the roof is made of the same materials – brick, lime, and brick dust – of which the steps are made.

1 Later Swami Turiyananda.

"He who is aware of high is also aware of low. After attaining spiritual knowledge, high and low appear as one.

"When Prahlada realized the Ultimate Reality, he felt, 'I am He.'[1] And when consciousness of the body returned, his attitude would change to 'I am Your servant.'[2]

"Hanuman also sometimes felt the attitude of 'I am He,' sometimes 'I am Your servant,' and at other times, 'I am a part of You.'

"Why should one cherish love for God? Without it, how can a man spend his days?

"This I-ness does not go away. As long as there is the pot of I-ness, the attitude of 'I am He' is not attained. In samadhi, however, that I-ness disappears. Then what exists is only He. Ramprasad says, 'Mother, only You will know in that state whether I am good or You are good.'

"As long as I-ness persists, it is better to have the attitude of a devotee. It's not right to think 'I am God' or 'O embodied being, you are not like Krishna, you are just a devotee.' But it's a different matter if God Himself draws you. It's like a master saying affectionately to his servant, 'Come, come along. Sit beside me. You are the same as I.'

"The waves belong to the Ganges, not the Ganges to the waves.

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1. So 'ham.
2. Daso 'ham.

"Shiva has both states of mind. When he is absorbed in the joy of the Self,[1] he is in the state of 'I am He' – he is fully fixed in union with God. But when he feels himself a separate 'I-ness,' he dances, exclaiming, 'Rama! Rama!'

"That to which the movable belongs, to Him also belongs the immovable.

"That is why you may not be moving just now, but after a while you begin to work.

"Spiritual knowledge and love for God are one and the same. Even so, one person says that it is water and another that it is a piece of ice."

Two kinds of samadhi – obstacle to samadhi: 'lust and greed'

"Broadly speaking, samadhi is of two kinds. By reasoning on the path of jnana, I-ness is obliterated and one attains samadhi. It is called sthira samadhi or jada samadhi (nirvikalpa samadhi). The samadhi attained by the path of bhakti is known as bhava samadhi. In this samadhi, a thin line of I-ness persists to enable one to enjoy divine bliss, divine contact. However, if a person is attached to 'lust and greed,' this state cannot be attained.

"I said to Kedar, 'If your mind dwells in "lust and greed," you can't realize God.' Once I thought I might stroke his chest with my hand, but I couldn't do it. Within him, there was something twisted. It was like a house smelling filthy – I couldn't enter it. It was like a natural Shiva Lingam, whose roots spread as far as Kashi. As long as you are attracted

1. Atmarama.

by the world, as long you are attached to 'lust and greed,' you cannot succeed.

"'Lust and greed' has not yet entered into these youngsters. That's why I am so fond of them. Hazra says, 'You like a boy who is handsome and the son of a rich man.' If that were true, why would I be so fond of Harish, Latu, Narendra? Narendra can't find a pice for salt to season his rice.

"Worldliness has not yet entered into these youngsters' minds. That's why they are so pure.

"And many of them are ever-perfect ones.[1] They were drawn to God since their birth. Imagine you've bought a garden and when clearing it, you discover a previously installed water pipe. You open it and lo, water gushes out!"

Purna and Niranjan – serving the mother – the attitude of a Vaishnava

Balaram: "Sir, how is it that Purna has realized suddenly that the world is an illusion?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "From past lives.[2] He's done everything in previous births. Only the body is small or grows old, not the Atman.

"Do you know how it is with these youngsters? Bearing fruit even before flowering. First they see God, and then they hear about His glories and attributes. After that comes direct union.

"Look at Niranjan. He's not a bookkeeper – he doesn't keep track of gain and loss. When he hears

1. Nityasiddhas.
2. Janamantrin.

the call, he can go. But as long as a person's mother is alive, she has to be looked after. I used to worship my mother with flowers and sandal paste. It is the Mother of the Universe who has come down in the form of your mother. The memorial service honouring a deceased relative is the worship of one's chosen deity. Vaishnavas celebrate in a grand way when somebody dies. Their festival has the same significance.

"As long as you take care of your own body, you must look after your mother. So I say to Hazra, 'When you have a cough, you make a mixture of sugar candy and pepper, and you have to get the pepper and also salt for taste.' As long as you do this for yourself, you have also to take care of your mother.

"A minor can't take responsibility for himself, so he has a guardian. Chaitanya Deva's state was like that of a minor."

M. goes to take dip in the Ganges.

Chapter IX

Sri Ramakrishna's horoscope – his earlier story – Thakur's realization of God

Vision of Rama, Lakshmana, and Krishna[1] – naked figure of a paramahamsa

Sri Ramakrishna is talking with the devotees in the same small room in Balaram's house. Mahendra Mukherji, Balaram, Tulsi, Haripada, Girish, and other devotees are sitting on the floor.

1. Parthasarthi.

Girish has been visiting Thakur for seven or eight months. M. has returned after his bath in the Ganges. He salutes Thakur and sits beside him. Thakur is relating a few of his wonderful visions of God.

"One day in the Kali Temple I saw Nangta[1] and Haladhari reading the Adhyatma Ramayana. Suddenly I saw a stream with woods and green trees and plants on either side. I saw Rama and Lakshmana walking along wearing shorts.[2] One day, in front of the kuthi, I saw Arjuna's chariot, with the Lord sitting in it as the charioteer. I remember this even now.

"Another day, during a kirtan at my native village, I saw the figure of Gauranga before me.

"A naked man used to be with me all the time then. I would touch his penis and cut jokes with him. Then I would laugh and laugh. This naked form came out of my own body – the picture of a paramahamsa – like a child.

"Oh, I can't describe the many divine visions I had. At the time I had severe stomach troubles. The visions would aggravate them, so when I had one, I would say, 'Get away!' But they would catch hold of me, like ghosts. I would remain absorbed in ecstasy. I couldn't tell you how I passed my days. Then all divine emotion would pass as if I had had a bout of diarrhea." (*Laughter.*)

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1. Totapuri.
2. Jandhiya.

Girish (*smiling*): "I am examining your horoscope."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I was born on the second lunar day. Except for the positions of sun, moon, and mercury,[1] it doesn't show much more."

Girish: "You were born under Aquarius. Rama and Krishna were born under Cancer and Taurus. And Chaitanya Deva under Leo."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I had two desires. One, to be king of the devotees. Two, that I should not be a dry sadhu."

Sri Ramakrishna's horoscope – why spiritual practice for Thakur? – vision of Brahmayoni

Girish (*smiling*): "Why did you have to practice spiritual disciplines?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "The Divine Mother[2] underwent many difficult spiritual practices for Shiva,[3] sitting encircled by five fires,[4] keeping her body immersed in water during cold weather, and gazing at the sun without blinking.

"Krishna practiced a number of spiritual disciplines with the Radha Yantra. That yantra was the Brahmayoni from which universes arise. He would meditate on it and worship it. From it thousands of universes are created.

"This is very secret. Under the bel tree I used to have sparkling visions."

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1. Ravi, Chandra, and Buddha.
2. Bhagavati.
3. To win him as a husband.
4. Panchatapa.

His earlier story – practicing Tantra under the bel tree – Brahmani procured the articles

"I practiced a number of Tantric disciplines under the bel tree – with a skull, and so forth. And I performed a number of postures. The Brahmani arranged everything.

(*Moving nearer to Haripada*) "In that state I used to worship the penis of young boys with flowers and sandalwood paste. I couldn't help myself.

"And there was another experience. I would fall sick the very next day if I became egoistic."

M. sits like a picture without saying a word when he hears Thakur tell of his wonderful experiences, words never heard before. The devotees also sit there as if bathed in the redeeming current of the Ganges, as if the Bhagavata itself were flowing from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna.

Everyone is silent.

Tulasi:[1] "He (M.) never laughs."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He has laughter within. There is sand over the course of the Phalgu River. But dig into it and you will reach water.

(*To M.*) "Don't you scrape your tongue? Please clean your tongue every day."

Balaram: "Well, Purna has come to know many things about you from him (M.)."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He knows my earlier life story. But what, I don't know."

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1. The future Swami Nirmalananda.

Balaram: "Purna is perfect by nature. What are these people?"[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "They are just instruments."

It is nine o'clock. Arrangements have been made for Thakur's return to Dakshineswar. A boat has been hired and is ready for him at the Annapurna ghat of Baghbazar. Prostrating, the devotees salute Thakur.

He boards the boat with one or two devotees. Gopal's Mother goes into the same boat. After a little rest at Dakshineswar, she will continue on foot to Kamarhatti in the evening.

Thakur's camp cot from Dakshineswar, which had been sent for repairs, is also loaded into the boat. It was on this cot that Rakhal generally slept.

This is, however, not an auspicious day for departure.[2] To change his itinerary date, Thakur has decided to return to Balaram's house this coming Saturday.

1. M. and the others.
2. Magha Nakshatra.

Section XXIV

Thakur at the Dakshineswar Temple with Rakhal, M., Mahimacharan, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Dwija, Dwija's father, and Sri Ramakrishna – debt owed to one's mother and father

Sri Ramakrishna is in his room at the Dakshineswar temple with Rakhal, M., and other devotees. It is about three or four o'clock.

It is the beginning stage of Sri Ramakrishna's sore throat, yet he thinks the whole day only of the good of the devotees – how they might not get bound to the world, how they can gain knowledge and love of God, and how they may realize God.

Ten or twelve days ago, on Tuesday, 28 July 1885, he visited the home of Nandalal Bose at Calcutta to see the pictures of gods. He then graciously visited the homes of Balaram and other devotees.

Having returned from Vrindavan, Rakhal has stayed at home for some days. At present he, Latu, Harish, and Ramlal are staying with Thakur.

A few months ago, the Holy Mother came from the countryside to nurse Thakur at Dakshineswar. She is staying in the nahabat. The grief-stricken Brahmani has been living with her for some days.

Dwija, Dwija's father and brother, M., and others are sitting beside Thakur. Today is 9 August, 1885.

Dwija is about sixteen years old. After the death of his mother, his father married a second time. Dwija often comes to see Thakur with M., though this displeases his father.

Some time ago Dwija's father spoke about coming to visit Thakur. Today he has come. He is the manager of a Calcutta business. He was a student of D.L. Richardson at the Hindu College and has passed examinations for lawyer of the High Court.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Dwija's father*): "Please don't worry about your son's visits here.

"I tell you, go live a householder's life after attaining spiritual awakening. If someone finds gold after hard labour, he can keep it underground or in a box or in water. It doesn't affect the gold.

"I tell you, live a householder's life without attachment. Break a jackfruit after rubbing your hands with oil. Then its juice won't stick to your hand.

"If an immature mind is put in worldly life, it gets dirty. You should only live a householder's life after you've attained spiritual knowledge.

"If you put milk in water, it gets ruined. But if you first churn butter out of the milk and then put it in water, you can keep the butter in water."

Dwija's Father: "True, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "I understand why you scold him. You only threaten. The brahmachari said to the snake, 'You are a real fool. I only asked you not to bite. I never asked you not to hiss. If you'd hissed, your enemies wouldn't have been able

to beat you.' When you rebuke the boy, it's only hissing."

Dwija's father laughs.

"If a father has a good son, it's a mark of his father's spiritual nature. If water in a pond is clean, it's a sign of the virtue of its owner.

"A son is said to be born of one's self (atmaja). There is no difference between you and your son. You have become your son in another way. On the one hand, you're a worldly man working in an office and enjoying family life. On the other hand, you're a devotee of God in the form of your son. I heard that you were a very worldly person. But it's not true. (*Smiling*) You know all this. But you are very tactful. You are saying yes, yes even to this."

Dwija's father smiles a little.

"If your boys come here, they know what you really are. How great is one's father! A person who practices religion by deceiving his parents will get nowhere."

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna's worry about his mother in Vrindavan

"A man owes many debts. Debt to the father, debt to the gods, and debt to the rishis. And there is debt to the mother too. Furthermore, there is debt to the wife. She has to be taken care of. If she's a faithful wife, a person even has to arrange for her maintenance after death.

"I couldn't stay in Vrindavan because of my mother. As soon as I remembered that she was at

the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, I couldn't keep my mind in Vrindavan.

"I tell them to live in the family and also keep their minds on God. I don't ask them to renounce the world. Do this and do that too."

Dwija's Father: "I tell the boys to study. I don't tell them not to visit you. But I don't want them to waste time frivolously with the other boys."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He (Dwija) surely has good tendencies from past births. Why aren't his two brothers the same? Why is only he inclined this way?

"Can you forcibly stop him? A person acts according to tendencies of past births."

The father: "Yes, that is certainly true."

Thakur comes down and sits on the mat close to Dwjia's father. He touches him now and then while he talks.

It is almost twilight. Thakur says to M. and the others, "Please take him for darshan of the deities. If I were well, I would go with him."

He asks for sandesh for the boys. He says to Dwija's father, "Let them eat a little. They should have some sweets."

Dwija's father strolls in the garden after visiting the deities in the temples. Sri Ramakrishna is talking happily with Bhupen, Dwija, M., and others on the southeastern verandah of his room. He slaps the backs of Bhupen and M. in fun and says to Dwija with a smile, "How I talked to your father!"

After twilight Dwija's father comes again to Thakur's room. He is going to leave soon. He is feeling the heat. Thakur himself fans him.

As Dwija's father leaves, Thakur stands up.

Chapter II

Thakur talks freely – what is Sri Ramakrishna, a perfect man or an incarnation of God?

It is 8 p.m. Thakur is talking with Mahimacharan while Rakhal, M., and a few of Mahimacharan's companions are also in the room.

Mahimacharan is going to spend the night here.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, how do you find Kedar? Has he 'drunk milk' or only 'seen it?'

Mahima: "Yes, he is enjoying bliss."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And Nityagopal?"

Mahima: "Good. He's in a very nice state."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Alright. So tell me, has Girish Ghosh changed?"

Mahima: "Very nicely – but he belongs to a separate class."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Narendra?"

Mahima: "He is what I was fifteen years ago."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And the younger Naren? Isn't he guileless?"

Mahima: "Yes. He is very simple-hearted."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's true. (*Thinking some more*) Who else?

"It's enough if all the youngsters who come here know just two things. When they do, they won't have to practice much spiritual discipline. First, who I am – and then who they are. Many of these youngsters belong to the inner circle.

"Those who belong to the inner circle won't attain liberation. I will take up a body again (in the northwest).

"I feel great peace when I see these youngsters. How can I feel happy when I see those who father sons, engage in law-suits, and are busy with 'lust and greed?' How can I live without seeing pure souls?"

Mahimacharan chants verses from the scriptures for Thakur and talks of different yogic postures[1] such as bhuchari, khechari, sambhavi, and so forth, mentioned in the Tantra.

Thakur experiences five kinds of samadhi – piercing the six spiritual centres – basic truth of yoga – kundalini

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, some people say that in samadhi the atman flies around like a bird in the Great Space.[2]

"Once a sadhu came here from Hrishikesh. He said, 'Samadhi is of five kinds. And you experience them all. I have seen this. Like an ant, a fish, a monkey, a bird, and a serpent.'

"At times, the spiritual current rises up like an ant's movement. Sometimes, in the state of

1. Mudras.
2. Mahakasha.

samadhi, the atman swims joyfully in an ocean of ecstasy, like a fish.

"Sometimes, when I'm lying on my side, the great spiritual current pushes me, like a monkey playing with me. I stay quiet. Then this great current suddenly jumps around like a monkey and climbs up to the thousand-petalled centre. That's why I jump up with a start.

"And sometimes, the great current rises up like a bird, hopping from one branch to another. The place where it rests feels like fire. Perhaps it rises from muladhara to the svadhisthana, from the svadhishtana to the heart, and in this way rises right up to the head.

"Sometimes, the spiritual current rises like the zigzag movement of a snake. When it rises to the head, I experience samadhi."

His earlier story – first ecstasy at the age of 22 or 23, in 1858 – piercing the six spiritual centres

"Spiritual consciousness is not awakened until the kundalini has awakened.

"The kundalini lies in the muladhara. When it is awakened, it passes though the centre of the sushumna spiritual nerve, to pierce the svadhisthana, manipura, and the other spiritual centres, until it finally reaches the head. This is known as the movement of the great spiritual current. Thus finally one enters samadhi.

"You can't gain spiritual awareness by just reading books. You have to call upon Him. The kundalini wakes up when you yearn for God.

Listening and reading about spiritual knowledge in books – of what use is that?

"Just before I reached this state, I was shown how the power of the kundalini is awakened. How all the lotuses of the spiritual centres begin to open out one by one – and finally I was in samadhi. This is very secret. I saw that a young man about twenty-two or twenty-three years old, just like me, entered my sushumna nerve and began to play intimately with the lotuses, touching them with his tongue. First at the rectum, then at the organ of reproduction, and then the navel. These lotuses with four petals, six petals, and ten petals, all looking downward, began to look up.

"When it reached the heart, I still remember it very clearly. The twelve-petalled lotus, which looked downward, turned upward and opened out when he touched it with his tongue. Then the sixteen-petalled lotus in the throat and then the two-petalled lotus in the forehead opened up. Last of all, the thousand-petalled lotus, the sahasrara, opened out. Since then I have been in this state."

Chapter III

His earlier story – Thakur talks openly – is he a perfect human being or an incarnation of God?

(Talks with God – view of maya – sees devotees before their actual coming – sees Keshab Sen in ecstasy – vision of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute – and Narendra – and Kedar – illumined body in his first ecstasy – his father's dream – the Naked One and samadhi in three days – Mathur's service from 1858 to 1871, fourteen years – yearns for devotees on the roof of the kuthi – in continuous samadhi – practices all spiritual disciplines)

While he is talking of these things, Thakur comes down from his cot and sits close to Mahimacharan on the floor. M. and one or two other devotees are there. Rakhal is also present.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): "I have been wanting to tell you this for many days, but I couldn't. I feel like telling you today.

"You say that my state can be attained just by practicing spiritual disciplines. This is not true. There is something special here."

M., Rakhal, and the other devotees listen eagerly and in amazement to what Thakur has to say.

Sri Ramakrishna: "God talked to me. It's not only that you can see God – you can talk with Him. Under the banyan tree, I saw Him coming up from the Ganges. O, how much we laughed after that! He twisted my fingers playfully. And then He talked. He actually talked to me.

"I wept for three days, and He showed me what the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and other holy books contain. He showed it all to me.

"One day He also revealed to me what the maya of Mahamaya is. A small light in the room gradually became bigger and bigger until it spread out over the whole world and enveloped it.

"And then He showed me a big lake totally covered with sedge. When a breeze parted it a little, I saw water. But in no time at all, the sedge came dancing from all sides and again covered it completely. I was shown that the water was Sat-chit-ananda and the sedge was maya. Because of maya, you can't see Sat-chit-ananda. But sometimes, though you can get a momentary glimpse, maya again covers it up.

"I am shown what kind of devotees will come before they arrive. Under the banyan tree, I was shown the singing party of Chaitanya Deva stretching to the bakul tree. I saw Balaram in that party. If he had not been there, who would supply me with sugar candy and such things? And I saw him (M.) too."

Sri Ramakrishna – Keshab Sen introducing the name of Hari and the Divine Mother into his Samaj

"Before I met Keshab Sen, I saw him in a vision. While in the state of samadhi, I saw him and his group. There was a room full of people sitting in front of me. I saw Keshab – like a peacock with its tail spread out. The tail meant his group. And I saw a red jewel on Keshab's forehead. This is a sign of rajas. Keshab was saying to his devotees, 'Please

listen to everything he says.' I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, they hold the views of English people. Why should I talk to them?' The Divine Mother made me understand that this is how it is in the Kaliyuga. Then Keshab and his followers carried the names of Hari and the Divine Mother from here. That's why the Divine Mother took Vijay from Keshab's group. But he didn't join the Adi Brahmo Samaj.

(*Pointing to himself*) "There is something special within [me]. A boy named Gopal Sen used to visit me, quite a long time ago. He who is within me placed his foot on Gopal's chest. Gopal said in a state of ecstasy, 'You will have to wait a long time. I can't get along with worldly people. I have to leave now.' Saying this, he left. I heard later that he had quit his body after that. Maybe he has now been born as Nityagopal.

"I have had many wonderful visions. I had the vision of the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. I saw two groups divided by a fence in the middle. On one side, I saw Kedar, Chuni, and many other believers in God with form. On the other side of the fence was a shining heap of red brick dust – illumined. In the middle of it, I saw Narendra sitting in samadhi.

"Seeing him absorbed in meditation, I called out, 'Oh, Narendra.' He opened his eyes a little. I understood that he had been born in one form in Simla[1] as the son of a kayastha. I then said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please bind him with Your

1. The section of Calcutta in which Narendra was born.

maya. Otherwise, he'll quit his body absorbed in samadhi.' Kedar, who was a believer in God with form, peeped in and ran away with a shudder.

"So I say to myself that the Divine Mother Herself resides in this [body] and plays with the devotees. When I first had this state, the body would shine with light and the chest would become red. Then I said, 'Mother, don't manifest Yourself externally. Go within, go within.' So now I have this dull body. If it were not so, people would trouble me a lot. They would gather in crowds if I still had that luminous body. There is no outer manifestation now. This drives away useless fellows. Only those who are pure devotees will stay. Why do I have this illness? It has the same meaning. Those who have devotion for some selfish reasons[1] will flee on seeing me ill.

"I had this desire. I said to the Divine Mother, 'May I become king of the devotees.'

"And then the thought came, 'Those who sincerely call upon God will have to come here. They will surely have to come.' Now see, this is exactly what is happening. Only those people are coming.

"My mother and my father knew what is here within. My father had a dream in Gaya in which Raghuvir said, 'I will be born as your son.'

"It is He who resides here within. As for such renunciation of 'lust and greed,' could I have

1. Sakama bhakti.

brought it about myself? I haven't cohabited with a woman even in dream!

"The Naked One taught me the Vedanta. I attained samadhi in three days. Seeing me in samadhi under the madhavi creeper, he was perplexed and exclaimed, 'Oh, what is this?' Later he realized what dwelt within this. Then he said to me, 'Please let me go.' Hearing these words I went into a state of ecstasy and said to him, 'You can't leave till I have realized the truth of Vedanta.'

"I was with him day and night. There was only Vedanta. Brahmani[1] would say, 'Son, don't listen to Vedanta. Your love for God will suffer.'

"I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, how will I be able to sustain this body? How can I live in the company of sadhus and devotees? Please send a rich man to me.' That's why Mathur Babu served me for fourteen years.

"He who dwells within tells me in advance what kind of devotees will come to me. As soon as I see the form of Gauranga before my eyes, I immediately know that the devotees of Gaur will be coming. And if a Shakta comes, I have the vision of Divine Energy, Kali, before my eyes.

"I used to shout from the roof of the kuthi at the time of the evening service, 'O all of you, where are you? Please come!' See, now they all are gathering one by one.

"God Himself dwells within this. As if He Himself is working with the devotees.

---

1 Bhairavi Brahmani.

"How wonderful is the state of mind of some of the devotees! The younger Naren automatically experiences kumbhaka without effort. And then goes into samadhi time and again. Sometimes for two-and-half hours at a stretch! Sometimes longer. How wonderful!

"All kinds of disciplines have been practiced here: jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, and karma yoga. Even hatha yoga, to add years to the life. A person dwells within this. How else could I have love for God and live with devotees after samadhi? Koar Singh said, 'I have never seen a person returning [to life] after samadhi. You are none other than Nanak.'"

His earlier story – in the steamboat with Keshab, Pratap, and Mr. Cook – 1881

"There are worldly people everywhere – everywhere 'lust and greed.' And yet I live in this state surrounded by them, constantly experiencing samadhi or ecstasy. That's why Pratap (Pratap Chandra Majumdar of the Brahmo Samaj), when he came with Mr. Cook and noticed my samadhi in the steamer, said, 'Dear sir, you seem to be possessed by a ghost.'"

Rakhal, M. and the others listen wonderstruck to all these amazing words issuing from the mouth of Sri Ramakrishna.

Has Mahimacharan been able to understand what Thakur is hinting at? Even after hearing it all, he says, "Sir, all this has happened as ordained by your

destiny."[1] His feeling is that Thakur is just a holy man, a devotee. Consenting to his remark, Thakur says, "Yes, actions of my past lives are showing their effect now. It is like a gentleman possessing a number of houses. Here you have a special parlour. The devotee is His parlour."

Chapter IV

Mahimacharan's brahmachakra[2] – his earlier story – instructions by Totapuri

Is it a small thing to have a vision in dream? Narendra sees divine forms

It is nine o'clock at night. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot. Mahimacharan wants to form a brahmachakra in the same room that Thakur is in. He forms a circle with Rakhal, M., Kishori, and one or two other devotees. Then he asks them all to meditate. Rakhal goes into ecstasy. Thakur comes down from the bed and, placing his hand on Rakhal's chest, begins to chant the name of the Divine Mother. Rakhal comes out of the ecstasy.

It must be one o'clock in the morning. It is the fourteenth lunar day of the dark fortnight, pitch dark everywhere. One or two devotees are pacing alone on the masonry embankment of the Ganges. Thakur gets up. He also comes out and says to the devotees, "The Naked One used to say that at such an hour, in the depth of night, one can hear the anahata sound."

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1. Prarabdha karma, that karma which has already been set in motion, the result of past actions being experienced in the present.
2. A mystic circle prescribed in Tantra.

In the later part of the night, Mahimacharan and M. lie down on the floor of Thakur's room. Rakhal is sleeping on the camp cot. Thakur at times paces the room stark-naked like a five-year-old boy.

It is morning. Thakur repeats the name of the Divine Mother. Going to the western verandah, he has a view of the Ganges. He then goes near all the pictures of the gods and goddesses in the room and salutes them. The devotees rise from their beds, salute him, and then attend to their morning ablutions.

Thakur talks to a devotee in the panchavati. The devotee had seen Chaitanya Deva in a dream.

Sri Ramakrishna (*in ecstasy*): "Ah! Ah!"

The devotee: "Sir, it was but a dream."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Is a dream a small matter?"

Thakur has tears in his eyes and his voice full of emotion.

Hearing that a devotee had a divine vision while awake, he says, "What is there to marvel at? Narendra also sees divine forms these days."

Finishing his morning ablutions, Mahimacharan goes to the Shiva temple west of the courtyard and alone chants verses from the Vedas.

It is eight o'clock in the morning. Mani comes to Thakur after a dip in the Ganges. The grief-stricken brahmin woman has also come to see Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the brahmin woman*): "Please give him some prasad to eat. There are some luchis and the like in the recess of the wall."

Brahmin woman: "You must eat first. Later, he will be served."

Sri Ramakrishna: "First eat the prasad[1] of Jagannath."

After having prasad, Mani goes to the Shiva temples. Then he returns to Thakur. Saluting him, he takes leave.

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "You may go now. You have to attend to your work."

1 Atka.

Section XXV

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, M., Pundit Shyamapada, and Other Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

In samadhi – showers his grace on Pundit Shyamapada

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room with one or two devotees. It is 5 p.m., Thursday, 27 August 1885; 12th of Bhadra, the second day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana.

Thakur's illness is in the beginning stage. Even so, he doesn't think of his body when his devotees visit. Sometimes he talks with them the whole day, sometimes even singing.

Doctor Madhu has come by boat. The devotees are very worried about the illness. They would like the doctor to come daily to examine him. M. says to the Master, "He is very competent. It would be nice if he would see you every day."

Pundit Shyamapada Bhattacharya comes to see Thakur. His home is in the village of Antpur. It is now almost evening. Noticing it, the pundit says that he must go for his evening worship and he goes to the chandni on the bank of the Ganges, where he has an amazing vision while performing his worship. Afterward he returns to Thakur's room and sits on the floor. After repeating the name of

the Divine Mother and meditating on Her, Thakur sits on his bed. M. is sitting on the foot rug. Rakhal, Latu, and others come in and go out of the room.

Sri Ramakrishna (*pointing to the pundit while speaking to M.*): "He is a very nice person." (*To the pundit*) "God is where you find peace after discriminating by the process of 'Not this, not this.'"

Signs of God-realization and Pundit Shyamapada – Thakur in samadhi

"The king lives beyond the seven gates. When you go to the first gate, you see a rich man sitting with many people. There is a lot of splendour there. Wanting to see the king, if you ask your companion, 'Is this the king?' the companion smiles a little and says, 'No.' He says the same thing at the second gate and the other gates. You notice that the farther you go, the more splendour you see. There is greater and greater show of pomp. But when you pass the seventh gate, you no longer need to ask your companion. You stand there amazed, dumb-founded at the sight of the matchless riches of the king. Now you know that this indeed is the king. There is no doubt in your mind about it."

God, maya, living beings and the world – Adhyatma Ramayana – hymn by Yamalarjuna

Pundit: "Only when one leaves behind the kingdom of maya does one see Him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "After attaining God-realization, you see that God Himself has become maya, the world and its living beings. If you reason, 'Not this, not this,' you realize that this world is a

very deceptive place. It's like a dream. When you attain the realization of God, this world becomes a mart of joy.

"What's the use of only reading scriptures? Pundits only reason."

Pundit: "I hate it when someone calls me a pundit."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is His grace. Pundits spend their time reasoning. But some have heard of milk and others have tasted it. After you have realized God, you will see everything as Narayana. It is Narayana who has become all this."

The pundit chants a verse on Narayana. Thakur is full of joy.

sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cātmani ।

īkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ ।।

[His mind being harmonized by yoga, he sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself; he sees the same in all.]

– Bhagavad Gita 6:29

Sri Ramakrishna: "Have you read the Adhyatma (Ramayana)?"

Pundit: "Yes, sir. I've read some of it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is full of spiritual knowledge and love for God. The Shavari story and Ahalya's hymn are all full of love for God.

"But this is a fact. God is far beyond worldliness."

Pundit: "God is very far[1] from worldly intelligence. And where it is not, He is near.[2] I saw a landlord of Uttarpara named Mukhujaya, who was quite old. But he only listened to stories from novels."

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is one more thing mentioned in the Adhyatma: that God Himself is the world and its living beings."

The Pundit delightedly recites some verses of Yamalarjuna pertaining to this; they are from the tenth chapter of the Srimad Bhagavata:[3]

> O Krishna, Krishna, great yogin! You are the supreme, primordial being. The wise know Your form as this universe, manifest and unmanifest.
>
> You are the one ruler over the senses, the ego, the vital force, and the bodies of all creatures. You are truly time, the blessed Lord Vishnu, the all-pervading ruler.
>
> You are the great Prakriti, subtle and consisting of sattva, rajas, and tamas; truly You are Purusha, the witness of change in all spheres of action.

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi – one will have to come here who sincerely practices meditation and japa

Listening to the hymn, he stands in samadhi. The pundit remains seated. Placing one foot on the pundit's lap and chest, Thakur smiles.

Holding the foot, the pundit says, "Oh Guru, illumine me!" Thakur is standing near the smaller cot, facing east.

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1. Suduram.
2. Aduram.
3. Srimad Bhagavata, X:10:29 to 31.

After the pundit has left, Thakur says to M., "My words are coming true. Those who have practiced meditation and japa sincerely will have to come here."

It is already 10 p.m. After taking a small, simple meal of farina pudding, Thakur lies on his bed. He says to Mani, "Stroke my feet a little."

After a while, he asks M. to stroke his body and chest.

Taking a short nap, he says to Mani, "You may go to sleep now. Let me see if I can fall asleep alone." In a little while, he says to Ramlal, "He (Mani) and Rakhal can sleep in the room."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ

It is daybreak.[1] Thakur rises and meditates on the Divine Mother. Because of his illness, the devotees are not able to hear the sweet chanting of God's name. After his morning ablutions, Thakur comes in the room and sits down. He says to Mani, "Well, why am I suffering this illness?"

Mani: "Sir, people won't have the courage to go through all these things unless you do. A person sees that you are suffering so much physically, but even then you know nothing but God."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Balaram also said, 'If you suffer like this, how can we be spared?'

1. 28 August 1885.

"When Rama couldn't lift the bow because of his pain of separation from Sita, Lakshmana was astonished. 'Bound by the five elements, even Brahman laments.'"

Mani: "Jesus Christ also wept like an ordinary man to see the suffering of his devotees."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How did it happen?"

Mani: "Martha and Mary, two sisters, and their brother Lazarus were devotees of Jesus. Lazarus died. Jesus was going to their house. On the way, one sister (Mary) went up to him and fell at his feet. Weeping bitterly, she said, 'Lord, if only you had come earlier, he would not have died.' Seeing her cry, Jesus also began to weep."

Sri Ramakrishna and miracles

"Then Jesus went to his grave and called him by name. Immediately Lazarus came back to life and arose."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "But I don't do such things."

Mani: "That is because you don't want to. Those are occult powers, so you don't practice them. If you did, people's minds would turn to their bodies, and not to pure love for God. That's why you don't do them.

"There are many similarities between you and Jesus Christ."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What similarities?"

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1. Luke 11: 132-44.

Mani: "You don't ask devotees to keep fasts or take to severe practices, You have no strict restrictions about food. Jesus Christ's disciples ate on the Sabbath which was against the rules.[1] That's why the people who strictly followed the scriptural rules showed their displeasure. Jesus said, 'They have done well to eat**.** As long as they are with the bridegroom, they must enjoy themselves.'"[2]

Sri Ramakrishna: "What does it mean?"

Mani: "That his disciples will only enjoy themselves as long as they are with the incarnation of God. Why should they be in sorrow? It is only when the incarnation returns to his abode in heaven that they will face the suffering and sorrows of life."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "And is there any more similarity?"

Mani: "Sir, as you say that 'lust and greed' has not entered into the youngsters, they will be able to internalize religious instructions. For instance, that you can keep milk in a new pot, but if it's put in a pot used for making curds, it will turn sour. He said things like that."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What did he say?"

Mani: "If you put new wine in an old wineskin, it can burst.[3] And if you patch an old cloth with a new piece, it will tear quickly.

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1. Mark 2:26-27.
2. Matthew 9:15.
3. Mark 2:22.

"Also, just as you say, 'The Divine Mother and I are one,' he used to say, 'I and my Father are one.'"[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Anything else?"

Mani: "Well, you say, 'If you call on Him with a yearning heart, He is sure to listen to you.' Jesus also said, 'Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'"[2]

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, if God incarnates as a human being, is He a full manifestation, or a portion or a fraction? Some people say it is full."

Mani: "Sir, whether He incarnates as a full manifestation or a portion or a fraction, I don't completely understand. But what you said, I have understood fully – a round hole in a wall."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Tell me about it."

Mani: "There is a round hole in a wall. You can see a little bit of the field beyond the wall through this hole. Similarly, you can have a little glimpse of the infinite God through you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you can very clearly see five or six miles[3] beyond."

After a dip in the Ganges at the chandni, Mani returns to Thakur's room. It is eight o'clock in the morning.

Mani asks Latu for some rice prasad[4] of Jagannath.

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1. John 10:30.
2. Matthew 7:7.
3. Two or three kosas.
4. Atka.

Coming close to Mani, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Eat prasad regularly. A real devotee cannot take his meals without some prasad."

Mani: "Sir, I brought some prasad of Jagannath from Balaram's house yesterday. I eat a grain or two of it every day."

Mani salutes Thakur and asks him for permission to leave. Thakur says to him affectionately, "Yes, go early in the morning. The hot sun of the rainy season[1] is harmful."

1. The month of Bhadra.

Section XXVI

Thakur with Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple on Janmashtami Festival Day

Chapter I

Coming of Subodh – Purna, M., Gangadhar, Kshirode, and Nitai

Sri Ramakrishna is resting in his room. It is 8 p.m. on Monday, 31st of August 1885, 16th of Bhadra, the 6th day of the dark fortnight of Shravana.

Thakur is unwell. It is the beginning of his throat trouble. But he remains constantly thinking, day and night, of the spiritual welfare of the devotees. Sometimes he worries about his illness like a child. But the very next moment, forgetting everything, he is intoxicated with intense love for God. He becomes almost mad with love for the devotees, like a mother.

Two days ago, last Saturday night, Purna had written in a letter to Thakur: "I feel immense joy. Sometimes, because of the joy, I cannot sleep at night."

When the letter had been read to Thakur, he had said, "The hair of my body stands on end to hear this. His state of joy will last. Let me see the letter."

Folding it and pressing it in the palm of his hand, he had said, "Usually I can't touch letters. But this is a good letter."

Thakur rests a while in bed. Suddenly, perspiring, he sits up and says, "I feel that I will not be cured of this disease."

All the devotees are worried to hear this from him.

The Holy Mother has arrived to serve Thakur and is living very quietly in the nahabat. Most of the devotees have no idea that she lives there. A woman devotee (Golap Ma) is also living in the nahabat. She frequently comes to Thakur's room to visit him.

Thakur said to her yesterday, Sunday, "You have been here for many days. What will people think? You'd better go home and stay there for ten days or so." M. heard this conversation.

Today is Monday. Thakur is not well. It is about 8 o'clock at night. He is lying on the small cot on his back, his head toward the south. After dusk Gangadhar[1] came with M. from Calcutta. He is now sitting at Thakur's feet. Thakur is talking to M.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Two boys came here. The great-grandson of Shankar Ghosh, his daughter's son (Subodh),[2] and another boy (Kshirode) from their neighborhood. Both of them are good boys. I am not well now. I have asked them to go to you for instruction. Do please look after them a little."

M.: "Yes, sir. They live in our neighborhood."

Beginning of Thakur's illness – Dr. Bhagavan – Dr. Nitai

Sri Ramakrishna: "The other day I woke up in a sweat. What can this illness be?"

M.: "Sir, we have decided to have you examined by Dr. Bhagavan Rudra. He is an MD and a very good doctor."

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1. Later Swami Akhandananda.
2. Later Swami Subodhananda.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What will he charge?"

M.: "He charges twenty or twenty-five rupees from others."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Then leave it alone."

M.: "But sir, we will not pay more than four or five rupees."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, if you ask him this way, 'Be kind enough to come and see him.' Has he not heard anything about this place?"

M.: "It seems he has. He has indicated that he wouldn't charge, but we will pay him so he will visit again."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It would be better if you called (Dr.) Nitai. After all, what do these doctors do when they come here? They only aggravate it by pressing the throat."

It is 9 p.m. Thakur sits up to take a little farina pudding.

He feels no discomfort in eating. He says to M. happily, "I've been able to eat a little. I am feeling very happy."

Chapter II

Janmashtami Day – with Narendra, Ram, Girish, and others

(Balaram, M., Gopal's Mother, Rakhal, Latu, the younger Naren, the sadhu from Punjab, Navagopal, the Vaishnavas of Katoa, and Dr. Rakhal)

It is Janmashtami,[1] Tuesday, 1 September 1885, 17th of Bhadra. Thakur is going to take a bath. A devotee massages him with oil while he sits on the southern verandah. Returning from a dip in the Ganges, M. salutes him.

After Thakur's bath, clad in a towel and facing south, he salutes the deities from the verandah. Because of ill health, he is not able to visit the Kali Temple or Vishnu temples.

It is the anniversary of Krishna's birth. Ram and other devotees have brought new clothes for Thakur. He puts them on – a dhoti from Vrindavan and a red silk cloth for the upper body. His pure body looks charming in these new clothes. When he has put them on, he salutes the deities.

Gopal's Mother has prepared some food for Gopala[2] and brought it from Kamarhatti. When she arrives, she says sadly to Thakur, "But you won't eat any of it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You see, I'm not well."

Gopal's Mother: "My misfortune! Please have a little in your hand."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please bless me."

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1. Anniversary of Krishna's birth.
2. Baby Krishna.

Understanding him to be her Gopala, Gopal's Mother feeds Thakur.

The devotees have brought sugar candy. Gopal's Mother says, "Let me take this candy to the nahabat." Sri Ramakrishna says, "I have to give it to the devotees. It's difficult to keep asking for it from the nahabat. Leave it here."

> It is eleven o'clock. The devotees of Calcutta are arriving one by one: Balaram, Narendra, the younger Naren, Navagopal, and a Vaishnava devotee from Katoa. Rakhal and Latu are living here. A sadhu from the Punjab has been staying in the panchavati for some time.

The younger Naren has a tumor on his forehead. While strolling in the panchavati, Ramakrishna says, "Why don't you get this lump removed? It's not on the throat, it's on the forehead. It wouldn't harm you. People even have surgery to treat swollen testicles." (*Laughter.*)

The Punjabi sadhu is going along the garden path. Thakur says, "I don't attract him. He has the disposition of a jnani. I see him as a dry piece of wood."

Thakur returns to his room. They talk about Shyamapada Bhattacharya.

Balaram: "He said, 'The ecstasy Narendra felt when Thakur placed his foot on his chest I didn't experience.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you know why? It's very difficult to concentrate a mind scattered by 'lust

and greed.' He has to hold a village court.[1] He said so. And he has to worry about his children. Narendra's and the other youngsters' minds are not scattered. 'Lust and greed' have not yet entered into them.

"But he (Shyamapada) is a great person."

The Vaishnava from Katoa is asking Thakur questions. He is a bit squint-eyed.

Discussion about previous lives – taking birth to gain love for God

Vaishnava: "Sir, is there another life after this one?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Gita says, 'A man is reborn with the same tendencies he had at the time of his death.' King Bharata was born as a deer because he was thinking of his deer in his last moments."

Vaishnava: "I could believe this if someone had seen it with his own eyes and told me."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I don't know, my dear. I'm unable to cure myself of disease, how can I tell you what happens after death?

"What you are talking about is a matter of petty intelligence. Make an effort to attain love for God. You have taken birth as a human being only for that. You have come to the garden to eat mangoes. What need is there to know how many thousands of branches and how many millions of leaves there are

1. Panchayat, "acting as an arbiter."

in the garden? What is the use of knowledge about what happens after death?"

Girish Ghosh and avatarhood – who is holy? He who has faith and love for God

Girish Ghosh arrives by carriage with a couple of friends. He is drunk. Weeping when he comes in, he places his head on Thakur's feet, still crying.

Sri Ramakrishna pats his back affectionately. He calls a devotee and says, "Prepare a smoke for him."

Raising his head, Girish says with folded hands, "You alone are the full manifestation of Brahman.[1] If this is not true, everything is false. I have been regretting that I could not serve you." (These words are said so tenderly that one or two devotees begin to weep).

"Oh Lord, grant a boon that I may serve you for a year. Who cares for salvation? I don't give a damn. Tell me, may I serve you for a year?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "People here are not nice. They could say something about it."

Girish: "No, that will not be. Grant that –"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, serve me when I go to your house."

Girish: "No. Let me serve you here."

Sri Ramakrishna (*seeing that he won't relent*): "All right, let it be as God wills."

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1. Purna Brahman, or Brahman in His absolute fullness. "Manifestation" implies partialness and differentiation; this is the unmanifest Whole.

Thakur's illness is in his throat. Girish says, "Say that you will be cured. All right. I will expel it magically. Kali! Kali!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Will it cure the disease?"

Girish: "Get well! (*Blowing at the throat*) Phuh. If you are not cured, then you will be with the love and devotion I have for you. Say that you are cured."

Sri Ramakrishna (*irritated*): "Go away. I can't say those things. I can't ask the Divine Mother to cure the illness. Alright, it will be according to God's will."

Girish: "You are deceiving me! It depends on your will."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Shame! Don't say such a thing. I am only a devotee and not Krishna. You may think what you like. You may look on your guru as God, but it is wrong to talk that way. You must not say such a thing."

Girish: "Say that you will be cured."

Sri Ramakrishna: "All right. Whatever has come about will go away."

According to his mood, Girish addresses Thakur now and then, "Well, dear sir, why haven't you come in your beautiful form this time?"

Later, he adds, "Perhaps this time it will save Bengal."

> Some devotees say to themselves, "Is it just for saving Bengal? It will be the whole world!"

Girish again says, "Why is he here? Does anybody understand? He has come down out of compassion for the sorrows of mankind – to save them."

The coachman has been calling. Girish rises and goes to him. Sri Ramakrishna says to M., "See where he is going. I hope he doesn't beat him." M. follows Girish.

Girish returns and recites a prayer to Thakur, "O Lord, grant that I may be so pure that I may never have a sinful thought."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But you are already pure. You have faith and love for God. Aren't you already in a joyful state?"

Girish: "No, sir. The mind is sick. No peace. That's why I drink so much wine."

After a while Girish adds, "Lord, I am surprised that I am serving the Supreme Brahman.[1] What austerities did I perform that I am eligible for this service?"

Thakur has his midday meal. Because of his illness, he eats only a little very simple food.

He is always in a state of ecstasy, forcing his mind down to bring it to his body. But like a child he is unable to take care of the body. Childlike, he says to the devotees, "I have eaten a little. Now I'd like to lie down. You may go outside a little while."

Thakur has a little rest. The devotees seat themselves again in his room.

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1. Brahman in His full manifestation, Purna Brahman.

Girish Ghosh – guru is one's spiritual ideal – two kinds of devotees

Girish: "Yes sir, the guru and the spiritual ideal. I am fond of the form of the guru! I don't fear him. Why is that? Whenever I see a person in ecstasy, I run away from him ten cubits. I fear it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The spiritual ideal itself comes as the guru. After practicing meditation on a corpse,[1] when a person gets the vision of the chosen ideal, the guru himself comes and says to the disciple, 'O disciple, this is your ideal.' Saying this, the guru merges into the form of the chosen ideal. The disciple then no longer sees the guru. When one attains the ultimate knowledge, who can be the guru and who can be the disciple? This is a very difficult situation, where there is no difference between the disciple and the guru."

Devotee: "The head of the guru and feet of the disciple."

Girish (*happily*): "Yes!"

Navagopal: "Listen to the meaning. The head of the disciple belongs to the guru, just as the feet of the guru belong to the disciple. Do you understand?"

Girish: "No, that is not the meaning. Doesn't a son climb up on his father's shoulder? So it says 'the feet of the disciple.'"

Navagopal: "That happens only when the son feels like an infant."

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1. Shava sadhana.

His earlier story – Sikh devotees – two classes of devotees: baby monkeys and kittens

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are two kinds of devotees: One kind has the nature of a kitten – absolute dependence on what the mother may do. It only knows how to meow. It doesn't know where it is going, or what it will do. The mother cat sometimes puts it in the kitchen and sometimes on a bed. In the same way, a devotee gives the power of attorney to God. Having given God the power of attorney, he is free from any anxiety.

"The Sikhs said, 'God is kind.' I said, 'He is our mother and father, why say He is kind? If after giving birth to children, shouldn't the parents bring them up? Should the neighbours do it? This kind of devotee really believes that He is our own mother and our own father.'

"There is another class of devotee. They have the nature of a young monkey. A young monkey holds onto its mother with all its strength. These devotees feel they have some duty to perform – to go on pilgrimage, to practice japa and spiritual disciplines, to worship with sixteen items – and that only then will they be able to hold onto God. This is their attitude.

"Both types are devotees. (*To the devotees*) The more you proceed towards God, the more you will see that God Himself has become everything, that it is He who is doing everything. He is the guru and He Himself is the spiritual ideal. It is He Himself who has granted you spiritual knowledge and love for God."

His earlier story – advice to Keshab Sen: go forward

"The farther you proceed, the more you will see that there is something beyond the sandalwood forest – silver mines, gold mines, and diamonds and jewels. Therefore, go forward.

"But how can I even say, 'Go forward?' When householders go too far, their world falls away. Once Keshab Sen was conducting a worship. He said, 'Oh God, may we drown in the river of Your love!' When the service was over, I said to him, 'My dear, can you drown yourself in a river of love? What then would happen to those who are sitting behind the screen?' But please do this. Dive every now and then and then get back to the bank." (*All laugh.*)

Chattering of Vaishnava – 'one must bring injunctions into practice' – truthfulness is austerity

The Vaishnava from Katoa is arguing with Thakur. Thakur says to him, 'Stop all this chattering. When butter contains water, it produces a sizzling sound.'

"Once a person has tasted the bliss of God, the tendency to argue vanishes. When a bee tastes the joy of sipping honey, it no longer buzzes.

"What will you achieve with talk after reading books? How many verses the pundits quote – 'Shirna Gokulmandali' ("The group in Gokul has shrunk") and so forth.

"What will you gain by just repeating 'hemp, hemp?' Even if you rinse your mouth with it, nothing happens. It has to go into the stomach.

Only then will you feel intoxicated. Without calling on God in solitude and with yearning, all these things cannot be internalized."

Doctor Rakhal arrives to examine Thakur, who says to him eagerly, "Please come and sit down." The conversation with the Vaishnava continues.

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are ordinary men and men with awakened minds.[1] A man who is spiritually conscious is awake. Without spiritual consciousness, birth as a human being is futile."

His earlier story – settling of disputes by a truthful and religious person

"In our village there are many people with pot-bellies and mustaches. But good people are brought from several miles away in a palanquin because they are truthful and religious. They are brought to settle disputes. They don't bring those who are mere pundits.

"Truthfulness is the austerity of the Kaliyuga. Truthfulness, dependence on God, and looking upon other men's wives as mother – these are the means."

Like a child, Thakur says to the doctor, "Sir, please cure me of this."

Doctor: "Can I cure you?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "A doctor is the Lord Himself. I honour all."

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1. *Manushya* means "human being," and *manhosha* "awakened mind."

Reconciliation of free will and God's will – liberty and necessity – God Himself is the mahout Narayana

"If you say I should remain quiet because everyone is God, I believe in the mahout Narayana as well.[1]

"Pure mind and pure atman are one and the same. What comes to a pure mind is God Himself. He is Himself the mahout Narayana.

"Why shouldn't I listen to Him? God alone is the doer. As long as He keeps my 'I-ness' in me, so long will I act according to His instruction."

The doctor is now going to examine Thakur's throat. Thakur says, "Doctor Mahendra Sarkar pressed my tongue the way they press a cow's tongue."

Thakur touches the doctor's shirt and says to him again, like a child, "Sir, please cure me of this."

Seeing the laryngoscope, Thakur laughs and says, "I understand – you will see the image of my throat in it."

Narendra sings. Because of Thakur's illness, not many songs are sung.

Chapter III

Doctor Bhagavan Rudra and Sri Ramakrishna

After taking his midday meal, Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on his bed, talking to Doctor Bhagavan Rudra.

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1. A reference to the fable of the Lord as the Elephant Driver, told several times by Thakur.

M., Rakhal, Latu, and some other devotees are also in the room.

It is Wednesday, 2 September 1885, 18th of Bhadra, the eighth to ninth day of the month of Shravana, the day of the Nanda Festival. The doctor hears all about Thakur's disease.

Thakur comes down to the floor and sits near the doctor.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You see, I can't tolerate the medicine. I have a different constitution."

Touching money, tying knots, saving – all these are impossible for Thakur

"Well, what do you think about this? My hand becomes twisted when I touch money and my breathing stops. And if I tie a knot, I can't breathe till the knot is untied."

After saying this, he asks for a rupee. The doctor is left speechless by what he sees: the hand on which the rupee coin is placed twists and Thakur's breathing stops. When the rupee is removed, Thakur exhales three long breaths one after the other and his hand again relaxes.

The doctor says to M., "It is action on the nerves."

His earlier story – saving opium in Sambhu Mallick's garden – picking mangoes in the native village of Kamarpukur – saving impossible

Thakur says to the doctor again, "There's another thing. I can't save anything at all. One day I went to Sambhu Mallick's garden. I had great stomach trouble and Sambhu said, 'Take a little

opium bit by bit. It will make you feel better.' He tied a little in a corner of my cloth. When I was returning, I began to wander around at the gate – I couldn't find the way. When I threw the opium away, I regained my normal state and returned to the temple garden.

"One day in my village, I picked some mangoes to take home, but then I couldn't walk. I remained standing in one place. When I put the mangoes in a pit, only then could I return home. Well, what do you think of this?"

Doctor: "There is special power behind it – will power."

Mani: "He says it is the Lord's power. But you say it is will power."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "And then if someone says, 'You are better,' at once I feel much better. The other day the brahmin woman said, 'You are fifty percent better.' I immediately began to dance."

Thakur is pleased with the doctor's nature. He tells him, "You have a fine nature. There are two signs of a person who has attained knowledge: a serene temperament and absence of pride."

Mani: "He (the doctor) has lost his wife."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "I tell you that God can be attained if one has these three attractions combined: a mother's love for her child, the love a chaste woman for her husband, and the love of a worldly person for his possessions.

"Sir, please cure me however you can."

The doctor is now going to examine the diseased throat. Thakur sits on a chair in the semicircular verandah. First he talks of Doctor Sarkar, "The rascal! He pressed my tongue as if it was a cow's!"

Doctor Bhagavan: "I don't think he meant to."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, it's not that. He pressed it so he could examine it properly."

Section XXVII

With Doctor Sarkar, Narendra, Sashi, Sarat, M., Girish, and Others at the Shyampukur House

Chapter I

His earlier story – in a state of God-intoxication, behind the kuthi, Thakur feels his body burnt by a sacrificial fire – Pundit Padmalochan's faith and his death

For treatment of his illness, Sri Ramakrishna is living with devotees in a house at Shyampukur. Today is Friday, 23 October 1885, the day of the full moon.[1]The time is 10:00 in the morning. Thakur is talking with M., who is helping him with his socks.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Would it be all right to cut my woolen scarf to wrap around my legs to warm them?"

Yesterday, on Thursday night, Sri Ramakrishna had a long conversation with Dr. Sarkar.[2] Referring to it, Thakur laughs and says to M., "Yesterday I told him the story about saying 'You, you[3] [the calf and egotism being the cause of all suffering].'"

Sri Ramakrishna had said, "A person keeps getting scalded by the three fires of the world,[4] yet

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1. Kojagar Purnima.
2. See Volume I, Section XV.
3. Tuhum, tuhum. For the complete story of the calf, see Volume I, Section XV, Chapter II.
4. Three afflictions or fires of the world: Adhidaivika, misfortunes caused by natural disasters or the forces of nature; adhibhautika,

says it is alright. A sharp thorn cuts into his hand and he bleeds profusely, yet he says, 'There's nothing wrong with my hand.' This thorn has to be burnt in the fire of spiritual knowledge."

The younger Naren, remembering it, says, "What you said about the thorn was nice. Burn it in the fire of spiritual knowledge!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I had the experience of this myself. One day when I was walking behind the kuthi, my body felt like it was ablaze in a sacrificial fire.

"Padmalochan said, 'I will call an assembly of people and talk about your experiences.' But he died soon after."

The time is eleven o'clock. Mani has taken news of Thakur to Dr Sarkar at his house. Hearing about Thakur's condition, the doctor speaks of him and shows his eagerness to hear more.

Doctor (*smiling*): "How well I said yesterday, 'To say 'You, you,' first you have to fall into the hands of a carder!'"

Mani: "That's true, sir. Unless you fall into the hands of a real guru, your ego doesn't disappear. And how nicely he talked about love for God. Bhakti is a woman and can go right into the inner apartments."

Doctor: "Yes, these really are beautiful words. But you still can't give up jnana."

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misfortunes caused by other living beings, i.e. war, physical or verbal assault, attacks of animals, snake bites, and so on; adhyatmika, misfortunes arising from the harm we do ourselves by mental anguish, addictions, and self-destructive behavior.

Mani: "The Paramahamsa Deva doesn't say that. He accepts both knowledge and love – God with form and God without form. He says that the cooling power of love for God has formed water into ice, but when the sun of knowledge rises, the ice melts again. In other words, you realize God with form through love, and the formless Absolute through knowledge.

"And we have noticed that he feels God is so very near that he's always talking with Him. Like a small boy, he says, 'Mother, it hurts a lot.'

"And what powers of observation he has! He saw some fossils in the museum. Immediately he found in them a simile for holy company. Just as they [the fossils] have become stone by dwelling near stones, one becomes holy by associating with the holy."

Doctor: "Yesterday Ishan Babu was harping on the subject of the incarnation of God. 'What is an incarnation after all! It is calling a man God!'"

Mani: "But such is his faith. What is the use of interfering with it?"

Doctor: "You're right, it would be of no use."

Mani: "And how he made us laugh when he said, 'Someone saw that a certain house had collapsed, but it wasn't mentioned in the newspaper, so no one would believe it.'"

The doctor keeps quiet because Thakur has said to him, "Your science does not mention incarnations of God, so there is no incarnation of God."

It is midday. The doctor gets into the carriage with Mani. After visiting some other patients, he will go to examine Sri Ramakrishna.

The other day the doctor was invited by Girish to see the play *Buddha Lila*. Now sitting in the carriage, he says to Mani, "It would have been better to call Buddha the incarnation of compassion. Why was he called an incarnation of Vishnu?"

The Doctor drops Mani at the crossing of Hedua road.

Chapter II

Thakur in the state of a Paramahamsa – seeing joy spreading like fog all around – vision of Mother of the Universe seeming to say, 'Come delusion, come illusion!'

It is about 3 o'clock. One or two devotees are sitting with Thakur. Impatient like a child, he asks repeatedly, "When is the doctor coming? What time is it now?" The doctor is to come this evening.

Suddenly Thakur goes into the mood of a child. Taking a pillow on his lap, he holds it maternally, as if nursing a child. Then he laughs like a child and, in ecstasy, and puts on his dhoti in a strange way. Mani and the others watch him in amazement.

In a little while the ecstatic mood diminishes. It is time for his meal. He eats a little farina pudding and talks to Mani alone about a very secret experience.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Do you know what I just saw in a state of ecstasy? A vast meadow extending six or eight miles[1] through which the road to Sihore runs. I was alone in that field. I saw a fifteen- or sixteen-year old boy paramahamsa, like the one I had seen earlier under the banyan tree.

"I was surrounded on all sides by a mist of joy when a boy thirteen or fourteen years old raised his head out of the mist. He looked like Purna. Both of us were naked. We began running around the field and playing.

"Purna felt thirsty. He drank water from a glass and then offered it to me. I said, 'My dear, I can't drink your leftovers.' Then he laughed and went away to wash the glass. He brought me fresh water in it."

Dreadful and fearful Mother – She shows that everything is a spell

Thakur again goes into samadhi. Returning to normal consciousness, he resumes his conversation with Mani.

"My mental attitude has changed. I can no longer eat the holy food offered to the deities. The Real and the apparent have become the same to me. Do you know what I saw? A divine form, the Mother of the Universe, with a child in her womb. She gave birth to it and then swallowed it again. As much as went into Her became empty. She was showing me that everything is empty.

1. Three to four kosas.

"She seemed to be saying, 'Come, delusion; come illusion! Come!'"

Mani reflects on Thakur's saying, "Only the magician is real, all else is illusion."

Occult powers are not good – occult powers are of a lower order

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, I tried to attract Purna, but I couldn't. It weakens my faith a little."

Mani: "But that would be occult power."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, downright occult power."

Mani: "When we were returning to Dakshineswar with you from Adhar Sen's house, a bottle broke in the carriage. Somebody said, 'Is that going to cause any trouble?' You said, 'I can't bother about that. That would be using occult power.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "In the same way sickly boys are made to lie on the ground where Hari's name is chanted so they may get well. Curing disease using occult powers is an act of miracle. Those who call upon the Lord for healing a disease have a very low spiritual ideal."

Chapter III

Ultimate spiritual knowledge – the body and Self are different – Thakur's life as told by him

It is evening. Sitting on his bed, Thakur is meditating on the Divine Mother and chanting Her name. A number of devotees are sitting silently near him.

After a while Dr. Sarkar arrives. Latu, Sashi,[1] the younger Naren, Paltu, and many other devotees are present. Ramtaran of the Star Theatre has come with Girish. He is going to sing.

Doctor (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Last night at three o'clock, I was very worried about you. It had rained and I wondered if the doors and windows of your room had been closed or left open. How could I know?"

Sri Ramakrishna is happy with the doctor's affection and says, "What are you saying, my dear? As long as you have a body, you have to take care of it. But I see that it is separate from the Self. When you are completely rid of the attachment to 'lust and greed,' you realize that the body and the Self are different from each other. When the water in a coconut dries up completely, the shell and the kernel separate from each other. Then you can feel the kernel rattling inside the shell. Or, take another example, a sword and its sheath.

"The sword is separate from the sheath. That's why I can't ask the Divine Mother to cure the disease of my body."

Girish: "Pundit Shashadhar said to him [Sri Ramakrishna], 'Please bring your mind to your body in samadhi. That will get rid of your disease.' But he had seen in ecstasy that the body was rattling like a skeleton."

1. Later Swami Ramakrishnananda.

His earlier story – visit to the museum – his prayer in pain

Sri Ramakrishna: "Long ago I was very ill. I was sitting in the Kali Temple. I felt like praying to the Divine Mother for help, but I couldn't do it for myself. I said, 'Mother, Hriday asked me to speak to you about my illness.' I couldn't say more. While I was saying it, I suddenly remembered the Asiatic Society Museum. It had a skeleton of human bones tied together with wires. Immediately I said, 'Mother, please tie this body with wires like the skeleton so I can go around chanting your name and glories.' I couldn't ask for any occult powers.

"In the beginning Hriday said to me – you see, in those days I was under Hriday's care – 'Ask the Divine Mother for some power.' And what a sight I saw when I went to the Kali temple to ask for power! I saw a widow prostitute thirty or thirty-five years old shamelessly opening her cloth and excreting. I became angry with Hriday because he told me to pray for occult powers."

Ramtaran's song – Thakur in ecstasy

Ramtaran sings now:

Behold my beloved vina, strung with special care,

For him who plays it tenderly, its strings tuned neither high nor low, its sweetness flows in a hundred streams.

But if the strings are slack, they will be mute, and over-stretched, they will break in two.

Doctor (*to Girish*): "Are these songs original?"

Girish: "No, they are adapted from Edwin Arnold."

Ramtaran first sings a song from a play of Buddha's life:

We cry for rest, but where to find it?

We know not from where we have come, nor to where we will float away.

We return again and again, weeping and laughing without end,

And always wondering where we may go.

O Awakened One, let me also awaken.

How long will it take for my dream to end?

The awakened sleep no more.

But for now a dense and dreadful darkness lies all around.

Destroy this darkness! Be my light!

Except for you, there is no way. And so I seek refuge at your feet.

Thakur goes into samadhi listening to the song. Then Ramtaran sings again:

Blow, blow, O raging storm…

Vision of god, the sun

When the song is over, Thakur says, "What have you done? Why the bitter soup of neem leaves after rice pudding?

"As soon as you sang, 'Destroy this darkness,' I saw the darkness all around dispelled by the rising sun. And everyone taking refuge at the feet of the sun."

Ramtaran sings again, first:

O Mother, saviour of the helpless, You are the slayer of evil. In You the three qualities of sattva, rajas, and tamas dwell.

You, who create, preserve, and dissolve the world, are with form as well as Formless. O my Mother, truly You manifest in every form.[1]

And then:

My devotion and worship have come to an end; no longer can I offer worship to Mother Shyama,

And by no means can I control the mind. Oh, how it torments me! For shame!

Hearing this song, Thakur again goes into samadhi.

O Mother, who has offered these heaps of red hibiscus flowers at Your feet?

Chapter IV

The ecstasy of younger Naren and others – duties of monks and householders

The song is over. Most of the devotees sit silently, deeply touched. The younger Naren is absorbed in meditation, sitting motionless like a wooden figure.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor, pointing at the younger Naren*): "He is very pure – untouched by the least trace of worldly thoughts."

The doctor looks at younger Naren, who is still in meditation.

1. For complete song refer to Volume III, Section XXII, Chapter III.

Manomohan (*laughing, to the doctor*): "About your son, he [Ramakrishna] says, 'If I have the son, I don't care about the father.'"

Doctor: "That's it! That's why I say that you forget everything else when thinking of the child. (that is, you are occupied with the incarnation or the devotee and forget God)."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "It's not that I don't want the Father."

Doctor: "I understand. How can you do without saying a few things like this?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Your son really is guileless. Sambhu's face reddened when he said, 'God is bound to listen if you call on Him sincerely.' Do you know why I love these boys so much? They are like pure milk that only needs to be brought to a boil to be offered to the deity. Watery milk has to be boiled quite a bit. A lot of firewood is wasted.

"These boys are like unused earthen pots – they are good receptacles. Milk can be put in them without a care. Talk to them just a little about spiritual knowledge and their consciousness is awakened. Worldly people are not easily awakened. It is always risky to keep milk in a pot that's been used for curds. It might go bad.

"Worldliness – 'lust and greed' – hasn't touched your son."

Doctor: "That's because he's living off his father's earnings! I'd like to see if he'd remain untouched by worldliness if he had to earn his own living."

Monk and renunciation of woman – monk and renunciation of gold

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's true! That's certainly true. But the fact is that God is very far away from worldliness. Otherwise, He is as near as the palm of the hand. (*To Doctor Sarkar and Doctor Dokari*) Renunciation of 'lust and greed' is not for you. You only have to renounce them mentally. I said the same thing to the goswamis, 'Why do you talk about renunciation? It won't do for you to renounce – you have to attend to the worship of Shyamasundar.'

"Renunciation is for sannyasins. They shouldn't even see the picture of a woman. Women are like poison for them. They must keep at least ten cubits away or, if that's not possible, at least one cubit. Even if a woman is a great devotee, a sannyasin shouldn't talk to her for long.

"A sannyasin should live in a place where he doesn't even see the face of a woman, or very rarely.

"Money is also a poison for sannyasins. When you have money, you quickly fall prey to anxiety, pride, physical comfort, anger, and so forth. Rajas increases. When there is rajoguna, it leads to tamoguna. So a sannyasin shouldn't touch money. 'Lust and greed' make you forget God."

Advice to the doctor – right use of money – wife for a householder

"But you know, money buys food and clothing and a place to live. It also provides for worship of the Lord and for holy men and devotees.

"But hoarding it is useless. A bee takes great trouble to make its hive. But then someone comes and breaks into it and takes away the honey."

The Doctor: "For whom does one save? Perhaps for the sake of a bad son!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not just a bad son alone. Maybe your wife is of easy virtue. She may even give away your watch and chain to her lover.

"You don't have to renounce women altogether. It's not wrong to sleep with your own wife. But after you've had children, you should live like brother and sister.

"If you are attached to 'lust and greed,' you develop pride of learning, pride of wealth and high position – all these things."

Chapter V

Advice to Dr. Sarkar – pride is not good – ego of knowledge is good – it enables one to teach others

Sri Ramakrishna: "Unless you give up pride, you can't attain spiritual knowledge. Water doesn't stay on the top of a mound. It flows down quickly on all sides to the ground below."

Doctor: "The water that comes down to the lower ground from all sides is both good and bad. It can be muddy and full of sewage, too. And there are hollows on the tops of hills – for instance, in Nanital and Mansarovar – where you have only pure water from the sky."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Only water from the sky. Ah, beautiful!"

Doctor: "And water from a higher level flows down in all directions."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Someone got a siddha mantra.[1] He stood on the top of a hill and shouted to the people below, 'You can realize God if you repeat this mantra.'"

Doctor: "Yes."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But then, there is a problem. When your soul is full of yearning for God, you don't see any difference between good water and dirty water. To know God, one might go to a good person, but sometimes also to people who are ignorant. But when His grace descends, even the turbid water does no harm. When He grants Knowledge, He tells everything – which water is good and which bad.

"There can be low ground on the top of a hill, but not on the hill of the 'rascal I.' The pure water from the sky only collects when there is the 'I of knowledge,' or the 'I of a devotee.'

"The water from a higher level can no doubt flow in all directions, but it is only possible if it comes down from the hill of the 'ego of knowledge.'

"Without receiving God's command, a person can't teach other people. Shankaracharya retained the 'I of knowledge' after attaining Knowledge in order to teach mankind. But lecturing without

1. A mantra that leads to perfection.

having attained Him! What good can it do for people?"

His earlier story – Samadhyayi's lecture – visit to Nandan Bagan Brahmo Samaj

"I went to the Nandan Bagan Brahmo Samaj. After worship, the leader lectured from a podium. While reading his prepared lecture, he looked all around. Even while meditating, he opened his eyes to see now and then.

"A person who hasn't realized God can't give right instruction. He may say one thing correctly but the next thing he says is totally confusing.

"Samadhyayi gave a lecture in which he said, 'God is beyond mind and speech. He is without sweetness and bliss. You must sing His glories with the sweetness of your own love and devotion.' Look at how he describes Him who is the very fountain of sweetness and bliss, the essence of joy! What will such a lecture do? Can it teach anybody?

"Someone said, 'My maternal uncle has a cowshed full of horses.' Horses in a cowshed! (*Everyone laughs.*) This can only mean that there are no horses there."

Doctor (*smiling*): "There are no cows either." (*All laugh.*)

The devotees who had been enraptured regain their normal mood. The doctor is enjoying them.

He asks M., "Who is that person?" M. introduces Paltu, the younger Naren, Bhupati, Sarat, Sashi,

and the other young devotees by pointing to them one after the other.

About Sashi,[1] M. says, "He is going to take his B.A. examination."

The doctor's mind has gone elsewhere.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "Look here, listen to what he's saying."

The doctor hears about Sashi.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor, pointing to M.,*): "He teaches school boys."

The Doctor: "That's what I heard."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How amazing! I'm unlettered but educated people come here. Isn't it surprising? You have to admit that it's God's play."

Today is the Kojagar Purnima[2] day, about half past nine in the evening. The doctor has been here watching everything since six o'clock.

Girish (*to the doctor*): "Well, sir, does this happen to you? You say to yourself, 'I'm not going there,' and yet you seem pulled by something. I'm asking because it happens to me."

Doctor: "I don't feel quite like that, but only the heart knows what is happening in the heart. (*To Sri Ramakrishna*) Besides, you shouldn't talk about things like this."

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1. Sashi (later Swami Ramakrishnananda) first saw Sri Ramakrishna in 1884.
2. The full moon day after the worship of Durga.

Section XXVIII

At the Shyampukur House with Narendra, Dr. Sarkar, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Dr. Sarkar and comparative religion

Thakur is sitting with Narendra, Mahimacharan, M., Dr. Sarkar, and other devotees in the second storey room of the Shyampukur house. It is one o'clock, 24 October 1885, 9th of Kartik.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Your homeopathic treatment is good."

Doctor: "We need to compare the symptoms of the patient with those mentioned in the book. It is like English music – you read and then you sing.

"Where is Girish Ghosh? Never mind. Don't bother him. He didn't sleep last night."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, when I'm in ecstasy, I feel inebriated, like I've taken hemp. Why is that?"

Doctor (*to M.*): "The action of the nervous system stops, so one is benumbed and staggers. All energy has gone to the brain. Life is nothing but the nervous system. The *medulla oblongata* is near the nape of the neck. If it is injured, life may be extinguished."

Mahimacharan Chakravarty talks about the kulakundalini power in the sushumna nerve. "The

sushumna nerve, which none can see, and being subtle, runs through the spinal cord. That's what Mahadeva says."

Doctor: "Mahadeva examined man in maturity. The Europeans have examined all stages, from the embryo to maturity. It's good to know comparative history. A study of the Santhal history has revealed that Kali was a Santhal woman. She was a great fighter. (*All laugh.*)

"Please don't laugh. Listen to what great good comparative anatomy has done. Earlier one could not distinguish between pancreatic fluid and bile. Then Claude Bernard examined the stomach, liver, and other parts of a rabbit and showed that bile had a different action from pancreatic fluid.

"It proves that we should examine lower animals as well. It will not do to examine man only.

"Similarly, a study of comparative religion is also highly beneficial.

"Why does what he (the Paramahamsa) says touch the heart so? He has examined all religions. He himself has practiced Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Shakta, and Vaishnava faiths. Bees gather honey from different kinds of flowers to make a beautiful hive."

M. (*to the Doctor*): "He (Mahima) has studied science a great deal."

Doctor (*smiling*): "Did you mean Max Müller's *Science of Religion*?"

Mahima (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "What help can doctors give you for your illness? When I heard that

you were sick, I said to myself that you were only boosting the pride of the doctors."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is a very good doctor, and very learned."

Mahima: "Yes sir! He is a ship and we are only small boats made of a single tree-trunk."

The doctor folds his hands humbly.

Mahima: "But here (with Sri Ramakrishna) all are equal."

Thakur asks Narendra to sing.

Narendra sings:

I have made You the pole star of my life…

Next he sings:

Ever intoxicated with pride am I, and with the unending cravings of my heart….

And then:

O Lord! The creation of your universe is infinite and wonderful;

This whole world is a mansion of beauty…

Then he sings:

O Lord of the universe, seated on Your great throne,

You listen to the music of the universe, Your creation.

I, born of the dust of the earth, come to the portal of Your house with a feeble voice.

O Lord! I ask for nothing but Your vision.

I have come to sing to You in Your great hall,

where the sun and the moon praise you with hymns.

where from a far corner I too would sing Your praise.

And then:

O King of kings, reveal Yourself to me.

At Your feet I dedicate my soul and my life,

Seared by the fire of this world,

And a heart stained with wrongful acts.

O compassionate Lord, entangled in maya, I live as one who is dead.

Revive me by Your life-giving glance.

Finally he sings:

O my mind, be drunk with the wine of divine love;

Rolling on the ground, weep and chant the name of Hari...

Sri Ramakrishna: "And sing, 'You are all that exists.'"

Doctor: "Ah!"

The singing over, the doctor is almost spell-bound.

After a few minutes he folds his hands devotedly and says to Thakur, "May I take your leave now? I shall come again tomorrow."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Stay a little longer. I've sent for Girish Ghosh. (*Pointing to Mahima*) He is a scholar, but he dances when the name of Hari is chanted. There is no pride in him. He went to Konnagar just because we were there. Besides, he is independent. He's rich and doesn't have to work under anyone. (*Pointing to Narendra*) What do you think of him?"

Doctor: "A very good man!"

Sri Ramakrishna *(pointing to a devotee)*: "And him?"

Doctor: "Wonderful!"

Mahima: "If one has not read some Hindu philosophy, one cannot claim to know philosophy. Europeans don't know the twenty-four cosmic principles of the Samkhya philosophy. They cannot even grasp them."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What are the three paths that you talk about?"

Mahima: "The path of Sat, or existence, is the path of knowledge. The path of Chit is the path of yoga, the path of karma yoga, which includes the duties of the four stages of life. And the path of Ananda, or the way of bliss, is the path of love and devotion for God. You know all three paths and give information on all of them. (*Thakur laughs.*)

"What more can I say? Janaka is the teacher and Sukadeva the listener."

The doctor takes leave.

In samadhi after dusk – Nityagopal and Narendra – perfection through japa

The moon rises after dusk. Today is the second day of Kojagar Purnima, Saturday, 9th of Kartik. Thakur is standing, in samadhi. Nityagopal stands nearby devotedly.

When Thakur sits down, Nityagopal gently strokes his feet. Devendra, Kalipada, and many other devotees sit close to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Devendra and others*): "It has come to my mind that these states of Nityagopal's will pass away and his whole mind will be concentrated on me – that is, on Him who dwells inside me.

"Don't you see how Narendra's whole mind is also becoming fixed on me?"

Many devotees are leaving. Thakur, standing, says to one of the devotees, "Japa is sitting quietly in solitude and repeating His name. Repeating His name with a concentrated mind – performing japa – one gets the vision of God's form and realizes Him. Think of a chain tied to a wooden log submerged in the Ganges, its other end fixed to the bank. Proceeding along each link of this chain, you enter the water and eventually reach the log. In the same way, by repeating God's name, you become absorbed in Him and realize Him."

Kalipada (*to the devotees, laughing*): "Our Thakur is wonderful! We don't have to practice austerities – japa or meditation."

Suddenly Thakur exclaims, "Something's not right!" His throat is troubling him.

Devendra says, "We aren't fooled by your words." His idea is that Thakur is only acting ill to fool the devotees.

The devotees leave. A few of the younger men have decided to stay for the night so they can nurse Thakur by turns. M. will also stay the night.

Section XXIX

The House in Shyampukur – Thakur with Narendra, Mani, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Why the illness? Advice to Narendra about sannyasa

Thakur is sitting in the Shyampukur house with Narendra and other devotees. It is 10 o'clock, Tuesday, 27 October 1885, 12th of Kartik, the fourth day of the dark fortnight of Ashwin. The conversations on 26 October, 11th Kartik and discussions with Dr. Sarkar have been published in *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita,* Volume I.

Thakur is talking with Narendra and Mani.

Narendra: "How strange the doctor was behaving yesterday."

A devotee: "The fish was hooked, but the line broke."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "It was tied to the fishhook. The fish will die and come to the surface."

Narendra goes out for a while. He will return soon. Thakur talks to Mani about Purna.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I am telling this only to you. Ordinary men shouldn't hear these things. With a feminine attitude, a devotee naturally wants to embrace and kiss God."[1]

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1. Purusha.

Mani: "Many are His sports. Even your illness is a part of God's sport. It is because of your illness that new devotees are coming."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Bhupati says, 'Had you not contracted the disease, what would people have said if you had just rented this house?' Well, what about the doctor?"

Mani: "On the one hand, he accepts the attitude of a servant – 'I am the servant and You are my Master.' On the other, he asks, 'Why do you call a man God?'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "See for yourself. Are you going to see him today?"

Mani: "I'll go if I have to report news about you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What kind of boy is Bankim? If he can't come here, you yourself instruct him. His spiritual consciousness will be awakened."

What comes first: show of the world or God? – Sri Ramakrishna hints to Keshab and Narendra

Narendra comes in and sits down near Sri Ramakrishna. He is very worried since his father's death. He has his mother and brothers at home to provide for. He is preparing for his law examination and also has been working for a few months as a teacher at Vidyasagar's Bowbazar school. He will be at peace only after he has provided for the family. This is what he is trying to do.

Thakur knows all this. He gazes at Narendra affectionately.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, I said to Keshab, 'One should be satisfied with what comes of its own accord.[1] The son of a rich family has no worry about his food – he gets an allowance every month. Narendra belongs to a high plane, so why isn't he getting help? If you surrender your mind completely to God, He will surely provide for everything."

M.: "Sir, it will surely come about. It is not yet too late."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But when a person develops deep dispassion, all such calculations vanish. Feeling intense nonattachment, it just doesn't come to the mind, 'Let me first arrange everything for the family and then I will take to spiritual practices.' (*Smiling*) A goswami said in a lecture, 'If you have ten thousand rupees, it is enough for meals, and then you can sit down free of worries and call on God.'

"Keshab Sen also alluded to the same thing. He said, 'Sir, is it all right if a person settles his worldly affairs and then thinks of God? Is there any harm in that?'"

"I said, 'When a person attains deep dispassion, the world appears like a deep well and one's family like deadly snakes. That person doesn't calculate, saying, 'Let me save my money and arrange my worldly affairs.' God alone is the Reality and everything else is unreal. Thinking of the world, abandoning God!

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1. yadṛcchālābha, Gita 4:22.

"A woman suffered extreme grief. First she took her nose-ring and tied it to the end of her cloth. Then she fell on the ground and began to wail, 'Oh what a catastrophe has befallen me!' But she took great care that her nose-ring did not break." *(Everybody laughs.)*

Hearing these words, Narendra lies down on the floor as if hit by an arrow. M., though realizing his mental condition, says to him with a smile, "You are lying down. What is the matter?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M., laughing*): "It's like the woman who said, 'I'm sleeping with my husband's elder brother and feeling so ashamed. How do all these (women) sleep with strangers?'"

M., himself a householder, should be ashamed of it. No one sees his own faults but notices the faults of others. This is what Thakur is saying. A woman had an illicit affair with her husband's elder brother but thought that she was less at fault than other women who were mistresses of strangers. She would argue, "The husband's brother is, after all, one's own. Even so, I am dying of shame."

Who is liberal? – One is more attached to money earned by flattery and servility

A Vaishnava is singing downstairs, and Thakur is overjoyed to hear him. He asks the devotees to give him some money. A devotee goes to give him something. Thakur asks, "What did he give?" The devotee says, "Two pice."

Thakur: "That devotee earns money with great difficulty through servitude. It is hard-earned money, earned by flattery. I thought he would give at least four annas."

Electric machine and Bagchi – sees portrait of the six-armed Gauranga and Ramachandra – his earlier story: long haired sannyasin at Dakshineswar

The younger Naren had said he would bring a machine to demonstrate to Sri Ramakrishna the nature of electricity. He has done this today.

It is two o'clock. Thakur is sitting with the devotees. Atul has brought a friend, who is a subordinate judge, with him. Bagchi, the famous painter from Shikdarpara, has come. He presents several pictures to Thakur.

Thakur, full of joy, examines the paintings. When he sees the picture of Gauranga with six arms, he says to the devotees, "Look! How beautiful it is!"

Wanting to show the devotees more, he asks for the picture of Ahalya turned into stone. He is very happy to see Ramachandra in the picture.

Bagchi has long hair like a woman. Thakur says, "A long time ago I saw a sannyasin at Dakshineswar. He had hair nine cubits long. He used to chant, 'Radhe, 'Radhe.' It was not an act."

After a while, Narendra sings. All the songs are filled with dispassion. Is Narendra inspired by hearing Thakur speak of deep dispassion and sannyasa?

Narendra sings, first:

Will my days just pass in vain, O Lord?[1]

Day and night my eyes are on the path of hope…

1. For the complete song refer to Volume III, Appendix, Chapter I.

Then:

O Mother, as the Inner Controller! You are awake within, day and night.[1]

And finally:

O Lord, O Compassionate One! What joy have I in this life

If my soul, like a bee, does not remain inebriated at Your lotus feet?

1. For the complete song refer to Section XXI, Chapter III.

Section XXX

Sri Ramakrishna with Hariballav, Narendra, Mishra, and Other Devotees at Shyampukur House

Chapter I

Thakur's anxiety for Balaram – Hariballav Basu

Sri Ramakrishna is staying in the Shyampukur house with the devotees for treatment. Today is Saturday, 31 October 1885, 16th Kartik, the eighth day of the dark fortnight of Ashwin. The time is 9 o'clock.

The devotees are living here day and night to nurse Thakur. None of them has yet renounced the world.

Balaram and his family are serving Thakur. Balaram was born into a family of great devotees. His father, now old, lives alone in Vrindavan at Shyam Sunder Kunj, which he had built. His cousin Hariballav Basu[1] and other members of the family are all Vaishnavas.

Hariballav is the Chief Advocate at Cuttack. He did not approve of Balaram's visits to the Paramahamsa Deva, especially his taking the women of the family with him. Balaram had said to him, "Go see him once. Then you can say whatever you like."

Hariballav has come today. He salutes Thakur with great devotion.

Sri Ramakrishna: "How shall I get cured? Do you think that it's a serious illness?"

Hariballav: "Only the doctors can say, sir."

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1. His father's younger brother's son.

Sri Ramakrishna: "The women take the dust of my feet. Then I think that God dwells in this form. That's how I take it."

Hariballav: "You are a holy man. Everyone salutes you like that. What harm is there in that?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That would be true with Dhruva, Prahlada, Narada, Kapila, and saints like them. But what am I? Do come again."

Hariballav: "Sir, I will come because you attract me. You don't have to urge me."

About to leave, Hariballav salutes Sri Ramakrishna and advances to take the dust of his feet, but Thakur pulls his feet back. Hariballav does not give up but takes the dust of Thakur's feet anyway.

Hariballav rises. Thakur also stands up, to show him courtesy. He says, "Balaram is very sad [that I haven't gone to his house]. I thought that I should one day go to his house and meet you all. But I was afraid you'd say, 'Who brought him here?'"

Hariballav: "Why do you say that? Please don't worry about such things."

Hariballav leaves.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "He has love for God. Otherwise, why would he take the dust of my feet forcibly?

"I told you the other day that in divine ecstasy I saw the doctor and someone else. He is the other person. That's why he has come.'"

M.: "Yes, sir. He certainly has great devotion to God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How guileless he is!"

M. has gone to Sankharitola to give a report on Thakur's illness to Doctor Sarkar. The doctor is coming again today to examine Sri Ramakrishna.

The doctor talks about Thakur, Mahimacharan, and other devotees.

Doctor: "He (Mahimacharan) hasn't brought the book he promised to show me. He said he had forgotten to bring it. That's possible. I'm forgetful too."

M.: "He has read a great deal."

Doctor: "He is in such a plight in spite of it?"

Talking of Thakur, the doctor says, "What use is mere love and devotion for God if there is no knowledge?"

M.: "Why? Thakur says love for God comes after knowledge. But his meaning of knowledge and devotion is different from yours.

"When he says, 'Love and devotion follow knowledge,' he means the devotion that comes after attaining ultimate knowledge, Knowledge of Brahman – first knowledge of God, then love for Him. What you mean by knowledge is information acquired through the senses. Ultimate Knowledge is not verifiable by our standard; it can't be arrived at through knowledge acquired through the senses. The latter can be verified."

The doctor is silent. Then he talks about the incarnation of God.

Doctor: "What is this idea of the incarnation of God? And why should one take the dust of a man's feet?"

M.: "Why, you yourself say that you feel ecstatic seeing God's creation when you're doing scientific experiments. And also when you think of man. That being so, why shouldn't we bow before God? There is God in man.

"The Hindu religion says that God is present in all existence. You haven't studied this subject very much. Since God resides in all beings, what's wrong with saluting a man?

"The Paramahamsa Deva says, 'There is greater manifestation of God in some things than in others.' The sun is reflected in water and in a mirror. There is water everywhere, but more apparent in rivers or lakes. It is God whom one salutes, not man. God is God – not man is God.

"God can't be known by reasoning. It all depends on faith. All these are Thakur's words."

As a token of brotherly regard, the doctor today presents M. with one of the books he has written, *Physiological Basis of Psychology*.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ – manifestation of Christ in Sri Ramakrishna

Thakur is sitting with devotees. It is eleven o'clock. He is talking with Misra, a Christian devotee. Misra is about thirty-five years old. He was born in a Christian family in northwestern

India. Though he is wearing European clothes, he wears ochre clothes under the Western dress. He has renounced the world. He was born in west India. Two of his brothers died on the day fixed for the marriage of one of them. Misra renounced the world that very day. He belongs to the Quaker sect.

Misra: "The same Rama dwells in all beings."

Sri Ramakrishna whispers to the younger Naren within Misra's hearing, "There is but one Rama, though he has a thousand names.

"He who is called God by the Christians is known by the Hindus as Rama, Krishna, Ishvara, and so forth. There are many drinking ghats at a reservoir. Hindus take water from one spot and call it 'jal,' or Ishvara. Christians take water from another spot and call it 'water,' that is to say God or Jesus. Muslims go to yet another spot and call it 'pani,' or Allah."

Misra: "Jesus was not the son of Mary, he was God Himself. (*To the devotees*) He (Sri Ramakrishna) appears this way now – at another time, he is God Himself.

"You (the devotees) don't recognize him. I saw him before in a vision. Now I see him in person. In my vision I saw him seated on a raised seat in a garden. Another person was sitting on the ground. He wasn't as spiritually advanced.

"There are four doorkeepers in this country. Tukaram in Bombay and Robert Michael in Kashmir. Here it is he [Sri Ramakrishna], and there's another person in the eastern region."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you see visions?"

Misra: "When I lived at home I used to see light. Then I had a vision of Jesus. How can I describe his beauty? What is the beauty of a woman in comparison with his!"

After a while, when talking to the devotees, Misra takes off his coat and trousers and shows his gerua loincloth.

Thakur comes in from the verandah and says, "It is not external. I saw him (Misra) standing in a heroic pose."

While he is saying this, Thakur goes into samadhi. He stands facing west.

Returning to the normal state somewhat, Thakur looks at Misra and laughs. Taking his [Misra's] hands, he laughs again. He says, "You will achieve what you are seeking."

It seems that Thakur is in the mood of Jesus. Are he and Jesus the same?

Misra (*with folded hands*): "I have surrendered to you my mind, heart, and soul since that day."

In an ecstatic mood, Thakur smiles.

He sits down. Misra tells the devotees about his earlier life. He tells how two of his brothers were killed when the canopy fell during the marriage.

Thakur asks the devotees to take care of Misra.

Thakur in the joy of devotional song, with Narendra, Doctor Sarkar, and others

Doctor Sarkar comes in. When he sees him, Thakur goes into samadhi. After the intensity of his ecstasy has decreased a little, Thakur says, "Sat-chit-ananda follows karanananda – He is the Karana of karana (the cause of the causal)."

Doctor: "Yes."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I have not become unconscious."

The doctor realizes that Thakur is full of God-consciousness. He says, "No! You are very conscious."

Thakur recites with a smile:

> I drink no ordinary wine, but the nectar of everlasting bliss, as I repeat "Jai Kali – to Kali, victory!"
>
> Seeing me drunk on this wine of the mind, by drunkards am I taken for a drunk.
>
> But my mind is drunk on drops of wine by knowledge[1] distilled from the molasses of the mantra, the guru's gift, and by the ferment of my own determination.
>
> Filled full with the Mother's nectar is the vessel of this body, which I purify by uttering Tara's name.
>
> Drink of this wine, says Prasad, and the four fruits of life shall be yours.[2]

Listening to the song, the doctor is almost overwhelmed with feeling. Thakur also becomes ecstatic and he puts his foot in the doctor's lap. A little later he comes out of ecstasy and pulls his foot

1. Jnana, knowledge of God.
2. Dharma (righteousness), artha (material comfort), kama (enjoyment), and moksha (liberation).

back. He says to the doctor, "Oh, what a nice thing you said the other day. You said, 'We are sitting in the lap of God. If we don't tell him about our illness, whom shall we tell? If we have to pray, we should pray to Him.'"

While saying this Thakur's eyes are filled with tears. He goes into an ecstatic mood again, and in that state he says to the doctor, "You are very pure. Otherwise, I could not have put my foot in your lap." And then he adds, "Only he is at peace who tastes the bliss of Rama."

"What is there in sense-enjoyment? What is there? And what is there in money, name, fame, and comforts of the body? If one has not known Rama, what has he known?"

The devotees are worried to see Thakur going into ecstasy during his serious illness. Thakur says, "I'll rest if someone sings that song, 'The wine of divine love.'"

Narendra is in another room. They ask him to come. He sings in his sweet voice, rare even among the gods:

O my mind, be drunk with the wine of divine love;

Rolling on the ground, weep and chant the name of Hari.

Fill the sky with the solemn roar of Hari's name.

Sri Ramakrishna: "And that song, too, 'On the sea of the bliss of consciousness.'"

Narendra sings:

The waves of ecstatic love for God rise on the sea of the bliss of consciousness.[1]

And then:

Meditate upon Hari, O my mind! He is the essence of consciousness. He is free from all impurity!

Without equal is His glory, beautiful is His shape, how very beloved is He in the hearts of His devotees!

Behold, His beauty is enhanced by fresh manifestations of love! It casts into shadow the effulgence of a million moons!

Verily, lightning flashes out of His glorious beauty! His blessed vision causes the hair to stand on end.

Worship His holy feet in the lotus of your heart. Gaze upon the matchless beauty of that Beloved Form.

Now that the mind enjoys peace and the eyes are filled with love, be immersed in divine love. Inspired with your devotion, remain merged in the joy of love.

The doctor listens to the song with rapt attention. When it is over, he says, "That was very good – 'on the sea of the bliss of consciousness.'"

Noticing how full of joy the doctor is, Thakur says, "A boy said to his father, 'Father, just taste a little wine. Then if you ask me to give it up, I will do so.' The father tasted it and said, 'Child, you may give it up, I have no objection – but I won't give it up.' (*The doctor and all others laugh.*)

"The other day the Divine Mother showed me two men. He was one of them. I saw that he would have immense knowledge – but dry knowledge. (*To the doctor, smiling*) But you will become succulent."

The doctor remains quiet.

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1. For the complete song refer to Section XVII, Chapter I.

Section XXXI

With Narendra and Other Devotees at the Cossipore Garden House

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna, an ocean of grace – M., Niranjan, and Bhavanath

Sri Ramakrishna is staying at a Cossipore garden house with his devotees. He is extremely ill, yet he has but one thought on his mind, the spiritual welfare of the devotees. He worries day and night for one or another of them.

He moved from the Shyampukur house to the Cossipore garden house on Friday, 11 December, the 27th of Agrahayana, the fifth day of the bright fortnight. He has been here for twelve days now. The young devotees have been gradually coming to stay in order to serve him. Many of them still visit their homes frequently. The householder devotees come almost daily, sometimes spending the night.

Most of the devotees, who have been gathering since 1881, have already met each other. The last have now come. Sashi and Sarat met Thakur at the end of 1884. After their college examinations in the middle of 1885, they began visiting him regularly. In September of 1884 Girish Ghosh saw Thakur at the Star Theatre. Three months after that, since the beginning of December, he has become a regular visitor. At the end of December 1884, Sarada saw Thakur at the Dakshineswar temple garden. Subodh and Kshirode met him for the first time in August of 1885.

All morning Sri Ramakrishna has been showering his love. He said to Niranjan, "You are my father. I will

sit on your lap." Touching Kalipada's chest, he said, "Be awakened!" Then stroking his chin with affection, he said, "Whoever has sincerely called on God or performed his daily religious duties will surely come here." He gave his blessings in the morning to two women, in the state of samadhi, touching their chests with his feet. They began to shed tears, one of them weeping, "Such grace!" His was a torrent of ecstatic love. As he wishes to bless Gopal of Sinthi, he said, "Fetch Gopal here."

Today is Wednesday, 23 December 1885, 9th of Pausha, the second day of the dark fortnight of Agrahayana. It is now evening. Thakur is meditating on the Mother of the Universe.

After a while he talks sweetly with one or two devotees. Kali, Chunilal, M., Navagopal, Sashi, Niranjan and other devotees are there in the room.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Buy a stool for me. How much will it cost?"

M.: "Between two and three rupees."

Sri Ramakrishna: "If a low seat for bathing costs twelve annas, why would a stool cost that much?"

M.: "It won't be too much. It might be less than that."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, tomorrow is Thursday and late in the afternoon is not auspicious. Can you come before three o'clock?"

M.: "Certainly, sir. I shall come then."

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God? The hidden significance of his illness

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, how long will it take me to recover from this illness?"

M.: "It is rather serious. It will take time."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How many days?"

M.: "It may take five or six months."

Hearing this, Thakur becomes impatient, like a child, and says, "What are you saying?"

M.: "Sir, that long to get completely well."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please tell me why I have such illness when I see so many divine visions and go into ecstasy and samadhi."

M.: "You are suffering a lot, sir. But it has a meaning."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What is that?"

M.: "Your mood will undergo a change. You are becoming inclined toward the Formless. Even the 'I of knowledge' is disappearing."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, my teaching to others is coming to an end. I am not able to speak any more. I see everything is Rama. Time and again I ask myself, whom shall I tell? Just see, this house has been rented with the result that so many different devotees are coming here. But there is no signboard announcing the lecture times, like Krishnaprasanna Sen's or Shashadhar's." (*Both Thakur and M. laugh.*)

M.: "And there is another meaning, to sift the devotees. What cannot be achieved by practicing austerities for five years, the devotees are gaining during these few days – spiritual disciplines, ecstatic love, devotion."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, undoubtedly. Niranjan has just been home. (*To Niranjan*) Tell me, how do you feel?"

Niranjan: "I did love you earlier, but now I simply cannot stay away."

M.: "One day I realized how great all these men are."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Where?"

M.: "Sir, I noticed this one day when I was standing by myself in the Shyampukur house. I realized how each one of them has come here to serve you, brushing aside so many obstacles."

Thakur in samadhi – in wondrous state – vision of the formless – selection of intimate disciples

Hearing this, Thakur becomes absorbed in ecstasy. After some time, he remains absolutely still, in samadhi.

When his ecstasy is over, he says to M., "I saw that all forms of God were merging into the Formless. I want to say much more, but I can't. Well, this inclination to the Formless – is it because the body will cease to exist? Do you think so?"

M. (*speechless*): "That could be, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I see even now the Formless Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute – just like that. But I have concealed the inclination with great effort.

"What you say about sifting of devotees is right. This illness is showing who belongs to the inner circle and who belongs to the outer. Those who

come here after renouncing the world belong to the intimate group. And those who just come once and ask, 'How do you do, sir?' belong to the outer circle.

"Did you notice Bhavanath? He came to Shyampukur dressed as a bridegroom and asked me how I was doing. He never came again. I treat him kindly because of Narendra, but my mind is no longer attracted to him."

Chapter II

Speaking freely the story of his life in his own words – who is Sri Ramakrishna?

āhus tvām ṛṣayaḥ sarve devarṣir nāradas tathā ।

asito devalo vyāsaḥ svayaṁ caiva bravīṣi me ।।

[Thus do all the seers acclaim You – the divine seer Narada, also Asita Devala and Vyasa – and now you yourself tell me so.]

– Bhagavad Gita: 10:13

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "When God descends, assuming a human form for the sake of His devotee, he is accompanied by devotees as well. Some are his intimate disciples, others belong to the outer circle, and some are suppliers of provisions.

"When I was ten or eleven years old, I was going to the Vishalakshi shrine in my native village and had my first experience of ecstasy in an open field. What did I see? It made me completely lose all external consciousness.

"When I was twenty-two or twenty-three, I was asked by the Divine Mother in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, 'Do you want to be Akshara?' I didn't know the meaning of *Akshara* and I asked Haladhari. He said, '*Kshara* means an embodied being and *Akshara* means the Paramatman, or the Supreme Self.'

"At the time of arati, I would climb up to the roof of the Kuthi and cry out from there, 'Come, O devotees! Wherever you may be!' I would stop breathing when I met worldly people. I told English-educated men and they said, 'All this is delusion of the mind.' I became peaceful, thinking to myself, That may be so. But all this is being confirmed now. All the devotees are gathering.

"Then the five providers were revealed to me. First I saw Mathur Babu and then Sambhu Mallick – I had never seen him before, but I had seen in ecstasy a fair-complexioned man wearing a crown. When I met Sambhu many days later, I remembered that it was this very man I had seen in ecstasy. The other three providers I have not yet been able to spot clearly. But they were all fair-skinned. Surendra might very well be one of the providers.

"When this state came over me, a person identical to me came and shook the spiritual nerve channels – the ida, the pingala, the sushumna. He licked the lotus of each of the six chakras and all the drooping lotuses turned up. Last of all, the lotus at the sahasrara opened out completely.

"I was shown beforehand what kind of person would visit me. I saw with these physical eyes, not in a vision, a kirtan party led by Chaitanya Deva, going from the banyan tree to the bakultala. I saw Balaram in it and, I think, yourself [M.]. The regular visits of Chuni and yourself to me have awakened spiritual consciousness [in both of you]. I also saw Sashi and Sarat. They were in the group of the rishi Christ.

"I saw a boy under the banyan tree. Hriday said that a son would be born to me. For me every woman is the Mother. How could I have a son? That boy is Rakhal.

"I said, 'Mother, since you have given me this temperament, please find me a rich man.' So it was that Mathur Babu served me for fourteen years. He did so much! A separate provision store for sadhus, carriages and palanquins for me – whatever I asked him to give to anyone, he gave. The Brahmani (Bhairavi Brahmani) used to say, 'He is Pratap Rudra.'[1]

"Vijay had a vision of this very form (of Sri Ramakrishna). What does this mean? He said he touched it just as I touch you.

"Noto (Latu) counted thirty-one devotees. This is not a big number. Kedar and Vijay are making a few more.

"I was shown in a vision that during my last days, I would have to live on farina pudding.

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1. A king of Orissa and a devotee of Chaitanya Deva, whom he served with immense faith, respect, and devotion.

"During this illness, my wife (Holy Mother) is feeding me farina pudding. I weep, saying, 'Is this the living on farina pudding? In this painful condition?'"

Section XXXII

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra and Other Devotees at the Cossipore Garden House

Chapter I

Advice to Narendra on the harmony of Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

Sri Ramakrishna is with the devotees in the big hall at the Cossipore garden house. It is about 8 p.m. Narendra, Sashi, M., the elder Gopal, and Sarat are there. Today is Thursday, 11 March 1886, 28th of Phalgun, 1292 (B.Y.), the sixth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Phalgun.

Thakur is ill. He is resting in bed with the devotees sitting near him. Sarat is standing and fanning him. Thakur talks of his illness.

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you go to Bholanath, he will give you some oil and tell you how to use it."

The elder Gopal: "Then we'll bring it tomorrow morning."

M.: "Somebody can go and get it today."

Sashi: "I can do it."

Sri Ramakrishna (*pointing at Sarat*): "He can go."

In a little while Sarat leaves for Dakshineswar temple to get the oil from Bholanath Mukherji.[1]

Thakur is lying down. The devotees sit silently. Suddenly he sits up and addresses Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Brahman is unattached. The three gunas are in Him, but He is not attached to them.

"It is like a breeze carrying the fragrance of both good and bad smells. The air remains unaffected. Shankaracharya was walking along a road in Kashi. An outcaste carrying a load of meat was coming his way and suddenly touched him. Shankara exclaimed, 'You've touched me!' The outcaste said, 'Master, you have not touched me, nor have I touched you. The Atman is not attached. You are that pure Atman.'

"Brahman and maya! A man of knowledge rejects maya.

"Maya is like a veil. See, I am using this towel in front of the lamp to bar the view, and I can't see the light of the lamp."

Thakur holds the towel between himself and the devotees. He says, "Look. Now you can't see my face.

"As Ramprasad says, 'Raise the mosquito net and see.'

"But a devotee doesn't reject maya. He worships Mahamaya. Taking refuge in it, he prays, 'Mother, don't stand in the way. Only when you step out of

1. A clerk at the Dakshineswar temple garden.

the way will I attain the knowledge of Brahman.' A man of knowledge denies the three states of wakefulness, dream, and deep sleep. But devotees accept them all. As long as 'I-ness' persists, so long does everything else exist.

"As long as you retain 'I-ness', so long do you see that God indeed has become maya, the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles."

Narendra and the others remain silent.

"The theory of maya[1] is dry. Now tell me, what I said."

Narendra: "Maya is dry."

Thakur strokes Narendra's face and hands and says, "All these are the signs of a devotee. The features of a man of knowledge are different: his face and body are dry."

"But a man of knowledge can live in the world with vidyamaya – love for God, compassion, and non-attachment[2] – after attaining spiritual knowledge. This is for two particular objectives. First, to teach mankind and second, to enjoy bliss.

"If a jnani remains silently in samadhi, he would not be able to instruct people. That's why Shankaracharya retained the 'ego of knowledge.'

"And a man of knowledge lives with devotees and love for God to enjoy and experience the bliss of God.

---

1. The Vedantic theory that the world of names and forms is illusory, dream-like.
2. Bhakti, daya, and vairagya.

"There is no harm in the 'I of knowledge,' the 'I of a devotee.' But the 'rascal I' is harmful. When one realizes God, one becomes childlike. There is no harm in the 'I of a child.' It's like a face reflected in a mirror. It doesn't say bad things. A burnt rope is a rope only in appearance – it is blown away with a puff. The 'I' gets burnt in the fire of spiritual knowledge. Then it can no longer harm anyone. It is 'I' only in name.

"Living in the relative world after reaching the Absolute is like going to the other bank and then returning. It is for teaching people and for enjoyment, for pleasure."

Thakur talks in a very low voice. He pauses for a while and then he says to the devotees, "I am so sick, but my mind is not subject to the power of ignorance.[1] Just look, I don't think of Ramlal or home or wife. But I am worried about Purna, a kayastha boy unrelated to me. I have no worry about the others.

"It is God who has kept vidyamaya in me for the benefit of others – for the devotees.

"And as long as one keeps vidyamaya, one has to return. Divine incarnations and other god-men keep vidyamaya. You have to come back even if you have the least trace of desire – you have to return repeatedly. A person gains liberation only when all desires are gone. But devotees don't want liberation.

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1. Avidyamaya.

"If you die in Kashi, you don't have to return. Men of knowledge want liberation."

Narendra: "The other day we went to Mahimacharan Chakravarty's house."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "And then?"

Narendra: "I have never seen a jnani as dry as he is."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What happened?"

Narendra: "He asked us to sing. Gangadhar[1] sang:

> By Krishna's name restored to life, Radha looks round and round, searching, searching….
>
> Then catching sight of the black tamal tree, Radha exclaims, "Behold! There is my Krishna's crest!"

"Hearing the song, he [Mahima] said, 'Why sing such songs? I don't like love, or things like that. Besides, I have a wife and son. Why sing such songs here?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "See his fear!"

1. Later Swami Akhandananda.

Section XXXIII

Sri Ramakrishna at Cossipore Garden House with Narendra and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Modesty is the ornament of women – his earlier story – gracious visit to M.'s house

Sri Ramakrishna is staying at the Cossipore garden house with the devotees. Although very ill, he is constantly anxious about the welfare of the devotees. Today is Saturday, 17 April 1886, 5th of Vaishakh, fourteenth day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra. It is also a full moon day.

Narendra has been visiting Dakshineswar almost daily to meditate in the panchavati for several days. Today he returns to Cossipore in the evening, accompanied by Tarak and Kali.

It is 8 p.m. The moonlight and southern breeze have made the garden very beautiful. Many of the devotees are meditating in the room downstairs. Narendra says to Mani, "They are giving it up" (i.e. giving up their personal adjuncts as they meditate).

In a little while Mani goes to the hall upstairs and sits with Thakur, who asks him to bring a spittoon and hand towel after cleaning them. Mani goes to the bathing ghat of the western pond and washes them in the moonlight. Then he brings them back.

The next morning Thakur sends someone for Mani. He had gone to the roof of the hall after taking his bath in the Ganges and meeting Thakur.

Mani's wife has gone almost insane with grief over the death of her son. Thakur asks for her to be brought to the garden for her meals. He indicates by a sign, "Ask her to come and stay here for two days. She should bring her baby and have her meals here."

Mani: "As you request, sir. It would be good for her to develop great love for God."

Sri Ramakrishna says by a sign, "Grief drives away (love of God). And he [the boy] was quite grown up.

"Krishnakishore had two sons almost Bhavanath's age. Each of them had two university degrees. They died. Krishnakishore is such a jnani, but he could not keep his balance in the beginning. Luckily, God has not given me a son.

"Such a great jnani Arjuna was! And he had Krishna as his companion. Even so, his grief was inconsolable at Abhimanyu's death.

"Why hasn't Kishori come?"

Devotee: "He goes every day to bathe in the Ganges."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why doesn't he come here?"

Devotee: "I'll ask him to."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Latu*): "Why doesn't Harish come?"

Modesty is an ornament of women – his earlier story – gracious visit to M.'s house

Two girls nine or ten years old, from M.'s family, have come to the Cossipore garden house and sung these songs for Thakur: 'O my tongue, always repeat the name of Durga,' 'The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight,' and others. When Thakur visited M.'s house at Telipara in Shyampukur (Thursday, 30 October 1884, 15th of Kartik, onset of the eleventh day of the lunar month), the same two girls sang for him then. He had been very pleased to hear them. When they sang today at the Cossipore garden house, the devotees heard them from downstairs and called them down to hear their songs again.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Don't teach your girls songs anymore. It is different if they sing on their own, but a woman's modesty suffers if she sings in the presence of anybody and everybody. It is very important that women preserve their modesty."

Sri Ramakrishna's self-worship – he gives prasad to the devotees

Flowers and sandal paste are brought to Thakur in a flower bowl. Sitting on his bed, he begins to worship himself, touching the flowers with sandal paste to his forehead, throat, and heart, and sometimes to his navel.

Manomohan has come from Konnagar. After saluting Thakur, he sits down. Thakur, still worshiping himself, places a garland around his own neck.

After a while, as if pleased with him, Thakur gives some offered flowers to Manomohan and a champak flower to Mani.

Chapter II

Did Buddha believe in the existence of God? Instruction to Narendra

It is 9 o'clock. Thakur is talking to M. Sashi is also in the room.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What did Narendra and Sashi talk about? What did they discuss?"

M. (*to Sashi*): "What were you talking about?"

Sashi: "Maybe Niranjan told you about it. Did he?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "God does not exist, God does exist. Is that what you were talking about?"

Sashi (*smiling*): "Shall I call Narendra?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, do call him." (Narendra comes in and sits down.)

(*To M.*) "Please ask him something. (*To Narendra*) Tell me what you were talking about."

Narendra: "My stomach is upset. What more can I say?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It will be all right."

M. (*smiling*): "What is the state of Buddha [illumination] like?"

Narendra: "Did I ever attain it that I could tell you?"

M.: "What is Buddha's opinion about whether or not God exists?"

Narendra: "How can you say that God exists? It is you who have created the world. You do know what Berkeley[1] says."

M.: "Yes, indeed he does say about external objects, '*Esse est percipi* (the existence of external objects depends upon their being perceived).'"

His earlier story – Totapuri's instructions to Thakur: 'the world is only the projection of the mind'

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Naked One used to say, 'The world is the product of the mind, then it dissolves itself back into the mind.'

"But as long as 'I-ness' persists, the attitude of master and servant is the right attitude."

Narendra (*to M.*): "How can you prove by reasoning that God exists? But if you rely on faith, you have to accept the attitude of master and servant. And if you accept that – and accept you must – you have to accept that He is kind as well.

"You only think of your sorrow. What about the happiness He has bestowed? Why do you forget it? How great is His grace! He has given us three precious things: human birth, longing for God, and the company of a great spiritual personality – manushyatam, mumukshutvam, mahapurusha-sanshrya."

They all sit silently.

---

1 George Berkeley (1685-1753), Irish philosopher.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "But I do definitely feel that there is someone within."

Dr. Rajendra Lal Dutta arrives and takes a seat. He is treating Thakur with homeopathic medicine. When the conversation about medicine ends, Thakur points to Manomohan.

Dr. Rajendra: "He is a son of my maternal uncle's son."

Narendra comes down to the lower floor and begins to sing to himself:

> By giving Your vision, You have rid me of all sorrows and charmed my soul.
>
> Beholding You, all the seven worlds forget their grief,
>
> What to speak of my poor self so mean and unworthy.

Narendra has been suffering from mild indigestion. He says to M., "Feelings of love and devotion for God make the mind tend toward the body. Were it otherwise, who would 'I' be? Then there would be no man and no god, and I would have neither sorrow nor happiness."

Thakur's worship of himself – his prasad to Surendra – Surendra's service to Thakur

It is already 9 p.m. Surendra and other devotees have brought a garland of flowers and offered it to Thakur. Baburam, Surendra, Latu, M., and some others are in the room.

Thakur puts the garland brought by Surendra, around his own neck. Everyone sits silently. Thakur is worshiping Him who resides within.

Suddenly he motions to Surendra. When he comes near the bed, Thakur puts the offered garland around Surendra's neck.

Surendra salutes after receiving the garland. Thakur asks him by a sign to stroke his feet gently. Surendra strokes Thakur's feet for some time.

Thakur in devotional singing with devotees in Cossipore garden house

There is a reservoir to the west of the room Thakur occupies. A few devotees are singing on the platform of its ghat with the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. Thakur sends word through Latu, "Please chant the Lord's name for a while."

M. and Baburam are still sitting with Thakur. They listen to the music of the devotees:

My Gaur is dancing,

Dancing with the devotees to the kirtan in Srivas's courtyard.[1]

Listening to the song, Thakur signals to Baburam, M., and the others, by a sign, "Please go downstairs. Sing with them and dance."

They go down and take part in the kirtan.

After a while Thakur sends someone to ask them to sing:

O friend! My Gaur even knows how to dance!

His divine mood I cannot describe,

As my Gaur dances with both hands upraised!

1. For the complete song refer to Section XV, Chapter V.

The kirtan ends. Surendra, in an ecstatic mood, sings:

My father[1] is mad, my mother too,

And I, their son, am mad.

My Mother is none other than Shyama,

And my father, He who utters "ba-ba-bam!"[2]

Drunk with wine, my Mother staggers, Her disheveled hair away.

While bees beyond number swarm around Her crimson feet,

Buzzing to the ring of her anklets' bells.

Chapter III

Existence of God and Narendra – Bhavanath, Purna, and Surendra

After visiting Sri Ramakrishna, Hirananda gets into a carriage. Standing close by, Narendra and Rakhal exchange a few words with him. It is 10 o'clock. Hirananda will come again tomorrow. This has been narrated in *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, Volume II, Section XXVII.

Today is Wednesday, 21 April, 1886, 9th day of Vaisakha, the 3rd day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra. Narendra and M. converse while they stroll the garden path. Narendra's mother and brothers are in great difficulty at home. He has not yet been able to make satisfactory arrangement for their well-being and is very worried.

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1. Shiva.
2. The hollow, drumming sound that Shiva makes while striking his cheeks.

Narendra: "I don't want to work in Vidyasagar's school anymore. I'm thinking of going to Gaya. Somebody told me there's a manager's job for someone's estate there. There is no God – or anything like God."

Mani (*smiling*): "You say this now, but later you won't. Skepticism is a stage on the path to God-realization. When you've passed this stage and progressed further, you will realize God. That's what the paramahamsa says."

Narendra: "Has anyone seen God the way I see these trees?"

Mani: "Yes, Thakur has."

Narendra: "That may be a hallucination."

Mani: "What a person sees in a particular state is reality for him – the truth – in that state. If you dream you are in a garden, that garden is a reality for you. However, in another state, say when you are awake, you may know that it was unreal, an illusion. When you attain the state of God-realization, you see Him as the Reality, the truth."

Narendra: "I want the truth. The other day I had a long argument with the paramahamsa."

Mani (*smiling*): "What was it about?"

Narendra: "He said to me, 'Some people call me God.' I said, 'Let a thousand people say so, but I won't unless I realize it myself.'

"He said, 'What many people say is the truth, that is the law.'

"I said, 'Unless I realize it for myself, I will not listen to what others say.'"

Mani (*smiling*): "You have the same attitude as Copernicus[1] and Berkeley. Everybody said that it was the sun that revolves [around the earth]. Copernicus didn't listen. The man in the street says that the external world is a reality. Berkeley refused to believe it. That is why Lewis said, 'Why was Berkeley not a philosophical Copernicus?'"

Narendra: "Can you give me a book on the history of philosophy?"

M.: "The one by Lewis?"

Narendra: "No, by Überweg.[2] I want to study a German author."

Mani: "You say, 'Has anyone seen God the way I see this tree?' Suppose God came as a human being and said, 'I am God,' will you believe him? Don't you know the story of Lazarus? When he died and was in the other world, Lazarus said to Abraham, 'Let me go tell my relatives and friends that there really is another world and a hell.' Abraham said, 'Will they believe you if you say that? They'll say that some charlatan has come and is telling stories.' Thakur says, 'God can't be known by reasoning. Everything comes from faith: jnana, vijnana, vision, intimacy – everything.'"

Bhavanath has married. He is worried about making a living. He comes to M. and says, "I hear

1. Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Polish astronomer and founder of modern astronomy.
2. Friedrich Überweg, *An Outline of a History of Philosophy from Thales to the Present,* 3 vols., 1867.

Vidyasagar is going to establish a new school. I need to earn a living. Can I get a job there?"

Ramlal – carriage fare for Purna – Surendra's straw screens

It is between three and four o'clock. Thakur is resting. Ramlal, who has come from Dakshineswar to see him, is gently stroking his feet. Gopal of Sinthi and Mani are also in the room.

Thakur asks Mani to shut the window and massage his feet.

Purna had been asked to hire a carriage and come to the Cossipore garden house. He has already visited Thakur and left. Mani will pay the carriage fare. Thakur asks Gopal by a sign, "Has he (M.) given the money?"

Gopal: "Yes sir."

It is about 9 p.m. Surendra, Ram, and others are planning to return to Calcutta.

It is a hot day in the month of Vaishakh. Thakur's room becomes extremely hot during the day, so Surendra has brought straw screens. Hung on the windows they will cool the room to a great extent.

Surendra: "Where are the screens? Why, they haven't been hung! Nobody pays any attention."

A devotee (*smiling*): "The devotees are now in the state of brahmajnana. It is now 'I am He';[1] the world is an illusion. When the feeling of 'You are

1. So 'ham.

the Lord and I am your servant' returns, they will attend to his service." (*All laugh.*)

APPENDIX A

BARANAGORE MATH

Shivaratri fast by Narendra, Rakhal, and other brothers of the monastery

Baranagore Math. Narendra, Rakhal, and other devotees have observed a fast today for Shivaratri. Two days later they will celebrate the anniversary of Thakur's birth.

Baranagore Math was founded only five months ago, not long after Thakur Sri Ramakrishna had gone to his eternal abode. Narendra, Rakhal, and other devotees are in a state of deep renunciation. One day, when Rakhal's father came to persuade him to return home, Rakhal said to him, "Why do you take the trouble of coming here? I'm alright here. Just bless me that you may all forget me and I may forget you." They are all in a state of deep dispassion, ever engaged in spiritual practices and singing the name of God. They have only one ideal, – to realize God.

Narendra and the other devotees sometimes practice japa and at other times study the scriptures. Narendra says, "Work without expectation of any reward, which the Lord talks about in the Gita, is what we are to do – worship, japa, meditation, and such. We are not to do activities of any other kind."

Narendra had gone to Calcutta in the morning, to appear in court in connection with his family's lawsuit. He had to testify in court personally.

M. reaches the monastery at 9 o'clock. Seeing him enter the "demons' room,"[1] Tarak begins to sing a song in praise of Shiva:

Tathaiya tathaiya dances Shiva …

Rakhal also joins him and both begin to dance as they sing the song that Narendra had recently composed:

Tathaiya tathaiya dances Shiva to the sound of *ba-ba-bam! ba-ba-bam!*[2]

Dimi-dimi-dimi rings His damaru,[3] while around his neck sways a garland of skulls.

And through his matted locks the Ganges roars and his scintillating trident flashes fire – *dhak-dhak-dhak!*

His hair, tied in a bun atop his head – how splendidly the moon glows upon it!

All the brothers in the monastery are fasting. Narendra, Rakhal, Niranjan, Sarat, Sashi, Kali, Baburam, Tarak, Harish, Gopal of Sinthi, Sarada, and M. are present. Jogen and Latu are in Vrindavan these days; they have not seen the monastery yet.

Today is Monday, 21 February 1887. Sarat, Kali, Niranjan, and Sarada are planning to go to Puri next Saturday to visit Lord Jagannath. Sashi is engaged in serving Thakur day and night.

The worship over, Sarat begins to sing to the accompaniment of a tanpura.

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1. "The monastic brothers were nicknamed "demons." The "demons' room" was a room in the house that they used as a parlour."
2. A reference to the hollow, drumming sound that Shiva makes while striking his cheeks.
3. A small, handheld drum, shaped like an hourglass.

The Lord of Kailas, the King of Kings, Shiva Shankara dances – *ba-ba-bam!*

The beat of his damaru rumbles over Kailas's peak, a garland of serpents encircles his neck, and his bloodshot eyes shine brightly,

Even as the crescent moon, adorning his forehead, shines brightly too.

Narendra has just returned from Calcutta and has not yet taken his bath. Kali asks him, "What is the news about the lawsuit?"

Narendra (*irritated*): "Why are you concerned about it?"

Narendra is smoking and talking to M. and others: "You cannot succeed without renouncing 'lust and greed.' 'Woman is the door to hell.' All men are under the control of women. Shiva and Krishna are different. Shiva made Shakti his maidservant. Sri Krishna did live a householder's life, but how unattached he was! How quickly he gave up Vrindavan!"

Rakhal: "And also how he left Dwaraka."

Narendra returns to the monastery after a dip in the Ganges, holding his wet dhoti and a towel in his hand. Sarada, his whole body covered in dust, comes and prostrates before Narendra. He has also observed the fast of Shivaratri and is now going to the Ganges to bathe. Narendra goes to the shrine room, salutes Thakur, and then sits and meditates for quite a long time.

They are now talking about Bhavanath, who has married and taken a job. Narendra, says, "Oh, he and people like him are but worldly worms!"

It is midday. Arrangements for the worship of Shivaratri are being made. Wood and vilwa leaves of the bel tree have been gathered for the homa fire that will be performed after the puja.

Evening arrives. Having waved incense in Thakur's shrine, Sashi takes the incense stick to the other rooms as well and bows to the picture of each god and goddess, chanting their names with utmost devotion. "I bow to the guru; I bow to Kalika; I bow to Jagannath, Subhadra, and Balaram; I bow to the six-armed one; I bow to Radha Vallabha; I bow to Nityananda, Advaita, and the devotees; I bow to Gopala and I bow to Yashoda; I bow to Rama, Lakshmana, and Vishwamitra."

Arrangements have been made for the worship of Shiva under the bel tree of the monastery. It is 9 o'clock [in the evening]. The first worship will be performed now. The second worship will be at half past eleven. There will be four worships in the four watches of the night. Narendra, Rakhal, Sarat, Kali, Gopal from Sinthi, and the other brothers of the monastery are present under the bel tree. Bhupati and M. are also there. A brother of the monastery is performing the worship.

Kali reads from the Gita sections on the review of the armies, Samkhya Yoga, and Karma Yoga. During the reading he discusses them with Narendra.

Kali: "I myself am everything. I create, preserve, and destroy."

Narendra: "How can I create? There is a power which makes me do it. All actions – even thinking – are caused by God."

M. (*to himself*): "Thakur said, 'As long as you are aware that you are in meditation, you are in the jurisdiction of Primal Power. You have to accept the fact of Primal Power.'"

Kali thinks for some time silently. Then he says, "The action you are talking about is all illusion. There is not even such a thing as thinking. I laugh when I think of these things."

Narendra: "The 'I' that is understood when we say 'I am He' (So 'ham) is not this ego. It is what remains after getting rid of the mind and body and so on."

After reading of the Gita, Kali chants, "Peace, peace, peace (Santih, santih, santih)."

Narendra and the other devotees all stand up and circumambulate the vilwa[1] tree repeatedly as they dance and sing. Now and then they chant in chorus, "Shiva Guru! Shiva Guru!" It is a deep dark night. The fourteenth day of the dark fortnight – darkness all around. All living creatures are still.

"Shiva Guru, Shiva Guru," chanted from the lips of these young, ochre-clothed, unmarried devotees, is full of dispassion. The sound of the great mantra merges with the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, having risen like rain clouds rumbling through the infinite sky.

1.The vilwa tree is also called the bel tree.

It is almost dawn when the worship ends. Narendra and the devotees bathe in the Ganges during this sacred time of early dawn, the Brahmamuhurta.

It is day break. After their dip in the Ganges, the devotees go to the shrine of the monastery and salute Sri Ramakrishna. Then they assemble in the "demons' room" (the parlour). Narendra has put on a beautiful new ochre cloth. The indescribably pure, celestial radiance of his face and body, the result of spiritual austerities, blend with the color of his apparel. His countenance is filled with vigour and also intense love for God. It looks as if a drop from the ocean of Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda has assumed a divine body in order to teach mankind knowledge and love for God – as a helper in the work of a divine incarnation. None can turn his eyes away from Narendra, who is now twenty-four years old – exactly Sri Chaitanya's age when he renounced the world.

The day before, Balaram had sent fruits and sweets from his house for the devotees to break their fast the next day.

Standing in the room, Narendra, Rakhal, and a couple of other devotees have some refreshments. After eating one or two, they say joyfully, "Blessed Balaram! Blessed you are!" (*They all laugh.*)

Now Narendra makes fun like a child. Putting a rasagolla in his mouth, he stands absolutely still, his eyes unblinking. Seeing Narendra in this state, a devotee pretends to hold him from behind lest he fall.

After some time, Narendra (with the rasagolla still in his mouth) opens his eyes and says, "I … am … well …" (*Everyone laughs loudly.*)

M. and the others are served the offered sweets and hemp.

M. watches this mart of joy. The devotees shout together, "Victory to Guru Maharaj, Victory to Guru Maharaj!"

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Section I

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna dances with devotees in the joy of ecstatic love at Balaram's house

It is about 8 or 9 p.m., seven days after the Dolayatra. Thakur is surrounded by Ram, Manomohan, Rakhal, Nityagopal and other devotees. They are all inebriated with chanting the name of God. Some of the devotees are in a state of ecstasy. In such a state, Nityagopal's chest has turned red. When they all sit down, M. salutes Thakur. He sees that Rakhal is lying down overwhelmed with ecstasy and unaware of the outside world. Thakur, putting his hand on Rakhal's chest, says, "Peace, peace." It is the second time Rakhal has experienced ecstasy. He lives with his father in Calcutta and goes to Dakshineswar from time to time to visit Thakur. At the present time he is a student in Vidyasagar's school in Shyampukur.

Thakur had said to M. in Dakshineswar, "I will visit Balaram's house in Calcutta. Please go there." That is why M. has come to see him.

It is Saturday, 11 March 1882, 28th of Falgun, the seventh day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra. Thakur has come to Balaram's house at his invitation.

The devotees sit for prasad on the verandah while Balaram stands humbly to serve them. He doesn't act like the master of the house.

M. has only recently begun to visit Sri Ramakrishna. He has not yet talked to the devotees, only with Narendra at Dakshineswar.

Harmony of religions

A few days later, Sri Ramakrishna had been sitting absorbed on the steps of the Shiva temples. It was about four or five o'clock. M. was seated near him.

A short while ago, Thakur had rested on his bedspread on the floor in his room. Nobody was yet living there to attend to his needs and he has been greatly inconvenienced since Hriday's departure. When M. came from Calcutta to see him, he talked to him while he walked to the Shiva temples. Sitting on a step of the Shiva temple opposite the temple of Sri Radhakanta, Thakur suddenly went into ecstasy at the sight of the temple.

He begins to talk to the Mother of the Universe. He says, "Mother, everybody says his watch gives the correct time. Christians, Brahmos, Hindus, Muslims, all of them say, 'Only our religion is true.' But Mother, nobody's watch is right. Who can really know You? But if someone calls on You with a longing heart, You can be reached, by Your grace, by any path. Mother, how do Christians call on You in church? Please show me once. But Mother, what will people say if I enter a Church? Maybe it will result in a hullabaloo; maybe I won't be allowed to enter the Kali temple again. So please let me see from the door of the church."

Thakur enjoys devotional music with devotees – love of Rakhal – 'the wine of divine love'

On another day [in March 1882] Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot in his room. He is a picture of joy with a smiling face. M. comes in with Kalikrishna.[1]

Kalikrishna did not know where he was being taken by his friend. The friend [M.] had only said to him, "Come with me if you want to go to a grog shop. There's a huge pitcher of wine there." When they reached Thakur and M. had saluted him, he told Thakur everything he had said to his friend. Thakur laughs.

He says, "The bliss of devotional music and the bliss of Brahman are wine indeed – the wine of love for God. The aim of life is to develop intense love of God. Indeed, love for God is the essence. It is extremely difficult to know God through knowledge and reasoning." Saying this, Thakur begins to sing:

> Who can know what Kali is? Even the six philosophies cannot reveal Her.
>
> The yogi meditates on Her from the Muladhara to the Sahasrara,
>
> As She sports with Kala – two swans amid a wilderness of lotuses.
>
> Like Om, the source of all, Kali is the inner self of the yogi who delights in the Self.
>
> She dwells in every living creature, of Her own will and just as She pleases.

1. Kalikrishna later became the main professor of Sanskrit and history at Vidyasagar's College.

Kala, eternity – he alone knows the meaning of Kali, time; who else but he can know Her as She truly is?

The universe and all living beings rest in the Mother's womb, and you presume to know Her vastness?

Says Prasad, to think that you can know Her is as laughable as trying to swim across the sea.

My mind understands, but alas my heart does not! Though but a dwarf, it aspires to catch the moon.

Sri Ramakrishna says again, "The aim of life is to love God – the way the cowherd boys and milkmaids of Vrindavan loved Sri Krishna. When Sri Krishna went to Mathura, the cowherd boys wandered around weeping in sorrow at being separated from him."

Saying this, Thakur gazes upward and sings:

I have just seen a new cowherd boy. He holds the branch of a young tree and in his arms he holds a new-born calf.

Says he, where is brother Kanai?

But he only mutters 'K' – unable to utter the complete word, Kanai.

And his eyes are filled with tears.

Hearing this song full of love from Thakur, M.'s eyes become filled with tears.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at a devotee's house – at Prankrishna's home

Today Sri Ramakrishna has come to Calcutta. He is sitting with devotees in the parlour on the first floor of Prankrishna Mukherji's Shyampukur house, having just eaten a meal with the devotees. It is Sunday, 2 April 1882, the 14th day of the bright fortnight of

Chaitra, the time between 1 and 2 in the afternoon. Captain lives in the same neighborhood and Thakur wants to go to his house after resting at Prankrishna's. Then he wants to visit Keshab Sen in his house called the Lily Cottage., Prankrishna is sitting in his parlour. Ram, Manomohan, Kedar, Surendra, Girindra (Surendra's brother), Rakhal, Balaram, M. and other devotees are present.

Some gentlemen of the neighborhood and other invited guests are also there. They are all anxious to hear what Thakur has to say.

Thakur: "God and His glory. This world is certainly His glory. But seeing His splendour and glory, people forget everything else. They don't look for Him who is the master of all these riches. Everybody wants to enjoy 'lust and gold' – but there are more problems than enjoyment. The world is like a whirlpool of Vishalakshi. Once a boat is caught in it, nothing can save it. Or it's like a thorny bush. You pull yourself out of one thorn and get entangled with another. Once you enter a labyrinth, it's difficult to find the way out of it. A man becomes scorched in the world of lust and gold."

A Devotee: "So what's the way out?"

The way: holy company and prayer

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is a way: holy company and prayer.

"Unless you go to a doctor, you can't be cured. One day of holy company is not enough. It is always necessary, because the disease is chronic. Without going to a doctor, you don't know how to diagnose

the problem. You have to be with the doctor, here there and everywhere. Only then can you understand if it is phlegm or bile."

The Devotee: "How is holy company useful?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Association with the holy develops fondness for God, it generates love for Him. Unless you can develop yearning for God, you won't achieve anything. By keeping the company of holy people, the heart becomes restless for God. It's like feeling constantly worried when somebody at home is ill, worrying how the patient can be cured. This yearning should be like a person out of work who is running around from one office to another in the search of a job. If he's told there's no vacancy in the office, he goes again the next day to ask if one has occurred.

"There is another way: praying with a sincere heart. He is your own. You have to say to Him, 'Please reveal yourself to me, grant me Your vision. Why have you given birth to me?' Sikh devotees said to me that God is kind. I said to them, 'Why should I call Him kind? He has created us. What wonder is there that He is kind to us?' What kindness is there in parents' bringing up their children? He has to do it, so we should make demands on Him. He is our own father, our own mother. If the son wants his inheritance and begins to fast for it, his parents release it three years early. Again, when a boy entreats his mother for money, 'Mother, I fall at your feet. Please give me money,' the mother has to comply with his wishes. Seeing his insistence, she tosses a few coins at him.

"There is another benefit of holy company: only the thought of what is Real comes to mind – what is Real, what is eternal, that is, God. What is unreal is transitory: the mind should discriminate. No sooner does an elephant raise its trunk to eat the plantain tree of a stranger but the mahout goads it."

A Neighbour: "Sir, why is there sin?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are all kinds of people in this world. He has created good people and He has also created the wicked. It is He who gives good as well as bad tendencies."

Responsibility of a sinner and results of actions

The Neighbour: "So a sinner isn't responsible for his sins."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's God's law that you have to bear the consequence of sin. Won't chili be hot if you eat it? Mathur Babu did a lot of bad things in his youth. That's why he suffered from a number of diseases before he died. You don't notice early on. There's a lot of wood fuel for cooking in the Kali temple. The wet wood burns nicely in the beginning and you don't notice water in it. But when the wood is burnt, all the water collects and it puts out the fire in the oven. That's why you should beware of lust, anger, greed and so on. Just see how Hanuman burnt Lanka in anger. Later, he realized that Sita was in the Ashoka grove. Then he was frantic that she might come to harm."

The Neighbour: "Why did God create wicked people?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is His will, His sport. Both knowledge and ignorance[1] are in His maya. Darkness is necessary to show the glory of light. If lust, anger and greed are bad, why has he made them? Because he wants to create saintly people. A person becomes high-minded when his senses are subdued. What is impossible for a person who has overcome his senses? By His grace, he can even realize God. And look at it from this point of view. It's through desire that His creation continues.

"Wicked people are needed too. When the tenants of a landlord rebelled the landlord sent Golok Choudhury. He was so cruel that the tenants trembled at his name. Everything is necessary. Sita said, 'Rama, if there were only palatial buildings in Ayodhya, it would be so nice, but I see so many old shanties.' Rama replied, 'Sita, if all the houses were well built, what would the masons do?' (*All laugh.*) God has created everything – good trees, poisonous trees, even weeds. Among animals also, there are good and bad – tigers, lions, snakes, all these and more."

It is possible to realize God even in household life – everybody will attain liberation

The Neighbour: "Sir, is it possible to attain God while living a householder's life?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Certainly you can. But, as I said earlier, you have to keep the company of holy people and constantly pray to Him. You have to weep before Him. When the mind is washed of all impurities, God is seen. The mind is like a needle

1. Vidya and avidya.

covered with mud – God is a magnet. Until all the dirt is cleaned off, it cannot join the magnet. When you weep, all the dirt of the needle is washed off. The dirt of the needle is lust, anger, greed, bad tendencies and worldly calculation. As soon as the dirt is washed off, the magnet will pull the needle to itself. In other words, you will have the vision of God. When the mind is purified, a person attains God. Say a person has a fever – a lot of poison in the body is causing the illness – how can quinine help in such a condition?

"Why isn't it possible to realize Him while living as a householder? The same thing – keep the company of the holy, weep and pray to Him, and live in solitude now and then. If plants on a roadside aren't fenced, cows and goats will eat them up."

The Neighbour: "So people who lead a householder's life can also realize God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Everybody will attain liberation. However, a person should follow the instructions of his religious preceptor. If you take a crooked path, it will be difficult to return. Then liberation will take a long time. It's possible that you won't attain it in this life, it may take more births. Janaka and others lived and worked as householders – they worked, keeping God on their minds – the same way a dancing girl dances with a pot on her head. And think of the western (Indian) women. They walk along talking and laughing while they're carrying water pots on their heads."

The Neighbour: "You said that you should follow the instructions of the religious teacher. But how can we find a religious teacher?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not just any kind of person can be a guru. A big log[1] floats and can carry a number of birds and animals on it. But if someone climbs on a light piece of wood, it not only sinks, but drowns whoever is on it. That's why God incarnates in every age as a guru. Sat-chit-ananda himself is the guru.

"What is knowledge and who am I? God alone is the doer and everything else is only an instrument – this is called jnana, or spiritual knowledge. I am not a doer, I am only an instrument in His hands. That's why I say to the Divine Mother: Mother, You are the operator, I am an instrument; You are the resident, I am the house; You are the driver, I am the carriage. I move at Your will; I do what You make me do. I speak only as You make me speak. Not I, not I, only You, only You."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab Sen at the Lily Cottage

From Captain's home, Thakur goes to Keshab Sen's house, the Lily Cottage. Many devotees are with him, including Ram, Manomohan, Surendra, and M. They are all seated in the hall on the second story. Pratap Majumdar, Trailokya and other devotees are also present.

Thakur has great affection for Keshab Sen. It was when Keshab was practicing spiritual disciplines with

1. Bahaduri.

his disciples in Belgharia – in 1875 after the festival of Magha – Thakur went to the garden to meet him. He was accompanied by Hriday, his nephew. It was in this Belgharia garden that Thakur said to Keshab, "You have cast off your tail. In other words, after renouncing everything you are able to live inside or outside the household – like a tadpole that's lost its tail and can live both in water and on land." He advised Keshab on many occasions later at Dakshineswar, the Lily Cottage, Brahmo Samaj and other places: God can be realized by different paths and by different religions. A person can live in the world after practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude and developing love for God. Janaka and others lived a worldly life after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. You must call on Him with a heart full of yearning, only then will He grant His vision. Worship God without form; this is very good. Attaining the knowledge of Brahman, you will have the correct understanding that God is real and all else is transitory. Brahman is real, the world unreal. The Eternal Religion[1] believes both in God with form and God without form; God is worshipped with different attitudes – the attitude of peacefulness, as servant, as friend, as parent, and as one's beloved. During a symphony of sanai and other instruments[2] a musician plays one single note though he has seven holes in his pipe – while at the same time there is another musician who also has seven holes in his flute but plays different notes.

"You don't believe in God with form. There is no harm in that. It's enough to have single-minded devotion to the formless God. Even so, you should cultivate the longing that the believers in God with form have. When you call upon Him as Mother, your love and devotion increase. At one time you may have the attitude of a servant, at another of a friend, then of a

1. Sanatana Dharma.
2. Roshan Chowki.

parent, again as one's beloved. I have no desire, I only love Him. It's a nice attitude. It's called motiveless devotion.[1] I have asked for nothing – not money, not fame, nor respect. All I ask for is love and devotion to Your lotus feet. The Vedas, the Puranas and the Tantras talk of only one God and of His sport. This attitude contains both spiritual knowledge and love of God. You should live in the world like a maidservant. A maid attends to all the household work, but her mind is tied to her native village. She brings up the children of her master. She even addresses them as 'My Hari', 'My Rama,' but she knows they're not hers. It's necessary to practice spiritual disciplines in solitude. You will receive His grace. How many spiritual disciplines King Janaka practiced! It is only by practicing spiritual disciplines that a person can live unattached in the world.

"You deliver lectures for the good of all. But good ensues to others only if you have realized God, have had His vision. Without His command, advice has no effect. And unless you've realized God, you don't receive His command. The signs of God-realization are that the person becomes like a child, like an inanimate object, like a crazy person, a demon – like Sukadeva and others. Chaitanya Deva used to dance, sometimes like a child, at other times like a madman – he would laugh, then weep, then dance and then sing. While living in holy Puri, he remained in *jada samadhi* (like an inanimate object) for a long time."

Keshab gradually develops reverence for Hinduism

Sri Ramakrishna instructed Keshab Sen during casual conversations in different places. Keshab Sen mentioned meeting him in Belgharia for the first time

1. Ahetuki bhakti.

in the Sunday edition of the *Indian Mirror*, 28 March, 1875.[1]

The Magha festival again fell in January in 1876. The title of Keshab Sen's lecture in the Town hall was: "Brahmo Religion and What We Have learnt From it (Our Faith and Experiences)." In the discourse, he mentioned a great deal about the beauty of the Hindu Religion.[2]

If Sri Ramakrishna loved Keshab Sen, the latter showed love and devotion to him no less. Almost every year during the Brahmo festival and on other occasions Keshab would go to Dakshineswar to bring him to the Lily Cottage. Sometimes he would take him alone, as one of his very own, with great love and devotion to the worship room on the first floor. He would worship God in seclusion there.

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1. We met Paramahamsa of Dakshineswar not long ago and were charmed by the depth, penetration and simplicity of his spirit. The never ceasing metaphors and analogies in which he indulged are most of them as apt as they are beautiful. The characteristics of his mind are very opposite to those of Pandit Dayananda Saraswati, the former being too gentle, tender and contemplative, as the latter is sturdy, masculine and polemical.
– *Indian Mirror*, 28th March, 1875

Hinduism must have in it a deep source of beauty, truth and goodness to inspire such men as these.
– Sunday Mirror, 28th March, 1875

2. If the ancient Vedic Aryan is gratefully honoured today for having taught us the deep truth of the Nirakar, or the bodiless Spirit, the same homage is due to the later Puranic Hindu for having taught us religious feelings in all their breadth and depth.

In the days of the Vedas and the Vedanta, India was all Communion (Yoga). In the days of the Puranas, India was all emotion (Bhakti). The highest and best feelings of religion have been cultivated under the guardianship of specific divinities.
– "Our Faith and Experiences", Lectures delivered in January, 1876

Keshab invited and brought him to the Bhadra festival in 1879 and again in the *tapovan* of Belgharia. Again, he brought him to the festival at the Lily Cottage on 21st September. It was on this day that he was photographed with the Brahmo devotees while in samadhi. In this photograph Thakur is standing in samadhi, held by Hriday. On 22nd October, the 6th day of Kartik, the festival of Mahalakshmi, on the 9th day of the lunar month, Keshab went to see him in Dakshineswar.

On 29 October, 1879, Wednesday, 13th day of Kartik, 1286 (B.Y.), at one in the afternoon on the day of Kojagar Purnima, Keshab went again with some devotees to Dakshineswar to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Along with his steamer, there were a barge, six boats and two small boats with about eighty devotees. They carried their pennant, flowers and leaves, and musical instruments such as khol, kartal and berry. Hriday welcomed Keshab and brought him from the steamer singing, "Who is chanting the name of Hari on the bank of the Ganges? It seems to be Nitai who is coming, inebriated with ecstatic love." The Brahmo devotees also accompanied them, singing kirtan from the Panchavati: "The image of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, beauty and bliss in body." Thakur goes into samadhi every now and then in their midst. On this day Keshab carried out the divine service after twilight in the light of the full moon on the Bandhaghat.

After the service Thakur had said, "Please say, 'Brahman-Atman-Bhagavan. Brahman-maya-jiva-jagat. Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan.' (Brahman, Atman and Bhagavan are one. Brahman, His maya, the world and the embodied beings are all He. God, His devotee and his word are one)."

The Brahmo devotees and Keshab repeated these mantras with Sri Ramakrishna in the moonlight on the bank of the Ganges, their hearts full of love for

God. And when Sri Ramakrishna said, "Now repeat Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava (the Guru, Krishna and the worshipper are one and the same)," Keshab smiled and said, "Sir, not that far yet. If we say, Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava, people will call us too orthodox." Sri Ramakrishna also laughed and said, "Yes indeed, you people should only go as far as you can."

Some days later after the worship of Kali, on 13 November 1879 on 28th Kartik, Ram, Manomohan and Gopal Mitra met Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar for the first time.

One summer day in 1880 Ram and Manomohan came to the Lily Cottage to see Keshab. They were very interested to know what Keshab thought of Sri Ramakrishna. They said that when asked, Keshab told them, "The Paramahamsa of Dakshineswar is no ordinary man. There is no one as great as he on earth. He is so beautiful, so extraordinary, he must be preserved with the greatest care. If this is not done he will not survive – he must be preserved the way a beautiful and valuable article is kept in a glass case.[1]"

A few days later, during the festival of Magha, in January, 1881, Keshab Sen went to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. Ram, Manomohan, Jaygopal Sen and many others were there.

---

1. Sri Ramakrishna came a second time to the Baelghar garden on 14 May, 1875, the first of Jaishtha. The Bharata Ashram libel suit ended on 30 April, 1875, 14th day of Vaishakha, 1282 (B.Y). Keshab was still there in this garden. Sri Ramakrishna had been in Kamarpukur for four months in 1880 – from Wednesday, 3 March, 21st day of Falgun to 10 October, 1880, 25th of Ashwin. During these days, they enjoyed kirtan while reading the holy books. In Seohar Shyambazar while returning, he witnessed the arati of the puja of the 7th day in the homes of the gentlemen of Koutulpur. On the way, he met some Brahmo devotees sent by Keshab. Keshab was worried as he had not seen Thakur for several months.

On Friday, 15 July 1881, the first day of Shravana, 1288 (B.Y.), 1803 Shaka Samvat, Keshab again took Sri Ramakrishna on a steamer from Dakshineswar.

In 1881, when Thakur visited Manomohan and they celebrated the occasion, Keshab was also invited. He took part in the festivity. Trailokya and others sang.

Sri Ramakrishna went by invitation to the house of Rajendra Mitra in December, 1881. Keshab was also there. This house is situated on Becchu Chatterji Street in Thanthania. Rajendra, Ram and Manomohan's uncle were also there. Ram, Manomohan, the Brahmo devotee Raja Mohan and Rajendra sent word to Keshab and invited him.

When Keshab received the message, he was mourning the death of his brother Aghornath. Brother Aghor, the preacher, breathed his last in Lucknow on Thursday, 8 December, the 24th day of Agrahayana. Everybody thought that Keshab would not be able to make it. However, when he received the message, Keshab said, "How is it possible? The Paramahamsa is coming and I shall not be able to see him! I will certainly go. Since I am in mourning I will sit separately for my meal."

The mother of Manomohan, Shyamsundari Devi, a great devotee, had served the meal for Thakur. Ram was there. The day Sri Ramakrishna graced Rajendra's house with this visit, Surendra took him to the Chinna Bazaar in the afternoon and had him photographed. Thakur was standing in samadhi.

On the day of this festival, Mahendra Goswami read out from the Bhagavata.

The festival was celebrated in the Shimulia Brahmo Samaj on the day of Maghotsava in January, 1882. The service and kirtan were performed in the open space and courtyard of Jnana Chaudhury's house. Both Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab had been invited.

It was here that Thakur heard Narendra sing for the first time and asked him to visit Dakshineswar.

On Thursday, 23 February, 1882, 12th day of Falgun, Keshab, accompanied by his devotees, visited Sri Ramakrishna again at Dakshineswar. Miss Pigot and Joseph Cook, the American clergyman, were with them. Keshab took Sri Ramakrishna for a cruise with the Brahmo devotees. Mr. Cook saw Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi. Nagendra was also in the boat. Hearing about Thakur from him, M. met Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar for the first time within the next three days.

Two months later, in April, Sri Ramakrishna went to see Keshab at the Lily Cottage. A short account of this visit has been given in this section.

Sri Ramakrishna's affection for Keshab; he vows to offer a green coconut and sugar to the Mother of the Universe

Today Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the parlour of the Lily Cottage with the devotees – Sunday, 2 April 1882, 21st Chaitra, 1288 (B.Y.), 5 p.m. A message is sent to Keshab who is in an inside room. He dresses himself in a shirt and cloth and comes to salute Sri Ramakrishna. He was going to see his friend, Kalinath Basu, who was ill. But he cannot go since Sri Ramakrishna has arrived. Thakur says, "You're a very busy man. Besides, you have to write for a newspaper. You don't have time to come to Dakshineswar, so I've come here to see you. Because of your illness I vowed to offer green coconut and sugar to the Divine Mother. I said, 'Mother, if anything happens to Keshab, whom shall I talk to in Calcutta?'"

Sri Ramakrishna has a long conversation with Pratap and other Brahmo devotees. Noticing M. sitting close by, he [Thakur] says to Keshab, "Why doesn't he come to Dakshineswar? Ask him, my dear. He's said many times that his mind is not attached to his wife and children." It has only been a month and a few days that M. has started to visit Sri Ramakrishna. For the last few days, he has not done so. That's why Thakur is saying this. Thakur had told him that if his visit was delayed, he should write him a letter.

Introducing Samadhyayi, the Brahmo devotees say to Thakur, "He is a learned man, well-versed in the Vedas and other holy books." Thakur says, "Yes, I can see inside him by looking through his eyes, just as the inside of a room is visible through a glass door."

Trailokya sings. Evening lamps are lighted while he sings. The singing continues. Listening to the song, Thakur suddenly stands up and, chanting the name of the Divine Mother, goes into samadhi.

Returning somewhat to normal consciousness, he begins to dance and sing to himself:

> I drink no ordinary wine, but the nectar of everlasting bliss, as I repeat "Jai Kali – to Kali, victory!"
>
> Seeing me drunk on this wine of the mind, by drunkards am I taken for a drunk.
>
> But my mind is drunk on drops of wine by knowledge[1] distilled from the molasses of the mantra, the guru's gift, and by the ferment of my own determination.

1. Jnana, knowledge of God.

Filled full with the Mother's nectar is the vessel of this body, which I purify by uttering Tara's name.

Drink of this wine, says Prasad, and the four fruits of life shall be yours.[1]

Thakur looks at Keshab with eyes full of affection, as if he is his very own, fearing that he may lose him; in other words, he might become entangled in worldly life. He looks at him and sings:

Afraid am I to speak the word to you; equally afraid am I not to speak it.

The fear that arises in my mind is that I may lose you, yes, be robbed of you, my wealth, my treasure!

Knowing well your mind, we shall teach you the *mantra* (holy name) that is to bring you to the Beloved.

Now ready yourself to receive that *mantra* which enabled us on many occasions to steer the ship safely to land.

"'Knowing well your mind, we shall teach you the *mantra* (holy name) that is to bring you to the Beloved.' In other words, call on God, renouncing all else. Only God is Real, all else is ephemeral. If you haven't attained Him, nothing has been achieved. This is the great secret."

Thakur sits down again and talks to the devotees.

They prepare to serve him refreshments. A Brahmo devotee is playing the piano on one side of the hall. Sri Ramakrishna smiles and goes to stand near the piano. Like a child, he looks at it. After

1. Dharma (righteousness), artha (material comfort), kama (enjoyment), and moksha (liberation).

awhile, he is taken to the inner apartments for refreshments. The ladies will salute him there.

After refreshments he boards a carriage. All the Brahmo devotees stand near the carriage. It leaves Lily Cottage for the Dakshineswar Temple.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Kedar's festival at Dakshineswar

Sri Ramakrishna is talking to Kedar and other devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple. It is Sunday, 13 August 1882, Amavasya, 29th day of Shravana, 1289 (B.Y.), the time about five o'clock.

Kedar Chatterji's home is in Halishahar. He is an accountant in government service. For a long time he had been in Dhaka where Vijay Goswami used to talk endlessly about Sri Ramakrishna. Hearing about God, his eyes would become filled with tears. He used to be a member of the Brahmo Samaj.

Thakur is sitting with devotees on the southern verandah of his room. Ram, Manomohan, Surendra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, M. and many other devotees are present. Kedar is celebrating a festival. The whole day passes in joy. During the singing by a master singer whom Ram has brought, Thakur goes into samadhi. He is sitting on the smaller cot in his room. M. and other devotees are sitting at his feet.

The nature of samadhi and harmony of religions: Hindus, Muslims and Christians

When he speaks, Thakur explains the nature of samadhi. He says, "You attain samadhi when you have realized Sat-chit-ananda. Then all duty drops off. What is the use of talking about Him in that state? How long does a bee hum? Till it sits on a

flower. But giving up duties is not for an aspirant. He must practice worship, the chanting of His name, meditation, various devotions and pilgrimages.

"If a person reasons after realizing God, it's like a bee buzzing softly while it sips honey."

The musician sings beautifully. Sri Ramakrishna is delighted to hear him. He says to the musician, "A person who has a great talent, such as music, has a special manifestation of the power of God."

Musician: "Sir, how can a person realize God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Love for God[1] is what is essential. God resides in everything, so whom do I call a devotee? The person whose mind ever dwells on God. This doesn't happen if one is egoistic and proud. The water of God's grace does not collect on the hill of 'I-ness'; it runs off. I am only an instrument.

(*To Kedar and the other devotees*) "You can reach God by treading any path, all religions are true. You have to climb up onto the roof with the help of something. You can go by brick steps, by wooden steps, and you can also do it with the help of a bamboo ladder or a rope. You can even climb with the help of a bamboo pole.

"If you say that there are shortcomings and wrong conduct in their religion, I say, let it be. There are flaws in all religions. Everybody thinks his watch gives the correct time. But it is yearning

1. Bhakti.

that is essential. It is enough if you yearn for Him; love for God and attraction to Him makes for success. He is the inner controller.[1] He sees the inner attraction, the yearning of the mind. Think of a father of many boys. Some of the older ones call him baba or papa very clearly. The younger ones can only utter ba or pa. Does the father get angry with the young ones? The father knows they're calling him even though they can't pronounce his name properly. All children are equal in the eye of a father.

"And also, devotees call God by different names. But they're calling the same person. A pond has four ghats. When Hindus take water from one, they call it 'jal'; Muslims take water from another and call it 'pani'; Englishmen take it from yet another ghat and call it 'water'. And there are others who call it 'aqua'. But God is one, though his names are different."

Chapter II

At a circus – Sri Ramakrishna and difficult problems of people in the world

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the door of Vidyasagar's school in Shyampukur in a hired hackney carriage. It is about three o'clock. He has taken M. with him, as well as Rakhal and one or two other devotees. Today is 15 November 1882, 30th of Kartik, the 5th day of the bright fortnight. The carriage gradually proceeds towards the Maidan of the fort via Chitpur Road.

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1. Antaryamin.

Sri Ramakrishna is filled with joy. As though intoxicated or like a child, he leans out this side of the carriage, then the other. He talks to the devotees about the pedestrians. He says to M., "Look, I see that these people are interested in earthly things. They're intent on their stomachs – they don't think about God."

Today Sri Ramakrishna is going to the Maidan to see the Wilson Circus. When they arrive, they buy the cheapest tickets of the lowest class, totaling eight annas. The devotees take him to a high gallery and sit on a bench. Thakur says happily, "Very nice. You can see well from here." He watches different feats in the circus ring for a long time. Then he sees a horse running around the ring with an Englishwoman standing on one foot on its back. There are big iron hoops suspended over the track and when the horse nears them, it runs under them and the lady jumps through them, landing on the horse's back again and balancing on one foot. The horse runs swiftly around the circular track again with the lady standing on its back as before.

The circus show is over. Thakur comes down from the gallery and goes with the devotees to the Maidan near the carriage. It is chilly. He is wearing a green cloth and talks to the devotees there in the maidan. One of the devotees has a small pouch of spices in his hand. The main spice is cubeb.

First practice spiritual life, then lead family life – yoga of practice

Sri Ramakrishna says to M, "See how the Englishwoman stands on one foot on the horse's back while it gallops around the ring. How difficult

it is. She's practiced it for a long time – that's how she can do it. A little carelessness on her part and she could break an arm or leg. She could even die. Family life is just as difficult. Very few people can lead it successfully, and then only by the grace of God and after having practiced spiritual disciplines. Most people can't do it. Domestic life brings much bondage. It drowns a person and makes him suffer deathlike pangs. A very few, like Janaka, were able to live in the family after practicing for a long time. Practicing spiritual disciplines is truly necessary. Without it, a person can't live rightly in the world."

Sri Ramakrishna in Balaram's house

Sri Ramakrishna gets into the carriage. It reaches the door of Balaram's house in Bosepara, Baghbazar. Thakur goes with the devotees to the parlour on the first floor. Evening lamps have been lit. Thakur talks about the circus. A number of devotees have assembled and Thakur talks about many spiritual things with them. He talks only about God.

Sri Ramakrishna, the caste system and problem of untouchables solved

Now the conversation turns to discrimination about castes. Thakur says, "There is a way to extinguish caste difference. That way is bhakti, or love for God. A devotee knows no caste. Love for God cleanses the body, the mind and soul. Gaur and Nitai spread the name of Hari and embraced all, including the pariah. A brahmin is no brahmin without love for God, and a pariah is no longer a

pariah when he has love for God. An untouchable becomes pure, sanctified, by love for God."

A worldly man is a bound soul

Sri Ramakrishna talks about worldly men: "They are like silkworms. They can come out of their cocoons if they want to, but they've made them with such effort they can't give them up. So they die there. Or they're like fish in a trap[1] which can come out through the hole they have entered but, enjoying the sweet sound of water and swimming about with other fish, they get lost and don't even try to come out. The lisping of children is the sweet sound of the water. The other fish are other people and the family. Only one or two swim out. They are called liberated souls."

Thakur sings:

What charm Mahamaya has exercised
that even Brahma and Vishnu remain in the dark,
what to speak of a human being!
The bamboo ghurni trap is laid,
fish enter into them.
There is a way to exit,
but the fish do not escape.

Thakur continues: "Individual souls are like lentils fallen between millstones. They will be ground to powder. Only a few grains stick to the peg and are not crushed. So you have to take refuge next to the peg, with God. You have to call on Him,

1. Ghurrni: A bamboo trap with big holes allowing fish to come in with the flow of water.

chant His name. That alone will bring you liberation. Otherwise, you will be ground in the millstone of death.[1]"

Thakur sings again:

Mother, having fallen into the ocean of the world, this boat of the body is sinking.

O Shankari, the tempest of delusion and the storm of attachment are gradually rising.

The helmsman of the mind is incompetent, its six boatmen[2] are stupid.

Having fallen into a whirlpool, I am struggling, shouting, "I sink, I sink!"

The oar of devotion is broken, the sail of faith torn, so, my boat is out of control.

What can I do? No remedy do I see.

Feeling helpless I fight the waves, I try to catch the boat of Durga's name.

Duty to wife and children

Vishwas Babu had been sitting in the room for a long time. He gets up now and leaves. He had been wealthy, but squandered it all in a depraved life. Now he doesn't even take care of his wife, daughter and family. When Balaram talked to Thakur about him, he said, "He is a spendthrift. A householder has duties and debts – to gods, to the father, to rishis, and also to the members of the family. A chaste wife must be provided for. And also children till they are grown and can stand on their own feet."

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1. Kala.
2. Probably a reference to the six passions: lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and envy.

"Only a sadhu doesn't have to save for the future. Birds and monks don't save. But birds bring food in their beaks for their chicks."

Balaram: "Now Vishwas wants to keep the company of holy men."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "The Kamandalu of a sadhu moves around to all four holy centres of pilgrimage,[1] but it remains just as bitter as before. The malaya breeze turns every tree that it touches into sandalwood. But the cotton, the ashwattha and the hog-plum do not become sandalwood trees. Some people keep the company of sadhus to be able to smoke hemp. (*Laughter.)* Don't the sadhus smoke hemp? So others sit with them to prepare the hemp and get some as prasad." (*All laugh.*)

Chapter III

Visit to the six-armed image of Chaitanya and to Rajmohan's house – Narendra

Sri Ramakrishna has come to Calcutta on the day following his visit to the circus at Fort Maidan. It is Thursday, 16 November 1882, the sixth day of the bright fortnight of Kartik, the first of Agrahayana. Reaching Calcutta, he first goes to visit the image of Chaitanya with six arms at Granhatta.[2] It is a centre for Vaishnava sadhus, Giridhari Das its chief priest. The six-armed Mahaprabhu has been worshipped here for some time. Thakur visits at dusk.

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1. Dham.
2. Now known as Neemtala Street.

Some time after dusk, Thakur goes by hackney carriage to Rajmohan's house in Shimulia. He has been told that Narendra and other young men perform the Brahmo Samaj service here. That is why he has come. M and one or two other devotees are with him. Rajmohan is an old Brahmo member.

Brahmo devotee and complete renunciation or sannyasa

Thakur is happy to see Narendra and says, "I'll watch how you worship." Narendra begins to sing. Priya and some other young men were present.

Worship now begins. One of the young men performs it. He prays, "Lord, grant that we may renounce everything else and become absorbed in You." It seems he has been inspired by seeing Sri Ramakrishna and so is talking of complete renunciation. M. is seated very close to Thakur and is the only one to hear him say in a very soft whisper, "Not much likelihood of that![1]"

Rajmohan takes the master inside the house to serve him some refreshments.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna in the houses of Manomohan and Surendra

Sri Jagadhatri Puja will fall on next Sunday, 19 November 1882. Surendra has invited Thakur to his home today. He impatiently goes in and out of the house waiting for Thakur to come. Seeing M.,

1. He is probably referring to Narendra.

he says, "You have come. But where is he?" Just then Thakur arrives by carriage.

Manomohan's house is quite close. Thakur has first gone there to rest awhile before going to Surendra's house. In Manomohan's parlour, he said, "God likes the devotion of a person who is humble and poor. Like a cow loves fodder mixed with oil-cake. Duryodhana showed his wealth and splendour, but the Lord didn't go to his house. He went to Vidura's. He is the gracious loving Lord of his devotee. He runs after a devotee the way a cow runs behind after her calf."

Thakur sings:

The ecstasy for which the exalted yogi practices yoga,

like a magnet attracting iron does the Lord pull.

"Tears used to flow from Chaitanya's eyes when he heard the name of Krishna. Only God is substantial, all else is illusory. The man, if he so wishes, can realize God. But he remains addicted to the enjoyment of 'lust and greed.' Though a snake has a jewel on its head, it is happy to eat a frog.

"Love for God is the essential thing. Who can know God through reasoning? I want love of God. Why do I need to know His boundless glories? If I can become inebriated by only one bottle of wine, why do I need to know how much wine is in the wine shop? A pot of water is enough to quench my thirst. Why do I need to know how much water is on the earth?"

Surendra and judge Sadarwala – caste distinction. Caste system and problem of untouchables solved – Theosophy

Sri Ramakrishna now arrives at Surendra's house. He goes in and sits in the parlour on the first floor. The brother of Surendra, Sadarwala, is also present. Many devotees have gathered together in the room. Thakur says to Surendra's brother, "You are a judge, that's good. But please remember that it is God's power through which everything happens. You have this high post because it is He who has granted it. People think they are great. But it is water on the roof that flows down the drain pipe which ends in the shape of a lion's mouth – it looks like the water's coming out of a lion's mouth. But see where the water is coming from. In the sky is a cloud that rains down on the roof. Then the water flows down the drain pipe and comes out through the lion's mouth."

Surendra's brother: "Sir, they talk of freedom of women in the Brahmo Samaj and say, 'Discrimination between castes must be abolished.' What do you think?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "People think like that when they have first developed love for God. A strong wind raises a lot of dust. Then you can't distinguish a mango tree from other trees. You can only see well when the tempest has blown over. When the first tempest of divine love has blown over, you gradually come to see that only God is the eternal substance[1] and all else is transitory. Without the company of the holy and the practice of austerity,

1. Shreya.

you can't realize this. What good is it to read the musical notation of a drum? It is very difficult to put them in practice. What use is there in just lecturing? You have to practice austerities. Only through them will you be able to realize.

"Distinction between the castes? There is only one way to wipe it away. That way is love for God. An untouchable becomes pure. An outcaste[1] is no longer an outcaste after attaining love for God. Chaitanya Deva embraced all, including outcastes.

"Brahmos chant the name of Hari. That's very good. If you call on God with a heart full of yearning, He will shower His grace, He will be realized.

"You can reach him by any path. God is one, but he is called various names. Hindus, for example, take water from one spot at a pond and call it jal. At another spot, Christians take water and call it water, and yet at another, Muslims take water and call it pani."

Surendra's brother: "Sir, what do you think of Theosophy?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I was told that it leads to supernatural powers – miracles. At Deomodal's house I saw a fellow who had attained mastery over a ghost. The ghost would fetch a number of different things. What shall I do with occult powers? Does it help to realize God? If God can't be attained by them, they're all illusion."

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1. Pariah.

Section III

Sri Ramakrishna at the Brahmo Festival Celebrated at Mani Mallick's

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna has kindly agreed to visit Mani Mallick's Sinduriapatti house in Calcutta with the devotees. A Brahmo Samaj Festival is celebrated there every year. It is 4 p.m. on 26 November, 1882, the annual festival day. Vijaykrishna Goswami, many Brahmo devotees, Premahand Baral and many friends of Mani's are there. M is also present.

Manilal has arranged for elaborate entertainment. The life of Prahlada will be read, followed by a Brahmo worship. Then all the devotees will be served prasad.

Vijay is still a member of the Brahmo Samaj. He will conduct today's service. He has not yet put on the ochre robes of a sannyasin.

Prahlada's life is being narrated. Hiranyakashipu, the father of Prahlada, speaks ill of the Lord and tortures his son repeatedly. Prahlada prays to Lord Hari with folded hands, "O Hari, grant right understanding to my father." Hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to weep. Vijay and others are sitting close to him. Thakur is in a state of ecstasy.

Sri Ramakrishna advises Vijay Goswami and other Brahmo devotees – teaching mankind only after attaining vision of God and His command

After awhile, Thakur says to Vijay and other devotees, "Bhakti is the essential thing. You acquire love for God by constantly chanting His name and glories. Ah! How great is Shivanath's love for God! Like a rasagolla.[1]

"It isn't good to think that only your religion is right and all others are wrong. A person can reach God by any path. Success is achieved by developing sincere yearning for God. As many beliefs – so many paths.

"Look here, God can be seen. He is beyond mind and speech – 'avāṅmanoagocara'. The Vedas say this. It means that He is invisible to a mind attached to worldly things. Vaishnavcharan used to say, 'He is visible to the pure intellect and the pure mind.'[2] That's why the company of the holy, prayer and the instruction of a preceptor (guru) are needed. They purify the chit (mind-stuff). That leads to God-vision. Muddy water can be cleaned by putting nirmali[3] in it. So much so that you can see your own face in it. You can't see your face in a dirty mirror.

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1. A cheese ball soaked in syrup.
2. mana eva manuṣyāṇāṁ kāraṇaṁ bandhamokṣayoḥ ।
   bandhāya viṣayāsaktaṁ muktyai nirviṣayaṁ smṛtamiti ।।
   maitrāyaṇī upaniṣad 4-10

[It is indeed the mind that is cause of men's bondage and liberation. The mind attached to sense objects leads to bondage while dissociated from sense-objects, it leads to liberation. So do the wise think.]

3. A fruit that cleans water.

"You attain God's vision by His grace, after you have attained love for Him, when your chitta has been cleansed. After God's vision, you have to receive His command before teaching people. It's not good to lecture before that. There's a song that says:

> O mind, what are you thinking about, sitting all alone? Without deep love, can the moon of Gaur appear?
>
> You have not dived into the love of Hari through your life.
>
> Eleven bats are creating confusion within your temple day and night.
>
> You have not installed Madhava in your temple. In vain do you make noise blowing on the conch.

"The temple of the heart must first be cleaned if you want to install the Lord's image there to worship. Nothing has been done, you are only blowing the conch. What good is that?"

Now Vijay Goswami goes to the altar and sits down. He conducts worship according to the Brahmo regulations. After that, he comes and sits close to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): "Why do you people harp so much on sin? By saying, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner' a hundred times, you become a sinner. Instead, you should have such faith that, because you have chanted His name, you think, how can sin attach to me? He is our Father, He is our Mother. Just tell Him that you will not repeat the sins you have committed. Then chant His name. Purify your mind, body and tongue completely with His name."

Chapter II

Conversation about free will with Baburam and others – Totapuri resolves to commit suicide

Sri Ramakrishna is talking in the verandah to the west of his room at the Dakshineswar Temple. It is evening. Baburam, M. and Ramdayal are with him. It is December, 1882. Baburam, Ramdayal and M. are going to stay for the night. They are on Christmas holiday. M. plans to stay on the next day. Recently Baburam has started visiting Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "A person is liberated when he realizes that everything is being done by God. Once Keshab Sen came with Sambhu Mallick. I said to him, 'Not even a leaf flutters on a tree except by God's will. Where is free will?' Everything is done by the will of God. Such a big man of knowledge, Nangta[1] was! But even he went to drown himself. He was here for eleven months. He was suffering from stomach trouble. Unable to bear pain of the disease, he went to drown himself in the Ganges. There was a long body of silt near the bathing steps. No matter how far he went into the water, he didn't feel water above his knees. He then understood and came back. Once I was severely depressed. I was going to cut my throat with a knife. So I say, 'Mother, I am only an instrument and You are the operator; I am a chariot, You the charioteer. I move as You make me move. I do what You make me do.'"

1. Totapuri.

There is music in Thakur's room. The devotees are singing:

O Kamalapati,[1] the lover of bhakti, if you dwell in the Vrindavan of my heart, my devotion to you will be like that of chaste Radha.

My wish for liberation will be like the milkmaids, and my body will be like the village of Nanda; my love will be like that of mother Yashoda.

Hold me, hold me, O Janardhana.[2] Lift the Govardhan weight of my sins.[3] Kill quickly the six messengers of kamsa, lust and so on.

Play on your flute of grace and tame the cows of my mind. I pray that You remain in this pasture of my heart and that I may have a glimpse of my ideal.

Dwell now and evermore with your heart full of affection for your servant under the Vanshivatta[4] of hope.

If you say that you are a prisoner of the love of the cowherds of Braja, then this Dasharathi, bereft of all spiritual knowledge, will become a cowherd and your slave.

Then they sang:

Sing, O bird in the cage of my heart.

Sitting under the wish-fulfilling tree of Brahman,

Sing, sing Its divine qualities,

And eat the ripe fruits of righteousness, wealth, legitimate desires and freedom.

Sreenath Mishra from Nandanbagan has arrived with friends. Looking at him, Thakur says, "I see everything within him through his eyes like

1. The husband of Kamala (Goddess Lakshmi).
2. A name of Lord Vishnu; the vanquisher of the demon Jana.
3. Krishna had lifted Mount Govardhan on his finger. So, the lifting the weight of sins means to mitigate the effects of sins.
4. A banyan tree at Vrindavan under which Krishna played his flute.

you see everything through a glass door." Sreenath, Srijnanath and the others belong to the Brahmo family of Nandan Bagan. Every year they celebrate a Brahmo festival at their house. Later, Thakur went there to take part in the festival.

After the evening arati is performed in the temple and sitting on the smaller cot in his room, Thakur meditates on God. Gradually he goes into ecstasy. When it has left him, he says, "Mother, attract him, too. He lives so very humbly. He visits You regularly."

Is Thakur talking about Baburam?

Baburam, M., Ramdayal and some others are sitting on the floor. It is between eight and nine at night. Thakur explains the nature of different kinds of samadhi: jada samadhi,[1] chetana samadhi,[2] stitha samadhi[3] and unmana samadhi.[4]

Vidyasagar and Genghis Khan. Is God cruel? Sri Ramakrishna's answer

They now talk of happiness and sorrow – why has God created so much pain?

M.: "Vidyasagar says, irritated, 'What is the use of calling on God? When Genghis Khan began looting, he took a great number of prisoners, almost a hundred thousand. The commanders of his army went to him and said, 'Sir, what shall we give them

1. Communion with God in which the aspirant appears lifeless, like an inert object.
2. Communion with God while being conscious of I-ness, aware of a relationship with God.
3. *Stitha* samadhi means steady samadhi.
4. *Unmana* samadhi means sudden samadhi.

to eat? It's great trouble to keep them all with us. What can we do? Releasing them will also create problems.' Genghis Khan said, 'What else can we do? Just kill them all!' Thus were they ordered to be beheaded. Didn't God see this massacre? He didn't help at all. If He is there, let Him be, but I don't find any need for Him. Nothing good has come to me from Him.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Can anyone understand what God is doing and for what purpose? He creates, preserves and dissolves – all of these. How can we know why He destroys? I say, 'Mother, I have no need to understand, only grant me love and devotion for Your feet.' The aim of man's life is to achieve love for God. The rest of it the Mother knows. I've come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Why do I need to sit down and count how many trees, how many branches and how many millions of leaves there are? I just eat mangoes. I don't need to keep account of trees and leaves."

Tonight Baburam, M. and Ramdayal sleep on the floor in Thakur's room.

Early in the morning, about 2 or 3 o'clock, the light in Thakur's room is lowered. Thakur, sitting on his bed, talks to them now and then.

Sri Ramakrishna, Baburam, M. and others - compassion and maya – hard austerities and realization of God

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and the other devotees*): "Look here, compassion and maya are two different things. Maya is like attachment to father, mother, brother, sister, wife and son – love for them. On the

other hand, compassion is love for everybody, the same regard for all. When you see compassion in a person, say Vidyasagar, know that it comes from God. By compassion a person serves all living beings. Maya also comes from God. He makes people serve their relatives through maya. But then, this is the point – maya makes a person ignorant – it binds. But compassion purifies the mind and gradually frees the person from bondage.

"Without purity of the mind, one cannot realize God. His grace dawns when desire, anger, greed and all that has been overcome. Let me tell you something very secret. I did many things to overcome lust. I circumambulated the ananda–asana[1] several times, saying, 'Victory to Kali, Victory to Kali.'

"When I was 10 or 11 years old and in my village, I experienced the state of samadhi. I saw something when I was walking across a field. I was completely overwhelmed. There are signs of God-vision. You see light, feel joy, and feel the mahavayu[2] rising like a rocket up into the chest."

Baburam and Ramdayal left for their homes the next day but M. stayed with Thakur through the following night. He took his meals from the temple.

1. A sexual union of man and woman according to Tantra.
2. A current felt in the spinal column when the kundalini is awakened.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with Marwari Devotees at Dakshineswar

It is afternoon. M. and a couple of devotees are here. Many Marwari[1] devotees enter and salute. They have business in Calcutta. Coming to Thakur, they say, "Kindly advise us." Thakur laughs.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Marwari devotees*): "Look, 'I' and 'mine' both mean ignorance. O Lord, You are the doer and everything is Yours. This is spiritual knowledge. Then how can you say that a certain thing is 'mine'? The guard of the orchard says: It is my garden. But if he makes a mistake, the owner dismisses him. Then he doesn't even have the courage to take his mango-wood box[2] with him. Desire, anger and these things don't leave you. So turn them towards God. If you have desire, if you are greedy, have desire and greed to attain God. Reason this out and turn away from them. When an elephant begins to eat somebody's banana plant, the mahout strikes it with his goad.

"You people are in business. You know very well that a person becomes successful only gradually. Somebody may install a castor oil factory, but when he's earned more money, he opens a cloth shop. In the same way, a person has to proceed up the path to God. When you've gone higher, maybe you'll live in solitude now and then and call upon Him more intensely.

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1. People of Rajasthan who migrated to Kolkata to trade and do business there.
2. Meaning an object of trifling value.

"But then, nothing happens before its time. Some people have to experience a lot of worldly enjoyment. So it happens late. If you cut open a boil before it's ripe, the result is the opposite of what is good. When it is ripe and oozes pus, the doctor uses his knife. A child said to its mother, 'Wake me up when I have to go to the toilet.' His mother replied, 'Child, you'll know when you have to go. I won't have to wake you up." (*Everyone laugh.*)

Telling lies in business and Marwari devotees – chanting the name of Rama

The Marwari devotees sometimes bring sweets, fruits, sugar candy and other things for Thakur. The sugar candy is scented with the fragrance of roses. But Thakur doesn't eat any of these things. He says, "These people tell so many lies to make money." He casually tells the Marwaris present, "You see, you can't be absolutely truthful in business. There are always ups and downs. Nanak once said, 'When I went to eat something at a worldly man's house, I saw it stained with blood.' Holy men should only be given pure things. Nothing earned by dishonest means should be given to them. Truth is attained by the path of truth.[1]

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1. satyena labhyastapasā hyeṣa ātmā
samyagjñānena brahmacaryeṇa nityam
muṇḍakopaniṣat 3-1-5
[This Atman is verily attainable through truth, concentration, complete knowledge and continence, practiced constantly.]
satyameva jayate nānṛtaṁ
muṇḍakopaniṣat 3-1-6
[Truth alone wins and not untruth.]

"A person should always repeat God's name. While working, keep your mind on Him. It's like this: I have a boil on my back. I attend to all my work, but my mind remains on the boil. Repeating Rama's name is good. Rama, the son of Dasharatha, is also He who has created the world and who dwells in all. He is very near to you – within and without.

Rama, who was the son of Dasharatha, dwells within all.

The same Rama has created the world, this Rama is best of all.

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna in Joyful Singing at the House of Govinda Mukherji in a Village in Belgharia – With Narendra and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is visiting Govinda Mukherji in Belgharia. Today is Sunday, 18 February 1883, the 7th day of Falgun, the 12th day of the bright fortnight of Magha, the constellation of Pushya.[1] Narendra, Ram, other devotees and a neighbour are also there. By seven or eight o'clock in the morning, Thakur dances with Narendra and others during the kirtan.

Advice to people in Belgharia – why salute? Why the path of devotion?

When the singing is ended, everybody sits down. Many of them salute Thakur. Now and then he says, "Offer your salutations to God." And he adds, "It is He Himself who dwells in all forms, though there is greater manifestation of His power in some – for example, in holy people. You might say there are wicked people as well as tigers, but you don't have to embrace God in the tiger. Just salute him from a distance and then go away. Think of water. Some water is fit for drinking and some fit for offering worship. But some is used for bathing. Also, there's water to gargle with and water used for the toilet."

1. The 8th of the twenty-seven stars according to Hindu astronomy.

Neighbour: "Sir, what are the doctrines of Vedanta?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Vedantists say, 'So 'ham, I am He' – Brahman is the Reality, the world is an illusion. The ego is also an illusion. Only the Supreme Brahman exists.

"But this I-ness doesn't go away. So it's good to have the feeling, 'I am His servant,' or 'I am His child,' or 'I am His devotee.'

"For the Kaliyuga, the path of devotion is especially good. God can be realized by love and devotion. As long as you have body-consciousness, you are conscious of objects – form, taste, smell, sound, and touch. These are all sense objects. It's very difficult to get rid of the consciousness of sense objects. As long as you are conscious of objects, you can't say, 'I am He.[1]'

"People of renunciation have less consciousness of worldly things, but worldly people are always thinking about them. So the attitude, 'I am Thy servant'[2] is good for them."

The theory of sin and the residents of Belgharia

Neigbhour: "We are sinners. What will happen to us?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you chant God's name, all sins of the body fly away. The bird of sin is

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1. avyaktā hi gatirduḥkhaṁ dehavadbhiravāpyate ||
   gītā 12-5
   [for the goal of the Unmanifest is very hard for the embodied to reach.]
2. Daso 'ham [So 'ham means "I am He"; Daso 'ham means "I am the servant of God"].

perched on the tree of the body. Chanting His name is like clapping your hands. As you clap, all the birds on the tree fly away. Sin flies away when you chant His name and glory.[1]

"Look, water in a reservoir dug in a dry field dries up by the heat of the sun. In the same way, the water of the reservoir of sin evaporates by chanting His name and glories.

"You have to practice every day. At the circus I saw an English woman standing on the back of a horse on one foot while it galloped around the track. How much practice was necessary to achieve that!

"Weep at least once to see God.

"There are two ways: practice and love for God – that is to say, yearning to see Him."

Singing of the six spiritual centers by the resident of Belgharia and Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi

Thakur is having his meal with devotees on the verandah of the parlour on the first floor. It is one o'clock. No sooner is the meal over than a devotee begins to sing in the courtyard below.

Awake, awake Mother.

How long have you been asleep in the Muladhara, O Mother Kulkundalini?

Hearing the song, Thakur goes into samadhi. His whole body is stiff, his hand remaining on the plate as in a picture. There is no more eating. After

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1.māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja । ahaṁ tvāṁ sarvapāpebhyo mokṣyayiṣyāmi
gītā 18-66
[Take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate you from all sins.]

a long time, when his ecstatic mood has somewhat passed, he says, "I want to go downstairs. I want to go downstairs."

A devotee takes him down with great care.

It was in this courtyard this morning that Thakur had danced joyfully in ecstasy while God's name had been chanted. The carpet and seats are still there. Thakur is still in an ecstatic mood. He walks over and sits close to the singer, who has by now stopped singing. In a most humble way, Thakur says, "Sir, I would like very much to hear the Mother's name again."

The singer sings:

Awake, awake Mother,

How long have you been asleep in the Muladhara, O Mother Kulkundalini?

Accomplish Your work. Rise to the head where the Supreme Shiva sits on a thousand- petalled lotus.

O my Mother, piercing through the six spiritual centres, O Mother, the image of consciousness, erase the pain of my heart.

Listening to the song, Thakur goes into ecstasy again.

Chapter II

Thakur with devotees at Dakshineswar on the new moon day[1] – his maternal love for Rakhal

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room with Rakhal and some other devotees. Today, Friday 9

1. Amavasya.

March 1883, the 26th day of Falgun, Amavasya in the month of Magha, time about 8 or 9 in the morning.

Thakur is always inspired by the Mother of the Universe on a new moon day. He says, "'God alone is Reality, everything else is unreal.' The Divine Mother has enchanted everyone with Her spell.[1] Of men, most are bound. They suffer so much pain and sorrow. But they remain attached to 'lust and greed'. Blood streams from the mouth of a camel when it eats thorny bushes. But it doesn't stop eating them. When a woman in labour pain says, 'My sister, I am not going to be with my husband again' – she forgets.

"Look, nobody seeks God. Leaving aside the fruit of the pineapple, people eat the leaves."

Devotee: "Sir, why does God keep us in worldly life?"

Why the world? To purify the mind through selfless work

Sri Ramakrishna: "The world is the field of action. A person attains spiritual knowledge through work. The guru says, 'Do this work but don't do that.' He advises you to perform work without expectation of any reward.[2] The mind is purified through work. Whatever disease you may be suffering from will be cured when you take the medicine prescribed by a good doctor.

"Why doesn't He free you from the world? He will do so when you are cured. He'll free you when

1. Mahamaya.
2. Karmaṇyevādhikāraste gītā 2-47 [Your right is to work only.]

you have rid yourself of the desire to enjoy 'woman and gold'. Having been registered as a patient in the hospital, you can't run away. As long as your disease is not fully cured, your doctor won't discharge you."

These days Thakur, like Yashoda, overflows with motherly love. That's why he has kept Rakhal with him. Thakur has a mother's love for Rakhal. Just as a child sits close to the lap of its mother to suck milk from her breast, Rakhal leans onto Thakur's lap.

Sri Ramakrishna watches the flood-tide of the Ganges with the devotees

Thakur is in the same mood when someone comes to give news that the flood-tide of the river is about to rise. Thakur, Rakhal, M. and all the others run toward the Panchavati to see it. They stand at the edge of the Panchavati to watch. It is about half past ten.

Seeing a boat in distress Thakur says, "Look! God knows what's going to happen to that boat."

Now he sits on the path to the Panchavati with M., Rakhal and the others.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What causes the flood-tide?"

M. draws a diagram on the ground and tries to explain the position of the earth, moon, sun, gravitation, flood-tide, ebb-tide, the full-moon day, the darkest day, an eclipse, and so on.

Sri Ramakrishna in school during his childhood – a yogi is beyond all finite relationships of number, quantity, cause and effect

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Stop it! I can't understand. It makes me feel giddy. My head is aching! How can they know things so far away?

"You see, in childhood I could draw good pictures, but Subhankar's arithmetic confused me. I couldn't learn arithmetic."

Thakur now returns to his room. Looking at Yashoda's picture on the wall, he says, "This picture isn't done well. She looks like a flower-girl."

First meeting with Adhar Sen – talk about animal sacrifice

After the midday meal, Thakur rests awhile. Adhar Sen and other devotees gradually assemble. It is Adhar Sen's first visit to Thakur. His home is in Benetola in Calcutta. He is a Deputy Magistrate, 29 or 30 years old.

Circumstances and non-violence

Adhar (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Sir, I have a question to ask. Is it all right to sacrifice an animal to the Deity? This involves killing."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The scriptures say that sacrifices can be made on special occasions. There's no harm doing it according to injunctions. For example, the sacrifice of a goat on the 8th day of the lunar month. But it can't be done in all situations. I'm in the state now when I can't stand the sight. I can't eat the meat offered to the Divine Mother. So I touch it and make a tilak mark with it on my forehead so She won't be angry with me later.

"And sometimes I'm in a state when I see God in all beings – even in ants. In that state when I see someone die, I have the consolation that only the body is destroyed, that there is no death of the soul.[1]"

Advice to Adhar – don't reason too much

"It isn't good to reason too much. It's enough to have love and devotion for the lotus feet of the Mother. Too much reasoning leads to utter confusion. If you take water from the surface of the pond here, you will get very clean water. But if you dip your hand deep into it and stir it, the water becomes muddy. So pray to God for love and devotion. Dhruva's devotion was motivated – he practiced austerities to gain a kingdom. But Prahlada's devotion was motiveless, *ahetuki* bhakti."

A Devotee: "How can you attain God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Through this very love for Him. But you have to force your demands on Him. 'Grant me Your darshan, or I will cut my throat!' This is called the tamas of bhakti."

The Devotee: "Can God be seen?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, certainly God can be seen. It's possible to see both God with form and God without form. You can see God with form as Spirit Personified. But He can also be seen as manifest Himself. Seeing an incarnation of God is

1. Bhagavad Gita 2:20.

the same as seeing God Himself. God incarnates in human form in every age.[1]"

1. Bhagavad Gita 4:8.

Section V

Sri Ramakrishna with Brahmo Devotees at Brahmo Samaj in Sinthi

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna has arrived at the garden house of Beni Pal in Sinthi, where the semi-annual celebration of the Brahmo Samaj is taking place. It is Sunday, 22 April 1883, in the afternoon of the full-moon day of Chaitra, 10th of Vaishakh. Many Brahmo devotees have come. They sit around Thakur in the southern courtyard. After twilight Becharam, a teacher of the Samaj, will conduct worship.

The Brahmo devotees now and then ask Thakur questions.

A Brahmo Devotee: "Sir, what is the way?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The way is devotion – love for God, and prayer."

The Devotee: "Love or prayer?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Love first, then prayer."

O mind, call upon the Divine Mother with a real cry. How can Mother Shyama then keep herself from coming?

Sri Ramakrishna sings the song and then continues: "One should chant His name and sing His glories continuously, and pray to Him. An old pot has to be cleaned every day. Cleaning it just once won't do. And one should practice discrimination and non-attachment, being conscious of the fact that the world is transitory."

The Brahmo devotee and renunciation of worldly life – selfless work in the world

The Brahmo Devotee: "Is it good to renounce worldly life?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Renunciation of worldly life is not for everyone. It is not for those whose desire for worldly enjoyment has not yet ended. Can you get drunk on only thirty millilitres of wine?"

The Brahmo Devotee: "So they should lead a worldly life?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, they should try to work without expectation of any reward. They should break open the jack-fruit after rubbing their hands with oil. A maid in a rich man's house attends to all her work, but her mind dwells in her village. This is called working without attachment.[1] It is called renunciation in mind. You should renounce mentally, while a sannyasin should renounce both outwardly and mentally."

Brahmo devotee and end of worldly enjoyment – nature of a spiritual woman – when does dispassion occur?

The Brahmo Devotee: "What is the end of the desire for worldly enjoyment?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Worldly enjoyment means enjoyment of 'lust and greed'. It is a great problem for a delirious patient to live in a room where tamarind pickles and water are stored. Until a person has enjoyed money, name and fame, bodily comforts and so on – until the desire for worldly

1. Bhagavad Gita 9:27.

enjoyments has ended – he doesn't feel a longing for God."

The Brahmo Devotee: "Who is bad, we or women?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are women with spiritual qualities just as there are women who are ignorant of the value of spirituality. A spiritually-minded woman takes you to God and one who is not spiritually-minded makes you forget Him and drown in worldliness.

"This world and worldly life are due to His Mahamaya. In it are both the power of knowledge and power of ignorance. When you take refuge in the power of knowledge, you keep the company of the holy, imbibe spiritual knowledge, love for God, dispassion and so on. In the power of ignorance are all things pertaining to the five elements and the five senses – sight, taste, smell, touch, hearing. They all give worldly enjoyment and make you forget God."

The Brahmo Devotee: "If it makes you ignorant, why has God created it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's His divine play. If there were no darkness, you would not realize the importance of light. If there were no sorrow, you wouldn't appreciate happiness. The knowledge of good depends on the knowledge of bad.

"Besides, the fruit of a mango develops and ripens because of its skin. It's only when the fruit is ripe that the skin can be thrown away. It's only when the skin of maya is present that a person can gradually attain the knowledge of Brahman.

Knowledge and ignorance are like the skin of the mango. They are both necessary."

The Brahmo Devotee: "Is it all right to worship a form, or a deity made of clay?"[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "You don't believe in God with form. That's all right. The image of God is not meant for you, only the feeling. Just the feeling of attraction, like Radha's attraction for Krishna. Accept the love. Those who believe in God with form worship Kali, worship Mother Durga. How much they call on Her, crying, 'Mother, Mother!' How much they love! Accept that feeling. You don't have to accept the image."

The Brahmo Devotee: "How do you develop non-attachment? Why doesn't everyone have it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You don't develop non-attachment until the desire for worldly enjoyment is silenced. A child is made to forget everything else by giving him something to eat or a toy to play with. But when his eating and playing are over, he cries, 'I want mummy!' If he isn't taken to his mother, he throws away the doll and screams."

Sat-chit-ananda Itself is the Guru – after God-realization, rituals such as evening worship end

The Brahmo devotees don't believe in the tradition of gurus. Now they talk about it.

Brahmo Devotee: "Sir, is it impossible to attain knowledge of God without a Guru?"

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1. Refers to Sri Ramakrishna's instruction to Keshab – 'The Goddess of consciousness in the clay image.'

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sat-chit-ananda Himself is the guru. If a man as a guru awakens your spiritual consciousness, it is Sat-chit-ananda Himself who has taken up that form. A guru is a companion who leads you by the hand. After God-realization, the distinction between guru and disciple ceases. 'It is a very difficult situation when the guru and the disciple can't differentiate each other.' That's why Janaka said to Sukadeva, 'Please give me the teacher's fee first if you want the knowledge of Brahman.' He said this because after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, the guru and the disciple wouldn't be able to distinguish between each other. As long as there is no vision of God, the relationship of guru and disciple exists."

The evening gradually sets in. Some of the Brahmo devotees say to Thakur, "It must be your time for evening worship."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, that's not so. All this is done somewhat in the beginning. Later, there's no need for rituals or worship items like *kosha* and *kushi*.[1]"

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and the Brahmo teacher, Becharam – Vedanta and Brahman

In the evening Becharam, the Adi Brahmo Samaj teacher, conducts the service from the pulpit. It is interspersed with Brahmo music and reading from the Upanishads. After the service, the teacher

1. Fish-shaped spoons, one larger than the other, used in ritualistic worship.

sits with Sri Ramakrishna and has a long conversation with him.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, what is your opinion? Are both God with and without form true?"

God-with-form, God-without-form, image of Consciousness and the devotee

Teacher: "Sir, God without form is like an electric current that you can't see, but can experience."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, both are true – both God-with-form and formless God. Do you know what it's like to speak only of God without form? It's like a person playing only one note on a sanai that has seven holes. Another person plays many different melodies on the instrument. In the same way, people who believe in God-with-form enjoy Him in so many ways – the serene attitude, the attitude of His servant, friendship, with maternal feelings, and of a lover[1] – so many moods.

"Do you know what the heart of the matter is? To fall somehow into the pool of nectar. Whether it is achieved by singing hymns or by being pushed into it by someone, the result is the same. Both ways bring the same immortality.[2]

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1. Shanta, dasya, sakhya, vatsalya and madhura.

2. brahmaivedamamṛtaṁ purastādbrahma paścādbrahma dakṣiṇataścottareṇa ।
adhaścordhvaṁ ca prasṛtaṁ brahmaivedaṁ viśvamidaṁ variṣṭham ।।
muṇḍakopaniṣat 2-2-1
[All that is in front is but the immortal Brahman. The immortal Brahman is behind, and also on the right and the left. It reveals everything above and below. This world is nothing but the supreme Brahman.]

"A good illustration for Brahmo devotees is of water and ice. Sat-chit-ananda is like an infinite ocean. At various places in cold places, the water takes the form of ice. In the same way, Sat-chit-ananda Brahman,[1] due to the cooling influence of devotees' love and devotion for Him, takes forms[2] for them. The rishis saw His supersensuous Spirit form[3] [transcendental] and talked to Him. Devotees see His Spirit form through the body of ecstatic love.[4]

"But then, Brahman is beyond speech and mind. Blocks of ice (God with form) melt under the heat of the sun of knowledge. After attaining the knowledge of Brahman, after attaining nirvikalpa samadhi, He is again the same Infinite, beyond speech and mind, formless Brahman without shape.

"The real nature of Brahman can't be described in words. One becomes silent. Who can describe the infinite in words? However high a bird may fly, there is still more space above it. What do you say?"

Teacher: "Yes sir. The Vedanta does say that."

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1. Brahman without attributes.
2. Brahman with attributes.
3. Atindriya.
4. prayujyamāne mayi tāṁ śuddhāṁ bhāgavatīṁ tanum ।
ārabdhakarmanirvāṇo nyapatatpāñcabhautikaḥ ।।
śrīmadbhāgavata 1-6-29
[Narada said, "I have attained the divine body, pure and omnipresent." When that Bhagavati-tanu, the divine body of Sudha-Sattva fit for the service of the Lord, was generated in me, my body of the gross material elements fell dead on the exhaustion of that quantum of my karma responsible for the previous embodiment.]

Brahman without attributes is beyond speech and mind – beyond the three gunas

Sri Ramakrishna: "A salt doll went to measure the ocean. It didn't return to give a report. There's a view that Sukadeva and others experienced the sight and touch of Brahman – but they did not dive into it.

"I said to Vidyasagar that everything has been polluted by speech – but not Brahman.[1] In other words, nobody has been able to say what Brahman is. The moment you say something, it becomes polluted. Vidyasagar was a learned man. He was pleased to hear this.

"I've heard that there are snow-covered mountains near Kedarnath. If you climb very high there you can't return. Those who climbed them to find out what was there at such great height, or what you'd experience there, never returned to tell about it.

"A man is overwhelmed with Bliss when he attains God's vision. He can't utter a word. Who will give the report? Who will explain?

"The king lives behind seven gates**.** A powerful person sits at every gate. At each gate the disciple asks if it is the king. The guru replies, 'No. Not this, not this.' What the disciple sees at the seventh gate strikes him dumb.[2] He is overwhelmed with joy.[1]

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1. acintyam avyapadeśyam … advaitam
māṇḍūkyopaniṣat 7

2. yato vāco nivartante . aprāpya manasā saha. taittirīyaopaniṣad 2-4-1

[One is not subjected to fear at any time if one knows the Bliss that is Brahman.]

He doesn't have to ask whether it is the king he's seeing. As soon as he looks at him, all his doubts vanish."

Teacher: "True, sir. The Vedanta does say this."

Sri Ramakrishna: "When He creates, preserves and dissolves, he is called Brahman with attributes or the Primal Power.[2] When he is beyond the three gunas, he's called Brahman without attributes, beyond speech and mind – the Supreme Brahman.

"Falling under the spell of maya, a man forgets his real nature – inheritor of his father's limitless wealth. Maya consists of the three gunas.[3] All three are dacoits. They rob a person of everything. They make him forget his real nature. They are sattva, rajas and tamas. Of them, only sattva can show the way to God, but not even this guna can take you to God.

"A rich man was walking along a path in the forest when three dacoits came and surrounded him. They robbed him of everything he had. After they'd snatched everything from him, one of the dacoits said, 'What's the use of sparing his life? Kill him.' Saying this, he stepped forward to cut the man to pieces. The second dacoit said, 'It's not necessary to kill him. Let's tie him up and leave him here. Then he won't be able to tell the police.' Saying this, they tied him up and left him there. A

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1. bhidyate hṛdayagranthiśchidyante sarvasaṁśayāḥ,
kṣīyante cāsya karmāṇi tasmin dṛṣṭe parāvare | muṇḍakopaniṣad 2-2-8
[The knot of the heart gets untied, all doubts become solved, and all one's actions become dissipated.]
2. Adyashakti.
3. Qualities or cosmic energies.

little later the third dacoit returned and said to him, 'Oh, how great your suffering must be! Let me untie you.' After freeing him, he took the man with him and showed him the way. When they reached the main road, he said, 'Go on this road and you'll reach home easily.' The man said, 'What do you mean, sir? Please come with me. You've done so much for me. I would be very pleased if you'd come to my home.' The dacoit said, 'No, I can't go there. The police would catch me.' Saying this, while pointing the way, the dacoit left.

"The first dacoit is tamas – the one who said, 'What good will it do to spare his life? Kill him.' Tamas leads to destruction. The second dacoit was rajas. Rajas binds man to the world – entangles him in different kinds of activity. Rajas makes a person forget God. Only sattva can show the way. Compassion, charity, love for God, etc. all come from sattva. Sattva is like the last landing of a staircase – beyond it there is only the roof. The supreme Brahman is one's own natural home. Unless a person goes beyond the three gunas, he does not attain the knowledge of Brahman."

Teacher: "What a clear explanation!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Do you know the nature of a devotee? 'Let me speak and you listen, and when you speak, I will listen.' You are a religious teacher. You teach so many people. You are a ship, but we are small fishing boats." (*They all laugh.*)

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna's enjoyment of Hari's kirtan – Sri Ramakrishna in the Haribhakti Pradayani Sabha (house of worship) in Ram Chandra's house

Sri Ramakrishna has arrived at the Kansari Para Haribhakti Pradayani Sabha in Calcutta. It is Sunday, 13 May 1883, 31st day of Vaishakh, 1290 (B.Y.), the 7th day of the bright fortnight of Sankranti. The society is celebrating its annual festival. Manohar Sai is conducting the kirtan.

The topic of the song is 'pique.' Radha's companions are saying to her, "Why are you piqued? It seems that you don't care about Krishna's happiness." Radha says, "It's not because he's gone to Chandravali's grove. Why should he go there? She doesn't know how to serve him."

The next Sunday, 20 May 1883, there is a kirtan again at Ram Chandra's house, 'The Song of Mathura.' Thakur has arrived. The 14th day of the bright fortnight of Vaishakh, the 7th of Jaishtha. 'The Song of Mathura' is now being sung. Radha is saying many things regarding her separation from Krishna. She has wanted to see Shyam[1] since she was a child. "Friend, my nails have worn down by counting the days on my fingers. Look, the garland he gave has dried up, but I have not thrown it away. Where has the moon of Krishna appeared now? It seems that it has run away in fear of pique. Oh, when shall I see that cloud of Krishna again? Will I ever see it again? O friend, I have never been able to see you to my heart's content. For I have only two eyes, and over them my eyelids blink and tears stream. The peacock feather on his head is like an unmoving flash of lightning. Peacocks, seeing the cloud of his figure, would raise their wings and dance."

1. Dark-hued Krishna.

"Friend, I cannot survive – please place this body on the branch of the Tamal tree and write Krishna's name on it."

Sri Ramakrishna says, "God and His name are one and the same. That's why Radha is saying this. He who is Rama is also His name."

Immersed in ecstasy, Thakur listens to this Mathur kirtan. A goswami musician is singing the songs. The same songs will be sung at Dakshineswar on Sunday, and then again sung at Adhar's house the following Sunday.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Sri Ramakrishna is standing in his room at the Dakshineswar temple and talking to the devotees. Sunday today, 27 May 1883, 14th of Jaishtha, the 5th day of the dark fortnight, time about nine o'clock. The devotees have assembled gradually.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "It's not good to have hostility – it's not good that the Shaktas, the Vaishnavas and the Vedantists quarrel with each other. Padmalochan was the court pundit in Burdwan. A discussion was going on in a meeting about who was greater, Shiva or Brahma. Padmalochan gave a beautiful reply: 'I don't know. I haven't talked to either Shiva or Brahma.' (*They all laugh.*)

"If you have earnest longing, you can attain Him by any path. But you must be steadfast. There's

another name for single-minded devotion,[1] chaste devotion.[2] Think of a tree with a single trunk. It grows straight up. Other devotion is like a tree with five branches. The gopis had such single-minded devotion that they didn't want to see any person but the shepherd[3] Krishna of Vrindavan wearing his peacock feather crown and yellow loin-cloth. When they saw Krishna in Mathura in royal dress with a turban on his head, they drew down their veils and said, 'Who is he? Should we become unchaste by talking to him?'

"The way a wife serves her husband is also single-minded devotion. She serves food to her husband's younger and elder brothers and gives them water to wash their feet, but she has quite a different relationship with her husband. In the same way, you can have single-minded devotion to your own religion, but you shouldn't show malice to other religions because of it. Instead, you should conduct yourself with them in a sweet manner."

Thakur goes to the Kali Temple after a dip in the Ganges. He is accompanied by M. Sitting on the worshipper's seat, he offers flowers at the lotus feet of the Divine Mother. From time to time he puts them on his head and meditates.

Worship of the Mother of the Universe and of Self – mantra for destroying danger – dancing

Thakur rises from his seat after quite some time. He is absorbed with emotion and dances and

1. Nishtha bhakti.
2. Avyabhicharini bhakti.
3. Gopal.

chants the name of the Mother. He says, "O Mother! Destroyer of all the trials in life, Remover of adversity."

There is bound to be sorrow and adversity for an embodied person. It seems that he might be reciting this great mantra for destroying danger and calling on Her with a yearning heart to teach humanity.

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna and Nakur Babaji of Jhamapukur

Now Thakur comes to sit on the verandah to the west of his room. He is still in ecstasy. Rakhal, M., Nakur Vaishnava and some others are near him. Thakur has known Nakur Vaishnava for twenty-eight or twenty-nine years. When Sri Ramakrishna first came to Calcutta and lived at Jhamapukur, he used to perform worship at different houses. At that time he would sit at Nakur Vaishnava's shop and enjoy his company. Now Nakur Vaishnava comes almost every year to see Thakur during Raghav Pandit's celebrations in Panihati. Nakur is a devout Vaishnava and sometimes celebrates festivals. He lives in M.'s neighbourhood. He showed M. the old house belonging to Govinda Chatterji where Thakur lived when he was in Jhamapukur.

Sri Ramakrishna enjoys the singing of the name of the Mother of the Universe

Filled to overflowing with emotion, Thakur sings:

Kali ever-joyous, the beloved of Shiva![1] Mother, You dance and clap Your hands of your own accord.

1. Mahakala.

O Eternal Primal Power, the image of the zero-shaped moon, where did You get Your garland of skeletons when there was no universe?

You are the great mechanic while we are instruments in Your hand, moving at Your will.

We do what You make us do Mother, we speak the way You make us speak.

O attributeless Mother, fondly berating You, Kamalakanta says – O Mother, the destroyer of all, You have swallowed both piety and impiety with the sword in Your hand.

Again he sings:

Mother! you are Tara,

Mother! You are Tara,[1] though You have assumed the three gunas, and You are the Limitless.

I know You are merciful to the lowly, the one who removes all distress.

You are sandhya, You are Gayatri, You are the support of the Universe, O Mother!

You are the savior of yearning souls; You have stolen the heart of Shiva.

You are in water; You are in earth; You are the root of the Beginning.

In all bodies You dwell, in all beings, in that with form and without.

Again he sings:

There is mal in golmal, leave out gol and hang onto mal.

[Pun on the word golmal which means confusion, but is composed of two words gol [disorder] and mal [wealth]].

And again:

1. The savior, literally "she who takes one across [the ocean of worldly existence]".

O mind, we have no business here! Let us go to that region of the stars

And:

O Mother Shankari! The boat of my body is sinking in the sea of the world. The tempest of maya and infatuation is gradually rising.

And then:

Come, Mother. Let mother and son talk a little about suffering,

Some elephants carry a canopy. And some have tasty curd on dried roasted rice.

Sri Ramakrishna says to the devotees, "It's not good to only talk of sorrow to householders. You should be cheerful. Those who are used to going without food can fast for two days. But others, whose meals are only somewhat delayed, fall ill. It isn't good to talk to them only about sad things and about sorrow.

"Vaishnavcharan used to say, "What's this, just saying 'Sin, sin. Enjoy yourself!'"

Thakur has not rested for even a short time after his meal before Manohar Sai Goswami arrives.

Sri Ramakrishna is filled with ecstasy in the attitude of Sri Radha – Is it Thakur or Gauranga?

The goswami is singing a kirtan about the first intimations of love.[1] Listening to it for only a short time, Thakur becomes absorbed in the ecstatic mood of Radha.

1. Purvaraga.

The beginning song is about Gaur Chandrika. "With your hand on your palm – worried – Gaur, why are you downcast today?" Perhaps he is absorbed in Radha.

The goswami sings another song:

She slowly moves in and out of the room, again and again.

Why is her mind distracted? She is breathing rapidly.

She looks steadily at the Kadamba forest.

(Radha, what has happened to you?)

Hearing this line, Sri Ramakrishna goes into a deep mood.[1] He tears the shirt off his body and throws it away.

When the singer sings, "Her cool limbs become motionless at a soft touch," Thakur trembles in mahabhava.

(*Looking at Kedar*) Thakur says in the singing tone of the kirtan, "O the master of my soul, the beloved of my heart, bring Krishna here; a friend of one's heart should do this. Either bring him here or take me there. I will remain your maid-servant forever."

The singer, the goswami, is overwhelmed to see Thakur's divine state. Folding his hands, he says, "Please take away my worldly tendencies."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "'The sadhu has found a place to stay.'[2] You are such a sweet person and express many sweet ideas."

1. Mahabhava.
2. Ref: A holy man who visits the city after first finding lodging.

The goswami: "Sir, I am like an ox carrying a load of sugar. But I haven't been able to taste it."

The kirtan continues. The singer describes Radha's condition. 'The cuckoo is warbling sweetly.' Hearing it, perhaps Radha is reminded of the sounds of Vraja, which is why she chants the name of Jaimini. She says, "Gopi friend, this life of mine will not survive separation from Krishna. Please place this body on a branch of the tamal tree."

The goswami ends the kirtan after singing of the meeting of Radha and Krishna.

Section VI

Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram's and Adhar's houses in Calcutta

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is on his way from the Dakshineswar Temple to Balaram's house in Calcutta. From Balaram's house, he will go to Adhar's and then to Ram's. Manohar Sai will conduct a kirtan at Adhar's house, and there will be a reading and exposition of the scriptures[1] interspersed with music at Ram's house. Today is Saturday, 2 June 1883, the 20th day of Jaishtha, the 12th day of the dark fortnight.

In the carriage on his way Thakur says to Rakhal, M. and the others, "Look, all sins flee when you develop love for Him, like the water in an open pond dries up in the heat of the sun."

Sannyasin and householder's sense attachments

"A person doesn't attain [the goal] as long as there is still love for sense objects, for 'lust and gold'. A person doesn't attain if he has attachment to sense enjoyments even if he embraces monastic life. That's like swallowing your own spittle after spitting it out."

Still in the carriage, Thakur adds in a little while, "Brahmos don't believe in God with form. (*Smiling*) Narendra says, 'It's idol worship.' He also says, 'He [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] still goes to the Kali Temple.'"

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1. Kathakta.

Sri Ramakrishna's vision of Nara Lila (divine sport as man) and enjoying it

Thakur has come to Balaram's house.

Suddenly he goes into an ecstasy. It seems he is seeing that God has become the world and all its creatures, that He is moving around as a human being, because he says to the Mother of the Universe, "Mother, what are you showing me now? Wait! What are you are showing me through Rakhal and others? All forms have vanished. And Mother, man is nothing but a pillow-case. Man's consciousness is Yours only."

"Mother, the Brahmos aren't tasting sweetness. Their eyes are dry and so are their faces**.** Nothing at all is achieved without love and devotion for God.

"Mother, I asked you, 'Give me a companion just like myself. It appears that You have given me Rakhal.'"

Thakur enjoys a Hari kirtan at Adhar's house

Thakur has arrived at Adhar's house. Preparations are being made for the kirtan of the musician, Manohar Sai.

A number of devotees and neighbours have come to Adhar's parlour to see Thakur. They all want him to say a few words.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "God's will is both in worldliness and freedom. It is He who has kept you unconscious in worldly life. And again, at His will, when He calls you, you will be liberated. The child has gone out to play – its mother will call at meal-time.

"He will give you the company of sadhus when he wants to grant you liberation. And He will also give you the yearning to attain Him."

A neighbour: "Sir, what kind of yearning?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The yearning that you feel when you lose a job – the way you go from office to office every day to enquire, 'Sir, is there a vacancy?' Yearning brings restlessness: how can I attain God?

"When a dandy twirls his mustache up on the sides, sits cross-legged, and chews betel-leaf nonchalantly, he can't attain God."

Neighbour: "Can you develop such longing by keeping the company of holy people?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you can. But a hypocrite can't attain such yearning. A kamandalu[1] is with the sadhu all the time that he is visiting the four centres of pilgrimage, but it remains as bitter as it was before."

The kirtan has started now. The goswami sings a song of inner grief.

Radha: "Friend, I am dying! Bring back my Krishna."

Gopi: "O Radha, the dark cloud[2] would have brought rain, but the winds of your pique have blown the cloud away. You aren't happy to see Krishna happy. What causes that pride?"

Radha: "Friend, this pride is not mine. My pride went away with him who makes me proud."

Lalita [speaking a few words on behalf of Radha]: "All of you made me fall in love. Some showed him to me on the

1. A sannyasin's water pot made of bitter gourd.
2. A reference to Krishna.

riverbank or in the open field; Vishakha showed him in a picture."

The goswami says in the song: The companions of Radha begin to look for Krishna near the Radhakunda pool. Then he mentions meeting Sri Krishna in the company of Sridam, Sudama, and Madhumangal; Sri Krishna's conversation with Vrinda, Sri Krishna's conversation with Jatila in the dress of a yogi, Radha giving alms, an astrologer yogi reading Radha's palm and speaking of a coming danger.

The kirtan ends. Sri Ramakrishna talks with the devotees about the preparation for worshipping Katyayani.[1]

The humanity of avatars

Sri Ramakrishna: "The gopis worshipped Katyayani. Everybody is under that Mahamaya, the Primal Power – even the avatars' work is performed taking refuge in maya. That's why they worship the Primal Power. Just look how Rama wept for Sita. 'Bound by the five elements [maya], Brahman weeps.'

"After killing the demon Hiranyaksha, Vishnu incarnated himself as a sow.[2] Having forgotten his real nature, he lived happily as a sow, nursing the young ones. The gods consulted each other and sent Shiva down. Shiva asked the sow, 'Why have you forgotten your real Self?' The sow answered, 'I am quite happy as I am.' Shiva cut open the body of the sow with his trident. Then he [Vishnu] went back to his own abode."

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1. A name of Durga.
2. Braha.

Now Thakur goes from Adhar's house to Ram's and there he listens the story of Uddhava.[1] Kedar and other devotees were present. (See Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Vol. II, Section V).

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Manirampur and Belgharia devotees

Sri Ramakrishna tells his own story

Sri Ramakrishna is in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple talking to devotees, sometimes standing, sometimes sitting. Today is Sunday, 10 June 1883, the 5th day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha, the time about ten o'clock. Many devotees are present including Rakhal, M., Latu, Kishori, Ramlal and Hazra.

Thakur is talking about his early days.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "When I was a child, everybody in my native village was fond of me, men and women. They would listen to me sing. And I could also imitate other people's mannerisms. They'd watch and listen to me doing this. The women in their families would set aside snacks for me to eat. Nobody distrusted me. They all looked upon me as a child of their own family.

"But I enjoyed life like a pigeon. I'd visit happy households when I saw them. And I'd run away from a house of pain and sorrow.

"When I found a happy boy or two among my companions, I'd shower great affection on them. With some, I was very friendly. But now they're

1. Uddhava Samvad.

deep in worldliness. Some of them visit here and say, 'My goodness, he's just the same as we saw him in school!'

"Subhankari's arithmetic problems that we studied in school made me giddy. But I could draw pictures and mould clay gods beautifully."

Fondness for charitable houses and for Ramayana and Mahabharata

"Wherever I saw houses where holy men were fed for free, I'd stand there and watch them for a long time.

"I'd sit and listen to the readings from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata wherever I found them narrated. But if the readers were insincere, I'd mimic them before the other people.

"I understood the ways of women rather well. I'd mimic the way they spoke. A child-widow replying to her father, 'I – am – leaving.' The women calling from the verandah: 'O, fisherman!' I could recognize a woman of easy virtue – a widow parting her hair straight in the middle, her body lovingly massaged with oil, little modesty, and her way of sitting is quite different.

"Let's not talk of these worldly things."

Thakur asks Ramlal to sing a song. Ramlal sings:

> Who is the lady dark as a cloud, dancing on the battlefield – like a fresh lily in the sea of blood.

Ramlal now sings Mandodari's grief at the death of Ravana:

O my beloved husband! What have you done? You the beloved, the life-breath of this helpless woman – till she leaves this body, it will find no peace.

He, the Lord of the Golden Kingdom is now lying dead on the ground. How can your wife not be desperate to see this sight?

The God of Death was your slave – you had the power never before seen on earth or in heaven.

She who was most respected among the women of Indra and other gods, that very woman has become a beggar on this earth.

Taking him, the wanderer in the forest, the man with matted hair, as a human being you have lost all.

You did not see anything great in that jewel which Brahma and Shiva, who has taken abode in the cremation ground, yearn for.

Even though you had heard that the stony Ahalya had become a human being by the very touch of Rama.

Sri Ramakrishna overwhelmed with Rama's name – ecstatic love of gopis

As Thakur hears the last song, tears flow from his eyes and he says, "When I was going to the Jhautala to answer the call of nature, I heard the boatmen singing this song. As long I sat there I cried and cried. They held me, and then brought me to my room."

I have heard that Rama is the Saviour Brahman.

Rama with matted hair is not a human being.

Father, did you steal Sita to destroy your own family?

Akrur is taking Sri Krishna to Mathura in a chariot. Seeing him, the gopis hold its wheels tightly in their grip – some of them even lie down in

front of it. They reprimand Akrur, not knowing that Sri Krishna is going of his own accord.

> Don't hold the wheels of the chariot. Does the chariot move on those wheels? Don't hold them, please do not.
>
> Lord Hari Himself moves the wheels – He on whose wheel the whole world moves.
>
> These are not horses. They are magic. The game of love is over today in Gokul.
>
> Why do you find fault unnecessarily with the charioteer? This driver is fully helpless.
>
> Can any chariot move without the will of the master of the chariot?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "What affection, what intense love the milkmaids had! Radha drew a picture of Sri Krishna with her own hands, but she didn't draw his feet lest he'd leave for Mathura.

"I used to sing all these songs often in my childhood. I could sing a whole act of a musical drama. Some people said I was an actor in the Kaliyadaman[1] play."

A devotee with a new chadar has arrived. Rakhal, who has the nature of a child, brings a pair of scissors to cut its loose fringes. Thakur says, "Why are you doing that? Please stop. It looks nice as it is. Brother, how much did it cost?" Foreign-made chadars are cheap. The devotee says, "A rupee and six annas for a pair." Thakur says, "Oh, no! A rupee and six annas for a pair!"

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1. Subjugation of the serpent by the Lord.

After awhile Thakur says to the devotees, "Go and have a dip in the Ganges. Please give him some oil."

When the devotee returns after his dip, Thakur takes a mango from the shelf and gives it to him. He says, "I'm giving him this mango. He has three university degrees. Well, how is your brother now?"

Devotee: "The medicine has helped him. He should be well if he makes some effort."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Can you find a job for him? That would be nice. You would become his patron."

Devotee: "When he gets well, he will have all the opportunities."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with the devotees from Manirampur

Thakur has been sitting for a while on the smaller cot after eating. He has had no time to rest and the devotees have begun to arrive. The first to come is a group from Manirampur. One of them who used to work for P.W.D.[1] is now drawing a pension. This group has been brought by a devotee. Another group of devotees from Belgharia also arrive. Mani Mallick and a few others arrive singly.

The devotees from Manirampur say, "We have disturbed you from your rest."

Sri Ramakrishna says, "No, no. These are rajasic words. People say, 'He is going to sleep now.'"

1. Public Works Department.

Listening to Chanak Manirampur, Thakur is reminded of his childhood friend, Sri Ram. He says, "Sri Ram has a shop in your area. He was my schoolmate in the countryside [Kamarpukur]. He came here the other day."

The devotees from Manirampur say, "Do kindly tell us how to attain God."

Instructions to devotees of Manirampur: practice spiritual disciplines and develop yearning for God

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must practice some spiritual disciplines.

"There is butter in milk, but just saying it won't help you. You have to turn the milk into curd and then churn the curd to get butter. And you need to go into solitude from time to time.[1] Having lived in solitude for some days and attaining love for God, you can live anywhere you like. When you are well shod, you can walk easily across even a thorny path in the forest.

"The main thing is faith. You benefit according to your attitude of mind, but the main thing is faith. Once you have faith, there is no fear."

Devotee from Manirampur: "Do you need a guru?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Many need a guru.[2] But you must have faith in the words of the guru. You

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1. yogī yuñjīta satatamātmānaṁ rahasi sthitaḥ |
   gītā 6-10
   [A yogi should always try to concentrate his mind, living alone in solitude.]
2. ācāryavānpuruṣo veda

succeed only when you take the guru to be God. That's why Vaishnavas say, "Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava [are one].

"You must always repeat the name of God. There is great importance of name in the Kaliyuga. Our life depends on food [which takes a great deal of time and energy to procure]. That's why the practice of yoga is not possible by repeating His name and clapping your hands, the bird of sin flies away.

"The company of the holy is always necessary. The nearer you go to the Ganges, the cooler the breeze you will feel. The nearer you are to the fire, the greater the heat you'll feel.

"Nothing happens by moving slowly to the beat of the drum. Those who desire enjoyment say, 'It'll come – we'll attain God some day or other.'

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'When his son grows insistent, a father will give him his share of inheritance three years early.'

"A mother is cooking food. Her infant is lying nearby. The mother has given him an artificial nipple to suck. When he throws it away and yells and cries, the mother puts down the boiling pot from the stove, takes the infant in her lap and nurses it. I said all this to Keshab.

"They say that in the Kaliyuga you can have the vision of God by weeping for a day and a night.

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chāndogyopaniṣat 6-14-2
[The need for guru.]

"Demand of God, 'You have created me! You will have to reveal yourself to me!'

"Whether you live in the household or elsewhere, God sees only your mind. A mind attached to worldly things is like a damp matchstick. Strike it any number of times and it won't catch fire. Akalabya learned archery by placing a clay image of Drona, his guru, before him.

"Move forward! A woodcutter, going forward, saw a sandalwood forest, then a mine of silver, farther a gold mine and then even diamonds and other gems.

"An ajnani [man without wisdom] is like a person living in a room made of mud walls. There's not much light inside and he can't see anything outside. But a person who attains Knowledge and then lives a family life is like a person living in a glass house. There is light inside and there is light outside. He can see things both inside the room and out."

Brahman and Mother of the Universe are one and the same

"There is nothing but one. The Supreme Brahman who preserves the 'I' of man is, in the form of Primal Power, the same as He who is creating, preserving and dissolving.

"That which is Brahman is also the Primal Energy. A king said to a yogi, 'You have to give me Knowledge in one word.' The yogi said, 'Yes, you will have it in one word.' After some time a magician suddenly appeared to the king. The king noticed that the magician was waving two of his

fingers round and round, saying, 'King, see this, just see this.' The king looked at him speechless with wonder when, after some time, he notices that the two fingers have become one. The magician says, as he revolves his finger, 'King, see this. See this!' That is to say, Brahman and the Primal Power appear separate from each other at first, but on attaining the knowledge of Brahman, they are no longer two. They are not separate from each other. One and the same. One without a second – non-duality.[1]"

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees from Belgharia

Govinda Mukherji, the head of the Belgharia devotees, has arrived. Thakur had gone into samadhi when he had heard the song 'Awake, awake!' from the musician the day he visited his home. Govinda has brought the same musician now. Thakur is happy to see him and says, "Please sing a few songs."

The musician sings:

1. O Mother, Shyama! Nobody is at fault. I am falling into the well I myself have dug.
2. Yama, don't touch me, since I have lost my caste.

   If you ask me O, Yama how I lost caste, listen.

   I have been turned into a sannyasi by the All-destroying one.

1. Advaita.

(The melody – mooltana)

3. O Mother, wake up, do wake up.

   How long has Kulkundalini been asleep in the Muladhara?

Mother, reach the thousand-petalled lotus in the head where Shiva resides

So that all your work may be done.

O You, the image of consciousness, pierce the six mystic centres and take away my grief.

Sri Ramakrishna: "This song is about piercing the six spiritual centres. God is within and also without. Residing within, He produces the different states of mind. When the six centres are pierced, the individual soul becomes one with the Supreme Soul, leaving behind the realm of maya. This is called vision of God.

"God-vision is not possible unless maya moves aside. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita are walking together. Rama is in front, Sita is in the middle, and behind her is Lakshmana. Because Sita is in the middle, Lakshmana can't see Rama. Similarly, with maya in between, the embodied soul can't see God. (*To Mani Mallick*) But by the grace of God, maya moves aside and leaves the door open. Just as a doorkeeper says, 'If the master orders, I'll let you through the door.'[1]

"The view of the Vedanta and the view of the Purana. The Vedanta says, 'This world is a web of deception.' That is to say, the world is unreal. It's like a dream. But the Puranas or the Bhakti Sastra says that God Himself resides in the universe in the

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1. māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetāṁ taranti te . gītā 7-14|| [...but they who take refuge in me alone, they cross over this illusion.]

form of twenty-four cosmic principles. Worship Him inside and outside.

"As long as He has kept the consciousness of 'I' in us, all this is real – we can't say it's a dream. When a pot is placed on the fire, lentils, rice, potatoes and vegetables[1] jump up and down. Like they're saying, 'Here I am jumping around.' The body is like the pot, the mind and intellect are like water; sense objects are like lentils, rice, potatoes and vegetables. The I-ness is their sense of ego – it's this 'I' that makes them jump. And Sat-chit-ananda is the fire.

"That's why devotional texts call this world 'the mart of joy.' A song of Ramprasad says, 'This universe is a web of deception.' But another person responded, 'This world is a mart of joy!' A devotee of Kali is liberated in this very life; he is ever full of joy. That devotee sees that He who is God has Himself become maya. It is He who has become the world and all its beings. He sees God, maya, living beings and the world as one. Some devotees see everything permeated with Rama – that everything is the form of Rama. Some devotees see the world permeated with Radha-Krishna, Krishna Himself residing as all the twenty-four cosmic principles. Put on green-tinted glasses and you will see everything green.

"But according to the devotional school of thought, there are different manifestations of God's power. Rama Himself resides everywhere – but at some places there is a greater manifestation than

1. Patal.

other places. He manifests Himself in an incarnation of God in one way and in an embodied-soul in another way. But an incarnation of God has body-consciousness. Assuming a body, maya exercises its jurisdiction – Rama wept for Sita. An incarnation can put a bandage on his eyes at will, like boys playing blindman's bluff. But as soon as the mother calls, the game is over. It's different with ordinary souls. The cloth with which they cover their eyes is tied to their waist with eight knots, with eight bonds.[1] Shame, hatred, fear, pride of caste, pride of ancestry, pride of good conduct, grief and secretiveness are the eight bonds. No one can free you from them but a guru.

Chapter V

Advice to the devotee of Belgharia – petition with a heart full of longing – signs of a genuine devotee

Devotee from Belgharia: "Please grant us your grace."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He resides in all. But you have to send an application to the Gas Company. They will connect you.

"You have to petition with a yearning heart. When three attractions of intense love combine, you can see God – a child's attraction for its mother, a husband's attraction for a chaste wife, and the attraction of possessions for a worldly person.

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1. The Tantric scriptures list eight bonds or fetters: shame (lajja), hatred or contempt (ghrana), fear (bhaya), pride of caste, rank or race (jati), hesitation or suspicion (shanka), secretiveness (jugupsa), pride of family, ancestry, or lineage (kula), and pride of good conduct, character or piety (shila).

"These are signs of a genuine devotee: he listens to the instructions of his guru with a concentrated mind. A python listens to the song of the snake-charmer without moving. But not a cobra. There is another special sign: a real devotee has great power of assimilation. You can't impress images on bare glass – but if you paint it with a black solution, a picture can be impressed on it. Take for example, a photograph. The black solution is devotion or love for God.

"There is another sign. A genuine devotee has complete control over his senses. He has conquered lust. The gopis of Vrindavan had no lust.

"You people are householders. Continue to live a family life. It will even help you in your spiritual practices – like fighting from within a fort. When people practice spiritual disciplines on a dead body,[1] the corpse produces the sound of hun-hun and frightens him. So they should keep rice or roasted gram with them to put in the corpse's mouth every now and then. When the corpse is quiet, it's possible to practice japa uninterruptedly. In the same way you have to keep the members of your family satisfied. Then alone will you be able to practice spiritual disciplines comfortably.

"Those who still have some desire for enjoyment should call on Him while living in the household. Nitai laid down this injunction: 'Cat-fish [magur]

1. A Tantric practice.

soup, the embrace of a young woman[1] and repeating Hari, Hari at the same time.'

"It's different with a person of intense renunciation. A bee sits on nothing but flowers. A chatak bird has water all around but will not sip a drop of it – it keeps its mouth open only for rain water that falls when the star Svati ascends. A true renunciate likes no enjoyment but the bliss of God. A bee sits only on flowers. A real sannyasi, one who has real renunciation, is like a bee. A householder devotee can be likened to a common fly – it sits on sandesh as well as on a festering wound.

"You people have taken so much trouble to come here. You are roaming around in search of God. Most people are satisfied to just see a garden – only very few try to find out who the owner of the garden is. They see the beauty of the world only. They don't look for its creator."

Hatha yoga, raja yoga and the devotee from Belgharia – the six spiritual centres and samadhi

(*Pointing to the musician*) "He has sung about the six spiritual centres. The words pertain to yoga. There is hatha yoga and raja yoga. A hatha yogi practices physical exercises. His ideal is to attain occult powers and a long life. His aim is the eight occult powers. The goal of raja yoga is to develop love for God – ecstatic love for Him – knowledge and non-attachment. Raja yoga is better.

1. Cat-fish soup means tears of devotion from singing God's name; the embrace of a young woman means rolling on the ground in ecstasy.

"The seven planes of the Vedanta and the six centres of the Yoga Sastra are very similar. The first three planes of Yoga are Muladhara, Svadhisthana and Manipura. In these three planes the mind dwells at the anus, the generative organ and the navel. When the mind rises to the fourth plane, that is to say when it reaches the Anahata or heart lotus, the embodied soul has the vision of light, like the flame of a lamp. He exclaims, 'What is this! What is this!'

"When the mind rises to the fifth or throat plane, the person only likes to hear about God. It is the centre of the Vishuddha chakra. The sixth plane between the eyebrows and the Ajna chakra are the same. When the mind reaches there, the person attains the vision of God. But it is like the light within a lantern. You can't touch it because there is a glass between.

"King Janaka used to teach the knowledge of Brahman from the fifth plane. Sometimes he lived on the fifth plane, at other times on the sixth.

"After piercing the sixth centre, the mind reaches the seventh plane, the Sahasrara, and is dissolved. The individual soul and the Supreme soul become one. One attains samadhi. One loses the awareness of the body. There is no outer consciousness left. All the different kinds of knowledge leave – reasoning stops.

"Trailanga Swami said, 'You have the perception of many when you reason – you identify with different kinds of knowledge. After attaining samadhi, at last, one dies within twenty-one days.'

"But you can't attain spiritual consciousness until the Kulkundalini is awakened."

Signs of God-vision

"There are signs of a person who has realized God. Such a person becomes child-like, or like one mad, inanimate, or like an insentient being. He understands rightly that he is an instrument and God is the operator; that it is God who is the doer and he is a non-doer. Just as the Sikhs said, 'It is by His will that even a leaf flutters.' Everything happens by Rama's will – one attains such awareness. A weaver said, 'It is by Rama's will that the cloth is one rupee six annas [per yard]; it is by Rama's will that there was a theft; it is Rama's will that the police took me away [as a suspect], and it is certainly by Rama's will that I have now been released.'"

It is almost evening. Thakur has not rested for even a moment. He has talked continuously about God to the devotees. Now the devotees from Manirampur and Belgharia and the other devotees prostrate to salute him. They go to the temple to visit the deity and then each one returns home.

The goswami ends his kirtan after singing about the meeting of Radha and Krishna.

Section VII

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Tantrik devotee and worldly life – fear of non-attachment

Sri Ramakrishna rests for awhile after a meal in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple. Adhar and M. arrive and salute him. A Tantrik devotee has also come. Rakhal, Hazra, Ramlal and some others are staying with Thakur these days. It is Sunday, 17 June 1883, 4th of Ashada, the 20th day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Why can't a person succeed while living a life in the world? But it is very difficult. Janaka and some others lived a worldly life after attaining knowledge. Even so, there is a risk. Even a worldly man who works without attachment has fear. When Janaka saw the Bhairavi, he bent his head down – he hesitated to look at a woman. The Bhairavi said, 'Janaka, I see that you haven't yet attained knowledge – you still see a difference between a man and a woman.'

"Howsoever clever you may be, if you live in a room full of soot, you're sure to dirty your body a little bit with it.

"I've seen a worldly devotee performing worship in silk clothes, and he's in a good mood. The mood lasts till he takes refreshments. Then he returns to his previous self – the same rajas and tamas.

"The sattva guna produces a devotional attitude – but there also is still the sattva of bhakti, the rajas of bhakti and the tamas of bhakti. The sattva of bhakti is pure sattva. With this attitude the mind only goes to God. It remains on the body only to the extent that is required for preserving the body."

A paramahamsa is beyond the three gunas and beyond the fruit of karma – also beyond sin and virtue – Keshab Sen and his group

"A paramahamsa is beyond the three gunas.[1] The three gunas, though within him, are almost non-existent. He's like a child, not subject to them. That's why a paramahamsa lets young children come around – to adopt their attitude.

"A paramahamsa cannot save for the future. This is not for householders – they have to save for their families."

The Tantrik Devotee: "Is a paramahamsa conscious of sin and virtue?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Keshab Sen asked me the same question. I said to him, 'If I tell you more, your organization will break up.' Keshab said, 'Then please say no more, sir.'

"What is sin and what is virtue? In the state of a paramahamsa, a person sees that it is God Himself who grants good behavior – and also bad. There are sweet as well as bitter fruits. Some trees bear sweet

1. And he who serves me with an unswerving devotion, he, going beyond the gunas, is fit for becoming Brahman. Bhagavad Gita 14:26.

fruits, others bitter or sour. He has created the tree of sweet mangoes as well as sour hog-plum.[1]"

The Tantrik Devotee: "That's true, sir. You see rose fields on the hills – as far as the eye can see."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A paramahamsa sees that it is all the splendour of His maya: real and unreal, good and bad, sin and virtue. But this is a very advanced stage. In this stage a person can't maintain an organization."

Tantrik devotee and fruit of karma – sin and virtue – sin and responsibility

Tantrik Devotee: "But doesn't a person have to reap the fruit of his action?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's true. The result of good acts is good. And the result of bad actions bring bad results. Don't you feel the bite of chillies when you eat them? All this is God's lila, His play."

Tantrik Devotee: "What is the way for us? Every action bears fruit, doesn't it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Let it be. It's different for devotees of God."

Saying this, he sings:

O mind, you do not know how to farm

The field of your life lies fallow; were you to cultivate it, you would reap a golden harvest.

Fence it around with Kali's name, and your crop will not be harmed.

That fence of the Mother with long flowing hair is strong indeed: not even Death himself dares come near.

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1. Amra.

Not today or in a hundred years will your crops be snatched away.

Work now, O mind, to reap your harvest to the full. Sow the seed, your guru's gift,[1] and shower it with the water of love.

If you cannot do so by yourself, take Ramprasad along.

He sings another song:

The path of Yama (God of Death) is barred.

The doubt of my mind has also gone.

O brother, at the nine gates of my house, four Shivas stand guard. The house stands on one pillar and is tied with three ropes.[2]

Sreenath sits on the thousand-petalled lotus in the head, giving fearlessness.

"Whether a brahmin or a prostitute dies in Kashi, he or she will become Shiva.

"When the eyes are filled with tears at the mention of Hari, or Kali, or Rama, ritualistic devotions[3] are no longer needed. All work falls away. The fruit of action does not touch him."

Thakur sings another song.

Love is born of contemplation.

One's gain depends on one's faith. Faith is the basis.

If the mind remains submerged in the nectar of the sea of the feet of Mother Kali,

There is no longer any need of puja, homa, yajna and so on.

Thakur sings another song –

1. Mantra.
2. The pillar is Brahman, the ropes are the three gunas.
3. Sandhya (thrice-performed worship and meditation) and protective mystic words.

Of what use are rituals for one who utters Kali's name at dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his footsteps, never catching up.

Why go to Gaya, Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi, or Kanchi, if I can breathe my last chanting Kali's name?[1]

"When the mind gets absorbed in God, bad or sinful tendencies do not survive."

The Tantrik Devotee: "But you have said that the 'I of knowledge' remains."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The 'I of knowledge', the 'I of the devotee', the 'I of a servant' are the good 'I's,' which remain. The rascal 'I' flees." (*Laughter*.)

The Tantrik Devotee: "Sir, many of our doubts have been resolved."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Upon attaining the vision of Atman, all doubts flee."

Tantrik devotee and tamas of bhakti – hollow doubts – eight occult powers

"Develop the tamas of bhakti. Say, 'What! I have repeated the name of Rama? I have repeated the name of Kali? What bondage have I? What fruit of action is there for me?' "

Thakur sings another song.

Mother, can I but die with Durga's name upon my lips, I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end you cannot refuse to rescue me.

Should I have killed a brahmin or a cow, or destroyed a child in the womb, or indulged in drink, or slain a woman,

For all those heinous deeds I care not in the least; still may I aspire to Brahman.

1. For complete song, refer Volume IV, Section XVIII.

Sri Ramakrishna adds: "Faith! Faith! Faith! The Guru has said that it is Rama who resides in every form, 'The same Rama lies in every being.' A dog is going away with bread in its mouth. The devotee says, 'O Rama! Stop, let me butter your bread.' One must have such faith in the words of the Guru.

"Hollow people have no faith. They are always in doubt. As long as you have not realized the Self doubt doesn't leave you.[1]

"Pure love for God is devotion without any desires. You attain Him quickly through this love.

"Occult powers such as *anima*[2] are all desires. Krishna said to Arjuna, 'My dear, if you have any occult power like *anima* you cannot attain God. You may only become more powerful.'"

The Tantrik Devotee: "Sir, why don't the Tantrik rituals bear fruit these days?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Because they're not done perfectly or not done with love and devotion for God. That's why they don't bear fruit."

While ending his talk Thakur now says, "Bhakti indeed is the essence. The genuine devotee has no fear, no feelings of anxiety. The Mother knows all. The cat holds the mouse in one way but its own kitten in quite another."

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1. bhidyate hṛdayagranthiśchidyante sarvasaṁśayāḥ,
kṣīyante cāsya karmāṇi tasmin dṛṣṭe parāvare । muṇḍakopaniṣad 2-2-8
[The knot of the heart gets untied, all doubts become solved, and all one's actions become dissipated.]
2. The power to become as small as an atom.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, M. and other devotees at Balaram's house

Today Sri Ramakrishna visits Balaram in Calcutta. M. is sitting close to him. Rakhal is also here. Thakur has entered into an ecstatic mood. It is Monday, 25 June 1883, the 5th day of the dark fortnight of Jaishtha, 12th day of Ashada, time about 5 o'clock.

Sri Ramakrishna (*in an abstracted mood*): "Look here, if you seek with a yearning heart, you can have a vision of your true Self. But the more the desire for sense enjoyment remains, the more that vision is obscured."

M.: "As you say, sir, you have to take a leap."

Sri Ramakrishna (*joyfully*): "That's it!"

Everybody remains silent. Thakur continues to speak.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Look, everybody can realize the Self."

M.: "But, sir, God is the doer. He does differently with different people. In the case of some, he awakens their consciousness. But in the case of others, He keeps them in ignorance."

Realization of one's own real Self – the way to realize God, or the Self – earnest prayer – union of the Absolute and phenomenal world

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no. You must pray to Him with a yearning heart. When you are sincere, He is bound to listen to your prayer."

A Devotee: "True, sir – because there is 'I,' you have to pray."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "You go to the Absolute by holding on to the phenomenal, step by step – like going up to the roof by stairs. After realizing the Absolute, you must come back down to the phenomenal and live there loving God in the company of devotees. This is the surest way.

"God has numerous forms, many games: He plays as the Lord, as deities, as man, and as the world. He takes the form of a human being in every age as an incarnation of God, to teach mankind love and devotion. Just think of Chaitanya Deva. You can taste and appreciate God's love only through an incarnation of God. Infinite is His divine sport, but we need love and devotion. We need only the milk. And that comes through the udders of a cow. The incarnation of God is the udder."

Is Thakur saying that he has come down as an incarnation himself? That just by seeing him, you see God? Is Thakur hinting about himself by referring to Chaitanya Deva?

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna in different moods at Dakshineswar and in the house of a devotee

Sri Ramakrishna is at the Dakshineswar Temple sitting on the steps of the Shiva temples in the month of June 1883. It is very hot. The evening will set in soon. M. has come with ice, etc. After saluting Thakur, he sits down on a step of the Shiva temple just below Thakur's feet.

John Stuart Mill and Sri Ramakrishna: limitations of man – a conditioned being

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "The husband of Mani Mallick's granddaughter came here. He has read in some book[1] that God doesn't appear to be all-knowing or wise. If He were, why is there so much misery? And an embodied being dies – why not let him die all at once? Why cause him to die slowly and with such great trouble? The author of the book has gone so far as to say that he could have created a better world."

M. listens to Thakur with his mouth agape, without saying anything. Thakur continues.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Can God be understood? Sometimes even I think of Him as good and sometimes as bad. He's kept us in the domain of delusion.[2] Sometimes He keeps us in the state of awareness and sometimes in unconsciousness. For a short time this ignorance disappears, but then it envelops us again. If you throw a piece of stone in a pond covered with algae, you see water for a minute – but very soon the water is covered by the algae again.

"As long as you have body-consciousness, you are subject to pleasure and pain, birth and death, disease and sorrow. They all belong to the body – not to the Atman. Maybe God takes you to a better place when the body dies. It's like the birth of a child after labour pains. Realizing the Self,

1. John Stuart Mill's Autobiography. Mill; 1806-1873
2. His Mahamaya.

happiness and sorrow, birth and death, appear like a dream.

"What can we understand? Can you put ten seers of milk in a pot that has the capacity for one seer? A salt doll that goes to fathom the sea never returns to tell its depth. It's dissolved and becomes one with the sea.

All doubts are solved, all actions are dissipated

It is evening. Arati is being performed for the deities. Sri Ramakrishna, seated on the small cot in his room, is meditating on the Mother of the Universe. Rakhal, Latu, Ramlal, Kishori Gupta and some other devotees are there. M. is going to stay here for the night.

Thakur now talks to a devotee alone on the small verandah north of his room. He says, "It's good to meditate before dawn and then late at night; and also every day at twilight." He is talking about how to meditate on God with form and on the Impersonal Reality.

A little later Thakur sits on the semi-circular verandah to the west. It is about 9 p.m. M. is sitting near him. Rakhal and the others go back and forth between the verandah and the room.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Look, all doubts will be removed from those who come here. What do you think?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

At a distance a man is singing while he rows his boat on the bosom of the Ganges. The sweet sound of the song passing through the infinite sky and touching the bosom of the Ganges sounds to Thakur

like the anahata sound.[1] He immediately goes into ecstasy – his whole body horripilated. Holding M.'s hands he says, "Look, my hair is standing on end. Pass your hand over my body."

M. is speechless to feel the body horripilated with love. 'The body horripilated': The Upanishads say that Brahman fills the entire universe and ether. Has the same Brahman touched Sri Ramakrishna in the form of sound? Is he Sound[2] Brahman?[3]

After awhile, Thakur resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna: "All those who come here have good tendencies from past lives.[4] What do you say?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Adhar must have good tendencies."

M.: "That goes without saying."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A person who is guileless realizes God quickly. There are two paths – good, toward God, and bad, toward the world. He should take the good path toward Reality."

M.: "Yes, sir. If there is the least fibre on a thread, it can't enter the eye of a needle."

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1. The sound of creation; Om, the unstruck sound.
2. Shabda.
3. etasminnu khalvakṣare gārgyākāśa otaśca protaśceti |
bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣat 3-8-11
[By this Immutable, O Gargi, is the ether pervaded.]
śabdaḥ khe pauruṣaṁ nṛṣu
gītā 7-8
[[I am] sound in Akasha, and manhood in men.]
4. Samskaras.

Why complete renunciation?

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you find a hair in your food, you have to spit out everything you have in your mouth."

M.: "But as you said: those who have realized God aren't harmed by the world – even a whole banana plant is consumed by the blazing fire of knowledge."

Sri Ramakrishna and Kavikankan –songs of the Chandi at Adhar's house

Thakur has come to Adhar's house in Benetola in Calcutta another day. Saturday, 14 July 1883, the 10th day of the bright fortnight of Ashada. Adhar is going to have Rajnarayan chant the Chandi for Thakur. Rakhal, M. and some other devotees are with Thakur. The recitation will be in the worship hall. Rajnarayan begins:

I have surrendered myself at the fearless feet of the Divine Mother. Am I afraid of Yama any more?

I have tied tuft of hair on the top of my head to the almighty mantra of Kali's name.

Having sold my body in the mart of the world, I have bought the name of Durga.

I have planted the wish-fulfilling tree of Kali's name in my heart,

This time when Yama comes, I will open my heart to him. This is my resolve,

The six wicked beings in the body I have driven out.

I have cried, 'Victory to Durga, to great Durga!' and have thus ended my journey.

Hearing only a part of it, Thakur is entranced and stands up. He sings along with the group of musicians.

Thakur adds his own line to the song, "O Mother, save me, O Mother!" As he does, he becomes absorbed in samadhi – unconscious of the outside world. Motionless, he stands there. The musicians continue:

> Who is this Woman who lights the battlefield?
>
> Her body is like a dark storm cloud. And Her teeth flash like lightening.
>
> Her hair is disheveled and She runs about fearlessly among the gods and the demons.
>
> She destroys the demons with terrible laughter on Her face. Thus She flashes like lightening in battle.
>
> The drops of diligence falling on Her body of red lotuses look beautiful!
>
> Beholding Her Sea of Beauty, the moon has shed its lustre.
>
> Is it possible that Shiva, who enthralls the Universe, is lying at Her feet as though dead?
>
> Kamalakanta wonders who this Woman with the gait of an elephant can be.[1]

Thakur again goes into samadhi.

When the music ends, he goes from the worship hall to Adhar's parlour on the second level and sits down with the devotees. The conversation is on different aspects of spirituality. Some devotees' emotion flows unseen as in the case of the Phalgu river – there is no sign of any internal emotion on the surface. The conversation continues in this way.

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1. Volume II, Section XX.

Chapter IV

Talk about God-realization at Balaram's house – the aim of life

Yet on another day, Saturday, 18 August 1883, the 2nd day of Bhadra, Thakur comes to Balaram's house in the afternoon. He explains the doctrine of divine incarnation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "An incarnation of God takes on a body to teach mankind love for God. It's like climbing up and down the stairs after reaching the roof. Other people tread the path of devotion to reach the roof until they have attained knowledge, until they're free of desires. You can reach the roof only when you're free from all desire. A shopkeeper doesn't go to bed till he's set his accounts right – he sleeps only after his balances tally in the ledger.

(*To M.*) "If you take a plunge, you're bound to succeed – you're bound to be successful if you make the jump.

"Well, what do you think of the service performed by Keshab Sen, Shivanath and the other Brahmos?"

M.: "Sir, it's just as you say: they only describe the garden – they don't talk much about seeing the master of the garden. They start by describing the garden, and also end there."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's right! The main thing is to look for the owner of the garden, and to talk to him. The only aim of life is to realize God."[1]

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1. ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo

Thakur has now gone from Balaram's house to Adhar's. He chants God's name and dances in Adhar's parlour after dusk. Vaishnavcharan, the professional singer, is singing. Adhar, M., Rakhal and others are present.

Joy of singing at Adhar's house – Thakur's advice to him

After the singing, Thakur sits absorbed with emotion. He says to Rakhal, "The spiritual feeling here is not like rainfall in the month of Shravana when it rains heavily and then just as quickly stops. Here, Shiva springs up from the bowels of the earth, though he has not been installed by human hands. The other day you left Dakshineswar in a huff. I prayed to the Divine Mother not to mind your bad mood."

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God? Is he Shiva?

And then in an ecstatic mood he says to Adhar, "I say, brother. Meditate on the name you were just chanting."

Saying this, he touches Adhar's tongue with his finger and writes something on it.

Has Adhar been initiated?

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bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣat 2-4-5
[The Self, my dear [Maitreyi] should be realized – should be heard of, reflected on and meditated on.]

Chapter V

Primal Power and the doctrine of incarnation

Yet on another day Thakur is sitting on the steps of the southeastern verandah of his room at the Dakshineswar Temple. With him are Rakhal, M. and Hazra. In a jocular mood Thakur mentions several things about his childhood.

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi at Dakshineswar – he converses with the Mother of the Universe

Thakur is in samadhi. It is evening. He is sitting alone on the smaller cot in his room and is talking to the Mother of the Universe. He says, "Mother, why do You create such confusion? Should I go there, Mother? If You take me, I'll go."

> There was talk about Thakur's visit to a devotee's house. Is he speaking like that to get the permission of the Mother of the Universe?

Sri Ramakrishna again talks to the Mother of the Universe. It seems that he is praying to Her for a devotee of his inner circle. He says, "Mother, please make him stainless. Why have you given him only one part[1] of divine power?"

He is silent for awhile. Then he says, "O yes, I see. It will be enough for Your work."

> Is this what Thakur is saying: Out of sixteen kalas, one kala of Your power will be enough for Your work, for teaching humanity?

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1. Kala.

Now in an ecstatic mood, Thakur talks to M. and the others about the Primal Power and the meaning of the incarnation of God.

"That which is Brahman is also Power,[1] which I call Mother. When It is inactive I call It Brahman and when It creates, preserves and dissolves, I call It Power. It's like still water and water with ripples in it. An incarnation of God is the play of Power. He comes to teach love and devotion to God. An incarnation is like the udder of a cow. You can only get milk from the udders.

"God manifests Himself as a human being – like fish collect in a hole."

Some devotees wonder if Sri Ramakrishna is a God-man like Sri Krishna, Chaitanya Deva and Christ.

1. Shakti.

Section VIII

Adhar's House – Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, Ishan and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Childlike faith – the untouchables and Shankaracharya – heart of a sadhu

Sri Ramakrishna has kindly visited Adhar's house in Calcutta. He is sitting in the parlour. It is afternoon. Rakhal, Adhar, M., Ishan[1] and several people from the neighbourhood are present.

Thakur is fond of Ishan Mukherji. He was a Superintendent in the Accountant General's Office. After retiring he took to meditation and charitable work. One day Thakur went to his house on the Macchuabazar Street and had his meal there, with devotees. Ishan had invited a number of guests. (See Part I). Thakur stayed almost the whole day. Narendra was expected, but couldn't come.

Since retiring, Ishan has visited Thakur at Dakshineswar often and gone to a solitary spot on the bank of the Ganges in Bhatpara to meditate. Now he

1. All of Ishan's sons were very well-educated. The eldest, Gopal, was a District Magistrate. The middle, Satish Chandra, was a District Judge. Satish was a classmate of Narendra. He could play the pakhavaj beautifully. He was a government servant in Gazipur. It was at his house that Narendra stayed during his pravajya state [period of sannyasa wandering] and met Pavhari Baba. One of the brothers, Girish, had worked as Assistant Registrar at Calcutta University for a long time. Ishan gave so much in charity that at the end of his life he became a debtor and suffered great difficulties. His wife died many years before his own death.

is going to perform Gayatri purashcharana in Bhatpara.

Today is Saturday, 22 September 1883, the 6th day of Aswin.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "Please tell that story of yours – about the boy who sent a letter."

Ishan (*smiling*): "A boy heard that God had created us. So he wrote a letter to God as a prayer and mailed it in a post box. The address he gave was Heaven." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Did you notice the story? You can only succeed in spiritual life with childlike faith.[1] (*To Ishan*) And that story about the renunciation of work."

Ishan: "After realizing God, all ritualistic devotion like sandhya drops off. One day everybody was performing devotions on the bank of the Ganges, everybody but one person. When asked, he said, 'I'm observing impurity.[2] I can't perform rituals. I've had both the defilements of death and birth – the death of Mother Ignorance and the birth of Self-knowledge.[3]

Sri Ramakrishna: "And now that story – about caste discrimination falling off by attaining Self-realization."

Ishan: "Acharya Shankara was going up the steps in Kashi after a bath in the Ganges. Seeing an untouchable with some dogs in front of him, he

1. The kingdom of heaven is revealed unto babes, but is hidden from the wise and the prudent. Bible.
2. Ashoucha.
3. Atmarama.

said, 'Hey, you touched me!' The pariah said, 'Master, neither have you touched me nor have I touched you. The Atman within all is not touched by anything.' Is there any difference between the sun's reflection in wine and in the water of the Ganges?" [1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "And next the story about the harmony of religions – that God can be realized by any path."[2]

Ishan (*laughing*): "Both Hari and Hara come from the same root. The only difference is inflection.[3] He who is Hari is also Hara. It's only a question of faith.[4]"

Sri Ramakrishna: "And also that story about the heart of a sadhu being the biggest of all."

Ishan (*smiling*): "The earth is the biggest thing we see. But the sea is even bigger – and the sky bigger than the sea! But Lord Vishnu has authority over all – heaven, the mortal world and the nether world – all three worlds in a single foot. That foot of Vishnu is in the sadhu's heart. So the sadhu's heart is the biggest of all."

The devotees thoroughly enjoy listening to these words.

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1. Bhagavad Gita 6:29.
2. Bhagavad Gita 4:11.
3. The word *pratyaya* has two meanings: faith and inflection. This is a pun meaning that if you have faith in God it doesn't matter who you worship.
4. Hari is a name of God according to followers of Vishnu, Hara of Shiva.

Chapter II

The worship of the Primal Power is the worship of Brahman – Brahman and the Primal Power are the same

Identity of God the Absolute and God the creator, preserver and destroyer

Ishan is going to perform Gayatri purashcharana in Bhatpara. Gayatri is the mantra of Brahman. Until a person is completely rid of worldly attractions, he does not attain the knowledge of Brahman. But a worldly mind cannot be gotten rid of since life depends on food in the age of Kali. It is always concerned with the senses[1] of sight, taste, smell, touch and sound. That is why Sri Ramakrishna says, "It is not possible to live by the Vedic tenets in the Kaliyuga." That which is Brahman is also Shakti, the power. When worshipping power, one is worshipping Brahman. When there is creation, preservation and destruction, it is called Shakti – they are not different, they are the same."

The quest of the Absolute and Ishan – the Vedantist position, 'I am He,' So 'ham

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "Why do you roam around with neti-neti [not this, not this] on your lips? Nothing can be said about Brahman – only that it exists, "asti mātram,"[2] only Rama.

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1. Bhagavad Gita 12:5.

2. naiva vācā na manasā prāptuṁ śakyo na cakṣuṣā ,
astīti bruvato'nyatra kathaṁ tadupalabhyate .
astītyevopalabdhavyastattvabhāvena cobhayoḥ ,
astītyevopalabdhasya tattvabhāvaḥ prasīdati .
kaṭhopaniṣad 2-3-12, 2-3-13
[It cannot be attained through speech, nor through mind, nor through eye. How can It be known to anyone apart from him who speaks of It as existing? The Self is (first) to be realized as existing,

"Whatever we see or think is the manifestation of the same Primal Power, the Primal Consciousness[1] – creation, preservation and dissolution, the world and living beings. Also meditation, he who meditates, love for God, ecstatic love for God – all these are manifestations of that Primal Power.

"But Brahman and Shakti are inseparable. Hanuman sang a hymn of praise for Rama when he returned from Lanka. He sang, 'O Rama, You are the Supreme Brahman[2] and Sita is Your Shakti. You are one and the same.' Like a snake and its zigzag movement. The moment you think of the movement of a snake, the snake comes to your mind. And when you think of a snake, you think of its movement. As soon as you think of milk, you think of its colour, its whiteness. And as soon as you think of milky whiteness, you think of milk. As soon as you think of wetness, you think of water. And, as soon as you think of water, you have to think of its wetness.

"This very Primal Power, or Mahamaya, covers Brahman. As soon as the veil is removed you realize, 'I am You and You are I.'

"As long as there is the covering of Mahamaya, cherishing the Vedantist attitude of So 'ham, 'I am indeed that Supreme Brahman,' is not correct. Waves belong to water, water does not belong to

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and then as It really is. Of these two, the real nature of the Self that has been known as merely existing, becomes favourably disposed for the self-revelation.]

1. Chitshakti.
2. Parabrahman.

waves. As long as there is the veil, it is good to call God, 'Ma, Ma – You are my Mother, I am Your child.' 'You are my Lord, I am Your servant.' The attitude of master and servant is also good. All other attitudes, such as serenity, friendship etc. – follow from this attitude. If a master has affection for his servant, he may say to him, 'Come, sit beside me. You and I are not different.' But if the servant sits beside the master of his own accord, won't the master be cross?"

The Primal Power, the play of the incarnation of God – and Ishan – what is maya? The harmony of the Vedas, the Puranas and the Tantras

"As for the play of an incarnation of God, it is all the manifestation of the power of Consciousness. He who is Brahman is also Rama, Krishna and Shiva."

Ishan: "Hari and Hara come from the same root. They are only distinguished in inflection." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, except for the One, nothing exists. The Vedas say, 'Om Sat-chit-ananda Brahman.' The Puranas says, 'Om Sat-chit-ananda Krishna.' And the Tantra says, 'Om Sat-chit-ananda Shiva.'

"This very Consciousness in the form of Mahamaya keeps everyone in ignorance. The *Adhyatma Ramayana* says, 'All the rishis who saw Rama just said only this, 'O Rama, don't enchant us with Your world-bewitching maya![1]'"

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1. ajñānenāvṛtaṁ jñānaṁ tena muhyanti jantavaḥ
gītā 5-15

Ishan: "What is maya?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Everything that you see, hear or think is all maya. If you have to say so in a word, 'lust and greed' constitute the veil of maya.

"There's nothing wrong in chewing betel-nut, eating fish, having a smoke or massaging the body with oil. What is the use of only giving these up? Giving up 'lust and greed' is the one thing necessary. Giving them up is true renunciation. Householders should now and then retire into solitude and practice spiritual disciplines. After developing love for God through them, they can renounce mentally. Sannyasis should renounce both within and without."

Keshab Chandra Sen and renunciation – Navavidhan and doctrine of the Formless – dogmatism

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'How can a person suffering from delirium be cured if he lives in a room where there's a pitcher of water and tamarind pickles? You have to go into solitude now and then."

A Devotee: "Sir, how about Navavidhan – it seems to me like a mix[1] of five kinds of lentils."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Some people say it's modern. But I ask myself, 'Is the God of the Brahmos a

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[Knowledge is enveloped in ignorance, hence do beings get deluded.]
daivī hyeṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā ।
māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetāṁ taranti te ।।
gītā 7-14
[Verily, this divine illusion of Mine, constituted of the gunas, is difficult to cross over. Those who devote themselves to Me alone, cross over this illusion.]
1. Khichuri.

different God?' They call their cult Navavidhan, the new dispensation. That may be so. Just as there are six systems of philosophy. Maybe this is like them.

"But, you know where the believers of the formless God are mistaken? When they say that God is formless and all other views are wrong.

"I know that God is both with form and without form – and much more beyond that. God can be everything.[1]"

God in the untouchables

(*To Ishan*) "The same Consciousness, the same power of Ignorance,[2] has become the twenty-four cosmic principles.[3] One day when I was meditating, my mind entered Rasik's house. He is a scavenger. I said to my mind, 'Stay, stay here, you rascal!' The Divine Mother showed me that all the members of his household were the same containers and have the same kulkundalini inside and the same six centers.

"Is the Primal Power male or female? In the countryside [Kamarpukur], I saw Kali being worshipped in the house of the Lahas. She was wearing a sacred thread around Her neck. Somebody asked, 'Why a sacred thread around the

1. nānto'sti mama divyānāṁ vibhūtīnāṁ parantapa ।
gītā 10-40.
[There is no end of My divine attributes, O scorcher of foes.]
2. Mahamaya.
3. mahābhūtānyahaṅkāro buddhiravyaktameva ca,
indriyāṇi daśaikaṁ ca pañca cendriyagocarāḥ.
gītā 13-6
[The great elements, egoism, intellect, as also the Unmanifested, the ten senses and the one (mind), and the five objects of the senses.]

Mother's neck?' The master of the house, said, 'Brother, you have understood the Mother. But I don't know whether She is male or female.[1]'

"It's said that the Mahamaya once swallowed Shiva. When her six centers were awakened, Shiva emerged out of Her thigh. Then He [Shiva] created the Tantra philosophy.

"You have to take refuge in that Chitshakti, that Mahamaya."

Ishan: "Please shower your grace on me."

Advice to Ishan – dive deep – need of a guru – brahmin pundit – Ishan and scriptures – mere book-learning

Sri Ramakrishna: "Pray with a guileless mind, 'O Lord, reveal Yourself to me!' Weep! Say, 'O Lord, please take my mind off 'lust and greed!"

"And dive. Can you reach the jewels by swimming on the surface of the water? You have to dive deep.

"Get the information from your guru about where to search. A person was looking for a special stone image of Shiva.[2] Somebody came along and

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1. tadvā etadakṣaraṁ gārgyadṛṣṭaṁ dṛṣṭṛ, aśrutaṁ śrotṛ, amataṁ mantṛ, avijñātaṁ vijñātṛ, nānyadato'sti dṛṣṭṛ, nānyadato'sti śrotṛ, nānyadato'sti mantṛ, nānyadato'sti vijñātṛ, etasminnu khalvakṣare gārgyākāśa otaśca protaśceti.

bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 3-8-11

[O Gargi, this Immutable, is never seen but is the Witness. It is never heard, but is the Hearer. It is never thought, but is the Thinker. It is never known, but is the Knower. There is no other witness but This, no other hearer but This, no other thinker but This, no other knower but This. By this Immutable, O Gargi, is the ether pervaded.]

2. Vanalinga, a particularly-shaped stone found in nature.

said, 'Go near that stream and you will find a tree. Close to the tree is a whirlpool. You will have to dive at that spot. Then you will find the stone image.' You have to get instruction from the guru where to search."

Ishan: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sat-chit-ananda Himself comes as the Guru.[1] If someone receives initiation from a human guru and regards the guru as a mere man, he will not succeed. He will have to regard the guru as God Himself. Only then will he have faith in the mantra. And faith does bring everything. Eklavya (a low caste boy) made a clay image of Drona and then learned archery standing in the forest before the image. He worshipped the clay Drona as Dronacharya himself. Thus, through that faith, he perfected himself in archery.

"And don't bother too much with brahmin pundits. They're always after money.

"I've seen brahmins who'd come to perform ceremonies – reading the Chandi or some other scripture – turning over many of the pages without reading. (*All laugh.*)

"A nail knife[2] is enough to kill yourself, but to kill others you need such weapons as a sword and a shield. That's the purpose of the scriptures.

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1. pitāsi lokasya carācarasya tvamasya pūjyaśca gururgarīyān
gītā 11-43
[You are the Father of the world, moving and unmoving; the object of its worship; greater than the great.]
2. Naharni.

"You don't need many scriptures.[1] If you don't have discrimination, mere scholarship won't help. Even the study of the six philosophies is of no avail. Go in solitude and weep for Him, call upon Him. He will certainly do everything for you."

Practicing spiritual disciplines in seclusion – concern for cleanliness and Ishan

Ishan is building a hut with eight thatched roofs on the bank of the Ganges in Bhatpara to perform purashcharana. Thakur has heard about it.

Sri Ramakrishna (*impatiently, to Ishan*): "Oh yes, is the hut ready? The fact is that the less people know about such activities, the better. People of sattvic nature meditate in their minds or in a forest or some solitary place. Sometimes they even meditate inside a mosquito net."

Sometimes Ishan takes Hazra to Bhatpara with him. Hazra is always concerned about outward purity. Sri Ramakrishna has asked him not to behave like that.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "Well, don't involve yourself with undue concern about outward purity. A sadhu felt very thirsty. A man with a water-skin passed his way. He offered water to the sadhu. The sadhu asked, 'Is your container clean?'[2] The man

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1. uttamā tattvacintaiva madhyamaṁ śāstracintanam ।
adhamā mantracintā ca tīrthabhrāntyadhamādhamā ।।
maitreyī upaniṣat 2-21
[To meditate upon the Reality is the best, to meditate upon the scriptures is placed in the middle, to meditate upon the mantra is inferior and to wander about in the places of pilgrimage inferior than the inferior.]

2. navadvāramalasrāvaṁ sadā kāle svabhāvajam ।
durgandhaṁ durmalopetaṁ spṛṣṭvā snānaṁ vidhīyate ।।

said, 'Sir, it is very clean, but in yours is a lot of urine and excreta. So I say, drink water from my skin. It won't cause any harm.' Your skin, i.e. your body, your stomach, contains filth.

"And believe in God's name. Then you won't need to go on pilgrimages."

Saying this and overwhelmed with emotion, Thakur begins to sing.

Renunciation of rituals in the stage of perfection

Why go to Gaya, Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi, or Kanchi, if I can breathe my last chanting Kali's name?

Of what use are rituals for one who utters Kali's name at dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his footsteps, never catching up.

Charity, vows, and almsgiving no longer appeal to Madan's mind. His worship alone is surrender at the Mother's blessed feet.

Lord Shiva Himself, the God of Gods, with all His powers, sings Her praises. Who, then, can conceive of the power of Her holy name?

Ishan remains silent.

Advice to Ishan; childlike faith – first practicing spiritual disciplines like Janaka, then God-realization in the world

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "If you still have any doubts lurking inside, please ask me."

Ishan: "Sir, you talked about faith."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's only through true faith that you can realize Him. It happens sooner if you

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maitreyī upaniṣat 2-6

have full faith. If a cow is choosy about her fodder, she yields less milk. If she grazes on all kinds of grasses and leaves, she yields more milk.

"Rajakrishna Bannerji's son told a story: A person received a command from God to see his ideal deity in a ram. He believed it. God exists in all.

"A guru said to his disciple, 'It is Rama who resides in every being.' The devotee put his full faith in this. When he saw a dog running away with a chapatti in its mouth, the devotee ran after it with butter in a container, shouting, 'Rama, wait a minute! Let me butter your chapatti.'

"Oh, what faith Krishnakishore had. He would say that by reciting, 'Om Krishna, Om Rama,' you earn the result of millions of sandhyas.

"Also Krishnakishore would say to me in my ear secretly, 'Please don't tell anybody that I don't like sandhya and other rituals anymore.'

"I also feel the same way. The Divine Mother reveals to me that She has become everything. Once when I was coming back from the Jhautala towards the Panchavati after easing myself, I saw a dog following me. I stopped at the Panchavati and said to myself, 'Maybe the Mother is going to say something through it.'

"So, as you said just now, a person attains everything by faith."[1]

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1. sarvadharmānparityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja,
ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣyayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ.
gītā 18-66

Difficult problems of the householder and the Lord's grace

Ishan: "But I am a householder."

Sri Ramakrishna: "So what? By His grace, even the impossible becomes possible.[1] Ramprasad sang, 'This world is a veil of deception.' Somebody replied to him by way of another song:

> This world is indeed a thing of joy; let me eat and drink and be merry.
>
> King Janaka, the great royal sage, was he inferior in any respect to a holy man who has given up the world?
>
> Oh no, it was he who was loyal to both matter and Spirit, who realized God and at the same time drank his cup of milk.

"But first you have to practice spiritual disciplines secretly, in seclusion. Then you can live in the world and become a King Janaka. But if you don't, how can you be like him?

"Just see, Kartika, Ganesha, Lakshmi, Saraswati, are all there, but Shiva is sometimes lost in samadhi. And sometimes he dances, chanting 'Rama, Rama.'"

[Relinquishing all dharmas take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate you from all sins; grieve not.]

1. With man it is impossible, but nothing is impossible with the Lord – Christ.

Section IX

At Dakshineswar with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple with the devotees. Rakhal, M., Ram and some other devotees are present. Hazra is outside on the verandah. Today is Sunday, 23 September 1883, the 7th day of the dark fortnight of the month of Bhadra.

Nityagopal, Tarak and a few other devotees are staying at Ram's house. He treats them with great affection and regard.

Sometimes Rakhal stays with Adhar Sen. Nityagopal is always absorbed in a spiritual mood. Tarak's mind is also indrawn – he does not talk to people very much these days.

Sri Ramakrishna's worry about Narendra

Thakur is now talking about Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to a certain devotee*): "Narendra doesn't like even you. (*To M.*) Why? Why didn't he come to Adhar's house?

"There are so many qualities all in the one person, Narendra. Singing, playing instruments, studying. The other day when he was in Captain's carriage, Captain asked him so many times to sit next to him. But Narendra sat on the other side and didn't even look at Captain."

Pundit Gauri, a Shakta, and Sri Ramakrishna

"What is the use of mere learning? Practice of spiritual disciplines are what is necessary. Gauri Pundit of Indesh was a spiritual seeker – and a scholar. Sometimes he would become absorbed in the ecstasy of the Divine Mother, now and then chanting [a Vedic hymn to the Mother], '*Ha re, re, re. Niralamba lambodar janani kam yami sharan.*' The other pundits would sit there like earthworms. I also would become overcome with emotion. Seeing me eat, he would ask whether I'd practiced spiritual disciplines with a bhairavi.

"Gauri was enraged to hear that a follower of the Kartabhaja sect described the formless aspect of God,[1] i.e. the shape[2] of water.[3]

"At first he was a bigoted Shakta. He would pick up a tulasi leaf with two sticks[4] – he wouldn't touch it. (*Everybody laugh.*) Then he went home. When he returned, he didn't behave like this.

"I planted a tulasi plant in front of the Kali Temple. It died. It is said that tulasi plants don't grow where goats are sacrificed.

"Gauri used to give very nice interpretations. He would say, 'O this!' explaining, 'O disciple! This is your ideal deity.' He would say that the ten heads of Ravana are the ten senses.[5] Kumbhakarana was a man of tamas, Ravana of rajas, and Bibhishana of

1. Nirakara: Sanskrit word for the Formless God.
2. Akara.
3. Neer.
4. A bigoted worshipper disdains anything to do with any other sect. Tulsi leaves are sacred to Vishnu.
5. The 10 indriyas: 5 sense organs and 5 organs of action.

sattva. That's why Bibhishana was blessed by Rama."

Ram, Tarak and Nityagopal

Thakur is resting for awhile after his midday meal. Ram, Tarak [later Swami Shivananda] and some other devotees arrive from Calcutta. Having saluted Thakur, they sit on the floor. M. is also sitting on the floor. Ram says, "We're learning to play the mridanga.[1]"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ram*): "Has Nityagopal learned to play?"

Ram: "No, he plays it just a little bit."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What about Tarak?"

Ram: "He plays a good deal."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Then he wouldn't sit so downcast, with his eyes on the ground. "If you give your mind to something else, it doesn't dwell on God that much."

Ram: "I've been learning the drum only to play kirtan."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Are you learning to sing."

M. (*smiling*): "No sir, not exactly. I just hum like a drone."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Have you learned the song, 'I have no use for knowledge or reason. Only make me mad in Your love?' My attitude is exactly this."

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1. An earthen drum.

Hazra shows malice toward some.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ram and other devotees*): "In Kamarpukur I used to visit one house almost every day. The boys were my age. They came here the other day and stayed for two or three days. Their mother used to dislike everybody, like Hazra. One day her foot was dislocated and gangrene set in. The room smelled so bad nobody could enter it. So I said to Hazra, 'Don't find fault with other people.'"

It is now about four o'clock. Thakur goes to the Jhautala slowly for a wash. A cotton carpet has been spread on the verandah southeast of Thakur's room. He will sit there when he returns from the Jhautala. Ram and others are present. Adhar Sen belongs to the caste of goldsmiths. Ram Babu comments that Rakhal had eaten at his house. Adhar is a great devotee. This is the topic of conversation.

A devotee jokes about the disposition of some of the goldsmiths. He said they like to eat bread with dry roasted vegetables. It doesn't matter if they have anything else to eat. They eat high quality rice, and they must have fruit as snacks. They like hog plum. If they receive hilsa fish[1] or sandesh as a present from someone, they send the same to the father-in-law of their daughter or son. Who would send the same present to his own daughter or son's father-in-law? In this way one hilsa fish would be eaten in fifteen to twenty houses. The women do all the work, but the cooking is done by a brahmin from Orissa. He spends an hour or two in every home. Sometimes one Oriya brahmin cooks at four

1. A delicacy of West Bengal.

or five places. Thakur laughs but offers no opinion of his own.

Thakur in samadhi – he talks to the Mother of the Universe

It is evening. While standing in the northwestern corner of the courtyard, Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi. After a long time his external awareness returns. What an amazing state Thakur is in. These days he almost always remains absorbed in samadhi. The slightest suggestion can make him unconscious of the outside world. When devotees come, he talks for awhile; otherwise he remains absorbed within. He cannot attend to worship, japa or any ritual.

Sri Ramakrishna in the state in which one cannot perform work of any kind

Coming out of samadhi, Thakur remains standing and talks with the Mother of the Universe. He says, "Mother, worship has left me and also japa.[1] Look Mother, don't make me so inert. Let my attitude be that of a servant of God. Mother, I should be able to talk, and chant Your name, and sing. And please, Mother, give some strength to this body so I can walk a little on my own. And be able to go to all the places where they talk about You and where Your devotees are."

This morning Sri Ramakrishna came to the Kali temple and offered flowers at the feet of the Mother of the Universe. Now he is talking to her.

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1. yastvātmaratireva syādātmatṛptaśca mānavaḥ ।
ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭastasya kāryaṁ na vidyate ।।
gītā 3-17
[But the man who is devoted to the Self, and is satisfied with the Self, and content in the Self alone, has no obligatory duty.]

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Mother, this morning I offered a few flowers at Your feet. I thought I had done well and that my mind was going to external worship. But Mother, why did this happen? Why are You making me inert again?"

It is the seventh day of the dark fortnight of Bhadra. The moon has not yet appeared. It is a dark night. Sri Ramakrishna remains in ecstasy. He returns to his room and sits on the small cot in his room, still abstracted. And he talks again to the Mother of the Universe.

Advice to Ishan – Vedic injunctions don't suit the Kaliyuga – carry out spiritual practice taking God as Mother

He seems to be talking to the Divine Mother about the devotees. He is talking about Ishan Mukherji. Ishan had said, "I'll go to Bhatpara and practice the Gayatri *purashcharana.*[1]" Sri Ramakrishna had said to him that Vedic injunctions did not suit the Kaliyuga because people have to work hard for food, are short lived and their body and sense consciousness can't be completely given up. He asked Ishan to carry out spiritual disciplines according to the Tantras instead, in the filial attitude. And he also said, "The Mother is none other than Brahman and Brahman is also the Primal Power."

Absorbed in ecstasy Thakur now says, "What, the Gayatri purashcharana! Leaping from this thatched roof to another … Who has told him this?

1. The repetition of japa, increasing and decreasing the number according to the moon.

Is he doing it himself? … Well, let him do a little purashcharana."

(*To M.*) "Well! Is this all real, or fancies of my mind?"

M. is amazed watching Thakur talking to the Mother of the Universe in this way. He is speechless. God is very near to us. He is both outside and inside us. If that is not so, how can Sri Ramakrishna talk with Him in whispers?[1]

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal and other devotees at Dakshineswar

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the platform in front of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. He is seeing the Mother of the Universe in the image of Kali. M. and other devotees are sitting near him. It is 26 September today, 1883, the 10th day of the dark fortnight of Bhadra. It is afternoon.

A short time ago, Thakur had said, "No calculation can be made about God. His glory is boundless. What can man say in words? An ant went to a sugar hill and ate a grain. Its stomach was filled. Then it thought to itself, The next time I come, I'll bring the whole hill into my hole.

"Is it possible to understand Him? That's why my attitude is like a kitten's. The mother cat can keep it

1. tadviṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padaṁ sadā paśyanti sūrayaḥ divīva cakṣurātatam ।
ṛgaveda saṁhitā 1-23-20
[Just as the eye perceives the universe in the vast expanse of the sky, the illumined souls too have the clear perception of that supreme state of Vishnu, the all-pervading Reality.]

anywhere and it doesn't care. A little child doesn't know all the riches of its mother."

Sri Ramakrishna sings while he sits on the platform of the Kali temple, "O Mother, O Mother, You, the embodiment of Omkar. Mother, how much these people talk. I understand nothing, Mother. I know nothing. I take refuge in You, in You I take refuge! I pray only that I may have pure love at Your lotus feet. Please do not bewitch me with Your world-enchanting maya, Mother. I take refuge in You, in You I take refuge."

The arati is over in the temples. Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the small cot in his room. Mahendra squats on the floor.

Earlier Mahendra[1] was a regular visitor to Keshab Sen's Brahmo Samaj. Since meeting Thakur, he doesn't go there any more. Sri Ramakrishna is always talking with the Mother of the Universe. Mahendra becomes speechless to see it. He is charmed by hearing about the harmony of religions and Thakur's yearning for God.

Mahendra has been visiting Thakur for almost two years. Not only does he have his darshan, he is also blessed by his grace. Thakur is always telling him and the other devotees that God is both formless and also with form, that He takes up a form for the sake of the devotee. To those who believe in God without form, he says, "Please stick to your belief. But you must remember that everything is possible for Him. He can be both with form and formless, and so much besides."

1. M., who used many names for himself, to humbly hide himself.

Sri Ramakrishna and Mahendra – God with form and formless – sense of duty – for the devotee, the world of spiritual ignorance is the pain of death

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahendra*): "You have held faith in one, the formless God?"

Mahendra: "Yes, sir. But as you say, everything is possible. Forms of God are also possible."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Beautiful. And remember that He is residing in the world of both animate and inanimate in the form of consciousness."

Mahendra: "I think of Him as the Consciousness of the conscious."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Stick to this attitude for the time being. There's no need to strain and change your attitude. Gradually you will know that He Himself is consciousness and that consciousness is His consciousness only. He is the very nature of consciousness.

"Well, are you attracted by money and power?"

Mahendra: "No. But, for the sake of contentment [freedom from worry]. I want to meditate on God without anxiety."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's only natural."

Mahendra: "Greed? No, I don't have that."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, that's all right. But who will look after your children? If you feel that you are not the doer, who will provide for your children and others?"

Mahendra: "I've heard that as long as there is the sense of duty, you can't attain knowledge. Duty is the burning sun!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Live in this state of mind now. It will be different later when the sense of duty leaves you by itself."

Everybody is quiet for awhile.

Mahendra: "If you have partial knowledge in worldly life, it's like death in full consciousness – like cholera."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Rama! Rama!"

If a person has awareness at the time of death from cholera, he suffers great pain. Perhaps this is what Mahendra is referring to: the world of ignorance is like a forest fire. Maybe that's why Thakur exclaimed, "Rama, Rama."

Mahendra: "Other people are like delirious patients. They go into a state of unconsciousness and don't feel the pain of death."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look, what good is money anyway? Jaygopal Sen has so much money, but he's not happy because his sons aren't obedient."

Mahendra: "Is poverty the only suffering in this world? We have six enemies. Add to it disease and grief."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And then name and fame – the desire to earn a name.

"Well! What do you think about the state I'm in?"

Mahendra: "The state in which one finds oneself on waking up. You are ever united with God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you see me in dream?"

Mahendra: "Yes, sir. Many times."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How? Do you see me giving instruction?"

Mahendra doesn't reply.

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you see me giving instruction, know that it is Sat-chit-ananda."

Then Mahendra tells him everything that he had seen in dream. Sri Ramakrishna listens attentively.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahendra*): "This is very good. Don't reason any more. You are a Shakta."

Section X

Sri Ramakrishna at the Durga Puja Festival at Adhar's House

Chapter I

Today is Navami Puja day, Wednesday, 10 October 1883, the 25th day of Aswin. Adhar is celebrating the Durga Puja festival at his house and has invited Thakur to it. Sri Ramakrishna is standing in the worship Hall**,** watching the arati of Sri Durga.

Sri Ramakrishna has come with devotees, including Balaram's father and Sarada Babu, a retired school inspector and a friend of Adhar. Adhar has invited his neighbours and relatives for the occasion. Quite a number of them have come.

Sri Ramakrishna stands, in ecstasy, after watching the evening arati. Absorbed, he sings to the Divine Mother.

Adhar is a householder devotee. Many householder devotees present have been scalded by the three fires of the world.[1]

Perhaps that is why Sri Ramakrishna sings a hymn of praise to the Mother of the Universe for the welfare of all.

O Mother, O Redeemer, take me across quickly this time.

I am dying in fear of the God of Death.[2]

O, Mother of the Universe, preserver and enchantress of the world, and its begetter.

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1. Three kinds of affliction: spiritual, material and supernatural.
2. Yama.

You took birth from Yashoda's womb, emerging as the Lord's divine sport.

In Vrindavan as Radha You sported and enjoyed Yourself with Krishna, the beloved of Vraja.

Full of sweetness, You took delight and participated in the dance of divine sport.

You are Shiva's consort; You are the Mother, the heartthrob of Govinda. You dwell in the heart and bestow salvation.

You are eternal. You are Ishani, ever full of bliss; You assume all forms; You have attributes and yet You are attributeless. You are ever the beloved of Shiva. Who can fathom Your greatness?

Sri Ramakrishna talks with the Mother of the Universe in an ecstatic mood

Sri Ramakrishna goes to Adhar's parlour on the second floor and sits down. Many invited guests are there. Balaram's father, Sarada Babu and others sit near him.

Still absorbed in ecstasy, Thakur says to the guests, "Gentlemen, I have eaten. Go now and enjoy the feast."

The Divine Mother has accepted Adhar's offering. Is it because of this that Sri Ramakrishna is saying to the Mother of the Universe, in an ecstatic mood, "I have eaten. Now, you people should eat the sacramental food." Still absorbed in ecstasy, Thakur says to Her, "Should I eat, Mother, or will You eat? O Mother, the image of divine bliss!"

Is Sri Ramakrishna seeing the Mother of the Universe and himself as one? Has the Divine Mother incarnated in this world as a son to instruct mankind? Is this why Thakur says, "I have eaten?"

In a state of ecstasy, he sees the six spiritual centres in his body and the Mother seated in them.

Absorbed, he sings:

You have enchanted the whole world, O Mother. You, the enchantress of Shiva Himself.

O Mother, sitting on the great lotus in the Muladhara, You enjoy Yourself, playing the vina.[1]

In the machine of a human body, You manifest Yourself. With Your great mantra, You pierce the three gunas which reside in the three spiritual nerves[2] – the Sushumna, Ida and Pingla.

You provide energy to the three musical scales.

You abide in the six-petalled lotus of Svadhisthana as Bhairava musical mode.[3]

You illuminate as Mallhar[4] raga in the Manipura and as the Vasanta[5] raga in the lotus of the heart.

You reside as Hindola musical mode in the Vishuddha chakra, and in the Ajna lotus as eardrum. You pierce the seventy-three melodies with the three octaves: keynote, metre and tempo.

O Mahamaya, you easily bind all creatures with the net of infatuation.

You become absorbed in the Supreme Consciousness and establish there as lightning.

Nanda Kumar says: who knows for certain what Your essence is? But sing like the cuckoo and Your essence is the three gunas – sattva, rajas and tamas.

He sings again:

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1. A stringed musical instrument.
2. Nadis.
3. Raga.
4. Indian musical mode of rainy season.
5. An Indian musical mode.

What more can I reason? I am already dead, reasoning and reasoning.

How did She take a black complexion, She whose name dispels the fear of death, and She who has Mahakala lying at Her feet.

There are so many forms of black, but this blackness is really amazing – it illumes the lotus of my heart when contemplated there.

She who is called Kali is blacker than black.

One who has seen this form of Hers but once likes no other form.

Prasad says in delight, "Where is such a woman that by merely hearing her name – without seeing Her – the mind is at once absorbed."

Taking refuge in the Fearless One, all fear is dispelled. Perhaps it is for this reason that Thakur is dispensing fearlessness to the devotees by singing this song.

I have surrendered myself at the Fearless feet of the Divine Mother. Am I afraid of Yama any more?

I have planted the wish-fulfilling tree of Kali's name in my heart.

Having sold my body in the marketplace of the world, I have bought the name of Durga.

I have cast from me my six unflagging foes.[1]

This time when Yama comes, I'll open my heart to him. This is my resolve.

The name of Tara, the Essence of Essences, I have tied to the top tuft of my hair.

Say Ramprasad: I have cried "Durga!" and am ready for the journey.

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1. The six passions: Lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride and envy.

Sarada Babu is mourning the death of his son. That's why his friend Adhar has brought him to Thakur. Sarada Babu is a devotee of Gauranga. At his sight, Sri Ramakrishna is inspired with the feeling of Gauranga. Thakur sings:

Why has my body turn fair? (for complete song see Section 19, Chapter 4 of Vol. IV of this title).

Now he sings, inspired with the feeling of Gauranga. He said that Sarada Babu was very fond of the song:

Surely Gauranga would be in ecstasy.

How else would he who is the treasure house of ecstasy be?

He laughs, weeps and dances, charged with divine feeling.

Seeing a forest, he thinks of Vrindavan. Seeing the sea, he thinks it the Jamuna.

He who has Krishna within and Gaur without surely will know ecstasy.

Gaur sobs and weeps. He holds his own feet and says:

Where are you, Radha, full of the ecstasy of love?

And he sings:

O Mother! The neighbours raise a scandal, they cast aspersions on me because of Gaur.

How shall I explain and to whom, O the friend of my heart? I am dying of shame.

One day Gaur was performing the kirtan round the city with his troupe.

Shouting, Hari Bol, Hari Bol, he went through Nadia's bazaar.

Accompanying them, I saw his two red-hued holy feet.

One day, there was noise and bustle of the kirtan in the house of Srivas.

The moon-faced Gaur rolled in ecstasy in Srivas' courtyard.

I stood aside, hiding myself in a corner.

I fell in a swoon and the wife of Srivas brought me to consciousness.

One day, the moon-faced Gaur was standing on the bank of the Ganges,

The moon and the sun both shone on Gaur's body.

Seeing the beautiful image of Gaur, both Shaktas and Shaivites were entranced.

Suddenly my water-pot fell and the husband's sister, that gossip, saw it.

M. muses: Balaram's father is a Vaishnava. Is it for this reason that Ramakrishna is singing the mad love song of the gopis and Sri Krishna?

O Friend, I have not found my Shyam within my reach.

Can I live happily at home? Had Shyam been the hair of my head, I would have made a braid with Bakul flowers entwined.

Had Shyam been a bracelet, he would always be around my arm.

O friend, I would have walked along shaking my arm for show.

I would have gone on the main road, wearing that bracelet of Shyam.

When Shyam plays his flute, I come to the Jamuna to fetch water.

And I look all around like a shy she-deer.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna on the harmony of religions – conversation with Balaram's father

Balaram's father has estates in Bhadrak and other places in Orissa and has built guest houses and temples for the service of the deities in Vrindavan, Puri, Bhadrak and other places for the service of the deities. During the last part of his life, he devotes himself to Shyamasundar Kunj [Krishna] in Vrindavan.

Balaram's father is an old Vaishnava. Many Vaishnava devotees have no sympathy for the views of Shaktas, Shaivites and Vedantists. Some of them even have malicious attitudes toward them. But Sri Ramakrishna does not like such a narrow-minded opinion. He says that you can realize God by all paths, all beliefs, if you have longing in your heart. Many Vaishnava devotees outwardly tell beads and recite the scriptures, but they have no yearning for God-realization. Perhaps that's why Thakur is advising Balaram's father.

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna wears the habit of Vaishnava hermits and is initiated with Rama mantra

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I thought, why should I walk on a single track? I also took up the habits of a Vaishnava recluse in Vrindavan. I followed this attitude for three days. Then I was initiated with the Rama mantra at Dakshineswar – I had Vaishnava mark on my forehead and wore a diamond around my neck. After a few days I put them all away.

Advice to Balaram's father – God with attributes and the attributeless – God with form and formless

"A man had a tub. People took their clothes to him to be dyed. The tub was full of a solution of dye, but the clothes would take whatever colour the people wanted by being dipped in the same liquid. Someone was speechless to see this and said to the dyer, 'Please give me the dye you are using.'"

Is Thakur saying that people from all religions will go to him to be awakened spiritually?

Sri Ramakrishna adds, "A chameleon lived on a tree. One person saw that it was green, another black, and another saw it yellow. Different people saw it in different colours. They talked about it, one saying that the animal was green. Another said, 'No, it is red.' 'No, no,' another said, 'It is yellow.' And they began to quarrel. Then all these fellows went to a person who was sitting under the tree. He said, 'I live under this tree day and night. I know that it is a chameleon. It changes its colour often. And sometimes it has no colour at all.' "

Is Sri Ramakrishna saying that God is with qualities, and that He assumes various forms? And again, that He is without qualities – He has no colour, He is beyond mind and speech? And that the sweetness of God can be tasted on all paths – bhakti yoga as well as jnana yoga?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram's father*): "Don't read any more books. You can read devotional scriptures, like the life of Chaitanya.[1]"

1. *Chaitanya Charitamrita.*

The significance of the play of Radha-Krishna – sweetness and the taster of sweetness – the one thing needful

"There is nothing more to it than this: to love Him and to taste His sweetness. He is sweetness, the devotee is the taster – it is the devotee who drinks the sweetness. He is a lotus and the devotee is the bee. The devotee drinks the honey of the lotus.

"Just as a devotee can't live without the Lord, the Lord can't live without a devotee. In that case, the devotee is the sweetness and the Lord its taster. The devotee is the lotus and the Lord a bee. To enjoy His sweetness God becomes two, which is the reason for the divine play of Radha-Krishna."

Advice to Balaram's father: How long do holy duties like visiting places of pilgrimage, wearing a string of beads and religious habit last?

"In the beginning a person should go on pilgrimage, wear a string of beads and practice rituals. But after attaining the goal, after realizing God, outer display gradually decreases. Then there is only living with God's name – remembering and meditating on it.[1]

"Sixteen rupees are a lot of paise. But when sixteen rupees are put together it doesn't look like much of a heap. When they are turned into one gold piece, how small they become. And when you buy a diamond for it, people hardly notice it."[2]

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1. Bhagavad Gita 3:17.
2. Bible, Matthew 13:45-46: A merchant sold all he had, closed his business, and bought a pearl of great price.

Vaishnavas criticize people who don't wear outer signs like rosaries around their necks. Is this why Thakur is saying that after God-realization, a devotee doesn't have any need for religious rosaries and clothes? When you attain the real thing, the outer observances decrease?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram's father*): "The Kartabhajas talk about beginners, practioners, perfected ones and the perfected among the perfect. A beginner puts a vermilion mark on his forehead, wears a rosary around his neck and practices outer rituals. Practioners don't observe as much outer conduct – for example, the bauls. The perfected is one who has firm faith that God exists. The perfected among the perfect are like Chaitanya Deva. They have realized God and are always communicating with Him. The perfected of the perfect are called Sai. There is no one beyond Sai."

Advice to Balaram's father – sattvic spiritual disciplines – harmony of all religions and giving up fanaticism

"There are different kinds of spiritual seekers. Sattvic spiritual disciplines are practiced secretly – the aspirant practices in seclusion. He looks like an average person, but he meditates inside a mosquito net.

"A rajasic aspirant indulges in outward show. He wears a rosary around his neck, puts on ochre clothes, a silk dhoti, and his rosary is interspersed with gold beads. This is like sitting outside with a signboard."

Vaishnava devotees do not have much faith in Vedanta or Shaktism. Thakur is instructing

Balaram's father to shake off such narrow-mindedness.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram's father and others*): "Whatever the religion, whatever the belief, everyone calls upon the same God. So you mustn't look down upon or criticize any religion or belief. The Vedas call God Sat-chit-ananda Brahman. The Bhagavata and other Puranas call Him Sat-chit-ananda Krishna. The Tantras call Him Sat-chit-ananda Shiva – the same one Sat-chit-ananda.

"Vaishnavas have different sects. That which is called Brahman in the Vedas is called Alekh-Niranjan by one of their sects. Alekh means that which is not noticeable, cannot be seen through the senses. They say that Radha and Krishna are two parts of the same Alekh.

"In Vedanta there is no incarnation of God. Vedantists say, 'Rama and Krishna are two waves of Sat-chit-ananda.'

"There are no two, only One. Whatever one may call God, if it is from the bottom of his heart, it will surely reach Him – it is yearning which brings it about."

Sri Ramakrishna is absorbed in ecstasy while he says all this to the devotees. Now he regains outer awareness and says, "Are you Balaram's father?"

Advice to Balaram's father – yearn for God

They are all quiet for awhile. Balaram's old father counts the beads of his Harinam rosary silently.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and others*): "Well, these people chant His name so much, go on pilgrimage

so often. Then why are they like this? For them a year has eighteen months.

"I said to Harish, 'What's the use of going to Kashi if you have no yearning? If you have yearning, Kashi is right here.'

"Why don't they succeed even after visiting so many holy places and repeating the name so much? They have no yearning. If you call Him with longing, He reveals Himself.

"Before a yatra [theatrical performance] begins, there is so much noise everywhere. You can't see Sri Krishna then. Later, when Rishi Narada comes to Vrindavan with a longing heart, playing on his vina and saying, 'My life-breath! My Govinda, my soul!' Krishna doesn't delay anymore. He appears with the cowherd boys and says, 'Stop, O white cow. Stop.'"

Section XI

The Lakshmi Full Moon Festival of the Bright Fortnight of Aswin at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Thakur with Rakhal, Balaram's father, Beni Pal, M., Mani Mallick, Ishan, Kishori Gupta and others

Today is Tuesday, 16 October 1883, 30th day of Aswin. Balaram's father and some other devotees are here. Balaram's father is a great Vaishnava. He continuously chants the name of Hari with his rosary.

Strict Vaishnavas do not like people of other sects very much. Balaram's father, on the other hand, sometimes visits Sri Ramakrishna – his attitude is different from other Vaishnavas.

Sri Ramakrishna: "People who have open minds accept all deities: Krishna, Kali, Shiva, Rama and so on."

Balaram's Father: "Yes, one husband in different dress."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But there is also something called single-minded devotion.[1] When the milkmaids went to Mathura and saw Krishna wearing a turban, they drew down their veils and said, 'Who is this man? Where is our yellow-robed Krishna with a crest of peacock feathers?'

1. Nishtha bhakti.

"Hanuman also had single-minded devotion. When he came to Dwaraka in the Davapar yuga, Krishna said to Rukmini, 'Hanuman won't be happy unless he sees Rama's form.' So he assumed the form of Rama."

Amazing state of Sri Ramakrishna – union of the temporal and the Absolute

"What do I know, brother? I'm in this state when I descend from the Absolute to the phenomenal, and then I return to the Absolute.

"Experiencing the Absolute is called Knowledge of Brahman. It is very difficult. Unless you're completely rid of worldly attachment, you can't succeed. When Bhagavati took birth in the house of Himalaya, She appeared before Her father in many forms.'[1] Himalaya said, 'Mother, I want to see Brahman.' Bhagavati said to him, 'Father, if that is what you desire, you'll have to associate with sadhus.' You'll have to keep the company of the holy and live in solitude from time to time, leaving behind your worldly activities.

"The One has produced many – the phenomenal comes from the Absolute. In a particular state of consciousness, 'many' vanishes. Then even 'one' also disappears, for if there is one, there is also two. It is beyond all comparison. You can't describe It with any analogy. It's not darkness and light. It's not the light that we see. That light is not material light.[2]

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1. Devi Bhagavata, 7th Skanda, chapters 31, and 35 to 36.
2. tacchubhraṁ jyotiṣāṁ jyotistadyadātmavido viduḥ
   muṇḍakopaniṣad 2-2-9
   [It is pure, and is the light of lights, It is that which the knowers of the Self realize.]

"And when God changes the state of mind, when He brings the mind down to the phenomenal world, I see that He Himself has become the Lord, maya, the individual soul and the world.[1]"

God is the doer – You and yours

"And sometimes He reveals to me that He has created all creatures and the world. Just think of a garden and its proprietor. He is the Doer, and the whole of this world and all its creatures belong to Him – this is spiritual knowledge. And to say, 'I am the doer, I am the guru, I am the father' is ignorance. The whole house and the family is mine, and also wealth and people – this is ignorance."

Balaram's Father: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "As long as you don't realize that God is the Doer, you will have to return to the world again and again – you will be born again. When you realize that He is the Doer, you won't be born into this life again.

"As long as you do not say, 'Tuhun, Tuhun [only You],' He will not liberate you. You will die and be born again and again and you will not attain liberation. So what's the use in saying, 'My and mine?' The servant of a proprietor says, 'That's our garden. This is my cot.' But when the proprietor dismisses him, he can't even carry away his mango-wood box.

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1. tvaṁ jāto bhavasi viśvatomukhaḥ
śvetāśvataropaniṣad 4-3
[Taking birth, You have Your faces everywhere.]

"'Me and mine' has veiled the Reality and doesn't allow you to perceive it."

The knowledge of non-duality and vision of pure consciousness

"Without the knowledge of non-duality, you can't perceive pure consciousness.[1] Only after realizing pure consciousness itself is there eternal bliss.[2] The state of paramahamsa is one of eternal bliss.

"There are no incarnations of God according to the Vedanta school of thought. According to it, Chaitanya Deva was only a bubble of non-dual consciousness.

"What is the perception of pure consciousness? Like sudden light in a dark room when a match is struck."

Incarnation is a jewel of a man

"In the path of bhakti, or love, one believes in incarnations of God. When a woman of the sect[3] saw the state I was in, she said, 'Father, you have realized the truth within. Don't dance so much. Grapes should be preserved carefully, in cotton.' When a woman conceives, her mother-in-law gradually decreases her work. A sign of God-realization is that the person's duties slowly drop off. There is a jewel of a man inside this person.

"When I ate, the Kartabhaja woman said, 'Father, are you eating or feeding someone else?'

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1. Chaitanya.
2. Nityananda.
3. Kartabhaja.

"This feeling of 'I' hides the Reality. Narendra said, 'The more this "I" disappears, the more His "I" will appear.' Kedar says, 'The more clay there is in a pot, the less water is in it.'

"Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Brother, if you have even one occult power, you will not find Me.' You may gain some power, such as witchcraft[1] or healing, and they may do some good to people. What do you say? So I prayed to the Divine Mother to grant me pure love – I didn't ask for occult powers."

Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi when he is saying this to Balaram's father, Benipal, M., Mani Mallick and others. He sits there like a picture, outwardly unconscious.

When his samadhi is over, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing:

I have not found Him, friend, for whom I have gone mad.

Now he asks Ramlal to sing. Ramlal begins with a song about Gauranga's renunciation.

What an exquisite bright form of Sri Gauranga – his eyes streaming with the tears of love – did I see in Keshab Bharati's hut!

Gauranga dances mad, like an elephant. He sings and then rolls in the dust, tears streaming from his eyes.

He calls on Hari, weeping, piercing the mortal world and heavens with his thundering voice.

Then he prays repeatedly for liberation as a slave of God, with a straw between his teeth and palms joined together.

He wears the robe of a yogi, his locks of hair shaved.

1. Gutika siddhi.

One's heart cries to see him so charged with ecstatic love for God.[1]

Having renounced all, he has come to distribute it to all, overwhelmed as he is by the sorrows of mankind.

Premdas wishes to wander from door to door like a slave at the feet of Sri Chaitanya.

After singing about Chaitanya Deva's madness in ecstatic love, and with a hint from Thakur, Ramlal sings of the intoxicated state of the milkmaids:

Don't hold it, don't. Does a chariot move because of its wheels?

Hari is the master of this wheel – His will alone make the world move.

And then he sings:

What value is the colour of a cloud holding fresh water?

In comparison to it, the beauty of the moon of Shyam (Krishna) with flute in hand and a smile on his lips illumines the three worlds.

Chapter II

The untouchable caste becomes pure by Hari's name

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you develop love for Hari, you don't distinguish between castes." (*To Mani Mallick*): "Please tell that story about Tulsidas."

Mani Mallick: "A chatak bird is dying of thirst. It has the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Saraju and many other rivers and lakes, but it won't drink from any of these. It only waits with its mouth open

1. Prema.

for the rain drops of the svati constellation of stars."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's to say, only devotion for His lotus feet is the real thing, everything else is illusion."

Problem of untouchables – the untouchable is purified by the name of Hari

Mani Mallick: "There's something else, too, that Tulsidas said. By touching the philosopher's stone, the eight metals turn into gold. In the same way all castes, even a pariah, becomes pure by repeating Hari's name. As well, without the name of Hari, all four castes – brahmin, kshatriya, vaishnava and shudra – become impure like a tanner of hides."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A hide which is not supposed to be touched can be taken into the temple when it is tanned.

"A man is purified by God's name. That's why you should practice chanting God's name. I said to Jadu Mallick's mother, 'At the time of death, the worries of the world invade the mind – worries about the family, sons, children, writing out a will – come to mind. The thought of God will not come.' The remedy is to practice chanting and singing His name. If you do this, only His name will come to the lips at the time of death. When a bird is caught by a cat, it only squawks – 'Rama, Rama' doesn't come to it.

"You have to prepare for the time of death. Repeat His name and meditate on Him in solitude for the rest of your life. If an elephant is taken to

the stable after a bath, it won't get dirty again by mud and dust."

Balaram's father, Mani Mallick and Beni Pal are all aged. Is this why Thakur is instructing them like this, especially for their good?

Addressing the devotees, Sri Ramakrishna speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why do I ask you to meditate on Him and repeat His name in solitude? Living day and night in the world brings restlessness. Just see how brother kills brother and becomes a murderer for only one yard of land. The Sikhs say, 'All the confusion and lack of peace in the world are because of land, wife and money.'"

Ramachandra, the world and Yoga Vaishishtha – the mart of joy

"You're a family man, but what is the danger in that? When Rama said he'd renounce the world, Dasharatha [Rama's father] was very worried and he asked Vaishishtha's advice. Vaishishtha said to Rama, 'Rama, why do you want to renounce the world? Let's talk about it. Is the world without God? So what will you renounce and what will you take? Except for Him, nothing exists. He appears [or reveals Himself] in the form of 'the Lord, maya, individual souls and the universe.'"

Balaram's Father: "Very difficult!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "During the time of spiritual practice, the world is a snare. But when you've attained knowledge, when you've had His vision, the world becomes 'a mart of joy.'"

Seeing God in an incarnation – Chaitanya Deva, an incarnation of God

"The Vaishnava scriptures say, 'You meet Krishna by faith. Reasoning takes you far away from Him. Faith, faith alone!'

"What faith Krishnakishore had! In Vrindavan a low-caste man drew water from a well for him. He said to the man, 'Just say Shiva.' As soon as he had repeated the name of Shiva, Krishnakishore drank the water. He used to say, 'You have chanted the name of God. Why should you buy repentance by paying money? What's this?'

"Seeing people offer tulsi leaves to cure diseases, Krishnakishore was amazed.

"When someone mentioned his going to see a sadhu, Haladhari said, 'Why should I go see a case built of the five elements?' Very angry, Krishnakishore reported, 'Haladhari said this! He doesn't know that the body of the sadhu is made of Consciousness.'

"At the bathing ghat of the Kali Temple he said to us, 'Please bless me that I may pass my days repeating Rama's name.'

"Whenever I went to Krishnakishore's house, he would dance when he saw me.

"Rama said to Lakshmana, 'Brother, wherever you find burning love for God, know that I am there.'

"For example, Chaitanya Deva. He laughed, wept, danced and sang with ecstatic love for God.

Chaitanya Deva was a divine incarnation, God in human form."

Sri Ramakrishna sings:

Sri Gauranga, a treasure of ecstasy. In ecstasy he laughs, weeps, dances, sings and cries.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple – dance and ecstasy

Balaram's father, Mani Mallick, Beni Pal and others take their leave. The devotees of the Harisabha at Kansaripara had arrived after twilight. Sri Ramakrishna is dancing with them like an intoxicated elephant.

After dancing, he is absorbed in ecstasy. He says, "I myself will walk a little by myself."

Kishori wants to massage Sri Ramakrishna's feet while he's in ecstasy, but Sri Ramakrishna does not allow anybody to touch him then.

Ishan arrives after dusk. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting, absorbed in ecstasy. After awhile he talks to Ishan. Ishan wants to practice Gayatri purashcharana.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "Do what you have in mind. Are there doubts in your mind any more?"

Vedic path[1] is not for the age of Kali – the path of Tantra[2] is

Ishan: "I've decided to do an atonement ceremony."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Can't it be achieved by the path of Tantra? He who is Brahman is also Shakti, the Primal Power, and Kali. 'Having realized the reality of Kali-Brahman, I've renounced both religion and irreligion.'"[3]

Ishan: "In a hymn to Chandi, it is said that Brahman Itself is the Primal Power. Brahman and His Primal Power are inseparable."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It doesn't help to just say this. It'll be true when you've realized it. After spiritual practice and when the heart is purified, you will clearly know that He alone is the doer. He is the mind, the vital-breath, the intellect. We are only tools.

'You mire the elephant in mud

And make the lame cross the mountain.'

"When your heart is purified, you will realize that He makes you perform rituals like purashcharana. 'It is He who does His work, people say that they do it.'

"When you've attained God-realization, all doubts vanish. The devotee sits contentedly, like a

1. Nigam.
2. Agama: A religious philosophy according to which Shakti is usually the main deity worshipped and the universe is regarded as the divine play of Shakti and Shiva; it deals primarily with spiritual practices and ritual forms of worship.
3. Lines from a Bengali song.

boatman with the tiller in hand who has unfurled his sail when a favourable wind blows and is now enjoying a smoke."

When Ishan has left, Sri Ramakrishna talks with M. alone. He asks him, "What do you think of Narendra, Rakhal, Adhar and Hazra? Are they guileless? And what do you think of me?"

M. says, "You are simple and yet profound. It's very difficult to understand you."

Sri Ramakrishna laughs.

Section XII

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is immersed in samadhi most of the time. He only engages himself outwardly for the instruction of devotees like Rakhal – to awaken their spiritual consciousness.

Everyone is sitting in the verandah to the west of Thakur's room. Today is Tuesday, 4th of Pausha, the 4th of Agrahayana, 18 December 1883. Sri Ramakrishna is praising Devendranath Tagore for his renunciation and devotion to God. Looking at Rakhal and the other young devotees, Thakur says, "He is a good person, but those who never enter into worldly life and develop dispassion by meditating on God day and night from their very childhoods, like Sukadeva, are truly blessed.

"Worldly people nurse some desire or another in spite of themselves – even though they are clearly very devoted. Mathur Babu was entangled in a law-suit. He said to me, 'Father, make this offering of flowers to Mother Kali for me.'[1] I did it whole-heartedly.'

"And Rati's mother – she was so devoted. She used to come occasionally to serve me. She was a Vaishnava devotee. After a few days, as soon as she

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1. Mathur wanted to offer the flowers to the Divine Mother in order to win his law-suit.

noticed that I ate food consecrated to Mother Kali, she stopped coming. So orthodox she was! It's not possible to recognize such a single-track mind at first."

Sri Ramakrishna is seated near the eastern door of the room. It is winter. He is wrapped in a moleskin shawl. Suddenly he sees the sun and then loses all outer-consciousness.

> Is this the realization of the truth of the Gayatri mantra: We meditate on the glory of that Being who has produced this universe; may He enlighten our minds?[1]

After a long time, he comes out of samadhi. Rakhal, Hazra, M. and others are sitting near him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): "The feeling in samadhi is ecstatic love. One time in Shyambazar a kirtan was being performed in Natabar Goswami's house. I had a vision of Sri Krishna and the milkmaids and went into samadhi. I felt that my subtle body[2] was following at the heels of Sri Krishna.

"During a kirtan at the Harisabha at Jodasanki, I lost all consciousness of the outer world. I almost quit my body that day."

Sri Ramakrishna goes out for a bath. When he returns, he continues talking about the ecstatic love of the gopis. (*To Mani and others*) "You should accept the attraction of the gopis for Krishna and sing songs like these:

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1. tatsaviturvareṇyaṁ bhargo devasya dhīmahi
   ṛgaveda 3-62-10
2. Linga sharira.

Friend, how far is that forest where my Shyamasundar lives? I cannot walk any farther.

And:

O companion, I shall not go into a house where it is hard for me to chant the name of Krishna.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at the Sri Siddheshwari Temple in Thanthania

Sri Ramakrishna had vowed to offer sugar and green coconut to Sri Siddheshwari for Rakhal. He had asked Mani, "Will you pay for the sugar and coconut?"

In the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna, accompanied by Rakhal, Mani and some others, goes in a carriage to the Siddheshwari Temple. They pass through the Shimulia bazaar, where green coconut and sugar are bought.

When they reach the temple, he says to the devotees, "Break open a green coconut, put sugar on it, and offer it to the Divine Mother."

When they had first arrived at the temple, priests and their friends were playing cards in front of Mother Kali. Seeing this, Thakur had said to the devotees, "Look! Playing cards in a place like this! They should be thinking of God here."

Then they go to the house of Jadu Mallick. Several gentlemen are sitting with him.

Jadu says, "Come, please come." After polite enquiries, Sri Ramakrishna says, (*smiling*): "Why do you keep ridiculous courtiers with you?"

Jadu (*smiling*): "So that you may save them!" (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Flatterers have in mind that the rich man will give them money. But it's very difficult to extract money from a gentleman. A jackal met a bull and wouldn't leave its side. When the bull was out grazing, the jackal was with him. The jackal thought the testicles of the bull would fall some time or other and he could eat them. Even when the bull slept, the jackal slept next to him. When it rose to graze, the jackal was by its side. A few days passed this way but the testicles did not drop. Disappointed now, the jackal left the bull. (*All laugh.*) Flatterers meet the same fate."

Jadu and his mother treat Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees with refreshments.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with Mani – can one not have both knowledge and love of God?

Wednesday, 19 December 1883. Past nine o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna is talking with Mani in the Panchavati (see detailed account in Volume IV, Section VII).

Mani (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Can't you have both knowledge and love for God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A person with a very high spiritual ideal can have them both. God-men like Chaitanya Deva had both. But it's different with ordinary human beings.

"There are five kinds of light: the light of a lamp, the light from another kind of fire, the light

from the moon, the light of the sun and the light of the sun and moon together. Love for God is the moon, knowledge is the sun.

"Sometimes you can see the moon in the sky even before the sun has set. In an Incarnation of God and those like him, the moon of devotion and the sun of knowledge appear together.

"Can knowledge and love for God come in a single receptacle just by wishing for it? Only a special kind of person can possess both. Some bamboo has big holes and some very small. Is it possible for everybody to comprehend God within him? Is it possible for a one-seer pot to contain two seers of milk?"

Mani: "But what is not possible by His grace? If He bestows His grace, even a camel can pass through the eye of a needle."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Does He shower His grace just like that? When a beggar begs for a pice, it is given to him. But if he suddenly asks for railway fare, he is refused."

Mani stands there without saying a word. Sri Ramakrishna is also silent. Then suddenly he says, "Yes, no doubt. In the case of some they both come, just by His grace – both knowledge and love for God."

Leaving Thakur respectfully, Mani goes toward the bel tree.[1] It is afternoon when he returns. As he had been delayed, Sri Ramakrishna had started

1 The tree under which Sri Ramakrishna practiced the most austere sadhana; sometimes referred to as the "beltala."

toward the bel tree himself. He notices Mani returning with a carpet, asana, and a pot of water. Thakur meets him near the Panchavati. Mani prostrates before him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "I came to look for you. It was very late and I thought you might have run away by jumping over the wall. Seeing your eyes, I thought maybe you had run away like Narayan Shastri. Then I thought, No, he wouldn't run away. He thinks a great deal before he acts."

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna with Mani and other devotees

Again that night Sri Ramakrishna talks with Mani. Rakhal, Latu, Harish and others are present.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Well, some people give a metaphysical interpretation of Krishna in Vrindavan. What is your opinion?"

Mani: "There are different opinions. There's no harm in it. You told the story of Bhishma Deva. Before quitting his body, when he was lying on a bed of arrows he said, 'Why am I weeping? Not because of the pain. When I think that God Himself was the charioteer of Arjuna and yet so many troubles befell the Pandavas, I realize that I have not understood God's ways at all. That's why I weep.'

"And then you told us about Hanuman's saying, 'I don't know the day of the week or the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rama.'

"And you said that there is nothing else besides the two: Brahman and Shakti. You also said that when a person attains the knowledge of Brahman, both of them are felt to be one, only one without a second."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, certainly. You have to attain your goal, whether you go through a forest of thorns or along a good road.

"Of course, there are many opinions. The Naked One (Totapuri) said, 'Sadhus can't be fed together because of the difference of their views. Once a feast was arranged and sadhus from different sects went. Each sect insisted that their group be served first and the others later. No solution could be found. In the end, they all left. Prostitutes were served the food.'"

Mani: "Totapuri was a great man."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Hazra said, 'He was just ordinary.' No brother, there's no use in talking about it. Everybody says only his watch gives the correct time.

"Look what dispassion Narayan Shastri developed. Such a great scholar. He left his wife and disappeared. When a person has renounced lust and greed totally, he attains union with God. Some have the characteristics of a yogi.

"I'll have to tell you about the six spiritual centres. After piercing them, yogis attain God's vision by His grace. Have you heard about the six spiritual centres?"

Mani: "According to the Vedanta school of thought, there are seven planes."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not Vedanta. According to the Vedas. Do you know what the six centres are like? There are 'lotuses inside the subtle body'. Yogis can see them – like the leaves and fruits of a wax tree."

Mani: "Yes, sir. Yogis can see them. One book says that there is a kind of glass that magnifies a very small object, causing it to appear larger. In the same way these subtle lotuses can be seen."

Sri Ramakrishna has asked Mani to stay in the hut in the Panchavati. He spends the night there. At dawn he sings the following song alone in the hut:

O Gauranga, I am without austerity and prayer. Please purify this lowly person with Thy philosopher's stone.

My only thought is that I shall attain Thy feet.

O Gaur, I have not reached Thy feet – my days have passed in vainless hope and expectation.

Suddenly, he looks toward the window and sees Sri Ramakrishna standing there. Hearing, "Purify this lowly person with Thy philosopher's stone," his eyes are filled with tears.

And then Mani sings another song:

I shall put on the ochre robe and wear earrings of Mother of Pearl.

Having donned the robe of a yogini, I shall go to that region where hard-hearted Hari is.

Sri Ramakrishna walks on with Rakhal by his side.

The next day, Friday, 21 December, Sri Ramakrishna talks to Mani alone at the bel tree. He is talking about different secret spiritual practices and about renunciation of 'lust and greed'. He also talks about how the mind itself becomes the guru – he talks about things like this.

After his meal he comes to the Panchavati, wearing a beautiful yellow robe. Two or three Vaishnava sadhus arrive. One of them is a Baul. Thakur says to the Vaishnavas, "Please tell me the meaning of the string in your loin-cloth."

In the afternoon a monk of the order of Nanak[1] arrives. Harish and Rakhal are also present. The sadhu believes in the formless Absolute. Thakur asks him to meditate on God with form also.

Sri Ramakrishna says to the sadhu, "Dive, dive. You can't find jewels by swimming on the surface. God is without form but also with form. A person develops love quickly by meditating on God with form. Then you can meditate on the Formless again. It's like throwing away a letter after reading it – then he attends to the instructions of the letter."

Chapter V

At Dakshineswar with the devotees – Balaram's father and others

Today is Saturday, 22 December 1883. It is about nine in the morning. Balaram's father has arrived. Rakhal, Harish, M. and Latu are staying here. Devendra Ghosh of Shyampukur arrives. Sri Ramakrishna is

1. Nanakpanthi.

sitting with the devotees on the southeastern verandah.

A devotee asks him: "How do you develop love for God?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram's father and the other devotees*): "Go forward! The king sits beyond the seven gates. Only when you've passed through all the gates, can you see him.

"During the installation of Annapurna at Chanak (1874-75), I said to Dwaraka Babu, 'There are big fish in the deep water of a large pond. Drop bait for them. They will make a big splash when they smell it.' Ecstatic love – love and devotion – is the bait."

Sri Ramakrishna and the meaning of incarnation

"God plays as a human being. He incarnates in a man – for example, Sri Krishna, Ramachandra and Chaitanya Deva.

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'There is the greatest manifestation of God in man. There are small holes in the ridges on the edge of a [rice] field. They're called *ghutis*. Small fish and crab gather there. If you want to find them, you have to look in these holes. If you're looking for God, look for Him in an incarnation of God.

"'The Mother of the Universe manifests Herself in the person three and a half cubits tall. There is a song that goes:

What a machine Mother Kali has made!

In this machine, three and a half cubits high, what pranks She plays!

She Herself residing within pulls the string to make it move.

The machine thinks it moves by itself, knowing not who its operator is.

But the machine who knows it is She will be a machine no more.

And Mother Shyama Herself will be tied with the string of love.

"But you have to practice spiritual disciplines if you want to realize God and to recognize an incarnation. There are big fish in a large pond. You have to throw bait for them. Milk contains butter, but you have to churn it. Mustard contains oil – but it has to be pressed to extract the oil. Henna makes a palm red – but you have to grind it first."

Sri Ramakrishna and the worship of the Formless

A Devotee (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Well! Is God formless or with form?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Wait. First go to Calcutta, then you'll know where Fort Maidan is and where the Asiatic society is and where the Bengal Bank is.

"If you want to go to the brahmin quarter in Khardaha, you have to first reach Khardaha.

"Why shouldn't it be possible to practice discipline of the formless? But it is very difficult. You can't practice it without renouncing 'lust and greed' – both outwardly and inwardly. You won't succeed if there is even a trace of worldly calculation.

"Worship of God with form is easier. But it's not that easy.

"You shouldn't talk to devotees about the spiritual disciplines of God without form, of the path of knowledge. It's only with a great deal of difficulty that a person develops a little love for God. Calling everything a dream can harm devotional feelings.

"Kavirdas believed in the formless God. He didn't believe in Shiva, Kali or Krishna. He used to say, 'Kali eats rice and bananas and Krishna danced like a monkey when the milkmaids clapped.' (*Everybody laughs.*)

"A worshipper of the formless perhaps first sees the ten-armed one and then the four-armed one. Then he sees the two-armed Gopala. Finally he sees the indivisible light and is merged in it.

"Dattatreya and Jadabharata didn't return after the vision of Brahman – so it is said.

"According to one belief, Sukadeva tasted only a drop of that ocean of Brahman. He saw and heard the play of the waves on the ocean – but he didn't dive into it.

"A brahmachari said to me, 'If you go beyond Kedar, your body will not survive.' Similarly, the body doesn't survive after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. The body dies in twenty-one days.

"There is a boundless plain on the other side of the wall. Four friends tried to see what was on the other side. Each one of them climbed the wall and, after seeing the field, fell into it laughing, exclaiming, 'Ah! Aha!' The first three didn't come back to give a report. Only one of them did. His body survived even after attaining the knowledge of

Brahman – in order to teach people. For example, Divine Incarnations.

"Parvati was born as the daughter of King Himalaya.[1] She began to show her different forms to her father. Himalaya said, 'Daughter, I have seen all these forms. But you also have the form of Brahman. Please show that to me.' Parvati said, 'Father, if you want the knowledge of Brahman, you will have to renounce the world and keep the company of sadhus.'

"But Himalaya would not give up beseeching her. So Parvati showed him her Brahman form. No sooner did he see it than he fainted."

Sri Ramakrishna and bhakti yoga

"All that I have said is a matter of deliberation. 'Only Brahman is real and the world an illusion' is the idea – that everything is a dream! It's a very hard path. In this path God's play is like a dream and so unreal. The 'I' also vanishes. In this path an incarnation of God is not accepted. Very difficult. Devotees shouldn't listen to much of such ideas.

"The reason God incarnates is to teach and cultivate love of God. He tells us to accept Him as a refuge. When a person has love for God and devotion to Him, everything happens by His grace – knowledge and vijnana, everything.

"He plays. He is under control of the devotee."

Mother Shyama has tied Herself with the string of love.

1. The king of the mountains.

"Sometimes God is the magnet and the devotee is the needle. At other times the devotee becomes the magnet and God the needle. A devotee attracts Him. The devotee has the gracious loving Lord under his control.

"According to one belief, Yashoda and the other milkmaids were believers of the Formless in earlier incarnations. They were not satisfied with that. So they enjoyed sporting with Sri Krishna at Vrindavan. One day Sri Krishna said, 'I'll show you the Eternal Abode.[1] Let's go to Jamuna for a bath. As soon as they dove into the water, they saw Goloka, and then the Indivisible Light.' Yashoda said, 'O Krishna, I don't want to see all this anymore. I only want to see Your human form. I want to take You in my arms and feed You.'

"That's why God is more manifest in His incarnation. As long as an incarnation of God lives in a human form, he should be worshipped and served.

O Brother, he will hide himself in the morning, in that secret chamber within.

"Not everyone can recognize an incarnation of God. Assuming a body, disease, sorrow, hunger and thirst, all invade him. He appears like any one of us. Rama wept in sorrow at his separation from Sita.

Bound by the five elements, even Brahman laments.

"It is said in the Puranas, 'After killing Hiranyaksha, God[2] lived happily with its young

1. Nityadham.
2. Vishnu as the Boar Incarnation.

ones, suckling them. (*Everybody laughs.*) He didn't think at all of returning to His own heavenly abode. At last Shiva came and killed the body with a trident and God, laughing out loud, returned to His abode.'"

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna with Bhavanath, Mani, Latu and others

It is afternoon. Bhavanath has arrived. Rakhal, M., Harish and others are in the room. It is Saturday, 22 December 1883.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhavanath*): "It's enough if you develop love for an incarnation of God. Oh, what love the milkmaids had!"

Saying this, Thakur assumes the attitude of the milkmaids and sings:

Shyam, You are the soul of my soul.

And:

My companion, I will not go home.

Again:

The other day I was standing at the door. Friends, you were going to the wood.

I wish I were a cowboy carrying your load on my head.

"When Sri Krishna disappeared in the midst of the dancing, the milkmaids became mad [with grief]. Seeing a tree, they said to it, 'Maybe you are a hermit. You've surely seen Sri Krishna. If not, how could you have become so immobile, absorbed in samadhi?' Seeing the ground covered with grass,

they said to the ground, 'O, surely you have seen him. If not, why does your hair stand on end? Surely, you have tasted the joy of his touch.' And seeing a madhavi creeper, they said, 'O madhavi, give us Madhava.' The milkmaids are mad with divine love.

"When Akrur arrived, Sri Krishna and Balaram got into his chariot to go to Mathura. The milkmaids caught hold of its wheels. They would not let it move."

After saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sings again:

Don't hold the wheels of the chariot. Please do not.

Does this chariot move because of the wheels?

It is Hari who is the charioteer – He who moves the world moves the chariot.

Sri Ramakrishna: "'Does this chariot move because of its wheels?' – I like that very much. 'He who moves the world moves the chariot' – the charioteer moves the chariot by His command."

Section XIII

Sri Ramakrishna with the Devotees in Ram Chandra's Garden House

Chapter I

Today Sri Ramakrishna is going to visit Ram Chandra's new garden. It is Wednesday, 26 December 1883.

Ram adores Thakur and considers him an incarnation of God. Every now and then he goes to Dakshineswar to see Thakur and worship him. He has bought a new garden close to Surendra's garden house. Sri Ramakrishna is going to see it.

Manilal Mallick, M. and one or two other devotees are seated in the carriage with Thakur. Manilal Mallick is a Brahmo devotee. The Brahmos don't believe in divine incarnation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Manilal*): "If you want to meditate on God, you should first try to meditate on the attributeless. He is without attributes, beyond mind and speech. But it's very difficult to become expert in such meditation.

"He incarnates Himself as a man. It is very easy then to practice meditation – Narayana in man. The body is only a veil, like a lantern with a light burning inside. Or like seeing valuable things in a glass case."

Alighting from the carriage, Sri Ramakrishna first goes with Ram and the devotees to see the tulsi grove in the garden.

Standing there, Thakur says, "O, it's a beautiful place. You can meditate on God very nicely here."

Now he goes to a room south of the pond and sits down. Ram Chandra has grapes, oranges and some sweetmeats on a plate for him. Thakur enjoys them with the devotees.

In a little while he walks around the whole garden.

Next he starts toward Surendra's garden, which is nearby. He walks a little, and before he climbs into the carriage to continue on, Sri Ramakrishna notices a sadhu sitting alone on a cot under a tree in the next garden. As soon as he saw him, he went to the sadhu and talks happily with him in Hindi.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the sadhu*): "To which order of sadhus do you belong? Are you from the Giri or Puri Order?"

Sadhu: "People call me a paramahamsa."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Very good, great indeed. It's nice to have the attitude 'I am Shiva.'[1] But then, it's also true – creation, preservation and dissolution go on day and night by His power. The Primal Power and the Absolute are inseparable. Without Brahman there is no Power, as there cannot be a wave without water, or music without an instrument.

"As long as He keeps us in the phenomenal world, we have a feeling of duality. But when you speak of power, you speak of Brahman – like being aware of day when you are aware of night.

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1. Shivoham.

"In another state, He shows us that the Absolute is beyond knowledge and ignorance. This cannot be expressed in words. What is, is."

It is after this nice conversation that Sri Ramakrishna goes back to the carriage. The sadhu accompanies him, arm in arm, like a long-time friend. When Thakur gets into the carriage, the sadhu returns to his place.

Next Sri Ramakrishna comes to Surendra's garden. Sitting with the devotees, the first thing he talks about is the sadhu.

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is a very good person. (*To Ram*) When you come to Dakshineswar the next time, bring him. He's a superior sadhu. There's a song that says that unless you're simple yourself, you can't recognize another simple man.

"He believes in God without form – that's all right. God is both formless and with form – and much more! The Absolute belongs to the same One that the phenomenal belongs. That which is beyond mind and speech takes different forms, incarnates and enters into various activities. From the same Om have come 'Om Shiva', 'Om Kali' and 'Om Krishna'. The master of a house sent a small boy of the family to invite people for a feast. What respect they showed him because he was the son or grandson of an important person."

After having refreshments at Surendra's, Sri Ramakrishna proceeds toward Dakshineswar with the devotees.

Chapter II

Thakur in Dakshineswar among devotees, Tantrik and others

Today is Wednesday, 2 January 1884, 19th day of Pausha, the 4th day of the bright fortnight, 1290 (B.Y.).

Sri Ramakrishna is in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar in the company of devotees. Staying with him at the time are Rakhal, Latu, Harish, Ramlal and M.

It is 3 o'clock. Returning from the bel tree, Mani walks toward Sri Ramakrishna's room to see him. He is sitting on the western verandah with a Tantrik devotee.

Mani comes and salutes him by prostrating on the ground. Thakur asks him to sit near him. Perhaps he wishes to teach him while he talks to the Tantrik devotee. Mahima Chakravarti has sent the Tantrik devotee to Thakur. The devotee wears ochre.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the Tantrik*): "It's part of Tantrik discipline to drink wine from a human skull. Isn't the wine called karana?"

Tantrik: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Eleven cups – isn't that right?"

The Tantrik: "Three tolas for spiritual discipline with a corpse."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But I can't even touch wine."

Tantrik: "You have spontaneous bliss.[1] Attaining such bliss, a person needs nothing else."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And please note that I don't even like japa and austerities. But I have constant remembrance and recollection of Him. Well, what are the six spiritual centres?"

Tantrik: "Sir, they are like places of pilgrimage. Shiva and Shakti reside in each spiritual centre, though they are invisible – you can't take them out by cutting into the body. The stalk of the lotus is the Shivalinga. The Primal Power is in the pistil of the vulva-shaped lotus."

Mani listens to the conversation silently. Glancing at him, Sri Ramakrishna asks the Tantrik devotee, "Well, can a person attain perfection without being initiated with a seed mantra?"[2]

Tantrik: "It's possible by faith – faith in the words of the guru."

Sri Ramakrishna (*turning to Mani and calling his attention*): "Faith!"

After the Tantrik devotee has left, Jaygopal Sen, a Brahmo, comes in. Sri Ramakrishna talks with him. Rakhal, Mani and other devotees are seated near them. It is afternoon.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Jaygopal*): "A person shouldn't entertain malice toward any person or belief. Believers in the formless as well as believers in God with form are going toward Him – whether it's a jnani, a yogi, or a devotee, they're all looking

1. Sahajananda.
2. Bija.

for Him. On the path of knowledge, He's called Brahman. Yogis call Him Atman, Paramatman. Devotees call Him Bhagavan, Lord. And then also 'eternal-god', 'eternal-servant'."

Jaygopal: "How can we know that all paths are true?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A person can attain God by following any one path properly. Then he can learn about all the other paths. It's like climbing up to a roof, whether you do it by a wooden ladder or brick steps or even by a rope.

"When God's grace descends, a devotee can know everything. You will know everything once you realize Him. You have to meet the landlord by whatever means possible – you have to talk to him. The he himself will tell you how many gardens, ponds and company securities he has."

The way to realize God

Jaygopal: "How do you receive God's grace?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have to chant His name and glories constantly. You have to renounce worldly thoughts as much as possible. You may have brought water to your field to irrigate it with great difficulty, but it is lost if there are holes in the ridge of the field – all the labour of digging a channel to the field is wasted.

"When your mind is purified and you are rid of attachment to the world, you will feel yearning for God and your prayer will reach God. If a telegraph wire is damaged by something or there is a break in it, you can't send a message.

"I used to weep all alone, full of yearning. I'd cry, 'Where are You Narayan?' While I cried, I would lose consciousness – and get merged in the Mahavayu.[1]

"How can union with God be attained? If there is no damage to the telegraph wire – no break – you achieve union. You must rid yourself of worldly attachment completely.

"You must not entertain any desire. If you have a craving, your love for God is selfish.[2] Devotion without desire[3] is love for its own sake[4] – whether or not you love me, I still love you. This is called love for its own sake.

"The basic thing is to love God. When you've developed intense love, you will see God. When these three things are combined into one – the attraction of a chaste wife for her husband, the love of a mother for her child, and the attachment of a worldly person for things of the world – you will have the vision of God."

Jaygopal is a businessman. Is that why Sri Ramakrishna thinks these instructions might be useful to him?

1. Cosmic Consciousness or the life force; a word also used to denote the spiritual current in the spinal column when the Kundalini is awakened.
2. Sakama.
3. Nishkama bhakti.
4. Ahetuki bhakti.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna tells Mani not to reason any more

Today is Friday, 4 January 1884. It is four o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting at the Panchavati smiling. With him are Mani, Haripada and some others. He is talking with Haripada about Hiranda Chatterji and about the spiritual practices of the Ghoshpara sect.

Sri Ramakrishna returns to his room. Mani, Haripada, Rakhal and other devotees are there. Mani has been spending a good deal of time under the bel tree.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Don't reason any more. It harms you in the end. You must assume one particular attitude when you call on God – the attitude of a friend, of a maidservant, or a child or a hero.

"I have the attitude of a child. When the goddess of maya notices this attitude, she moves out of the way in shame.

"The heroic attitude is very difficult. The Shaktas and the Vaishnava bauls practice this attitude. It is very difficult to remain correct with this attitude. Besides, there are the attitudes of serenity, of a servant or friend, as well as the filial attitude.[1]

(*To Mani*) "Which attitude do you like best?"

Mani: "I like all of them."

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1. Shanta, dasya, sakhya and vatsalya.

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's only in the state of perfection that a person likes all these attitudes. In that state, there is no trace of lust. The story of Chandidas and the washerwoman Rajakini is in the Vaishnava scriptures. Their love had no trace of lust.

"In that state a man has the disposition of a female – he no longer has the feeling of being a man. Rupa Goswami refused to see Mirabai because she was a woman. Mira sent the message: 'Sri Krishna is the only male, everyone else in Vrindavan are his maidservants. Was it right for the Goswami to nurse the ego of a male?'"

At dusk Mani sits again at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. A message has been received that Keshab Sen's disease has taken a turn for the worse. In connection with this, the subject of the Brahmo Samaj comes up.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Well, are there only lectures there? Do they also practice meditation? Maybe they call it worship.

"Earlier in his life Keshab studied the Christian religion and faith deeply. At that time and before that, he was associated with Devendra Thakur (Tagore)."

Mani: "If Keshab Babu had come here from the beginning, he wouldn't have been so busy with social reform. He wouldn't have given so much thought to removing the caste system and widow remarriage, inter-caste marriage, female education and such social concerns."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Keshab now believes in Kali – the embodiment of knowledge and consciousness – the Primal Power. He chants Her name and glories crying, 'Mother, Mother.'

"Well, do you think the Brahmo Samaj will continue to exist as a sort of social reform movement?"

Mani: "This isn't the tradition in this country. The correct thing will take root here."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, the Sanatana Dharma[1] – that which the rishis taught – will last. But the Brahmo Samaj and other such sects will also continue in some form. Everything comes and goes by God's will."

A number of devotees came from Calcutta in the afternoon. They sang many songs for Thakur. One of the songs says:

> Mother, You have made us forget by giving us a red pap.[2]
> When we throw away the pap and cry for You, You will certainly come running to us.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "They only sang about red paps."

Mani: "Sir, you talked about them with Keshab Sen."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. But I also talked about the Sky of Consciousness and many other things. We enjoyed ourselves singing and dancing."

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1. The Eternal Religion.
2. Pacifier.

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Manilal and other devotees

Chapter I

Today is Sunday, 9 March 1884, 27th day of Falgun. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple with several devotees – Manilal Mallick, Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi, Balaram, M., Bhavanath, Rakhal, Latu, Adhar, Mahimacharan, Harish, Kishori Gupta, Shivachandra and others. Girish, Kali and Subodh have not yet arrived. Sashi and Sarat have visited Thakur only once or twice, Purna and the Younger Naren have not yet met him.

Sri Ramakrishna's arm is in a splint. He broke it when he fell down near a railing in a state of ecstasy. It was only a short time ago and his arm is giving him constant pain. But even in this condition, he is often merged in samadhi or speaks to the devotees of deep eternal truths.

One day while he was crying with pain, he suddenly went into samadhi. When he returned to the normal state of consciousness, he said to Mahimacharan and some other devotees, "Babu, if you haven't realized Sat-chit-ananda, you have achieved nothing. It can't happen without deep longing." I used to weep and call out, "O friend of the humble, I am without spiritual effort – but you have to grant me Your vision!"

Mahimacharan, Adhar, M. and others are now sitting with Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan and the others*): "There is a kind of love for God that is

completely unselfish.[1] You can perfect it in your life – if you can practice it!"

(*To Adhar*): "Can you stroke this arm a little?"

Manilal Mallick and Bhavanath talk about the exhibition which took place near the Asiatic Museum in 1883-84. They say, "So many kings had sent precious things to it – golden bed and so on – worth seeing."

Sri Ramakrishna, wealth and splendour

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to the devotees*): "Yes, a person can gain a lot by going to exhibits. Seeing such valuable articles and other belongings of the rajas and maharajas, you develop repulsion for them. This in itself is a great gain.

"When I used to go to Calcutta, Hriday would show me the residence of the Governor General. He'd say, 'Uncle, just look at the palace of the Viceroy with its big pillars.' The Mother showed me that it was just clay bricks placed one on top of another.

"The Lord and His splendour. Splendour only lasts two days or so. Only God is true. Think of a magician and his magic. Seeing the tricks, everybody is amazed – but it is all illusion. The magician alone is true. Or take a rich man and his garden. Seeing the garden, you should try to meet its owner."

Mani Mallick (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "And what an amount of electric light they've put in it! Seeing

1. Ahetuki bhakti.

it, you feel how great whoever invented electric light is."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Manilal*): "One idea is that He Himself has become everything that you see. And the person who says it is also He – God, maya, the individual soul, and the universe."

Now they talk about the museum.

Sri Ramakrishna and the company of the holy – the picture of a yogi

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Once I went to the museum. I saw that everything there had turned into brick or stone – animals had become transformed into fossils. I saw what can happen as the result of company. Like that, by keeping the company of holy people, a person becomes like them."

Mani Mallick (*smiling*): "By going there (to the exhibition) only once, you have material to teach us for ten to fifteen years."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What, for example?"

Balaram: "No. If you go around here and there and everywhere, your arm won't heal."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I'd like to have two pictures – one of a yogi sitting near a sacred fire. And the other of a yogi pulling deeply on a chillum of hemp, with the coals of his pipe blazing up.

"Such images are very inspiring. Like an imitation custard apple. Seeing it, you're reminded of a real one.

"But there are obstacles to union with God – 'lust and greed'. When the mind is purified, it attains union with God. The seat of the mind is in the forehead[1] – but attention remains tied to the organs of generation and evacuation – in other words, to 'lust and greed'. Through spiritual practices, the mind turns upward.

"What spiritual practice turns the mind up? You come to understand this by keeping the constant company of holy people.

"The rishis lived either alone or in the company of sadhus. That's why they could renounce 'lust and greed' and unite their minds to God effortlessly. They rid themselves of fear and fault-finding.

"You must pray to God to give you the ability to renounce – to enable you to give up immediately what appears to be an illusion.

"The rishis had this ability. They conquered their senses because of it. When a tortoise pulls in its limbs, it doesn't let them out even if you cut it into four pieces.

"A worldly man is a hypocrite. He's not guileless. He'll say, 'I love God,' but he doesn't give God even the least attraction he has for worldly things, the love he has for 'lust and gold'. All the while saying he loves God.

(*To Mani Mallick*): "Give up hypocrisy."

Manilal: "About men or about God?"

1. The ajna chakra, between the eyebrows.

Sri Ramakrishna: "In every way. Regarding everything, man as well as God. You must not be hypocritical.

"How guileless Bhavanath is! After his marriage he came to me and said, 'Why do I have so much affection for my wife?' Oh, he is so guileless!

"Why wouldn't a man feel love for his wife? She is the world-bewitching maya of the Mother of the Universe. A man begins to think of his wife as if no one in the whole world is equal to her – she is one's own in life and death, in this life and hereafter.

"How much a man suffers because of his wife! Even then, he thinks she has no parallel. What a terrible thing! A salary of twenty rupees a month and he already has three children. He doesn't have the means to feed them properly. The roof of his house leaks, but there is no money to repair it. He can't afford a new book for his son. He can't celebrate his son's sacred thread ceremony, but has to beg eight annas from here and another eight from there.

"Only a wife with spiritual qualities is a real partner in life. She helps her husband to advance toward God. They live like brother and sister after having one or two children. Both are devotees of God – His servant and His maid. Their family is a spiritual family. They know that God alone is one's own – one's own for eternity. Don't ever forget Him, in happiness or in sorrow – like the Pandavas."

Worldly devotee and devotee who has renounced

"For worldly people, the love of God is only momentary, like water dropped on a burning pan. It dries up right away, *pssht*!

"The mind of worldly people is attached to sense pleasures. So it doesn't have that love, that restlessness for God.

"The *ekadashi* fast on the eleventh day of the lunar month is of three kinds. One, without water, – even water is not drunk. This is the fast of an all-renouncing mendicant. He has completely renounced all enjoyment. Second, a person can take milk and sweets made of milk. It's like a devotee who keeps a few things of enjoyment in his house. Third, the devotee eats luchi and vegetables to his fill. He may even keep two chapattis soaked in milk to eat later on.

"People practice spiritual disciplines, but their minds remain tied to 'lust and greed'. That's why they don't get results from their practices.

"Hazra used to practice a lot of japa and austerities here. But he had a wife and children in the country, and a piece of land. While he practiced japa, in his mind he was engaged in the business of a broker. Such people can't stick to their word. One minute they may say they won't eat fish, but then the next minute they eat it.

"What won't a person do for the sake of money! He can even make a brahmin and a sadhu carry a load for him.

"Sandesh may become rotten, but I couldn't give it to such people. I can use water from the toilet can of other people, but I can't touch the can of worldly people.

"Seeing a rich man, Hazra would welcome him. He'd call out to him and talk to him. And he'd say to him, 'You see Rakhal and the others. They don't practice austerities or japa. They just wander around talking.

"There may be a person living in a cave in the hills with his body covered with ashes, and he may observe fasts and practice different kinds of austerities, but if his mind is on worldly things inwardly, on 'lust and greed,' I say 'fie on him!' On the other hand, if a person eats, drinks and wanders around here and there but his mind is not on 'lust and greed,' I call him blessed."

(*Pointing to Mani Mallick*) "He doesn't have a picture of a holy man in his house. Pictures of sadhus awaken divine feelings."

Manilal: "Yes, I do. Nandini[1] has a picture in her room of a European woman praying. And there's another picture. A man is holding to the Rock of Faith. There's a bottomless sea below him. By losing hold of faith, he'd fall into the water and drown. And there's another picture. Some girls are keeping vigil with their lamps filled with oil, waiting for the bridegroom.[2] Anyone who falls

1. The widowed daughter of Mani Mallick and a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna.
2. St. Matthew 25:1 – "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lantern, and went forth to meet the bridegroom."

asleep will not be able to see the bridegroom when he arrives. Here, the bridegroom stands for God."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "That's very good."

Manilal: "There are other pictures too – one of the Tree of Faith and the other of Sin and Virtue."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhavanath*): "These are all beautiful pictures. You must go see them."

After awhile Sri Ramakrishna says, "I think about these things sometimes, and then I don't like all that. In the beginning you can talk about sin and how to be free from it. But, if by God's grace, you begin to feel love for Him, you develop devotion, you forget all about sin and virtue. Then you go beyond injunctions and scriptures. You no longer feel you have to bother about penance and repentance.

"It's like reaching your destination by a winding river, taking a long time and with great difficulty. But if the water rises in flood, you reach your destination by a straight path, without difficulty and in a short time. Then there is pole-deep water even on dry land.

"In the early stages you have to go around and about and face a lot of difficulties. But when you develop intense love for God, the path becomes straight. It's like choosing any direction to cross a field after the paddy has been harvested. Before, you had to go around and along the ridge of the field, but now you can go any way you like. Even if there is stubble, you can put on shoes to walk across. If you have discrimination, non-attachment

and faith in the words of the guru, you won't have any trouble."

Sri Ramakrishna and Dhyana Yoga, Vishnu Yoga – meditation on the Formless and God with form

Manilal (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Well, what is the rule for meditation? Where should one meditate?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The heart is the most well-known place. You can meditate either there or in the Sahasrara.[1] These are rules for meditation according to the scriptures. But you can meditate wherever you want. Every place is filled with Brahman. Where is Brahman not present?

"When Narayana, in Vali's presence, covered the heavens, the earth and the nether-world in three steps, did any place remain uncovered? Whether it is the bank of the Ganges or a dirty place, they are equally holy. Besides, it's said that everything you see is His Universal Image.[2]

"Meditation on the Formless and on God with-form. To meditate on the Formless is very difficult. In that meditation whatever you may see or hear will melt away; then you will contemplate your true Self. Contemplating his own Self, Shiva dances. He dances, exclaiming, 'Who am I, who am I?' This is called Shiva Yoga. While meditating, your gaze should be fixed on the forehead. You must give up the world and meditate on your real Self after confirming, 'Not this, not this.'

1. The thousand-petalled lotus at the top of the head.
2. Virat.

"And then there is Vishnu Yoga. You fix your sight on the tip of your nose – half within, the other half on the world. Meditation on God with form is like this.

"Shiva sometimes dances when meditating on God with form. Then he exclaims, 'Rama, Rama!'"

Chapter II

The state after realization of God

Manilal Mallick is an old member of the Brahmo Samaj. Bhavanath, Rakhal and M. sometimes go there. Sri Ramakrishna is explaining 'Omkar,' and the stage after the knowledge of Brahman and the vision of Brahman.

The anahata sound[1] and the supreme state

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Sound Brahman.[2] Rishis and sages used to practice austerities to hear this sound. When you attain perfection, you hear it rising automatically from the navel.

"Some ask, 'What is the use of just hearing this sound?' You can hear the sound of waves from a distance. If you follow the sound, you will reach the ocean – when there is the sound of waves, the ocean must be near. By following the anahata sound, you reach Brahman, which is what it indicates. That is called the supreme state.[3] But as long as you are

1. Om.
2. Shabda.
3. yatra nādo vilīyate [where the nada ends.]
tadviṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padaṁ sadā paśyanti sūrayaḥ
ṛgaveda saṁhitā 1-23-20

conscious of your I-ness, you cannot have this kind of perception. It is possible only when there is neither 'I,' nor you, nor many."

Union of individual soul and supreme soul

"Just imagine the sun and ten pitchers of water. You see the reflection of the sun in every pitcher. At first you see one sun and ten reflected suns. If nine pitchers break, there remains only one sun and a reflected one. Each of the pitchers is like an individual soul. Following the reflection, we can reach the true sun – from the individual soul to the supreme soul. The individual soul can have the vision of the supreme soul if he practices spiritual disciplines. But if you break the last pitcher, what remains cannot be described.

"At first the embodied soul is ignorant – it is not aware of God, but is aware of many things. When knowledge arises, it feels that God is in all things. It's like taking out a thorn that's stuck in your foot by finding another thorn to take it out. It's taking out the thorn of ignorance with the thorn of knowledge. And when you attain vijnana, you throw away both thorns – the one of ignorance as well as the one of knowledge. In that state you don't merely have a vision of God, but you converse with God day and night.

"A person who has only heard about milk is ignorant. One who has seen it has acquired some

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[Just as the eye perceives the universe in the vast expanse of the sky, the illumined souls too have the clear perception of that supreme state of Vishnu, the all-pervading Reality.]

knowledge. But the one who has become strong after drinking milk has attained vijnana."

Perhaps Thakur is now explaining his own state of mind to the devotees. By describing the state of a vijnani, he may be describing his own state.

Sri Ramakrishna's state of mind, told by himself – the state after attaining God's vision

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "There is a difference between a sadhu who is a jnani and a sadhu who is a vijnani. The way a jnani sadhu sits is very different. He twirls his moustache. When somebody comes to see him, he says, 'What's brought you here, sir? Have you any questions?'

"Those who see God constantly and talk to Him are vijnanis. They have a different nature. One moment they are inert, another moment they act like a ghoul, and sometimes childlike, other times like a madman.

"Such a person loses all outward consciousness when he goes into samadhi. He becomes inert. He sees everything filled with Brahman, so he behaves like a ghoul. He's not conscious of purity and impurity. He can eat a plum at the same time he defecates – like a child. When he soils himself at night, he doesn't feel polluted, knowing that the body is made from semen.

"He's not aware of urination and defecation. For him everything is filled with Brahman. Rice and dal become filthy like faeces to him when they turn bad.

"Then again he acts like a madman. Noticing his conduct, people think he's insane.

"And sometimes he acts like a child, free from all bonds – shame, hatred, hesitation, and so on.

"This is the state that comes with God-realization. It's like a ship sailing near a magnetic hill. All the screws and nails of the ship are loosened. With God-realization, lust, anger, etc. vanish.

"I noticed that the screws lost their heads when lightning hit Mother Kali's temple.

"A person who has seen God is no longer able to continue creation by begetting children. When you sow rice you get plants, but boiled rice won't yield plants.

"Those who have realized God retain their 'I' only in name. It can't do any harm. It exists only in name, like the mark left by a fallen coconut branch. The branch has fallen – only its mark remains.

The 'I' when God is realized – Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab Sen

(*To the devotees*) "I said to Keshab Sen, 'Give up your "I" – renounce the consciousness that you are the doer, that you teach men.' Keshab Sen said, 'Sir, then I will lose my organization!' I said, 'Renounce the rascal 'I'.'

"You don't have to give up the feeling that you are God's servant, that you are God's devotee. But as long as the rascal 'I' remains, you can't do this.

"When there is a man in charge of the storeroom, the master doesn't take responsibility for the food in it."

Sri Ramakrishna – God's play as a human being and the essence of an incarnation

(*To the devotees*) "Look, because I've hurt my arm, my temperament is changing. Now I see that God is more manifest in man. It's as if He's saying, 'I reside in human beings. Enjoy yourself in their company.'

"He is more manifest in pure devotees – that's why I long so much for Narendra, Rakhal and others like them.

"You find small holes at the edge of lakes. Fish and crab collect in those holes – just as God is more manifest in man.

"They say that a man is even greater than the Shalagram, Nara-Narayana.[1] If God manifests Himself in an image, why can't He manifest Himself in man?

"He appears as a man to play as a human being – for example Ramachandra, Sri Krishna, Chaitanya Deva. When you meditate on an incarnation, you meditate on God."

Bhagavan Das, a Brahmo devotee, arrives.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhagavan Das*): "The rishis followed the Eternal Religion.[2] It has existed since eternity and will continue forever. Whether with form or without form, it is the Eternal Religion.

1. An emblem of Vishnu.
2. Sanatana Dharma.

There is the path of knowledge and the path of devotion. Other modern religions will last for a few days and then disappear."

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar – Phalaharini Puja and the Vidyasundar Musical Theatrical Performance

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Rakhal,[1] Adhar, Hari[2] and other devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room. It is eleven o'clock. Rakhal, M. and some other devotees are present. The Phalaharini Kali Puja was celebrated last night. A musical theatrical performance of Vidyasundar played in the natmandir late at night. Sri Ramakrishna had watched a little of it when he went to visit the Mother in the temple in the morning. After the actors took their baths, they came to see Sri Ramakrishna.

It is Saturday, 24 May 1884, 12th of Jaishtha, a new moon day.[3]

The fair-skinned young man who had played the role of Vidya had acted his part really well. Sri Ramakrishna happily talks to him about spiritual things. The devotees listen intently to the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the actor who played Vidya*): "Your acting was beautiful. Anybody who is

1. Later Swami Brahmananda.
2. Later Swami Turiyananda.
3. Amavasya.

good at singing or playing musical instruments or dancing, or good at any art, can realize God quickly if he makes the effort.

Advice to the people associated with the play and the soldiers of Chanak – the yoga of practice – remember death

"You should practice concentrating the mind on God as hard as you practice singing, playing musical instruments and dance. You have to practice worship, japa and meditation regularly.[1]

"Are you married? Do you have children?"

Vidya: "Sir, I lost a daughter. I have another child."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You had her and already lost her. You're so young! As the saying goes, 'The husband died in the evening. How long shall I cry into the night?' (*All laugh.*)

"You have experienced worldly happiness. It's like a hog-plum, only pit and skin. If you eat it, you'll get an upset stomach.

"It's fine that you work with a troupe. But there is trouble in that too. You are very young now, so you have a round face. After a time, it will wrinkle. People connected with the theatre are all like that: with hollows in their cheeks and big bellies and a band of strings on their arms.[2]

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1. abhyāsayogena tato māmicchāptuṁ dhanañjaya
gītā 12-9
[…then by abhyasa-yoga, you seek to reach Me, O Dhananjaya.]
2. Amulets or armlets.

"Why did I watch the Vidyasundar play? I noticed that the beat, the rhythm and the music were beautiful. Then the Divine Mother showed me that Narayana had assumed the forms of the actors."

Vidya: "Sir, what is the difference between lust[1] and desire[2]?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Lust is like the root of a tree and desires are like its branches and leaves.

"These six enemies – lust, anger, greed and the rest – will not go away entirely. That's why you have to turn them towards God. If you have to nurse a desire, if you have to be greedy, then desire love for God and be greedy for Him. If you have to be ego-centered, if you have to be proud, be intoxicated with the idea and proud of the fact that you are a servant of God, a child of God.

"Unless you give your whole mind to Him, you can't reach Him."

Union with God comes when desire for worldly enjoyment is over – brotherly love and the world

"The mind's energies are wasted on 'lust and greed'. Look, you have a son and a daughter. You're an actor in the theatre. A person can't achieve union with God in the middle of all these activities.

"When you have desire for worldly enjoyment, desire for union with God is diluted. There is suffering as long as there is desire for worldly enjoyment. The Srimad Bhagavata says, 'The

1. Kama.
2. Kamana.

Avadhuta chose a kite[1] to be one of his twenty-four gurus. The kite had a fish in its beak, so thousands of crows surrounded it. Whichever way the kite went with the fish in its beak, the crows followed, cawing all the time. When the fish suddenly dropped from the kite's mouth, all the crows flew toward the fish, leaving the kite alone.[2]

"The fish stands for objects of enjoyment and the crows are worries and anxieties. Wherever there is desire for worldly enjoyment, there are worries and anxieties. You can attain peace only when you give up worldly enjoyment.

"And look, money itself becomes a reason for trouble. Brothers are good to each other, but when property is divided, problems arise between them. Dogs lick each other and have good feelings toward each other – but when a householder throws a little rice, they begin to fight.

"Do come here now and then. (*Then pointing to M. and the others*) They visit on Sundays or on other holidays."

Vidya: "Our Sunday lasts for three months with the month of Shravana, Bhadra and Paush – the rainy season and when the paddy is harvested. We are lucky to be able to visit you. Just before I came to Dakshineswar I heard about two people – you and Jnanarnava."

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1. Osprey.
2. sāmiṣaṁ kuraraṁ jaghnurbalino'nye nirāmiṣāḥ,
tadāmiṣaṁ parityajya sa sukhaṁ samavindata।
śrīmadbhāgavata 11-9-2

Sri Ramakrishna: "Be a friend to your brothers, live in harmony. Everything is nice to hear and see if there is harmony. Have you seen it in a play? If four or five people sing a different tune, the performance is destroyed."

Vidya: "A bunch of birds get caught in a net. If they fly together to take the net in one direction, they are saved. But if they all fly in different directions, that doesn't happen.

"But in a play you also see a person dancing and at the same time balancing a brass pitcher on his head."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Live in the world, but balance the pitcher properly – in other words, keep your mind on God.

"I said to the soldiers at Chanak, 'Do your duties in the world, but bear in mind that the pestle of death can fall on you.'

"In Kamarpukur the women of carpenter families use a husking machine to flatten rice. One woman presses one end of the wooden beam with her foot and the other woman spreads the paddy into a mortar with her hand. She is careful that the pestle doesn't fall on her hand. At the same time, she nurses her baby. And with all this, she talks to a buyer: 'You owe us so much. Please come and pay us.'

"Keep your mind on God and at the same time attend to your many duties of the world. But you have to practice, and you have to be careful. Only then can you take care of both things."

Way to realize the Self, or God: holy company, not science

Vidya: "Sir, what is the proof that the soul [the Atman] is separate from the body?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Proof? God can be seen. If you practice austerities, you can see Him, through His grace. The rishis had the direct perception of the Atman. You can't understand the essence of God from science. In science there is only this: Mix this with that and such and such a thing will happen. Mixing that with this, it does happen, and in this way, you get information about all things connected with sense objects.

"That's why you can't understand spiritual things with the help of this kind of intellect. You need to keep the company of holy people. Associating with a physician, you learn how to feel the pulse."

Vidya: "I understand it now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have to practice spiritual disciplines. Only then can you attain your objective. It doesn't help to memorize verses of the scriptures. By repeating 'Hemp, hemp,' you don't get intoxicated. You have to swallow the hemp.

"It's not possible to explain to people the experience of God. You can't explain to a five-year-old child the joy that a husband and a wife share."

Vidya (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Sir, how do you realize the Atman?"

Sri Ramakrishna's motherly attitude toward Rakhal

Just then Rakhal is about to sit down to eat but because there are so many people in the room, he hesitates. These days Thakur is treating Rakhal just like a mother treats her child, just like Mother Yashoda and Gopala.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Rakhal*): "Oh, do eat. These people will stand aside. (*To a devotee*) Keep some ice for Rakhal. (*To Rakhal*) Do you want to go to Vanhooghly? Don't go in this hot sun."

Rakhal sits down to eat. Thakur again talks to the young man who acted the part of Vidya in the musical.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vidya*): "Why didn't you all take prasad from the temple? You could have eaten here."

Vidya: "Sir, not everybody feels the same way. So they cook food in a separate kitchen. Not everybody wants to eat at the guesthouse."

Rakhal sits down to eat. Thakur talks with the devotees on the verandah.

Chapter II

The actor in the play and spiritual practice in the household – way to realize God

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the actor Vidya*): "The means to God-realization is deep longing. Make the effort with your body, with your mind, with your speech. When there is too much bile in the body, a person suffers from jaundice. Everything looks yellow. Yellow is the only colour you see – in everything.

"Among you actors, a person who only plays the role of a woman develops a feminine nature. In the same way, if you meditate on God day and night, you acquire the nature of God.

"Dip your mind in any colour and it will take on that colour. The mind is like a freshly laundered cloth."

Vidya: "So you have to send it to be washed once."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. At first you have to purify the heart.[1] Then if you keep it occupied with thoughts of God, it will take that colour. But if you live a householder's life and only keep it on acting, the mind will be coloured by that."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with Hari (Swami Turiyananda), Narayan, and other devotees

Before Sri Ramakrishna could rest more than a few minutes, Hari, Narayan, and Narendra Bannerji, the son of Rajkrishan Bannerji and a Sanskrit teacher at Presidency College, arrive from Calcutta. Because of problems at home, Narendra Bannerji lives in a separate house in Shyampukur with his wife and son. He is a very simple man, twenty-nine or thirty years old. When he meditates, he hears the sound of bells and other temple instruments. He had traveled in Bhutan, the northwest, and several other places. He comes to visit Thakur now and then. (He spent his last days in Allahabad and passed away at the age of fifty-eight.)

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1. Chitta.

Hari (Swami Turiyananda) lives with his brothers at their Baghbazar house. Having studied for the matriculation examination at the General Assembly School, he now spends his time in contemplation of God, studying the scriptures and in practicing yoga. He comes to Dakshineswar to see Sri Ramakrishna now and then. When Thakur goes to Balaram's house in Baghbazar, he often sends for him.

On Buddhism – Brahman is the nature of knowledge – Totapuri's instruction to Thakur

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "I've heard a lot about Buddha Deva. He's one of the ten incarnations of God. Brahman is immovable, changeless, inactive and the nature of knowledge. When the intellect merges into the awareness of knowledge, a person attains Brahmajnana – then he becomes *buddha*, enlightened.

"The Naked One used to say, 'The mind merges into the intellect and the intellect into the nature of knowledge.'

"As long as I-ness persists, a person doesn't attain the knowledge of Brahman. Only after gaining the knowledge of Brahman and having the vision of God can you get I-ness under control. Otherwise, you can't control it. It's difficult to catch your shadow, but when the sun is overhead, your shadow is no farther away than half a cubit."

Instruction to Bannerji – God's vision – company of the holy is the way

A Devotee: "What is the vision of God like?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Haven't you seen a theatrical performance? People are talking with each other –

but as soon as the curtain is raised, everybody's mind turns completely to the play on the stage – it doesn't wander away. This is called being absorbed in samadhi.

"When the curtain drops again, the attention turns to external things. When the curtain of maya drops, the mind of a man again turns outward."

(*To Narendra Bannerji*): "You've traveled to many places. Tell us something about the sadhus."

> Bannerji had seen two yogis in Bhutan who used to drink a pound of bitter neem juice every day. This is the kind of thing he talked about. Also, he had gone to the ashram of a holy man on the bank of the Narmada. Seeing a Bengali gentleman dressed in trousers, the sadhu had said, "He's carrying a dagger next to his belly."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Listen. You should keep pictures of holy men in your room. They will inspire you."

Bannerji: "I have a picture of you in my room, and one of a sadhu on a hill. He's holding a pipe with burning hemp in it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, a person is inspired by seeing pictures of sadhus. A custard apple carved out of soft wood brings to mind a real custard apple. It's the same as being aroused by the sight of a young woman.

"That's why I say to you, you need the company of sadhus constantly.

(*To Bannerji*) "You're already seeing the fire of the world. A fire blazes whenever you indulge in

enjoyment. As long as the kite kept the fish in its beak, one flock of crows after another tormented it.

"A person finds peace in the company of sadhus. A crocodile stays under water a long time. It comes up to the surface from time to time to breathe deeply. Then it is at peace."

Actor and God, the wish-fulfilling tree – the danger of prayer with a motive

Actor: "Sir, you've talked about enjoyment. What you say is right. If you pray to God for enjoyment, you will get into trouble. How many wishes and desires are in the mind! But not all of them bring happiness. God is the wish-fulfilling tree. Whatever you pray for, you will get. But thinking that God is the wish-fulfilling tree, you might wish to test whether or not a tiger will come at your asking. As soon as the idea of a tiger comes to mind, it comes and devours you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must understand that the tiger does come.

"What more can I say? Turn your mind to God. Do not forget God. If you call upon Him sincerely, He will reveal Himself.

"There is another thing. At the end of your performance, you must chant the name of Lord Hari. In this way, those who listen will return home thinking of God."

The actors offer their salutations and leave.

Sri Ramakrishna and advice to devotees on the household ashram

The wives of two devotees enter and salute Thakur. They have fasted in preparation for seeing him. They are the wives of two brothers, sisters-in-law. They are wearing veils. They are twenty-two or twenty-three years old and each has a son.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the wives*): "Look, worship Shiva. There is a book on how to worship him called *Nityakarma*. Study it. Then you will be able to engage your minds for a long time preparing for the worship: picking flowers, making sandalpaste, cleaning the utensils of worship, arranging offerings. By doing all this, your mind will be directed. You will get rid of meanness, attachment, anger and so on. When you two sisters-in-law talk, talk only about God."

Sri Ramakrishna and the value of image worship

"You have to unite your mind with God in whatever way you can. See that you don't forget Him even once – it should be like an unbroken flow of oil – no break in it. Even if you worship a brick or a stone as God, with a spirit of love and devotion, you can see Him by His grace.

"As I said before, you should worship Shiva the way I told you. When you become established in that, you don't have to continue formal worship. Then the mind will always be united with Him. Then you always remember Him and think of Him."

Elder sister-in-law (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Will you give us some instruction?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "I don't initiate with a mantra. When you initiate a person, you have to take on yourself the sins of the disciple. The Mother of the Universe has kept me in the state of a child. I told you about Shiva Puja. Just perform that. And come here now and then. We will see what His will is later on. Try to come again on the day of Snanyatra.[1]

"I asked you to chant the name of Hari. Are you doing that?"

Sister-in-law (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why did you fast before coming here? You should have eaten something before you came. Women are the image of my Mother,[2] so I can't bear to see them suffer. Each of you is a different image of the Mother of the Universe. Come here after you have eaten and you will be happy."

Saying this, Thakur asks Ramlal to give the ladies seats and offer them refreshments. They are served the prasad of the Phalaharini Puja – luchis, different kinds of fruit, sweets and a glass of sweetened water.

Thakur says, "You have had something to eat. Now my mind is at peace. I can't bear to see women fast."

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1. The Bathing Festival.
2. striyaḥ samastāḥ sakalā jagatsu
caṇḍī 11-6
[O Devi,] all the women in the world are your aspects.]

Chapter IV

Secret conversation with devotees – Keshab Sen

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on a step of the Shiva temples. It is 5 p.m. Adhar, Dr. Nitai, M. and a couple of other devotees are sitting near him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "You see, my nature is changing."

As if he is going to talk about something secret, he comes down a step and sits beside the devotees. Then he talks to them.

The human being is the highest creation of God – the secret of divine incarnation

"You are devotees. I'm not afraid to tell you. These days I don't see the spirit-form of God. Now I only see Him in the concrete form of a human being. It's my nature to see, touch and embrace Him. But now He says to me, 'You have assumed a body. Enjoy me in human forms, in a concrete form.'

"God certainly resides in all beings, but there is greater manifestation of Him in man.

"Is man something insignificant, brother? Man can think of God, he can meditate on the Infinite. Other living beings can't do this.

"He is present in other beings – in plants and trees, in all elements – but there is greater manifestation of God in a human being.

"The essence of fire is in all beings, in all things – but there is greater manifestation in wood.

"Rama said to Lakshmana, 'Look brother, an elephant is such a big animal – but it can't think of God.'

"Then again, there is a greater manifestation of Him in an incarnation of God. Rama said to Lakshmana, 'Brother, when you see deep ecstasy[1] in a man – laughing, weeping, dancing and singing – know for certain that I am there.'"

Thakur is now quiet. After a few minutes, he speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna's influence on Keshab Sen

Sri Ramakrishna: "Keshab Sen used to come here quite frequently. Since he first came he's changed a lot. Now he's quite a remarkable man. He's brought his group here several times. But he also wanted to see me alone. Before, Keshab never had the opportunity of holy company.

"I met him in his Colootola house. Hriday was with me. We were taken to the room where Keshab was sitting. He was at a table writing something. After a long time, he put down his pen and came down from his chair to sit with us. He didn't salute us or give any other kind of greeting.

"He used to visit me here now and then. One day in a spiritual mood I said to him, 'You shouldn't sit with one leg on the other before a holy man. It increases rajas in a person. Whenever he came, I saluted him and his friends. They gradually learned to salute, bending their foreheads toward the ground."

1. Urjita bhakti.

Repeating the name of Hari and the Divine Mother's name in the Brahmo Samaj – vision of God in the heart of a devotee

"And I said to Keshab, 'Chant the name of Hari. You should sing His glories in the Kaliyuga.' They began to do it with the accompaniment of drums and cymbals.

"How did my faith in the name of Hari grow? Sadhus visit this temple from time to time. One of them from Multan came. He was waiting for pilgrims going to Gangasagar. (*Pointing to M.*) About the same age as he is. It was he who said, 'There is a way: the path of devotion taught by the rishi Narada.'"

Advice to Keshab – 'lust and greed' is the basket smelling of fish – company of the holy, fragrance of flowers – practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude now and then

"Keshab came here one day and stayed till ten at night. Pratap and some others said, 'Let's stay the night.' They were sitting under the banyan tree (in the Panchavati). Keshab said, 'No. I have some work to do. We have to leave.'

"At that, I laughed and said, 'So you won't be able to sleep without the smell of your fish basket? A fishwife was a guest in a gardener's house. She had come back from selling fish with her basket in hand. She was given the flower room to sleep in. But she couldn't get to sleep until late at night because of the fragrance of the flowers. Seeing her plight, the mistress of the house asked her, 'Why are you so restless?' The fishwife answered, 'I don't know, sister. Maybe I can't sleep because of the

fragrance of the flowers. Could you bring me my fish basket? Maybe, I can sleep then.' When the basket was brought to her, she sprinkled some water on it and put it close to her nose. Then she fell sound asleep, snoring loudly.

"Hearing the story, Keshab's group burst out laughing.

"At dusk Keshab conducted worship at the river ghat. After the worship, I said to Keshab, 'Look here, in one way, God has become the Bhagavata, so you should worship the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras. He has also become a devotee. The heart of a devotee is His living room. You can easily find the owner of the house in his living room.' So by worshipping a devotee, you worship God.

"Keshab and his followers listened with great concentration. A full moon flooded the area with its light. They were all sitting just above the stairs leading to the Ganges. I said, 'Let's all chant *Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan*.'

"Everyone chanted together, '*Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan*.' Then I said, 'Brahman is Primal Power and Primal Power is Brahman.' Those people again repeated in one voice, 'Brahman is Primal Power, Primal Power is Brahman.' I said to them, 'Whom you call Brahman, I call Mother. Mother is a very sweet name.'

"Then I said to them, 'Say this too: Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava.' At this, Keshab said, 'Not that far, sir. Then people will think of us as orthodox Vaishnavas.'

"Sometimes I'd say to Keshab, 'Whom you call Brahman, I call Shakti, the Primal Power.' What is beyond mind and speech, attributeless and inactive, the Vedas call Brahman. When I see creation, preservation and destruction, I call it Shakti, the Primal Power.

"I said to Keshab, 'It's very difficult to succeed leading a worldly life. How can a person recover delirium if he's put in a room where there is pickle, tamarind and a water pitcher? So from time to time it's necessary to go into solitude to practice spiritual disciplines. When the trunk of a tree grows thick, you can tie even an elephant to it. But when it's just a sapling, a goat or a cow can eat it up. That's why Keshab said in a lecture, 'Get established strongly in spiritual life – and then live in the world.'"

Advice to Adhar, M., Nitai and others – go forward

(*To the devotees*): "You see, Keshab was a very learned man. He lectured in English and many people respected him. Queen Victoria herself talked to him. But when he came here, he would be bare-bodied. When you go to meet a holy man, you should take something for him – so he used to bring me some fruit in his hand. He had no pride at all.

(*To Adhar*) "Look, you are so learned and you are a Deputy Magistrate. But you are under the power of a snub-nosed[1] woman**.** Go forward. Beyond the sandalwood are better things: silver mines, gold mines, and then diamonds and precious gems. A

1. Hen-pecked.

woodcutter was chopping wood when a brahmachari said to him, 'Go forward.'"

Coming down the steps of the Shiva Temples, Sri Ramakrishna goes toward his room through the courtyard. Adhar, M. and some other devotees are with him. Just then, Ram Chatterji, the priest of the Vishnu Temple, comes and gives news that the attendant [maidservant] of Holy Mother has contracted cholera.

Ram Chatterji (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "I told you about this at ten o'clock but you didn't listen."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What could I do?"

Ram Chatterji: "What could you do? Rakhal, Ramlal, all of them, were there. But they did nothing."

M.: "Kishori (Gupta) has gone to Alambazar to get medicine."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What, has he gone alone? Where is he getting it?"

M.: "Nobody went with him. He'll get it in Alambazar."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Please tell whoever's nursing the patient what they have to do in case she gets worse and what she should eat when she gets better."

M.: "Yes, sir."

The devotee's sisters-in-law come again and offer their salutations. They ask for permission to leave. Sri Ramakrishna says to them again, "Please perform worship the way I told you. And come here

after eating something. Otherwise, I feel bad. Try to come again on the Snanyatra day."

Chapter V

Instruction to Bannerji – wife is the reason for worldly life – take refuge in God

Sri Ramakrishna is now sitting on the western semi-circular verandah. Bannerji, Hari, M. and some others are sitting with him. Thakur knows that Bannerji has some family problems.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look, all problems that exist are just 'for a loin-cloth.' You are married and have children, so you have to have a job. A sadhu is worried about his loin-cloth and a householder about his wife. On top of that, you don't get along well with everyone at home so you have to live separately. (*Smiling*) Chaitanya Deva said to Nitai, 'Listen, brother Nityananda. A man caught in the world is never free.'"

M. (*to himself*): "Maybe Thakur is talking about the world of delusion. Maybe a worldly man lives in a world of ignorance."

Sri Ramakrishna (*pointing to M. and smiling*): "He is also living in a separate house. 'Who are you, sir?' 'I am an expatriate.' 'And who are you, Sir?' 'I am separated from my beloved.' (*All laugh.*) You will get along well.

"But there's no danger if you take refuge in God. He will save you Himself."

Hari and others: "Well, why does it take so many people so long to find Him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You know what the reason is? A person doesn't feel yearning for God until all work and desire for enjoyment are over. A physician says, 'Let a few days pass. Then the ordinary medicine will do him good.'

"Narada said to Rama, 'Rama, how can Ravana be killed if you stay in Ayodhya? You have come down to earth for that purpose.' Rama said, 'Narada, let the right time come. Let Ravana's past actions begin to bear fruit. Then the ground will be prepared for killing him.'"[1]

The problem of evil and Hari (Swami Turiyananda), Thakur's the state of vijnani

Hari: "Well, why is there so much suffering in the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "This world is like play. In this game there is sorrow and happiness, virtue and vice, knowledge and ignorance, good and bad – everything. If there were no sorrow, no sin, the play couldn't go on.

"In the game of blind man's buff you have to touch the granddame. If you touch her in the beginning of the game, she is not pleased. God [the granddame] wills that the play continue for some time. After that:

> Among a hundred thousand kites only one or two break free.
>
> And then, O Mother, how you laugh and clap your hands!

"In other words, after practicing a lot of austerities, one or two attain the vision of God and

1. *Adhyatma Ramayana*, Ayodhyakanda.

are liberated by His grace. The Divine Mother then claps in joy: 'There! It's cut free!'"

Hari: "This game is death to us."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Just tell me who *you* are; it is God Himself who dwells in everything – maya, living beings, the world and the twenty four cosmic principles.[1]

"'I bite becoming a snake and cure becoming a doctor.' He has become both knowledge and ignorance and dwells in the world. He dwells as ignorance in the maya of delusion, and He cures in the form of the maya of knowledge, in the guru.

"There are ignorance, knowledge[2] and supreme knowledge.[3] A man of knowledge sees that He alone exists, that He is the doer, creating, preserving and dissolving. The man of supreme knowledge sees that He exists and dwells in the world as all.

"When you attain ecstatic love[4] for God, you see that there is nothing besides Him.

"Compared to ecstasy, devotion is very weak. And then ecstasy matures into ecstatic love for God.

(*To Bannerji*) "Do you still hear the sound of a bell when you meditate?"

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1. tvaṁ strī tvaṁ pumānasi tvaṁ kumāra uta vā kumārī ।
tvaṁ jīrṇo daṇḍena vañcasi tvaṁ jāto bhavasi viśvatomukhaḥ ।।
śvetāśvatara upaniṣat 4-3
[You are the woman, You are the man, You are the boy, (and) You are the girl too. You are the old man tottering with a stick. Taking birth, You have Your faces everywhere.]
2. Jnana.
3. Vijnana.
4. Mahabhava and prema.

Bannerji: "I do hear the same sound, every day. And I have visions of His form as well. Once the mind has experienced this, does it ever stop?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes, when once firewood catches fire, it doesn't cool down. (*To the devotees*) He knows a lot about faith."

Bando [Bannerji]: "My faith is very deep."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why not talk about it?"

Bannerji: "Once a guru gave a mantra of the ram to someone. He told the man that the ram was his ideal. The fellow attained perfection by repeating that mantra of the ram.

"And a grass cutter crossed the Ganges by repeating the name of Rama."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Bring the women of your family to meet the women of Balaram's."

Bannerji: "Which Balaram?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Don't you know Balaram? He lives in Bosepara."

Sri Ramakrishna is filled with joy to meet a guileless man. Bannerji is very simple. Sri Ramakrishna is also very fond of Niranjan because he is so guileless.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Why did I ask you to see Niranjan? I told you to find out if it's true that he's a man of guileless heart."

Section XVI

Birthday Celebration for Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar – Joyful Kirtan with Narendra and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the long northeastern verandah at the Dakshineswar Temple, listening to the songs relating to Gopigoshtha and Subol Milan. Narottam is singing. Today is Sunday, 22 February 1885, 12th day of Phalgun 1291 (B.Y.), the eighth day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month. The devotees are celebrating Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. According to the lunar calendar, it fell on the 2nd of the bright fortnight of Phalgun, last Monday. Narendra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, Surendra, Girindra, Binode, Hazra, Ramlal, Ram, Nityagopal, Mani Mallick, Girish, Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi and many other devotees have assembled. The kirtan has been going on since early morning. It is now about eight o'clock. M. enters and salutes Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur motions to him to sit near him.

Listening to the singing, Sri Ramakrishna has become filled with emotion. Sri Krishna is late in bringing the cows to pasture. One of the cowherd boys says, "Mother Yashoda is keeping him from coming." Balai says sharply, "I'll blow a horn and bring Kanai here." Balai's love for him is deep.

The musicians continue. Sri Krishna is playing his flute. As the milkmaids and cowherds listen, different moods arise in their minds.

Thakur sits with the devotees and listens to the singing. Suddenly his glance falls on Narendra, who is sitting close to him. Thakur stands up and goes into samadhi. He touches Narendra's knee with one foot. Returning to normal consciousness, Thakur sits down again. Narendra leaves the room. The kirtan goes on.

Sri Ramakrishna whispers to Baburam, "There's pudding[1] in the room. Please go and give some to Narendra."

Is Thakur seeing the very presence of God in Narendra?

At the end of the kirtan Sri Ramakrishna returns to his room. He feeds Narendra affectionately with sweets.

Girish believes that God has come down to earth in the form of Sri Ramakrishna.

Girish (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "All your actions are like Sri Krishna's – the way he used to pose before Yashoda."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, because Sri Krishna was an incarnation of God. Playing as a human being, He acts like this. Even while he lifted the Govardhan hill (on his hand), he pretended to Nanda[2] that he found it difficult to pick up a footstool.[3]"

Girish: "I'm sure I understand you now."

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1. Kshir.
2. His father.
3. Pidda.

Sri Ramakrishna puts on new clothes for his birthday – service rendered to him by devotees – in samadhi

Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot. It is about eleven o'clock. Ram and other devotees want to dress Thakur in a new cloth. Thakur says, "No, no." Pointing to a person educated in English, he says, "What will he say about it?" When the devotees insist, Thakur says, "If you insist, I'll do it."

The devotees are making arrangements for Thakur's meal in the room.

Thakur asks Narendra to sing. Narendra sings:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Your formless beauty sparkles. And so the yogi meditates in a dark mountain cave.

In the lap of infinite darkness, on the waves of the great silence,[1] eternal peace and joy float without end.

Putting on the form of the Formless One, in darkness draped, O Mother, who are You, seated alone in boundless bliss?

At the lotus of Your fear-dispelling feet flashes the lightning of love, while loud and earth-shaking laughter issues from Your dazzling face.

What wondrous beauty, what an enchanting face I see!

The Lord of my soul has entered my humble hut, and the spring of love wells forth.

O Lord, beloved of my heart, what treasure shall I offer You?

Accept my soul, accept my life; whatever I have, accept all that from me.

As Narendra sings, "O Mother, who are You, seated alone in boundless bliss?" Thakur

1. Nirvana.

immediately loses all outer consciousness and goes into deep samadhi. After a long time, when he returns to normal, the devotees make him sit for his meal. He is still absorbed in ecstasy and eats rice but with both hands. He says to Bhavanath, "Please feed me." He is still in an ecstatic mood and is unable to feed himself. Bhavanath feeds him.

Thakur eats a little. Then Ram says, "Nityagopal will eat from your leaf plate."

Sri Ramakrishna: "From the plate? Why?"

Ram: "Can't he eat from your leaf plate if you say he can?"

Seeing Nityagopal in an ecstatic mood, Thakur feeds him one or two morsels

By this time the devotees of Konnagar have arrived by boat. They enter the room singing kirtan. After singing, they go out for refreshments. A singer, Narottam, is in the room. Thakur says to him, "Their music is like they're pushing a boat in the river. The music should be such that everybody wants to dance. You should sing like this:

O Brother, because of the intensity of Gaur's ecstatic love, the village of Nadia is swaying.

(*To Narottam*) "And this should be added to it."

Behold the two brothers[1] who shed tears on chanting Hari's name have come.

They who ask for prema (ecstatic love) even after receiving blows, these two brothers have come.

They who are Kanai and Balai of Vraja, these two brothers have come.

1. Gauranga and Nityananda.

They who embrace even the pariah, these two brothers have come.

And you should sing this too.

O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers are so full of compassion.

You even raise the *chandala* up in your arms and utter *Haribol*[1] to him with so much compassion, O Lord of the indigent.

Chapter II

Conversation with devotees during the birthday celebration

The devotees now eat the sacrificial food. They are happy to have the flattened fried rice,[2] sweets and some other kinds of food. Thakur says to M., "Didn't you invite the Mukherjis? Please ask Surendra to feed the musicians."

Bepin Sarkar has come. A devotee says, "This is Bepin Sarkar." Thakur sits up and says humbly, "Give him a seat and offer him a betel leaf." He says to him, "I can't talk to you. There's such a big crowd."

Seeing Girindra, Thakur says to Baburam, "Give him a seat." Seeing that Nityagopal is squatting, Thakur says, "And him too."

Mahendra, the kaviraj[3] from Sinthi, has arrived. Smiling, Thakur points to Rakhal and says, "Show him your pulse."

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1. To chant the name of Lord Hari.
2. *Chinre.*
3. Ayurvedic physician.

He says to Ramlal, "Make friends with Girish Ghosh. Then you'll be able to go to the theatre [free of charge]." *(Laughter.)*

Narendra has been talking a long time to Hazra on the verandah. Since the death of Narendra's father, there are great troubles with his family. Narendra comes in the room and sits down.

Thakur gives Narendra various instructions

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Were you sitting with Hazra? You are 'a foreigner' and he is a 'woman separated from her lover.' Hazra also needs one and a half thousand rupees. *(Laughter.)*

"Hazra says, 'Narendra has developed sixteen annas[1] of sattva guna, but he still has a little red raja guna in him. I am seventeen annas of pure sattva.' (*All laugh.*)

"When I say, 'You are dry because you only reason,' he says, 'I'm dry because I drink the nectar of the sun.'

"When I talk to him about pure love for God, when I say that a pure devotee doesn't want money and wealth and splendour, he says, 'When the flood of His grace rises, not only will streams be flooded, but even canals and pools will be filled with water. A person gains pure devotion and also the six splendours. And money too.'"

Narendra and many other devotees are sitting on the floor in Thakur's room. Girish enters and takes a seat.

1. One-hundred percent.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "I regard Narendra as the very essence of Atman. And I obey him."

Girish: "Who do you not obey?"

Narendra belongs to the Supreme Abode

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "He has a manly nature and I have a feminine nature. Narendra has a high spiritual ideal – the abode of Indivisible Brahman."

Girish goes out for a smoke.

Narendra (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "I had a talk with Girish Ghosh about you. He's a great man."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What did you say about me?"

Narendra: "That you don't know how to read and write and we are all learned – this is the drift of the conversation." *(Laughter.)*

Sri Ramakrishna and Narendra – scholarship and scriptures

Mani Mallick (*to Thakur*): "You are learned without being literate."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra and others*): "To tell you the truth, I haven't studied Vedanta or other scriptures, but I'm not a bit sorry about it. I know the essence of Vedanta: Brahman is real and the world is an illusion. And what is the essence of the Gita? That when you go on repeating the word *Gita* ten times, you get *tyagi*, *tyagi*.[1]

1. Renunciation.

"A person should know the essence of the scriptures from the lips of a guru, but then practice spiritual disciplines. Somebody wrote a letter. Before it was read, it got lost. Everybody began to look for it. When they found the letter, they read that five seers of sandesh and a dhoti had to be bought. They threw the letter away and began to collect five seers of sandesh and a dhoti. In the same way, when you know the essence of the scriptures, what further need do you have to read the book? Now you have to practice spiritual disciplines.[1]"

Girish enters the room.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "Hello! What were you saying about me? I just eat, drink and live."

Girish: "What else should we say about you? Are you a sadhu?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I'm no sadhu. Truly, I don't feel like I am."

Girish: "Even in joke, I can't compete with you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I went to Jaygopal Sen's garden house wearing a red-bordered dhoti. Keshab Sen was there. Seeing my red-bordered dhoti, he said, 'That's a lot of colour today – so much red border!' I said, 'I have to distract Keshab's mind, so I have come like a spring festival.'

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1. tameva dhīro vijñāya prajñāṁ kurvīta brāhmaṇaḥ,
nānudhyādbahūñchabdān vāco viglāpanaṁ hi tat.
bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 4-4-21
[The intelligent aspirant after Brahman, knowing about this alone, should attain intuitive knowledge. He should not think of too many words, for it is particularly fatiguing to the organ of speech.]

Narendra is going to sing now. Sri Ramakrishna asks M. to take down the tanpura. Narendra tunes it for a long time. Thakur and the others become impatient.

Binode says, "Today it will be tuned and another day we'll hear the song." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna laughs and says, "I feel like breaking it. Only *tang, tang* is being produced? It may be followed *by tana nana, nere tum*."

Bhavanath: "There's always impatience before a musical performance."

Narendra (*while tuning*): "When you don't understand."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "There! He's explained away all our complaints!"

Narendra's song and Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy – inwardness and outwardness – still water and wave

Narendra sings. Thakur listens, sitting on the smaller cot, and Nityagopal and other devotees listen, sitting on the floor.

Song No.1

O the all-knowing Mother, You are always awake within me. Night and day You hold me in your arms.

Song No. 2

Sing O brother, the name of the Self of Joy. She, the one Reality,[1] brings peace to my mind.

1. Ektantri.

Song No. 3

In dense darkness, O Mother, Your formless beauty sparkles. And so the yogi meditates in a dark mountain cave.

Thakur, filled with ecstasy, comes down from the cot and sits near Narendra. He speaks while still in ecstasy.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Should I sing? Fie on it! (*To Nityagopal*) What do you think? You have to hear it before you're inspired. What happens after makes no difference.

"He has lit a fire. That's good. Then afterward it is quiet. I'm silent and you should also remain silent.

"The important thing is to be immersed in the nectar of joy.

"Should I sing? Well, I may. When water is still, it is water and when it is in waves, it is still water."

Advice to Narendra – go beyond knowledge and ignorance

Narendra is sitting near. His family at home is in trouble and he is always worried about them. He used to visit the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and still reasons about knowledge. He is interested in reading Vedanta and other holy books. He is about twenty-three years old. Thakur looks at him steadfastly.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to Narendra*): "You are *kha* (like space). If only you did not have this tax (worry at home). (*All laugh.*)

"Krishnakishore used to say, 'I am *kha*.' One day I went to his house and found him worried. He

wouldn't talk much. I asked him, 'Brother, what has happened? Why are you sitting so silently like this?' He said, 'The tax man came and warned me that if I didn't pay taxes, he would auction off all the pots and pans in my house. So I'm worried.' I laughed and said, 'How is that? You are '*kha*,' like the sky. What does it matter if the rascal comes and carries away your pots and pans?'

"So I say to you, 'You are only '*kha*'. Why do you worry so much? Do you know that Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, 'If you have even one of the eight occult powers, you can be a little powerful, but you will not be able to attain Me.' You can have power, strength, money and things like that through occult powers, but not God.

"And there's something else – go beyond knowledge and ignorance. Many people say that a certain person is a great man of knowledge, but in reality it is not so. Vasishtha was such a great jnani, but he lost his balance at the loss of his sons. Lakshmana said, 'Rama, this is strange! He is totally overwhelmed with sorrow.' Rama answered, 'Brother, the person who has knowledge also has ignorance. A person who is conscious of light also knows darkness. One who knows what is good also knows what is bad. The one who knows what happiness is also knows what sorrow is. Brother, go beyond both. Go beyond happiness and sorrow, knowledge and ignorance.' That's why I say to you, 'Go beyond knowledge and ignorance.'"

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees – advice to Surendra – family life and charity – mind yoga and action yoga

Sri Ramakrishna again sits on the smaller cot, the devotees near him on the floor. Surendra also sits near him. Thakur looks at him affectionately and, in the course of their conversation, advises him on many things.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Surendra*): "Come here now and then. The Naked One (Totapuri) used to say that a pot should be washed every day or it will get stained. It's necessary to keep the company of holy men often. A sannyasin has to renounce 'lust and greed', but that's not the path for you. You should occasionally go into solitude and call on God with a longing heart. You should renounce mentally.

"Unless you are a heroic devotee, you can't take care of both sides. King Janaka lived a worldly life after he had attained perfection through spiritual disciplines. He wielded two swords: one of knowledge and the other of action."

After saying this, Thakur sings:

This world is indeed a thing of joy; let me eat and drink and be merry.

King Janaka, the great royal sage, was he inferior in any respect to the holy man who has given up the world?

Oh no, it was he who was loyal to both matter and Spirit, who realized God and at the same time drank his cup of milk. *(Laughter.)*

"For you people, Chaitanya Deva's advice is best: compassion for the living, service, and chanting God's name and glories.

"Why do I say this? You work in a merchant's office. You have to attend to many things. That's why I say it to you.

"You tell lies at the office. So why do I eat the food you bring me? Because, you give in charity and also practice meditation. You give away more than you earn. 'A melon seed is larger than the fruit.'

"I can't eat food brought by a miser. Their money is squandered in a number of ways: first, in law-suits; second, in robbery or theft; third, in medical expenses; and then by the extravagance of bad children. This is how their money goes.

"It's very good that you give in charity and perform meditation. Whoever has money should give in charity. A miser's wealth is hidden away, but the wealth of a generous man is saved and spent in good causes. There in the countryside [Kamarpukur], farmers bring water to their fields by digging canals. Sometimes the flow of water is so forceful that it breaks the ridges and floods the fields. The crops are then destroyed. That's why the farmers make holes at places along the ridge. They are called 'muzzles.' The water runs out a little through them so the ridge doesn't wash away by the force of the water. Then a layer of silt covers the field. This layer makes the field very fertile and yields a very good crop. A charitable person reaps the four fruits of karma – virtue, wealth, fulfillment of legitimate desires and liberation."

All the devotees listen attentively to this instruction of Thakur on the virtue of charity

Surendra: "I can't meditate well. Now and then I repeat, 'Ma, Ma.' At bedtime I repeat, 'Ma, Ma' and fall asleep."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's enough. It is remembrance."

"Mano[1] yoga and Karma yoga. Performing worship, going on pilgrimage, service to living beings and so on under the guru's instruction is called karma yoga. The work Janaka used to perform is also called karma yoga. Mano yoga is what yogis do: remembering God and meditating on Him.

"When I go to the Kali Temple, I say to myself, 'Mother, you are the mind also.' Pure mind, pure intellect and pure Atman are one and the same thing."

It is almost dusk. Most of the devotees are returning home after saluting Thakur. He goes to the western verandah with Bhavanath and M.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhavanath*): "Why do you come here so infrequently?"

Bhavanath (*smiling*): "I visit you once a fortnight. The other day I saw you on the road. That's why I didn't come then."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you saying? What use is it to just see each other? There should be touching and talking too."

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1. Mental yoga.

Chapter IV

Thakur with Girish and other devotees on the night of his birthday – in the joy of ecstasy

It is evening. The sounds of arati in the temples can be heard. Today is the 8th day of the bright fortnight of Phalgun. The Holi festival[1] will be held six or seven days later, on the next full moon.

The spires of the temple, the courtyard, the garden, the tree tops are beautifully lit by moonlight. The Ganges is flowing north by the temple, its surface bright with moonlight, as if with joy. Sri Ramakrishna, seated on the smaller cot, is meditating quietly on the Divine Mother.

One or two devotees are still here after the birthday celebration. Narendra had left earlier.

Arati is over. Absorbed in ecstasy, Thakur begins to pace the long southeastern verandah. M. stands watching him. Suddenly, Thakur says to him, "O, how beautifully Narendra sings!"

Meditation on Mahakali according to Tantra – the deep meaning of meditation

M.: "Sir, are you talking about the song beginning 'in dense darkness?'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. There's deep meaning in that song. It is still drawing my mind."

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "To meditate in the dark is prescribed in the Tantra. Where is sunlight then?"

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1. Dol festival, a color-sprinkling ceremony.

Girish Ghosh comes in and stands near. Sri Ramakrishna sings the song:

Is my Mother black?

She is the image of death.

Naked, She is illumining my heart.

Thakur, as though intoxicated, stands there with a hand on Girish's body.

What need is there of going to the Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi and Kanchi if the lips can utter 'Kali, Kali' when my life ebbs away?

He who repeats 'Kali' in all the three sandhyas[1] needs no daily ritualistic worship.

Worship itself follows his footsteps but can never overtake him.

Charity, kindness and vows no longer appeal to him.

For Madan, the poet, all worship means the red feet of the Blissful Mother.

Who can know the qualities of the holy name of Kali,

The praises of which are sung by the God of gods, Mahadeva Himself?

Then he sings:

This time I have given my full attention.

I have learned divine fervour[2] from one well-versed in it.

O Mother, I have found a man from the country which has no night.

And now I can no longer distinguish day and night.

I have rendered barren all ritualistic devotions.

My sleep is broken. Why should I sleep anymore?

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1. At dawn, noon and twilight.
2. Bhava.

I am awake in the sacrifice of yoga.

Having received the sleep of yoga from You, I have put sleep to sleep.

I have given myself permanent colour with the help of borax and sulphur.[1]

Both eyes brush the floor of the temple of my mind.

Says Ramprasad: Knowing the truth that Kali is the Supreme Brahman,

I bowed before both bhakti and salvation, and gave up all ideas of what is righteousness[2] and what is unrighteousness.[3]

It seems that Thakur's joy of ecstasy increases as he looks at Girish. He sings more songs as he stands there:

I have surrendered myself at the Fearless feet of the Divine Mother. Am I afraid of Yama anymore?

I have tied to the top tuft of my hair the almighty mantra of the name of Kali,

Having sold my body in the mart of the world, I have bought the name of Durga.

And then:

I have planted the wish-fulfilling tree,[4] the name of Mother Kali, in my heart.

I am waiting to open my heart to Yama[5] to show him the name of Kali residing there.

I have thrown out the six bad beings[6] that were dwelling in my body.

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1. Borax and sulphur render paint permanent.
2. Dharma.
3. Adharma.
4. Kalpataru.
5. King of Death.
6. Six passions, namely lust, anger, avarice, delusion, pride and envy.

Says Ramprasad, I am prepared to start my journey of life, taking the name of Durga.

Intoxicated with feeling, Thakur continues to sing:

I have bought Sri Durga's name having sold my body in the market place of the world.

(*To Girish and other devotees*): "*Bhavate bhrala tanu haral ge jnana.* [Feelings of ecstasy fill my body and steal my consciousness.]

"That *jnana* means consciousness of the outside world. You need consciousness of Truth,[1] consciousness of Brahman.[2] The body becomes filled with divine ecstasy and you lose all body consciousness."

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God? The state of a paramahamsa

"Love for God is the essence. There is love with a motive and there is also motiveless devotion, pure love and devotion, love that seeks no return. Keshab Sen and his group didn't know about motiveless love. In this love the devotee has no desire for return, he only has devotion for the lotus feet of the Lord.

"Then there is ecstatic love,[3] as if love for God is overflowing. 'The devotee laughs, weeps and dances in ecstasy' – it's like Chaitanya Deva's. Rama said

1. Tattva-jnana.
2. Brahmajnana.
3. Urjita bhakti.

to Lakshmana, 'Brother, wherever you find overflowing love, know that I am present."[1]

Is Thakur alluding to his own state? Is he an incarnation of God like Chaitanya Deva, come down to earth to teach mankind love for God?

Girish: "Everything is possible by your grace. Just think what I was before, and what I am now!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well brother, you had good tendencies from past births. That's why it happened. Nothing happens before its time. When the time comes for a disease to be cured, the physician says, 'Grind this leaf with black pepper and take the powder.' The patient recovers. Who knows whether it was the medicine with black pepper which cured the patient, or it was spontaneous?

"Lakshmana said to Lava and Kusha,[2] 'You are children. You don't know Ramachandra. By the touch of his feet, the Ahalya who had been turned into a stone became a woman again.' Lava and Kusha said, 'Yes sir, we know all this. We've heard all about it.' A stone turned into a human being because of the words of a sage. The sage Gautama had said that in the age of Treta Ramachandra would pass by this ashrama. 'By the touch of his feet you will again turn into a human being.' Who can tell now whether it happened because of

1. śraddhāluratyūrjitabhaktilakṣaṇo yastasya dṛśyo'hamaharniśaṁ hṛdi adhyātma rāmāyaṇa - uttara kāṇḍa 5-58
[He who has deep faith and has great urjita bhakti, I am always visible to him in his heart.]

2. Rama's sons.

Rama's holiness or because of the words of the sage?

"Every single thing happens by the will of God. If you are becoming spiritually awakened here, please know me to be only the instrument. 'Uncle moon is the uncle of all.' Everything happens by the will of God."

Girish (*smiling*): "Yes, certainly by the will of God. That's what I'm saying." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "If a person is sincere, he realizes God soon. There are some who do not attain knowledge: One, a person who has a crooked mind – insincere. Two, one who is obsessed with external purity. And three, one who doubts.

Thakur praises Nityagopal's ecstatic condition.

There are still three or four devotees standing near Thakur on the long southeastern verandah, listening closely. He describes the state of a paramahamsa: "A paramahamsa always has the awareness that God is real and everything else is transitory. Only a swan can separate milk from water. If milk is mixed with water, the acid on its tongue can separate the milk from the water. A paramahamsa also has a similar acid, that of ecstatic love for God. Having such love, he can discriminate between the eternal and the transitory. He can experience God and see Him."

Section XVII

Conversation at Girish's House on Harmony of Knowledge and Devotion

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is at Girish Ghosh's Bosepara house talking about spiritual things with the devotees. It is three o'clock. M. arrives and salutes him by prostrating on the ground. Today is Wednesday, 25 February 1885, 15th of Phalgun, the 11th day of the bright fortnight. Last Sunday Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was celebrated at Dakshineswar. Today, after visiting Girish's house, Thakur is going to see a play by Vrishaketu at the Star Theatre.

Thakur arrived only a short time ago. M. had arrived late, having been delayed by finishing some work. Reaching Girish's, M. sees that Thakur is talking enthusiastically about the harmony of the knowledge of the Absolute and the essence of love for God.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish and other devotees*): "To be awake, to dream and to be in deep sleep – these are the three states of an individual's consciousness.

"People who reason and discriminate don't acknowledge these three states. They say that Brahman is beyond the gross, subtle and causal states – beyond the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. Everything is maya, they say, like the reflection in a mirror. The reflection has no

substance. Only Brahman has substance, everything else is illusory.[1]

"The knowers of Brahman say also that you see duality because of body-consciousness – you feel that even the reflection is real. When this identification is gone,[2] you experience So 'ham – I am That Brahman."

A Devotee: "So is that what we should do? Follow the path of reasoning?"

Girish and two paths – reason and love for God – Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is the path of reasoning. Jnana Yoga. It is the path of the Vedantists. The other path is devotion. Bhakti Yoga. If a devotee weeps longingly for the knowledge of Brahman, he can attain it too.

"You can attain the knowledge of Brahman by following either path. Some people retain love for God even after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, to teach others. For example, incarnations of God.

"But it's not easy to get rid of body-consciousness, I-consciousness. It goes away only by His grace when you attain samadhi – nirvikalpa samadhi[3] and jada samadhi.[4]

"The 'I' of an incarnation of God returns after attaining samadhi – the 'I' of wisdom, the 'I' of a

1. Mandukya Upanishad.
2. That is, the identification of oneself with the body/mind.
3. The highest state of samadhi, total oneness with Brahman.
4. Union with God in which one is inert and appears lifeless.

devotee. It is by this 'I' of wisdom that he can teach. Shankaracharya retained this 'I' of wisdom.

"Chaitanya Deva used to taste love of God with this 'I' and lived with love of God and devotees, talking about spiritual things and chanting God's name.

"'I-ness' doesn't die easily. So a devotee doesn't reject the states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep as unreal – he accepts all the states. He also accepts the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. A devotee sees that it is these qualities that have become the twenty-four cosmic principles, that they are the world and its creatures. He also sees that God reveals Himself visually in the tangible form of Spirit.

"A devotee accepts the maya of knowledge and makes it his shelter. He takes refuge in the company of the holy, in pilgrimage, in knowledge, and in non-attachment – all of them. He says, 'If "I" doesn't leave easily, let the rascal remain a servant or a devotee.'

"A devotee also attains knowledge of the Oneness of God. He sees that there is nothing but God. He doesn't call the world a dream, but he says that it is God who has become everything. In a garden of wax, it is all wax – only in different forms.

"But you attain this experience only when your love for God has matured. When too much bile accumulates, you get jaundice and everything looks

yellow. Srimati,[1] by constantly thinking about Shyam,[2] saw everything filled with Shyam; and even felt herself to be Shyam. If lead remains immersed in a basin of mercury, it becomes mercury. Thinking a long time about a beetle, a cockroach becomes motionless. It doesn't move and finally it turns into a beetle. A devotee also becomes ego-less constantly thinking about God. And then sees that 'He is I' and 'I' am, indeed, He.' When the cockroach becomes a beetle, everything is accomplished. Then comes liberation."

Girish and different moods of worship – 'I have the mood of a child with its mother'

"As long as this 'I' remains, a person should call on Him with one of these attitudes: serenity, servant, child[3] and so on.

"I had the attitude of a maid-servant for a whole year – the servant of the Divine Mother. I dressed and adorned myself as a woman in many ways. And I wore a nose ring. If you assume the attitude of a woman, you can conquer lust.

"You should worship the Primal Power.[4] You have to please Her. It is She who lives in the world in the form of all women. That's why I look on all women as mother.

"The attitude of looking on women as mother is very pure. The Tantra mentions worship in the company of a woman, *vamachara*. But that's not

1. Radha.
2. Krishna.
3. Shanta, dasya, vatsalya.
4. Adyashakti.

good. There's danger of slipping if you keep an object of enjoyment near you.

"Looking at a woman as mother is like the *ekadashi* fast without taking a drop of water. There's not a single trace of desire in it. But then there's also the *ekadashi* fast with a meal of fruit and roots. And then there's also *ekadashi* when you eat luchis and vegetable curry. I keep the *ekadashi* without taking a drop of water. I performed the Shorashi Puja[1] with the attitude of a woman as mother. I saw her breasts and female private parts as parts of Mother.

"The attitude of God as Mother is the last word in spiritual practice. 'You are the Mother and I am Your son' – this is the last word."

Difficult rules for a monk – rules for householders and Girish

"A sannyasin keeps the *ekadashi* fast without taking a drop of water. It is a dangerous situation if he clings to enjoyment. 'Lust and greed' are sense enjoyments – they're like swallowing your own spittle. Money, name and fame, sense pleasures – all these are sense enjoyments. It's not good for a sannyasin to even sit and talk to a woman devotee. It harms not only him, but others – they don't learn from it. It doesn't help them. A sannyasin lives to teach others.

"Sitting or talking with women for a long time is also described as a kind of sexual intercourse.

1. Worship of a sixteen-year old girl.

There are eight kinds of intercourse:[1] Listening to a woman and enjoying her conversation is one kind. Talking about women is another kind. To whisper to a woman in private is also a kind of intercourse. Another kind is to keep a memento of a woman and enjoy it. Touch is another kind. That's why you shouldn't touch the feet of your guru's wife if she's young. These are all rules of conduct for a sannyasin.

"It's different for householders. After begetting one or two children, a husband and wife should live as brother and sister. The other seven forms of intercourse are not so harmful for them.

"A householder has debts: debts to gods, to the father, to the rishis, to raise one or two children, and then debts to his wife – if she is chaste.

"Worldly people don't understand who a good wife is, and who is a bad one; who is the power of knowledge, *vidyashakti* and who exhibits the power of ignorance, *avidyashakti*. A good wife who is the power of knowledge has very little lust, anger and so on. Her sleep is short, she pushes her husband's head away. She has affection, compassion, devotion to God, modesty, and so on. She serves everybody like a mother. And she helps her husband to develop love for God. She doesn't spend much, so

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1. smaraṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ keliḥ prekṣaṇaṁ guhyabhāṣaṇam,
saṅkalpo'dhyavasāyaśca kriyāniṣpattireva ca.
etanmaithunamaṣṭāṅgam.
[Hearing about women, speaking about them, playing with women, watching them, speaking to them secretly, thinking of sexual intercourse, determination towards it and the actual accomplishment; these are the eights kinds of sexual intercourse.]

her husband doesn't have to work harder and deprive himself of thinking about God.

"And then, there are mannish women who have certain signs. Their bad traits are – squint eyes, pigeon breasts, cat eyes, and calf cheeks."

Essence of samadhi and Girish – ways to God-realization – Girish poses a question

Girish: "What is the way for us?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Bhakti, love for God, is the essence. But then there is the sattva of bhakti, rajas of bhakti and tamas of bhakti.

"Sattvic bhakti means an attitude of humility and modesty, while tamasic bhakti shows itself in the attitude of a highway robber: 'I have recited His name, how can I sin? You are my real Mother, You will have to reveal Yourself to me.'"

Girish (*smiling*): "You yourself are teaching us tamasic bhakti."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "But there are signs when one has attained His vision. The devotee goes into samadhi – there are five kinds or five different feelings. One is like the movement of an ant – the spiritual current[1] feels like it is crawling up like an ant. The second is like the movement of a fish. The third feels like the zig-zagging of a snake, the fourth like the flight of a bird – flying from one branch to another. The fifth is like the movement of a monkey, as if the great current jumps up to the head. Samadhi follows.

1. *Mahavayu*.

"And there are two other kinds of samadhi. Unwavering samadhi[1] when the person is completely unconsciousness of the outside world. It can last a long time, perhaps many days. In the other samadhi,[2] the scattered mind suddenly withdraws and unites with God."

Sudden samadhi and M.

(*To M.*) "Do you understand this?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "People have realized God many different ways. Some attain Him by long and hard spiritual practices – they become perfect through them.[3] Some are perfect from birth – for example, Narada, Sukadeva and others. They are known as ever-perfect.[4] And then there are those who realize Him suddenly,[5] – not expecting it, like Nanda Basu's inheriting great wealth."

Chapter II

Girish's peaceful attitude – devotion and liberation of the shudra in the Kaliyuga

Sri Ramakrishna: "And then there are ones who attain perfection in dreams[6] and those who attain it by God's grace.[7]"

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1. Sthita.
2. Unmana.
3. Sadhana-siddha.
4. Nitya-siddha.
5. Hatha-siddha.
6. Swapna siddha.
7. Kripa siddha.

Saying this, Thakur begins to sing, absorbed with feeling:

Does everyone attain the treasure of Shyama? Does everyone get the treasure of Kali?

The ignorant mind does not know what She is.

Even Shiva with all his austerities cannot fix his mind on Her crimson feet.

The riches and wealth of Indra and the other gods is a trifle compared to Her love.

If Mother Shyama turns toward one and casts Her glance, that one lives in eternal Bliss.

The kings of yogis, the best of munis, and Indra are unable to meditate on Her feet.

But the worthless Kamalakanta still yearns for those feet.

Thakur remains in ecstasy for some time. Girish and other devotees are seated in front of him. A few days ago Girish had said quite a few rude things at the Star Theatre, but he is in a quiet mood now.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "This mood of yours is very good – the peaceful mood. That's why I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, make him peaceful so he doesn't say rude things to me.'"

Girish (*to M.*): "It seems like somebody is pressing my tongue and not letting me speak."

Sri Ramakrishna is still in ecstasy and he gradually becomes forgetful of people and things outside. Then coming down somewhat to the normal state, he brings his mind down. He looks again at the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (*looking at M.*): "All these people come (to Dakshineswar). Let them. The Divine Mother knows everything.

(*To a young man of the neighbourhood*) "Hello! What do you think? What's man's duty?"

Everyone remains silent. Is Thakur saying that the aim of human life is God-realization?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narayan*): "Don't you want to pass your examinations? O, Shiva is freed from all bonds. A man is Shiva, but the individual soul is bound by them."[1]

Thakur is now in an ecstatic mood. Finding a glass of water near him, he drinks from it. He says to himself, "Why, I have drunk water in this mood."

Sri Ramakrishna and Atul – yearning for God

It is not yet dusk. Thakur is talking with Atul, Girish's brother. Atul is sitting in front of him with the other devotees. A brahmin neighbour is also sitting there. Atul is an advocate of the High Court.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Atul*): "I have this to tell you – do both. Live in the world and also try to develop love for God."

Brahmin neighbour: "Can a person attain perfection without being a brahmin?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why not? Devotion of shudras in the Kaliyuga has been mentioned. For example, Shavari, Ruhidas, Guhak Pariah – all these."

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1. *Pash-mukta* Shiva, *pash-baddha* jiva. Thakur is making a pun on the word *pash* (pass).

Narayan (*smiling*): "Brahmins and shudras, all one!"

Brahmin neighbor: "Is it possible to find God in one lifetime?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What is not possible when God's grace dawns? If you bring a light into a room that's been dark for a thousand years, does the darkness disappear little by little? No, the room is lit up all at once.

(*To Atul*) "Intense renunciation is necessary. It has to be like a naked sword removed from its sheath. When such dispassion arises in the mind, near and dear relatives appear like deadly snakes, and the home like a deep well. And you have to call on God earnestly, with a yearning heart. He is bound to listen to an earnest call."

Everybody is silent, reflecting on what Thakur has said.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Atul*): "But maybe you don't have such yearning, such a pull."

Atul: "The mind doesn't concentrate."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The yoga of practice.[1] You have to call on Him daily. It doesn't happen in one day. Yearning comes when you call on Him daily.

"How can yearning come when a person is involved in worldly things day and night? In the beginning Jadu Mallick used to listen to spiritual talk, and he also used to talk about God. These days he doesn't talk so much. Day and night he is

1. Abhyasa Yoga.

surrounded by flatterers and only talks about worldly things."

Prayer at dusk – Tejchandra

It is now dusk. A lamp is lighted in the room. Sri Ramakrishna chants the name of God. He sings and prays.

He chants, "Haribol, Haribol, Haribol" and then, "Rama, Rama, Rama," then, 'Nitya Lilamayi,'[1] 'O Mother, tell us the way, Mother. You are our only refuge, our only refuge, our only refuge are You.'

Noticing that Girish is restless, Thakur stops talking for awhile. He says to Tejchandra, "Come and sit closer to me."

Tejchandra comes and sits near him. After awhile, he whispers to M., "I have to leave."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What is he saying?"

M.: "He has to go home."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why do I attract these boys so much? Because they are pure receptacles – worldliness hasn't touched them yet. If there is worldliness in a person, he can't grasp spiritual instruction. You can keep milk safely in a new pot, but if you put it in a pot already used for making curds, it turns sour. A cup that garlic paste has been made in doesn't lose its smell even if you wash it a thousand times."

1. The Mother image of eternal sport.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna, Star Theatre – Thakur watches the play of *Vrishaketu* with Narendra and others

Sri Ramakrishna is going to watch the performance of *Vrishaketu*. The Star Theatre is the same theatre on Beadon Street where the Manomohan Theatre later came into existence. Arriving there, they sit in a box facing south. M. and other devotees sit near Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Has Narendra come?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

The play begins. Karana and his wife, Padmavati, sacrifice their son, Vrishaketu [to please God, their guest, who came in the guise of a Brahmin to test Karana's charity]. Each one holds one end of a saw. Padmavati cries while she cooks the meat. The old brahmin guest says happily to Karana, "Come now, let's sit down together and share the meat." Karana says, "I can't do that. I can't eat the flesh of my son."

A devotee breathes heavily in consolation. Thakur also expresses his sorrow.

The play over, the Master goes to the recreation room. Girish, Narendra and other devotees are already there. When he enters the room, Sri Ramakrishna stands near Narendra and says, "I have come."

Overwhelmed hearing the sound of the sanai

Thakur sits down. The music is still heard.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "I feel happy listening to this music. There (in Dakshineswar), I used to be filled with ecstasy when they played the sanai. Noticing my state of mind, a sadhu said, 'This is a sign of the knowledge of Brahman.'"

Girish and 'me-mine'

When the music stops, Sri Ramakrishna speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "Is it your theatre or does it belong to other people too?"

Girish: "Ours, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's good to say 'ours'. It's not good to say 'mine'. Some people [talk of *me* and *mine]* say, 'I have come here on my own.' Only egotistical people of poor understanding say such a thing."

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra and others

Narendra: "The world is theatre."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, yes. Quite right. But at some place it's the play of vidya,[1] other places the play of avidya.[2]"

Narendra: "Everything is the play of vidya."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, yes. But that only comes with the knowledge of Brahman. In the case of a

1. Knowledge.
2. Ignorance.

devotee following the path of devotion, there's both: vidyamaya and avidyamaya.

"Sing a little."

Narendra sings:

The waves of ecstatic love for God rise on the sea of the bliss of consciousness.

The sweet play of intense bliss[1] has overwhelmed me.

All has become one in the great union.[2]

All divide and distinctions of time and space have disappeared.

Now, raising your arms in the inebriation of bliss, with the mind sing Hari's name.

When Narendra sings, "All has become one in the great union," Sri Ramakrishna says, "This is what a person realizes when he has attained the knowledge of Brahman – as you were saying, indeed everything is vidya."

When Narendra sings, "Now raising your arms in the inebriation of bliss, with the mind sing Hari's name," Sri Ramakrishna says, "Repeat that again."

When the song ends, Sri Ramakrishna resumes his conversation with the devotees.

Girish: "Devendra Babu didn't come. He said peevishly, 'We don't have fillings of condensed milk, we're only filled with lentil paste.[3] What can we contribute if we go there?"

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1. Mahabhava.
2. Mahayoga.
3. Meaning: without milk, the sweetness of divine love, we will only be filled with worthless lentil soup.

Sri Ramakrishna (*surprised*): "What? He never spoke like that before!"

Thakur has refreshments. He offers some to Narendra.

Jatin Deva (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "You're always saying, 'Eat, Narendra; do eat, Narendra.' Have the rest of us washed in with the wave?"

> Thakur is very fond of Jatin, who comes to Dakshineswar to visit him from time to time. Sometimes he stays for the night. He is a son of an aristocratic family of Sobhabazar – he belongs to the house of Radhakanta Deva.[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra, smiling*): "He's (Jatin) talking about you."

Then Thakur laughs and touches Jatin affectionately by holding his chin. He says "Go there and eat" [in other words, go to Dakshineswar].

Thakur is now going to watch the play *Vivaha Vibhrant*.[2] He goes to the box and takes his seat. He laughs when he hears the conversation of the maidservant in the play.

Girish's belief in incarnations of God – Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation?

After watching the action on the stage for awhile, Thakur becomes absent-minded. He whispers to M.

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1. Radhakanta was the family's household deity.
2. A marriage farce.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, is it true, what Girish Ghosh says (that he is an incarnation of God) true?"

M. "He's right. If it weren't true, why would it appeal to us?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look, I'm going through a change. My old mood has changed. I can't touch anything metal anymore."

M. listens, speechless.

Sri Ramakrishna: "This is a new state. It has a deep meaning."

Thakur cannot touch metal. Incarnations of God do not enjoy any of the splendours of maya. Is this why Thakur is saying this?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Do you see any change in me?"

M.: "How, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "In what I do."

M.: "Your activities are increasing as more people have come to know about you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You see! What I said before is becoming true now."

Thakur is silent for awhile. Then suddenly he says, "Well, why can't Paltu meditate well?"

Girish's cup of garlic – the Lord's message of hope for so-called sinners

Now Thakur is ready to go back to Dakshineswar.

Talking about Girish, Thakur had said to a devotee, "Does the cup in which garlic paste is made lose its smell completely if you wash it a thousand times?" Girish's pride had been wounded.

When Thakur is ready to go, Girish speaks to him.

Girish (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Will the smell of garlic ever go?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, it will go."

Girish: "So you are saying that it will?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "All smell or odor leaves when you put it in fire for a long time. If you put a cup smelling of garlic through fire, it won't retain its smell. It becomes a fresh, new cup.

"The person who says he won't succeed doesn't succeed. A person who feels he is liberated becomes liberated. But the person who thinks himself bound remains bound. The one who says emphatically that he is liberated does in fact become liberated. The one who says day and night, 'I am bound, I am bound' truly is bound."

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna Observing Silence and Vision of Maya

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna has been observing silence from eight in the morning to three in the afternoon. Today is Tuesday, 11 August 1885, 27th day of Shravana. The new moon day[1] was yesterday.

Sri Ramakrishna's disease has manifested. Has he come to know that he will soon be quitting this world to sit again in the lap of the Divine Mother? Is it because of this that he is observing silence? The Holy Mother weeps to see that he doesn't speak. Rakhal and Latu also weep. The brahmini woman of Baghbazar has arrived and is also crying.

The devotees ask him every now and then, "Will you remain silent always?"

Sri Ramakrishna by a sign says, "No."

Narayan comes at three o'clock. Thakur says to him, "Mother will bless you."

Narayan happily gives the news, "Thakur is speaking now." It is as if a heavy stone has been removed from the chest of Rakhal and the other devotees. They all come and sit near Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Rakhal and the other devotees*): "The Divine Mother has shown me that everything is maya. Only She is real and everything else is the manifestation of Her maya.

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1. Amavasya.

"And She showed me something else: how much every devotee has progressed."

Narayan and other devotees: "Well, how far has each of us advanced?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I saw everything about them: Nityagopal, Rakhal, Narayan, Purna, Mahima Chakravarti and others."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with Girish, Pundit Shashadhar and other devotees

The devotees in Calcutta have come to know of Thakur's illness. They understand that his epiglottis is diseased.

Today is Sunday, 16 August 1885; the first of Bhadrapada. A number of devotees have come to visit him – Girish, Ram, Nityagopal, Mahima Chakravarti, Kishori (Gupta), Pundit Shashadhar, Tarka Chudamani.

Thakur is full of joy as usual and talks to the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I can't talk about my disease with the Divine Mother. I feel ashamed to mention it."

Girish: "My Narayana will heal you."

Ram: "You'll be all right."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes, please bless me like that." (*All laugh.*)

Girish has started coming just recently. Thakur says to him, "You have to live in the middle of a lot

of problems. You have so many things to do. Come here three times more." Now he talks to Shashadhar.

Advice to Pundit Shashadhar – Brahman and the Primal Power are the same

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shashadhar*): "Say something about the Primal Power."

Shashadhar: "What do I know?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "A person was very respectful of another. The latter asked him to bring some fire to light a smoke for him. He said, 'Am I fit to bring fire for you?' And he didn't bring it!" (*All laugh.*)

Shashadhar: "Sir, the Divine Mother Herself is the cause and the material of the universe. It is She who creates it and its creatures. Then She Herself dwells as the universe and as its creatures. Just like a spider that makes a web (instrumental cause), drawing the web out of itself (material cause)."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And this is also true. He who is Purusha is also Prakriti; He who is the Absolute is also the Primal Power. When He is not active, when He is not creating, preserving or dissolving, I call Him Brahman or Purusha. And when He is active doing all these things, I call Him Shakti, Prakriti. But He who is Brahman is also the Primal Power. He who is Purusha has become Prakriti. Water is water whether it is still or moving. A snake remains a snake whether it moves in its zigzag way or lies coiled up quietly.

Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi talking about the knowledge of Brahman – desire for sense enjoyment and duty

"What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words. Speech stops. At the end of the song, 'Nitai is my mad elephant!' nothing remains to be said. First the singer repeats, 'Elephant, elephant.' Then, after saying 'Elephant,' he now can only say, 'Ele.' In the end, he can't even utter this. He loses all outer consciousness.

Saying this, Thakur goes into samadhi. He is standing.

Coming out of samadhi, he says, "What is beyond 'kshara'[1] and 'akshara'[2] cannot be described in words."

Everyone is silent. Thakur continues: "As long as the desire for sense enjoyment is not fulfilled and duties remain unfinished, a person cannot attain samadhi.[3]

(*To Shashadhar*) "God is making you work now, giving lectures and so on. You have to do all that now. "When this work is finished, there will be no more duties. A housewife who has finished the chores of the household and goes for a bath does not return however much you call her."

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1. Perishable.
2. Indestructible.
3. bhogaiśvaryaprasaktānāṁ tayāpahṛtacetasām,
vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhīyate ।
gītā 2-44
[O Partha, no set determination is formed in the minds of those that are deeply attached to pleasure and power, and whose discrimination is stole.]

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna ill – Doctor Rakhal – dancing with the devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room at Dakshineswar with the devotees. Today is Sunday, 20 September 1885, 5th of Aswin, the 11th day of the bright fortnight. Navagopal, Haralal (a teacher in the Hindu School), Rakhal, Latu, the kirtan singer Goswami and several others are present.

M. has brought Doctor Rakhal from Bowbazar to examine Thakur's sore throat. The doctor is stout and has thick fingers.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to the doctor*): "Wrestlers have fingers like yours. When Mahendra Sarkar examined my throat, he pressed my tongue so hard I felt great pain. He did it like he was pressing a cow's tongue."

Doctor Rakhal: "Let me examine you. You won't feel any pain."

Why is Sri Ramakrishna suffering?

After the Doctor examined him and made a prescription, Sri Ramakrishna begins to talk.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Well, people say that if he's so holy, why is he suffering from disease?"

Tarak: "Bhagavan Das Babaji was confined to bed for a long time because of illness."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Doctor Madhu carries food to the house of his mistress. He's sixty years old, but he's not suffering from any disease."

Goswami: "Your disease, sir, is because of others. You take upon yourself the transgressions of those who visit you. That's why you're suffering."

A Devotee: "If you say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, cure me of this disease,' you will be cured quickly.'"

Attitude of master and servant is diminishing – even looking for 'I-ness,' it can't be traced

Sri Ramakrishna: "I can't ask the Divine Mother to cure me. And the attitude of master and servant is diminishing. Sometimes I say, 'Mother, please repair the scabbard of the sword a little.' But I can make such a prayer less and less now. These days even when I'm looking for 'I,' it can't be found. I see that She Herself is dwelling inside this scabbard."

The Goswami has come for kirtan. A devotee asks whether there will be music. Sri Ramakrishna is not well and might become ecstatic if there is kirtan – this is what everyone is afraid of.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Let's have a little kirtan. They're afraid I might go into ecstasy – it hurts that spot in my throat."

Listening to the music, Thakur is unable to control his feelings. He stands up and begins to dance with the devotees.

Doctor Rakhal sees everything. His hired carriage is waiting for him. He and M. stand up to return to Calcutta. Both of them salute Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately, to M.*): "Have you had your meal?"

Instructions to M. on self-realization – 'the body is only a sheath'

It is Thursday, 24 September, the full moon day. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot in his room. He is in agony with the disease in his throat. M. and the other devotees are sitting on the floor.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Every now and then I think this body is only a pillowcase. There's nothing but the Indivisible (Sat-chit-ananda).

"When I go into ecstasy, the disease stays away from me. Now that mood is coming on me and I feel like laughing."

Dwija's sister and younger maternal grandmother have come to see Thakur since hearing of his illness. After saluting him, they sit on one side of the room. Seeing the maternal grandmother, Thakur asks, "Who is she? Is she the one who raised Dwija? Why has Dwija brought an ektara?"[1]

M.: "Sir, it has two strings."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Dwija's father doesn't agree with his views. Besides, what will people say? It's better for him to pray secretly."

There is an extra picture of Gaur and Nitai on the wall of Sri Ramakrishna's room. The picture is of Gaur and Nitai singing kirtan in Navadvip with their companions.

Ramlal (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Let me give this picture (to M.)."

1. A single-stringed musical instrument.

Sri Ramakrishna: "That would be good."

Sri Ramakrishna and Harish's service

Thakur has been taking the medicine prescribed by Doctor Pratap for some time. He woke up deep at night feeling very restless. Harish, who was in the room, was nursing him. Rakhal was also there. Ramlal is sleeping on the verandah outside. Later, Thakur said, "When I was feeling so restless, I felt like embracing Harish. After being massaged with medicinal oil, I felt better and began to dance."

Appendix I

Sri Ramakrishna and Narendra (Swami Vivekananda)

Vivekananda in America and in Europe

Chapter I

It is the day following the Rathayatra, 1885, Sankranti of the month of Ashada. This morning Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with the devotees in Balaram's house talking about Narendra's (Swami Vivekananda's) great qualities.

Great qualities of Narendra – 'a prince among men'

"Narendra belongs to a very high plane – the realm of the Absolute. He has a manly nature. Many devotees come here, but none can equal him.

"Now and then I sit down and consider the devotees. They are like lotuses: some with ten petals, others with sixteen petals and some others with a hundred petals. But among lotuses Narendra is a thousand-petalled lotus.

"The others may be a brass pot or a jug – but Narendra is a barrel.

"Compared to ponds and tanks, Narendra is a big lake like the Haldarpukur.

"Among fish, he is a big red-eyed carp. Others are different kinds of small fish – minnows and other small fish.[1]

"He is a very large container – he can hold many things. He is a bamboo with a big space inside.

"Narendra is not under the control of anything. He is above attachment and sense enjoyments. He is a male pigeon. If you hold a male pigeon's beak, it will pull it back – a female pigeon doesn't resist."

First realize God – when you receive the commandment you may preach

Three years ago, in 1882, Narendra came to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with a couple of Brahmo friends. He stayed there for the night. At dawn, Thakur said, "Go and meditate in the Panchavati." A short time later, Thakur went there and saw that Narendra was meditating with his friends at the foot of the Panchavati. When the meditation was over, Thakur said to him, "Look, the aim of life is to realize God. You should meditate and think on Him privately in a solitary spot and with a yearning heart. And you should pray and weep, saying, 'Lord, reveal Thyself to me!'"

About the welfare work of the Brahmo Samaj and other religious sects – like the education of women, establishing schools and lecturing – he said, "First realize God, both the formless God and God with form. He who is beyond speech and mind assumes a form for the sake of devotees – appears

1. Pona, kathi vatta.

and talks to them. After attaining His vision and getting His commandment, then one should take to humanitarian work. It is said in a song: No deity has been installed in the temple, yet Podo blows a conchshell as if arati is being performed. So somebody scolds him, saying:

O Podo, Madhava has not been installed in your temple.

You have unnecessarily created confusion by blowing the conch.

Eleven bats live here day and night.

"If you wish to install Madhava in the temple of your heart, if you wish to realize God, what is the use of only blowing the conch shell? Purify your heart first. When the heart is purified, the Lord will come and sit upon the pure seat. When there are bat droppings, Madhava cannot be brought here. The eleven bats are the eleven sense organs.

"First dive deep. Dive and pick up the jewels. Other work will come later. First install Madhava. Then if you feel like it, you can deliver lectures.

"Nobody likes to dive. No one practices spiritual disciplines – devotion is missing, discrimination and non-attachment are absent. After learning a few words, people start lecturing.

"It's difficult to teach people. If someone receives His command after realizing God, only then can he instruct."

Pundit Shashadhar met Sri Ramakrishna in Calcutta on the Rathayatra day in 1884. Narendra was there. Sri Ramakrishna said to the pundit, "You lecture for the benefit of people. That is good. But my dear, without receiving a command from

God, instructions are useless. People will listen to your lectures for two days and then forget about them. There were people who used to ease themselves on the bank of Haldarpukur. Others berated them with foul language, but they continued. At last, when the government put up a notice, it stopped. In the same way teaching is useless if you haven't received a command from God."

That's why, taking the instruction of his guru, Narendra renounced the world and carried out austerities secretly in solitude. Later, after strengthening himself, he took up the difficult task of teaching humanity.

When Sri Ramakrishna was lying ill at Cossipore in 1886, he wrote on a piece of paper: "Naren will instruct mankind."

Swami Vivekananda sent a letter to the residents of Madras from America. In it he said he was a servant of Sri Ramakrishna and was becoming his messenger; he was propagating Thakur's message to the whole world:

> "It was your generous appreciation of him whose message to India and to the whole world, I, the most unworthy of His servants, had the privilege to bear, it was your innate spiritual instinct which saw in him and his message the first murmurs of that tidal wave of spirituality which is destined at no distant future to break upon India in all its irresistible power"... (Reply to the Madras Address)

In his third lecture in Madras, he said, "Whatever of significance I have said is all the

Paramahamsa's. And if I have told you anything with no substance, it is all mine."

> "Let me conclude by saying that if in my life I have told one word of truth, it was his and his alone; and if I have told you many things which were not true, correct and beneficial to the human race, it was all mine and on me is the responsibility." (Third lecture, Madras.)

When he was welcomed in Radhakanta's house in Calcutta, he said that the power of Sri Ramakrishna was manifest around the world. O Indians, meditate on Him and you will achieve greatness in every type of activity. He said:

> "If this nation wants to rise, it will have to rally enthusiastically round his name. It does not matter who preaches Ramakrishna Paramahamsa; whether I or you or anybody else. But him I place before you and it is for you to judge, and for the good of our race, for the good of our nation, to judge now what you shall do with His great ideal of life.
>
> Within ten years of his passing away His Power had encircled the globe. Judge him not through me. I am only a weak instrument. His character was so great that I or any of his disciples, if we spent hundreds of lives, could do no justice to a millionth part of what he really was!"

While talking about his gurudeva, Swami Vivekananda would be completely beside himself. Blessed be his love and devotion to his guru!

Chapter II

The work of spreading Sri Ramakrishna's teachings by Narendra

Today we will comment a little on how Swami Vivekananda made efforts to spread the universal eternal Hindu religion[1] as taught by Sri Paramahamsa Deva.

Realization of God

Sri Ramakrishna's first teaching was that you have to realize God. Religion does not mean memorizing the doctrines of a religion or quoting verses. God-realization comes to the devotee who calls on Him with a yearning heart – whether in this life or another. I remember what he said one day at the Kali temple in Dakshineswar.

The Paramahamsa was talking to Mahima Chakravarti of Cossipore (on Sunday, 26 October 1884).

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan and other devotees*): "How long will you study scriptures? What is the use of only reasoning? First you have to try to realize Him. What will you know by reading books? As long as you are at a distance from the marketplace, you only hear the hustle and bustle. When you reach it, you find it very different. Then you see and hear clearly: 'Take these potatoes, pay me for them.'

"You don't get the right feeling from books. There is a great difference. When you realize God,

1. Sanatana Dharma.

scriptures and science all seem like straw and dry grass.

"What you need is to know the rich man. Why are you anxious to know how many houses, gardens, and company shares he has? Somehow or other get introduced to the owner – whether or not you have to scale the fence to do so. Then if he wishes he will tell you himself about his houses, gardens and company shares. Once you're introduced to the proprietor, his servants and his guards will all salute you." (*All laugh.*)

Devotee: "But then how can you manage to get acquainted with the proprietor?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have to work for it – practice spiritual disciplines. It won't do to just sit and say that God exists. You have to reach Him somehow. Call on Him in solitude and pray, 'Reveal Yourself to me!' Weep with a longing heart. You roam around madly for 'lust and greed' – be a little mad for Him too. Let people say that so-and-so is mad for God. In whatever way you can, call on Him in solitude for a few days – renounce all else. What is the use of just sitting there and saying, 'He exists?' There are big fish in the Haldarpukur. Can you get one by just sitting on its bank? Prepare some bait and offer it to the fish. Gradually, one will come out of the deep water, making ripples on the surface. Then you will feel joy. You might be able to have a little glimpse of it jumping out of the water. When you see it, you feel even more joy."[1]

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1. Jesus Christ would tell his devotees: 'Blessed are the pure in spirit, for they shall see God.'

Swamiji said exactly the same thing at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, i.e. the aim of religion is God-realization, to see God:

> "The Hindu does not want to live upon words and theories. He must see God and that alone can destroy all doubts. So the best proof a Hindu sage gives about the soul, about God, is I have seen the soul; I have seen God … the whole struggle in their system is a constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God and see God; and their reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect even 'as the Father in Heaven is perfect', constitutes the religion of the Hindus." Lectures on Hinduism (Parliament of Religions, Chicago)

Swamiji lectured at many places in America and he said the same thing everywhere. In a place known as Hartford, he said:

> "The next idea that I want to bring to you is that religion does not consist in doctrines or dogmas… The end of all religions is the realization of God in the soul. Ideals and methods may differ but that is the central point. That is the realization of God, something behind this world of sense – this world of eternal eating and drinking and talking non-sense – this world of eternal shadows and selfishness. There is that beyond all books, beyond all creeds, beyond the varieties of this world and that is the realization of God within you. A man may believe in all the churches in the world, he may carry on his head all the sacred books ever written, he may baptize himself in all the rivers of the earth; still if he has no perception of God I would class him with the rankest atheist."

Swamiji said in his book *Raja Yoga* that people nowadays do not believe that God can be realized. They say, 'Yes, rishis and great spiritual

personalities like Christ may have realized the Self. But that doesn't happen these days.' Swamiji says that one certainly can realize the Self. Practice concentration of mind; you will certainly find Him within your heart:

> "The teachers all saw God; they all saw their own souls and what they saw they preached. Only there is this difference that by most of these religions, especially in modern times, a peculiar claim is made, namely, that these experiences are impossible at the present day; they were only possible with a few men, who were the first founders of the religion and subsequently bore their names. At the present time these experiences have become obsolete and therefore we have now to take religion on belief, this I entirely deny. Uniformity is the rigorous law of nature; what once happened can happen always." (Raja-yoga: Introduction)

On 9 January, 1896 Swamiji lectured in New York on the Ideal of Universal Religion. That is to say, the religion where you can find the followers of the path of knowledge or devotion or action unite. While ending his lecture he said: The aim of all religions is God-realization. He also said: knowledge, action, devotion – these are all different paths, different ways – but the goal is the same, the realization of God. He said:

> "Then again all these various yogas (work or worship, psychic control or philosophy) have to be carried out into practice; theories will not do. We have to meditate upon it, realise it until it becomes our whole life. Religion is realization, not talk nor doctrine nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging. It is not an intellectual assent. By intellectual assent we can come to a hundred sorts of foolish things and change

> them next day, but this being and becoming is what Religion is."

In a letter he wrote to the residents of Madras he said: The specialty of the Hindu religion is realizing God. The chief ideal of the Vedas is realization of God. This is what distinguishes the Hindu religion from others:

> "The one idea which distinguishes the Hindu religion from every other in the world, the one idea to express that which the sages almost exhaust the vocabulary of the Sanskrit language, is that man must realize God… Thus to realize God, Brahman, as the Dvaitins (dualists) say, or to become Brahman as the Advaitins say – is the aim and end of the whole teachings of the Vedas."

Swamiji lectured in London on 29 October 1896. His subject was God-realization. In this lecture he read from the Kathopanishad and mentioned the story of Nachiketa. Nachiketa wanted to see God. He wanted to acquire the knowledge of Brahman. Yama, the King of Death,[1] said, "Brother, if you want to know God, you will have to rid yourself of attachment and the desire for enjoyment. You cannot attain union with God if there is desire for enjoyment. By loving something insubstantial [avastu], you cannot attain the substantial [vastu]." Swamiji said, "According to me, everybody is an atheist. With the help of a rigmarole of words, I harp on religion. If you see God only once, you will gain real faith.

"We are all atheist and yet we try to fight the man who tries to confess it. We are all in the dark;

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1. Dharmaraj.

religion is to us mere intellectual talk. We consider a man religious who can talk well. But this not religion… Religion comes when that actual realization in our own souls begins. That will be the dawn of religion. Then will real faith begin."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and Narendra. Harmony of religions

Narendra and other educated young men were surprised to see Sri Ramakrishna's love and reverence for all religions. The paramahamsa would frankly say that there is truth in all religions. And he would add: All religions are true – you can reach God through every religion. One day, the Kojagar Lakshmi Puja day[1] (27 October 1882), Keshab Sen went by steamer to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar and took Thakur back to Calcutta. They talked about many things on the way – the same conversation as the one on 13 August, a few months ago. I am quoting from my diary their talk about the harmony of religions.

Kedarnath Chatterji organized a great festival at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. After the celebration, about three or four o'clock, many talked on the southern verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "As many religions, so many paths. Every religion is true. It's like going to Kalighat by different paths. Religion is not God. One can reach God following different creeds.

"Rivers come from different directions – but they all end in the ocean. They all become one there.

1. Full moon day of the bright fortnight of Aswin, the nightlong puja of Lakshmi.

"You can climb to the roof by different means. You can go up by brick steps, a wooden ladder, a spiral staircase, even a rope. But you have to hold onto only one. You can't put your foot on two or three different kinds of steps and reach the roof. But when you have reached it, you can come down by using any means, and again go up.

"So at first a person must follow only one religion. When God is realized, he can come and go by any religious path. When he is among Hindus, everybody thinks he is a Hindu. When he is with Muslims, all think he is a Muslim. And when he is with Christians, they all think he is a Christian.

"The followers of all religions call upon the same one Person. Some call Him Ishvara, some Rama, some Hari and others Allah or Brahman. These are different names, but the Reality is the same.

"A pond has four landing steps. Hindus take water from one of them and call it *jal*; from another, Muslims take water and call it *pani*; Christians at yet another spot call it water; and then there are some people who call it *aqua*. (*All laugh.*) It's the same thing – water. But the names are different. What is the use in quarreling? Everybody is calling upon the one, the same, God, and everybody will go to Him."

A Devotee (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Is there anything false in another religion?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Which religion is without error? Everybody says his watch gives the correct time. But no watch is absolutely correct. All

watches have to be set right from time to time by comparing them with the sun.

"What religion has no error? But even if there is an error and you call on Him sincerely with a yearning heart, God will certainly listen to you.

"Just imagine a father with many sons, small and big. Not all of them can say, 'Father.'[1] One says, 'Baba', another says, 'Ba.' Yet another one says just, 'Pa.' Will the father be angry with the ones who can't pronounce *baba*? (*All laugh*.) No, the father will still love them all equally.[2]

"People think that their religion is true, that they have understood what God is, but these people have not understood. They think they are calling on Him correctly, but they're not. They think that God grants them His grace but not others. Such people don't understand that God is the father and mother of all. If they are sincere, He will be compassionate to all."

What the religion of love is, he explained many times. But how many people have been able to comprehend it? How much could even Keshab Sen understand? Swami Vivekananda, having been initiated into this fiery formula of love, was able to propagate it in the world. Sri Ramakrishna again and again advised not taking recourse to dogmatism. To say that my religion is true and yours is false is dogmatism. And it is the basis of all trouble. Swamiji spoke of this at the Parliament of

1. Baba.
2. The same is mentioned in an English book: Max Muller's Hibbert Lectures. Max Muller also explained it with the same metaphor, that it is not right to hate those who worship gods and goddesses.

Religions in Chicago: how much killing, shedding of blood, and violence have taken place in the name of Christianity, Islam and other religions:

> "Sectarianism, bigotry and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often, and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair." Lecture on Hinduism, (Chicago, Parliament of Religions).

In another lecture Swamiji said, "All religions are true," and tried to explain it through scientific reasoning.

> "If anyone here hopes that this unity will come by the triumph of any one of these religions and destruction of the others, to him I say, Brother, yours is an impossible hope. Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid.
>
> "The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become earth or the air or the water? No, it becomes a plant, it assimilates the air, the earth and the water, converts them into plant substance and grows a plant.
>
> "Similar in the case with religion. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve its own individuality and grow according to its own law of growth."

In America Swamiji lectured on the Hindu religion at the Brooklyn Ethical Society. Dr. Lewis Janes chaired this meeting. Here too, Swamiji's first words were on the harmony of religions. He

said that it is not possible that the religion of a particular person is true and those of all others are false. To say that only my religion is true is a kind of disease. We all have five fingers. If one person has six, we will have to say that he is different."

> "Truth has always been universal. If I alone were to have six fingers on my hand while all of you have only five, you would not think that my hand was the true intent of nature, but rather that it was abnormal and diseased. Just so with religion. If one creed alone were to be true and all others untrue, you would have again to say that, that religion is diseased. If one religion is true, all others must be true. Thus the Hindu religion is your property as well as mine." (Lecture at Brooklyn Ethical Society)

When Swamiji spoke to thousands at his first lecture at the Chicago Parliament of Religions, six thousand were fascinated and stood up to give him a standing ovation.[1] He said:

> "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to tell you that I belong to a religion into whose sacred language, the Sanskrit, the word 'exclusion' is untranslatable."

1. "When Vivekananda addressed the audience as sisters and brothers of America, there arose a peal of applause that lasted for several minutes." (Dr. Barrow's Report) "But eloquent as were many of the brief speeches, no one expressed so well the spirit of the Parliament of Religions and its limitations as the Hindu monk… He is an orator by divine right." (New York Critique, 1893).

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra, Karma Yoga and Patriotism

Sri Ramakrishna used to always say, "'Me and mine,' this is just ignorance. 'You and yours,' is knowledge." One day, a great festival was being celebrated in the courtyard of Suresh Mitra, on Sunday, 15 June 1884. Sri Ramakrishna and many devotees, including many Brahmo devotees, were there. Thakur said to Pratap Chandra Majumdar and other devotees, "Look, 'me and mine' – this alone is ignorance. Everybody says that the Kali Temple was built by Rani Rasmani – nobody says that God built it. So-and-so founded the Brahmo Samaj – that's what people say. Nobody says that it came about by the will of God. 'I have done it' – this is ignorance. 'O God, nothing at all is mine, this Kali Temple is not mine, the Samaj is not mine, all these belong to you; wife, son and family, none of these are mine, they are all yours.' These are the words of spiritual wisdom."

"Saying, 'Mine! Mine,' and getting attached to all those things are maya. Loving everybody is compassion. I love only the members of the Brahmo Samaj is maya. To love all people of the country, the followers of all religions, comes from compassion, love of God. Maya binds a man and makes him forget God, but compassion moves him to realize God. Sukadeva and Narada had compassion."

Thakur said, "To love only your compatriots is maya. To love people of all countries and all religions comes from compassion, love of God." Then why did Swami Vivekananda concern himself so much with his own country?

Swamiji said one day at the Chicago Parliament of Religions that he went there to beg for money for his poor countrymen, but he found it very difficult. It is very difficult to collect money from Christians for people who are not Christian.

> "The crying evil in the East is not religion, they have religion enough, but it is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats;…
>
> "I came here to seek aid for my impoverished people and fully realized how difficult it was to get help for heathens from Christians in the Christian land." Speech before the Parliament of Religions (Chicago Tribune).

One of the chief disciples of Swamiji, Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble) said that when Swamiji was living in Chicago, he would shower a lot of love on any Indian he met, whatever religion he belonged to – Hindu, Parsee or Muslim. He would take his countrymen to the prosperous home where he was staying as a guest. The hosts took care of them generously. They knew very well that if they didn't, Swamiji would surely leave their homes and go somewhere else.

> "At Chicago any Indian man attending the great world Bazaar, rich or poor, high or low, Hindu, Mohammaden, Parsee, what not, might at any moment be brought by him to his hosts for hospitality

> and entertainment and they well knew that any failure of kindness on their part to the least of these would immediately have lost them his presence."

Swamiji constantly pondered how to rid his countrymen from the pangs of poverty, how to educate them correctly, how to help them grow spiritually. But he was as anxious for the African Negroes as he was for his own countrymen. Sister Nivedita said that when Swamiji was traveling in the southern United States, some refused to receive him, thinking that he was a coloured man, a negro. But when they found out that he was a Hindu monk, the well-known Swami Vivekananda, they took him home with great regard and served him. They said to him, "When we asked if you were an African, why did you leave without saying anything?"

Swamiji said, "But why? Isn't the African Negro my brother?"– in other words, "Are my countrymen different from men anywhere in the world?" You should love a negro the same way you love a countryman. But because one always lives with his own countrymen, service to them comes first. This is called service without attachment.

It is also called karma yoga. Everybody works, but work without expectation of any reward is very difficult. Without renouncing everything, without meditating on God in solitude for a long time, it's not possible to help one's country. Don't say, 'My country,' for that is maya. Whoever lives there are Yours (God's), so want to serve them. It is Your command, that's the reason to serve one's country. 'It is Your work,' I am your servant – that's why I

observe this vow. Whether I succeed or not. You [God] care about it – it is not for my own name or fame, it is to bring to light Your glory."

What is real patriotism? It was to teach its ideal to humanity that Swamiji took this earnest vow. Those who have a home and family, those who have never longed for God, who, hearing the word *renunciation* only smile, those whose minds are always on 'lust and greed' and for name and fame in this world, those who are struck dumb to hear that the ideal of human life is to realize God – how can such people accept this high and lofty ideal of benefiting their country? Though Swamiji used to weep for his, he always remembered with it that in this transitory world only God is real and everything else is unreal. When he returned from the foreign land, Swamiji went to Almora to see the Himalayas. The residents of Almora worshipped him as the very presence of God. When he saw the very high peaks of Nagadhiraj Deva Atma Himgiri, he became absorbed with emotion. He said, "Today I am seeing that holy land of renunciation in the holy Uttarakhand, where rishis meditated on God day and night after renouncing the hubbub of the world. It was from their lips that the Vedic verses poured. Oh, when will such a day come to me? I do have the desire to continue some work, but coming to this holy land again after so long, I am losing those desires. Now I wish to sit down alone and spend my last days in meditation on the lotus feet of Hari, merged in deep samadhi.

> "It is the hope of my life to end my days somewhere within this Father of Mountains, where Rishis lived – where philosophy was born." (Speech at Almora.)

On seeing the Himalayas, one's desire for work is lost. Only one idea comes to mind, the renunciation of work.[1]

> "As peak after peak of this Father of Mountains began to appear before my sight, all those propensities to work, that ferment that had been going on in my brain for years seemed to quiet down and mind reverted to that one eternal theme which the Himalayas always teach us, that one theme which is reverberating in the very atmosphere of the place, the one theme, the murmur, of which I hear even now in the rushing whirlpools of its rivers – renunciation."[2]

Upon achieving this renunciation, this detachment, a person becomes fearless – all other things involve fear.

> sarvaṁ vastu bhayānvitaṁ bhuvi nṛṇāṁ vairāgyamevābhayam
>
> vairāgyaśatakam 31
>
> "Everything in this life is fraught with fear.
>
> It is renunciation that makes one fearless."

When you come here, you lose the feeling of sectarianism – quarrels and arguments concerning religion disappear. Only one supreme truth becomes established in the mind – that the only thing needed in life is the worship of God – all else is illusion.

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1. Karma sannyasa.
2. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda: Volume 3; Lectures from Colombo to Almora; Address of Welcome at Almora and Reply.

Only God is the reality, all else unreal. Or, a bee doesn't buzz anymore when it sits on a lotus flower.

> "Strong souls will be attracted to this Father of Mountains in time to come, when all this fight between sects and all those differences in dogmas will not be remembered any more, and quarrels between your religion and my religion will have vanished altogether, when mankind will understand that there is but one Eternal Religion and that is the perception of the Divine within and the rest is mere froth; such ardent souls will come here, knowing that the world is but Vanity, knowing that everything is useless except the worship of the Lord and the Lord alone." (Speech at Almora.)

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Tie the knowledge of Advaita (non-dualism) to the end of your cloth and go anywhere you like." Swami Vivekananda engaged himself in work with the knot of Advaita tied to the end of his cloth. For the sannyasin, what are home, wealth, strangers and one's own family, homeland or foreign lands? Yajnavalkya said to Maitreyi, "Without realizing God, what use is wealth and education? Maitreyi, first know Him and then anything else." Swamiji propagated this very idea to the world. He said, "O, people of the world, first renounce sense pleasures and worship God in solitude. After this, you can do whatever you like. It will not cause any harm. Serve your country or, if you like, raise a family. There is no harm in any of these when you understand that He resides in all, that there is nothing else but He, that the world and your country are not without Him. After you have realized God, you will see that it is He alone who

dwells in the world." Rishi Vaishishtha Deva said to Ramachandra, "Rama, what you say, that you want to renounce the world – just reason it out with me. If God is outside the world, then renounce it."[1] Ramachandra had realized the Atman (Self), so he kept silent. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "First know how to use a dagger before you take it in your hand." Swami Vivekananda explained who a real karma yogi is. What good can he do for his country? Swamiji knew that there were other great things to do besides helping the poor with money. The main thing is to help them know God. After that comes learning, then the gift of life, then clothing and feeding the poor. How long can you end the miseries of the world? Sri Ramakrishna asked Krishnadas Pal,[2] "Well, what is the aim of life?" Krishnadas said, "In my opinion it is to do good to the world, to remove misery from the world." Thakur was irritated and responded, "You have the intelligence of the son of a widow![3] Why, how much can you save the world from its trials and tribulations? Is the world so small? Do you know that there are crabs in the Ganges in the rainy season? In the same way, there are innumerable universes. He who is the Master of this universe takes care of all of them. The goal of life is to know Him first. Then you may take up anything you like." Swamiji also said somewhere:

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1. Yogavashishtha.
2. Krishnadas Pal was a famous and wealthy man of Calcutta, a well-known philanthropist. He visited Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple.
3. Randi putti buddhi: low intelligence, having grown up flattering others and by other such means.

> "Spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can remove our miseries forever, and other knowledge satisfies wants only for a time... He who gives spiritual knowledge in the greatest benefactor of mankind... Next to spiritual help (Brahmajnana) comes intellectual help (Vidyadana), the gift of secular knowledge. This is far higher than the giving of food and clothes; the next gift is the gift of life, and the fourth, the gift of food. Karmayoga (New York), My plan of Campaign (Madras).

God-realization is the aim of life and it is the main interest in this country. First this, and then anything else. Politics shouldn't be talked about in the beginning. First meditate on God with a concentrated mind and see Him in your heart. Having realized Him, you'll be able to do good to your motherland because then your mind will be detached. You can't serve your country by thinking, "my country." It is the God in all that you can serve. Then you will not see any difference between your country and foreign countries. Then you will be able to truly see how you can do good to others. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Those who play the game of chess can't understand the right moves as well as unattached onlookers. They can suggest much better moves." This is because an unattached person needs nothing for himself. An unattached person who is free from attachment and malice, who is a spiritual personality, who is liberated in this very life, who has practiced spiritual disciplines for a long time and attained Him doesn't like anything else."

> And having gained which, he thinks that there is no greater gain than that, wherein established he is not

> shaken even by the heaviest affliction. (Bhagavata Gita 6:22)

For this reason, the politics and the social code of Hindus are all religious regulations. Manu, Yajnavalkya, Prashar and other great saints are the authors of these religious texts. They had no need of anything. Even so, having received the command of God they composed these scriptures for householders. Remaining unattached they suggested the right move in the chess game. For this reason, there is no possibility of any error in what they said due to place, time or character.

Swami Vivekananda was also a karma yogi. Remaining unattached, he took the vow of service to others. That is why he was so valuable a worker. Remaining detached, he did good for this country, the way the sages of yore worked incessantly for the good of humanity. May we be able to follow his footsteps on this path of religion without selfish desire.[1] But how difficult a thing it is. First we have to attain the lotus feet of Lord Hari. We have to practice renunciation and austere spiritual effort like Vivekananda. Only then may we be eligible.

Blessed are you, the all-renouncing personality. You have truly followed in the footsteps of your guru. You have truly practiced the great mantra of your gurudeva: first attain God, and then anything else. You understood that if you don't believe in God, this world is only a dreamlike magic show. That is why you renounced everything and devoted yourself to spiritual practice. When you saw that He is the life of all, when you saw that there is

1. Nishkama.

nothing but Him, then you put your mind on the world, O Mahayogin! You entered again the region of work for the service of Hari imminent in all. Thus all Hindus, Muslims, Christians, foreigners, wealthy, poor, all men and women became a part of your limitless love – you gave them all the embrace of ecstatic love. Overwhelmed with deep dispassion, leaving behind the mother who gave you birth, with tears flowing from your eyes, you put on the ochre robe and left. Later, to acknowledge her maternal love and to fulfill her desire, you came back to see that mother. You worked like Narada and Janaka to educate humanity.

Chapter V

Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra, Keshab Sen and worship of God with form

Is God with form or without form?

One day Keshab Chandra Sen, accompanied by his disciples, came to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur talked with him about God without form for some time. The paramahamsa said to him, "I don't think of Kali as an image of clay or stone. She is Spirit. That which is Brahman is also Kali. When not acting, it is Brahman; when creating, preserving or destroying, it is Kali. Kali – that is, She who romances time.[1] Time, that is, Brahman." The following conversation took place that day:

1. Kala.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab*): "Do you know what it's like? Think of Sat-chit-ananda [Existence-Consciousness-Bliss] as an ocean – without any shore or limit. Due to the coolness of devotion, water freezes into ice at different places – into different forms. In other words, at times God reveals Himself as a form for the sake of his devotee. And when the sun of the knowledge of the Absolute rises, the ice melts – that is, one goes into samadhi and realizes that God is the only reality and the world is an illusion. All forms disappear. Then it's not possible to say in words what He is. You can't catch Him with your mind, reason or ego.

"A person who knows one thing properly can also know another. He who knows God without form can also know God with form. A person who hasn't gone to the neighborhood can't know where Shyampukur and Telipara are. Not everybody is able to worship God without form. So there's a great need for worship of God with form."

Explaining further, the paramahamsa says: "A mother has five sons. She has cooked fish in different ways to suit the digestion of her children. For one, she has made fish pulao. And for the son who has bad digestion, she has made fish soup – whatever suits the different boys.

"In this country people worship God with form. Christian missionaries from America and Europe brand Indians as uncivilized. They say that Indians are idol worshipers, that they are in miserable condition."

Swami Vivekananda explained for the first time in America the significance of God with form. He said, "Indians do not worship idols."

> "At the very outset I may tell you there is no polytheism in India. In every temple if one stands by and listens, he will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God to these images." (Lectures on Hinduism, Chicago)

Swamiji explained with the help of psychology that nothing except God with form comes to mind when one begins to think of God. He said:

> "Why does a Christian go to Church? Why is the Cross holy? Why is the face turned toward the sky in prayers? Why are there so many images in the Catholic Church? Why are there so many images in the minds of Protestants when they pray? My brethren, we can no more think about anything without a material image than we can live without breathing. Omnipresence to almost the whole world means nothing. Has God a superficial area? If not, then when we repeat the word we think of the extended earth; that is all." (Lectures on Hinduism, Chicago)

Swamiji also said, "The worship of God with form and the formless God depends on the worshiper. The worship of God with form is not sinful[1] or illusory. It is a truth of the lower order.

"If a man can realize his divine nature easily with the help of an image, is it right to call it a sin? Nor even when he has passed that stage, should he call it an error. To the Hindu, man is not traveling from error to truth, but from lower to higher truth."

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1. Kusanskara.

Swamiji said that there could not be one rule for everybody. The Lord is one, but He appears in various forms before His different kinds of devotees. The Hindu understands this.

"Unity is variety in the plan of nature and the Hindu has recognized it. Other religions lay down certain fixed dogmas and try to force society to adopt them; they place before society one kind of coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry, all alike. If it does not fit John and Henry, he must go without a coat to cover his body. The Hindus have discovered that the Absolute can be realized, thought of, or stated only through the Relative."

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna, Brahmo Samaj, Narendra and the Doctrine of Sin

Swamiji's spiritual preceptor, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, used to say, "By repeating the name of God and meditating on Him sincerely, sin vanishes. It's like a mountain of cotton that burns away instantly with the touch of fire. Or, imagine a group of birds perched on a tree. If you clap your hands, they fly away."

One day Thakur was talking with Keshab Babu.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab*): "It is the mind that binds, and then again it is the mind that liberates. I am liberated. Whether I live a worldly life or in a forest, how can I be bound? I am a child of God, the son of the King of kings. Who can bind me? If a snake bites, its venom dries up immediately if you say emphatically, 'No venom, no

venom.' Similarly, by saying repeatedly and firmly, 'I am not bound, no, I am not bound. I am free.' You in fact become that, you become free.

"Somebody gave me a book of the Christians, the Bible. I asked him to read out loud. It was full of nothing but sin and sin only. The person who says again and again, 'I am bound, I am bound,' in the end is indeed bound. The one who says day and night, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner,' does become a sinner.

"A person should have such faith in the name of God as to say, 'since I have taken His name, can sin possibly reside in me?' What bondage is there then? What sin? Krishnakishore was an orthodox Hindu brahmin who observed all the rules of conduct. He went to Vrindavan. One day there he felt thirsty. Approaching a well, he saw a person standing at it. He said to him, 'Brother, can you give me some water to drink? Which caste do you belong to?' The man said, 'Maharaj, I belong to the low caste of cobblers.' Krishnakishore said, 'Just repeat the name of Shiva and draw me some water.'

"When you repeat the name of the Lord, it purifies both the body and the mind. Why just talk about sin and hell? Say once, 'I shall never again do the evil I have committed today' and have faith in His name."

Swamiji also spoke to Christians about this *sinism*. What sin? You are the children of Immortal Bliss! Your priests talk day and night of the fire of hell. Don't listen to them.

> "Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings, Ye divinities on earth – sinners! It is a sin to call a man so. Come up, O lions! and shake off the delusion that you are sheep! You are souls immortal, spirits free and blest and eternal, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant; not you the servant of matter." (Lecture on Hinduism – Chicago)

Swamiji was asked to speak in Hartford in America. The American Consul here, Mr. Paterson, was present there and chaired the meeting. Swamiji again talked about the Christian doctrine of sin. If it is dark in the house, what good will it do to just to say, "Dark, dark!" You have to bring light.

> "Shall we advise men to kneel down and cry – O miserable sinner that I am! No, rather let us remind them of their divine nature … If the room is dark, do you go about striking your breast and crying, 'It is dark?' No, the only way to get in light is to strike a light and then the darkness goes. The only way to realise the Light above you is to strike the spiritual light within you and darkness of impurity and sin will flee away. Think of your higher Self, not of your lower."

Swamiji had heard a fable[1] from the Paramahamsa Deva. He told the same story. A tigress attacked a herd of goats. She was pregnant and ready to deliver. When she jumped, a cub was born, but she died. The cub began to grow up with the goats, eating grass with them and bleating *baa, baa* like them. In due course, it grew up. One day a tiger attacked the flock of goats. It was surprised to see a tiger eating grass and crying *baa baa*, and also running away like a goat when it saw the tiger.

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1. It is from the Akhyayika Sankhyadarshan – Section on Akhyayika.

It caught hold of the grown cub and brought it to a water pond. "You are also a tiger. Why do you eat grass and bleat? Look how I am eating meat. You eat it too. Look in the water and see that your face looks just like mine." The young tiger saw it and also had a taste of meat.

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna, Vijay, Keshab, Narendra and the renunciation of 'lust and greed' – renunciation

One day Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Vijaykrishna Goswami at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): "A person can't teach people without renouncing 'lust and greed.' Keshab Sen couldn't do it. Just see what happened at last. If, living in 'lust and greed,' you say that the world is transitory, that only God is eternal, many will not accept your words. You have treacle with you but you're saying to others, 'Don't eat treacle'. That's why, after giving it a lot of thought, Chaitanya Deva renounced the world. If he hadn't, no one could have been saved."

Vijay: "True sir, Chaitanya Deva said, 'It was to get rid of a cough that medicine from peepal seeds was prepared.[1] But it brought more trouble instead. The cough increased.' Many people of Navadvip began to make fun: 'Pundit Nimai is having a great time, brother. He has a beautiful wife. He has a great reputation, and no want of money. He is in great shape.'"

1 In other words, propagation of name of Hari at Navadwip.

Sri Ramakrishna: "If Keshab had renounced, he would have been able to do great work. If there is a scar on a goat's body, God doesn't accept it, it can't be offered to the deity. Unless a person has renounced, he doesn't have the authority to teach. How many people are going to listen to a person who is a householder?"

Swami Vivekananda renounced 'lust and greed.' That's why he had the capacity to teach people about God. Vivekananda is foremost amongst scholars of Vedanta, English and Philosophy. He is an extraordinary lecturer. Is this his only greatness? Sri Ramakrishna will answer this question. Addressing the devotees at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple in 1882, the paramahamsa said about Swami Vivekananda:

"You see this boy?[1] He's different here, a restless boy. But when he sits near his father, he's quiet like a bugbear.

And when he plays in the courtyard, he's quite another person. These boys belong to the class of the ever-perfect. They are never bound in the world. At quite an early age, their spiritual consciousness is roused and they turn towards God. They come to the world to teach people. Nothing in

1. Swami Vivekananda was then studying in the Assembly General College. He was nineteen or twenty years old. At the time his home was near the College in Shimulia. His father's name was Viswanath Dutta; he was an attorney in the High Court. The boy's childhood name was Narendra. He passed his B.A. from the College. Mr. Hastie was the principal. He had brothers and sisters. Swamiji was born on Monday, Pausha Sankranti, 1269 (B.Y.), 1863 A.D., time 6:30–33 am, 6 minutes before the sunrise. His died at the age of 39 years 5 months and 24 days.

the world attracts them – they are never attracted by 'lust and greed'.

In the Vedas there is mention of the homa bird that lives high in the sky. It lays its eggs in the sky. When an egg starts falling, it hatches as it falls. And as the young one falls, its eyes open and its feathers begin to grow. As soon as it opens its eyes, it becomes aware that it is falling and will soon be dashed to pieces when it hits the ground. It turns and flies straight up to its mother high above.

Vivekananda is this homa bird. He has one aim in life: to go to his mother in full flight before his body has touched the ground – that is, to take to the path of God before coming in contact with the world. Sri Ramakrishna said to Vidyasagar, "Learning! What will mere scholarship do for you? A vulture soars high up in the sky, but its gaze is fixed on the charnel pits below where the carcasses of dead animals are thrown. A scholar can recite many verses fluently – but where does his mind dwell? If his mind dwells on the lotus feet of the Lord, I respect him. But if it dwells on 'lust and greed,' I consider him dry straw."

Swami Vivekananda is not only a scholar, he is a sadhu, a highly elevated soul. It is not for his learning alone that the English and Americans waited on him like servants. They followed him as being a man of a different class. People are interested in honour, wealth, sense pleasures, learning and so forth – but he had just one aim: God-realization. In the song of the sannyasin, he himself says, "A sannyasin must renounce lust and greed."

Truth never comes where lust
and fame and greed
of gain reside. No man who
thinks of woman
As his wife can ever perfect be.
Nor he who owns however little,
nor he –
Whom anger chains
Can ever pass
Through Maya's gates,
So give these up, sannyasin bold, Say –
"Om Tat Sat Om!"

– Song of the Sannyasin.

In America, there was no want of temptation for him. His fame was worldwide, and extremely beautiful and well-educated women of high class families would come to talk to him and serve him. He had such an attractive power that many of those (ladies) wanted to marry him. An heiress came to him one day and said, "Swami, I have surrendered my all and myself to you." Swamiji said in reply, "Gentle lady, I am a sannyasin. I cannot marry. All women are like my mother to me." Blessed hero! You are the genuine disciple of the gurudeva! The mud of the earth has truly not touched your body. The stain of 'lust and greed' has not touched you at all. You did not flee from the kingdom of temptation, but living in it, staying in the land of riches, you advanced on the path to God. You did not want to spend your days like a common man.

You left this mortal world as a living example of divinity.

Chapter VIII

Sri Ramakrishna, Karma Yoga, Narendra and service of God in the poor (selfless work)

The paramahamsa used to say, "Everybody has to do his duty. Knowledge, devotion and work without attachment – these are the three paths to attainment of God." The Gita says: Both a sadhu and a householder first have to work without expectation of any reward according to the instructions of the guru in order to purify their minds. To think 'I am the doer' is ignorance; that wealth, people, work and activities – these are mine – is also ignorance. The Gita says: Knowing yourself not to be the doer, surrender the reward of your work to God and then perform whatever work you do. The Gita further says: Some people, even after attaining spiritual perfection, receive the divine command to work, like Janaka and others. This is the karma yoga that the Gita teaches. Sri Ramakrishna said the same thing.

So karma yoga is a very difficult path. Without practicing spiritual disciplines in seclusion for a sufficiently long period of time, one cannot work without attachment. During the time of spiritual disciplines, the guru's direction is essential. It is a period of immaturity, so one can easily fall prey to unforeseen attachment. He may think that he is serving selflessly and practicing charity without attachment solely in the name of God, but in reality he may be doing so to gain the admiration of the

world. He does not understand this. It is very difficult for an individual with hearth and home and family to learn to work for others without any motive, to understand *nishkama* karma, non-attachment.

But if an all-renouncing – a renunciate of 'lust and greed' – and perfected person works selflessly, people can easily understand and imitate him.

Swami Vivekananda renounced 'lust and greed'. He practiced spiritual disciplines in seclusion according to the instructions of his guru for a long time, and he perfected himself. Thus he was truly eligible to practice karma yoga. But he was a sannyasin. If he had wanted to, he could have lived with devotion and knowledge alone, like a rishi, or like his master, Paramahamsa Deva. But his life was not merely to serve as an example of renunciation. It was also to show people how to live unattached in the middle of the things that worldly people own. Like Narada, Sukadeva and Janaka, Swamiji has also shown this to the multitudes. Like a sannyasin, he considered wealth and name and fame the droppings of a crow – in other words, he did not indulge in them himself – yet he showed how to use them in the service of others by teaching as well as by practice. The money he collected from his friends in America and other foreign lands, he spent only for the good of humanity. He established monasteries at different places, such as Belur Math near Calcutta, Mayavati near Almora, at Kashi and at Madras. He served famine-stricken people in Dinajpur, Vaidyanath, Kishangarh, Dakshineswar and other places. He established orphanages during

times of famine for boys and girls without parents. He established an orphanage at Kishangarh in Rajputana. An orphanage still exists near Murshidabad (Bhavda) in the village of Sargachhi. He established a *seva-ashrama*[1] for the sick sadhus of Kankhal, near Hardwar. During the plague he sent relief for patients suffering from the epidemic that entailed a good deal of expenditure. He would sit alone, crying for the poor and the destitute, and he would say to his friends, "Alas, how they are suffering! They don't even have time to think of God."

All work except what the guru teaches is a cause for bondage. He was a sannyasin. What need did he have to work?

Who sows must reap, they say,
and, cause must bring
The sure effect. Good good;
bad bad; and none
Escape the law. But whoso
wears a form
Must wear the chain. Too true,
but far beyond
Both name and form is Atman,
ever free.
Know thou art that, Sannyasin bold!
Say "Om Tat Sat Om."

– The Song of the Sannyasin.

1. Home of service.

God made him do all this work to teach mankind. Now both sannyasins and householders will learn how to develop love and to work without attachment, such as practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude for a period of time, according to the instructions of the guru. Then they will be able to do charitable work like Swamiji did. Swamiji's guru, Sri Ramakrishna, used to say, "If you oil your hands before opening a jackfruit, its milky juice will not stick to them." In other words, by practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude and attaining love for God, worldly work can be accomplished in a detached way. By contemplating Swami Vivekananda's life, one can glimpse what spiritual discipline in solitude is and what work for the instruction of humanity is.

All the works of Swami Vivekananda were for the instruction of humanity.

> [By performing prescribed activities King Janaka and others certainly realized complete perfection; likewise you should perform [work] as well for the sake of benefiting the welfare of the world.] (Gita 3:20)

It has been mentioned in the Gita that karma yoga is extremely difficult. Janaka and others attained spiritual perfection through work. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Janaka had practiced a lot of difficult austerities in seclusion, in the forest, before that." That is why sadhus take to the path of knowledge and love of God and practice spiritual disciplines far from the noise and bustle of the world. Only a very competent person like Swami Vivekananda, a hero, is able to practice this karma

yoga. How many saintly persons of this class are on earth, those who experience God and yet work in the world unattached? How many religious teachers do you see going around actively engaged in the service of individual souls, intoxicated with the love of God, with no stain of 'lust and greed'?

Swamiji quoted the Gita in explaining the karma yoga of the Vedanta on 10 November 1896 in London:

> "Curiously enough the scene is laid on the battlefield where Krishna teaches the philosophy to Arjuna; and the doctrine which stands out luminously in every page of the Gita is intense activity, but in the midst of that, eternal calmness. And this idea is called the secret of work, to attain which is the goal of the Vedanta." (Practical Vedanta – London)

In the lecture Swamiji talked about the feeling of a sannyasin while performing karma yoga (calmness in the midst of activity). Swamiji tried to work without love or hate. He could do this only because of the quality of his spiritual practice and his experience of God. Such calmness is not possible without being spiritually perfect or an incarnation like Sri Krishna.

Chapter IX

Sri Ramakrishna's and Swami Vivekananda's instructions regarding spiritual disciplines with women (*vamachara*)

One day Swami Vivekananda went to the Dakshineswar Temple to see Sri Ramakrishna. Bhavanath and Baburam were there. It was 29 September 1884. Narendra raised the subject of the

Ghoshpara and Panchanami. He asked, "How do they practice spiritual disciplines with a woman as a partner?"

Thakur said to Narendra, "It's not for you to hear such things. The Kartabhaja, the Ghoshpara, the Panchanami and the Bhairava-Bhairavi cannot practice spiritual disciplines correctly – they experience a downfall. All these paths are dirty – they're not good. It is only good to take a pure path. They took me to a Bhairava circle in Kashi. There were Bhairava–Bhairavi couples. I was asked to drink wine. I said, 'Mother, I cannot touch wine.' They began drinking. I thought they would now practice japa and meditation. But they didn't. Instead, after drinking wine, they began to dance."

He further said to Narendra, "Do you know that I have the 'mother-child feeling,' the filial attitude? The attitude of a child to a mother is very pure – there's no danger in it. To look upon God as wife, 'the hero-attitude,' is very difficult – it can't be practiced correctly – a man experiences a downfall. You are my own, so I say to you, 'My last realization is this: He is full,[1] and I am just a part of Him; He is the Lord, and I am His servant. And sometimes I think, I am He and He is I; love[2] is the essence.'"

Another day, 9 September 1883, Thakur said to the devotees at Dakshineswar, "I have the attitude of a child. Achalananda sometimes came and stayed here. He would drink a lot of wine. Since I didn't approve of spiritual practice with women, he said,

1. Purna.
2. Bhakti.

'Why don't you approve of the hero-attitude? It's prescribed in the Tantra. Can you deny Shiva's direction? He (Shiva) talked about the attitude of the hero as well as the attitude of a child.'

"I said, 'I don't know why, but I don't like it. I have the attitude of a child.'

"There (in Thakur's village) I noticed Bhagi Tailin [an oil-woman] in the Kartabhaja group. They have the same discipline, with a woman as a partner – and a woman cannot practice religious discipline without a man. They call the man the Krishna of Love. He asks three times, 'Have you found Krishna?' And the woman also answers three times, 'I have found Krishna.'"

On another day, 23 March 1884, Sri Ramakrishna said to Rakhal, Ram and some other devotees, "Vaishnavcharan belonged to the Kartabhaja sect. When I went to that part of the country, to Shyambazar, I said to him, 'I don't like this. I have the attitude of a child with its mother.' I noticed that they talk big and perform adultery. These people don't like to worship the image of God – they prefer a living person. Many of them follow Radhatantra – the principles of the earth, fire, water, air and ether – excreta, urine, semen, sperm etc. are the principles of all these. It is a very bad practice – it's like entering a house through the latrine."

In accordance with Thakur's teaching, Swami Vivekananda also found fault with the practice of spiritual disciplines with women. He said, "Almost everywhere in India, particularly in Bengal, many

people practice it secretly and quote the Vamachara Tantra as their justification. It is best to give this up and teach the boys the Upanishads, the Gita and so on."

On his return from abroad, Swami Vivekananda delivered a very important lecture on Vedanta which carried a deep inner significance. He gave this lecture in the temple of Radhakanta Deva in Sobhabazar. In it he ran down the practice of spiritual practice with women as partners, saying:

> "Give up this filthy Vamachara that is killing your country. You have not seen the other parts of India. When I see how much the Vamachara has entered our society, I find it a most disgraceful place with all its boast of culture. These Vamachara sects are honeycombing our society in Bengal. Those who come out in the daytime and preach most loudly about *achara*,[1] it is they who carry on the most horrible debauchery at night, and are backed by the most dreadful books. They are ordered by the books to do these things. You who are of Bengal know it. The Bengali shastras are the Vamachara Tantras. They are published by the cartload, and you poison the minds of your children with them instead of teaching them your shrutis.[2] Fathers of Calcutta, do you not feel ashamed that such horrible stuff as these Vamachara Tantras, with translations too, should be put into the hands of your boys and girls, and their minds poisoned, and that they should be brought up with the idea that these are the shastras of the Hindus? If you are ashamed, take them away from your children and let them read the true shastras,[3] the Vedas, the Gita, the Upanishads." (Reply to Calcutta address at Shovabazar.)

1. Good behavior.
2. The Vedas.
3. Sacred scripture.

One day when Sri Ramakrishna was lying ill at the Cossipore Garden house (in 1886), he sent for Narendra and said to him "Son, see that nobody drinks wine here. It's not good to drink wine in the name of religion. I have seen that it has done nothing good where people have done so."

Chapter X

Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and the doctrine of incarnation of God

One day Sri Ramakrishna was sitting with Baburam and other devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple – 7 March 1885, the time about 3:00 or 4:00 p.m.

The devotees were gently stroking Thakur's feet. He smiled a little to a devotee and said, "There's a lot of meaning in this service (stroking of the feet)."

Then putting his hand on his heart, he said, "If there's anything inside here, you will be rid of ignorance and illusion in no time (by stroking the feet)."

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna became very serious, as though he were going to divulge a secret: "There is no outsider here. I'm telling you a secret. The other day I saw Sat-chit-ananda come out from inside me and take a form. It said, 'I do incarnate from age to age.' I saw the fullest manifestation, but with the glorious quality of sattva."

The devotees listened to these words without saying anything. Some of them were remembering the great words of Sri Krishna in the Gita:

> [Whenever there is decay of righteousness, O Bharata, and rise in unrighteousness, I manifest Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age.] (Bhagavad Gita 4:7-8)

On another day, 1 September 1885, the birthday of Sri Krishna, Janmashtami day, Narendra and other devotees had come to Dakshineswar. Girish Ghosh and a couple of his friends had arrived by carriage. He was crying. Sri Ramakrishna patted him affectionately.

Lifting his head and folding his hands, Girish had said, "You yourself are the Supreme Brahman. If that is not so, everything is illusion. I regret that I have not been able to serve you. Grant me, O Lord, that I may serve you for a year."

When he sang hymns of praise again and again to Sri Ramakrishna as the Lord, Thakur said, "Shame! You must not say such things; a devotee cannot be treated like a Krishna. You may think as you please – a guru is the Lord Himself – but it is wrong to speak of such things."

Girish again praised Thakur, "Lord, give me purity so my mind will not have the least sinful thought."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You are already pure. You have such faith and devotion to God."

One day, on the day of throwing color (dol yatra), the 1st of March 1885, Narendra and other devotees had arrived. It is on this day that Thakur instructed Narendra on renunciation and said, "Son, you will not succeed without renouncing 'lust

and greed.' Only God is eternal; everything else is transitory." As he talked, he was filled with emotion, his look full of compassion and affection. Consumed with feeling, he sang:

> Afraid am I to speak a word to you; equally afraid am I not to speak.
>
> The fear that arises in my mind is that I may lose you, yes, be robbed of you, my wealth, my treasure!
>
> I teach you the *mantra* (holy name) that is to bring you to Your Beloved.
>
> Now ready yourself to receive it, which enables us to steer the ship safely to land.

It was as if Sri Ramakrishna was afraid Narendra might go to someone else – be no longer his – that he might enter worldly life later on. He said, "I know the sacred mantra I have given you is the only mantra for you. I have given you the mantra for the highest ideal of life – renouncing all and taking refuge in God." Narendra looked at Sri Ramakrishna with eyes full of tears.

That same day Thakur said to Narendra, "Did anything that Girish say agree with your own ideas?"

Narendra: "I didn't say anything. It's he who says he has the faith that you are an incarnation of God. I didn't say anything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Such firm faith! Did you notice?"

After a few days Thakur and Narendra talked about the incarnation of God. Thakur says, "Well, some people say I'm an incarnation of God. What do you think?"

Narendra said, "I won't say anything about what others think. I will only speak when I understand myself, when I begin to believe it myself."

One day when Thakur was restless in the Cossipore garden house because of the pain from the cancer, when he could not even swallow rice gruel, Narendra, sitting near him, thought to himself, "If, in such a pain as this, he says that he is an incarnation of God, I will believe it." The same moment Thakur said, "He who was Rama, He who was Krishna, has manifested Himself in the form of Ramakrishna for the sake of His devotees." Hearing it, Narendra was speechless.

After Thakur passed away,[1] Narendra embraced sannyasa and devoted himself to austere spiritual practices. Then all Thakur's great statements about incarnation became enshrined in his heart more firmly. He began to explain this truth more clearly in his native land and abroad.

When Swamiji was in America he wrote in English the book Bhakti Yoga, basing it on the Narada Sutras and other such books. He says in it, too, that incarnations of God awaken the spiritual consciousness of people by their mere touch. By their touch even the wicked become great saints. "Even a person of the vilest conduct who worships me and depends on me entirely should be considered holy, for he is truly resolved."[2] God

1. Left his own *dham*.
2. Srimad Bhagavad Gita, 9:30 – Even if the vilest sinner worships Me with exclusive devotion, he should be regarded a saint; for, he

Himself comes to us as an incarnation. If we want to realize God, we will see Him in an incarnation. We cannot help but worship him.

> "Higher and nobler than all ordinary ones, are another set of teachers, the Avataras of Ishvara, in the world. They can transmit spirituality with a touch, even with a mere wish. The lowest and the most degraded characters become in one second saints at their command. They are the teachers of all teachers, the highest manifestation of God through man. We cannot see God except through them. We cannot help worshipping them; and indeed they are the only ones whom we are bound to worship. (Bhakti Yoga)

He also says: As long as we are in the human body and worship God, we cannot help but worship an incarnation. Talk as long as you want, but you cannot think of God except as a human being. What you say about the nature of God with your little intelligence is nonsense. Whatever you say, it will have little value – it will be mere froth.

> "As long as we are men, we must worship Him in man and as man. Talk as you may, try as you may, you cannot think of God except as a man. You may deliver great intellectual discourses on God and on all things under the sun, become great rationalists and prove to your satisfaction that all these accounts of the Avatars of God as man are nonsense; but let us come for a moment to practical common sense. What is there behind this kind of remarkable intellect? Zero, nothing, simply so much froth. When next you hear a man delivering a great intellectual lecture against this worship of the Avatar of God, get hold of him and ask him what his idea of God is, what he understands

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has rightly resolved. (He is positive in his belief that there is nothing like devoted worship of God).

> by 'Omnipotence,' 'Omnipresence' and all similar terms beyond the spelling of the words. He really means nothing by them; he cannot formulate as their meaning any idea unaffected by his own human nature; he is no better off in this matter than the man in the street who has not read a single book." (Bhakti Yoga)

Swamiji went to America again in 1899. In 1900 he gave a lecture in Los Angeles in the state of California on Christ the Messenger. Swamiji said, you will have to see God in the incarnation (in the Son). We may have God within us but there is greater manifestation of Him in His incarnation. There are vibrations of light everywhere, but all darkness is dispelled when big lamps are lit.

> "It has been said by the same Messenger (Christ), 'None, hath seen God, but they have seen the son' and that is true. And where to see God but in the Son? It is true that you and I and the poorest of us, the meanest even, embody that God – even reflect that God. The vibration of light is everywhere, Omnipresent; but we have to strike the light of the lamp before we can see the light. The Omnipresent God of the universe cannot be seen until He is reflected by these giant lamps of the earth; the Prophets, the Man-Gods, the Incarnation, the embodiments of God." (Christ, the Messenger)

Swamiji also said, "You may imagine the real nature of God as much as you can, but you will find that your imagined God is far below that of an incarnation of God. What harm is there in worshipping these God-men? No, there is no harm in worshipping them. Not only that, if you wish to worship God you will have to worship an incarnation. You are human beings, so there is no way but to worship God in a human being."

> "Take one of these great Messengers of light, compare his character with the highest ideal of God that you have ever formed, and you will find that your God falls short of the ideal, and that the character of the prophet exceeds your conception. You cannot form a higher ideal of God than what the actually embodied have practically realized and set before us as an example. Is it wrong, therefore, to worship these as a God? Is it a sin to fall at the feet of these man-Gods and worship them as the only divine beings in the world? If they are really, actually, higher than all our conceptions of God, what harm is there in worshipping them? Not only is there no harm; but it is the only possible and positive way of worship." (Christ, the Messenger)

Signs of an incarnation – Jesus Christ

What do incarnations of God come to proclaim? Sri Ramakrishna said to Narendra, "Son, it will not do to not give up 'lust and greed.' Only God is real – nothing else lasts." Swamiji also said to the Americans:

> "We see in the life of Christ the first watchword, 'Not this life, but something higher!' No faith in this world and all its belongings! It is evanescent; it goes!"

Jesus had renounced 'lust and greed'. He knew that the soul is neither male nor female. An incarnation of God does not look for money, name and fame, pleasure, sense satisfactions – none of these. For him, "me" and "mine" have no meaning. The feelings "I am the doer, this house is mine, this is my family etc." are all illusions born of ignorance.

> "We still have fondness for 'me' and 'mine.' We want property, money, wealth. Woe unto us; let us confess; and not put to shame that great Teacher of humanity! He (Jesus) had no family ties. But do you think that

> that man had any physical ideas in him? Do you think that this mass of Light, this God and Not-man, came down to earth to be the brother of animals? And yet they make him preach all sorts, even of low sexual things. He had none! He was a soul! Nothing but a soul, just working, as it were, in a body for the good of humanity; and that was all his relation to the body. Oh, nor that! In the soul there is neither man, nor woman. No, no. The disembodied soul has no relationship to animal, no relationship to the body. The ideal may be high; away beyond us. Never mind; it is the Ideal. Let us confess it so – that we cannot approach it yet." (Christ, the Messenger)

And he also said to the Americans, "What else does an incarnation say? You see me, but you cannot see God? But He and I are one. He is known by the pure mind within the heart."

> "Thou hast seen me and not seen the Father? I and my Father are one! The kingdom of Heaven is within you! If I am pure enough I will also find in the heart of my heart, I and my Father are one. That was what Jesus of Nazareth said." (Christ, the Messenger)

In this lecture at another place, Swamiji said, "An incarnation assumes a body in every age to establish religion. He comes down like Christ at different times and places. Just by wanting to, he can pardon our sins – he can liberate us (vicarious atonement). May we worship them always."

> "Let us, therefore, find God not only in Jesus of Nazareth, but in all the great ones that have preceded him, in all that came after him, and all that are yet to come. Our worship is unbounded and free. They are all manifestations of the same infinite God. They are all pure and unselfish; they struggled and gave up their lives for us, poor human beings. They all and each of them bore vicarious atonement for every one of

us and also for all that are to come hereafter." (Christ, the Messenger)

Jnana Yoga and Swami Vivekananda

Swamiji would advise people to talk about Vedanta, but he would also point out difficulties associated with discussion. When Thakur talked to Pundit Shashadhar in Thanthania in 1884, Narendra and many other devotees were there.

Thakur had said, "The path of knowledge is very difficult to practice in this age. Life depends on food, and this requires hard work – but life is short. And it is impossible to get rid of body-consciousness. On the other hand, until you can get rid of body-consciousness completely, you can't attain the knowledge of the Absolute. A man of knowledge says, 'I myself am that Brahman. I am not the body – I am beyond hunger, thirst, disease, sorrow, birth, death, happiness, pain, and so on.' So if you have disease, sorrow, happiness, pain, how can you be a knower of the Absolute? It's just as if your hand is cut by thorns and is bleeding profusely and is very painful, but you say, 'Why my hand has not been cut, there is nothing wrong with me.'

"So the path of devotion is for this age. It is easier to reach God by it than by other paths. You can reach God by jnana yoga or karma yoga or other paths, but they are all difficult paths."

Thakur also said, "Whatever work remains complete has to be done selflessly. When the mind is purified by selfless work without expecting any reward, a person develops love and devotion for God. God is realized by such devotion."

Swamiji said, "As long as there is body-consciousness, the realization that 'I am He' [*So 'ham*] cannot be had. In other words, when one is rid of all desires, when one has completely renounced everything, one attains union with God [samadhi]. Only by attaining samadhi, does one attain the knowledge of the Absolute. Bhakti yoga is natural and sweet."

> "Jnana yoga is grand, it is high philosophy; and almost every human being thinks curiously enough that he can surely do everything required of him by philosophy. But it is really very difficult to live truly the life of philosophy. We are often apt to run into great dangers in trying to guide our life by philosophy. This world may be said to be divided between persons of demonic nature who think the caretaking of the body to be the be-all and end-all of existence, and persons of godly nature, who realize that the body is simply a means to an end, and instrument intended for the culture of the soul. The devil can and indeed does quote the scriptures for his own purpose, and thus the way of knowledge often appears to offer justification to what the bad man does as much as it offers inducements to what the good man does. This is the great danger in jnana yoga. But bhakti yoga is natural, sweet and gentle; the bhakta does not take such high flights as the jnana yogi, and therefore he is not apt to have such big falls." (Bhakti Yoga)

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation? Swamiji's faith

Swamiji delivered a lecture on the sages of India. In it he said several things about incarnations of God. He talked about Sri Ramachandra, Sri Krishna, the Buddha, Ramanuja, Shankaracharya, Chaitanya Deva, and

about their lives. When righteousness[1] declines and lack of religion[2] rises, sages appear from age to age to save the good and destroy wickedness. The Lord says so in the Gita. Swamiji elucidated it:

> "Whenever virtue subsides and irreligion prevails I create myself for the protection of the good and for the destruction of all immorality I come from time to time." (The Sages of India)

And then he said, "Sri Krishna harmonised religions in the Gita."

> "In the Gita we already hear the distant sound of the conflicts of seers, and the Lord comes in the middle to harmonise them all. He, the great preacher of Harmony, the greatest Teacher of Harmony, Lord Krishna himself.

"Sri Krishna also said in the Gita, 'Women, Vaishya, shudra, all will attain supreme liberation, not to speak of brahmins and kshatriyas.'"

The Buddha is the deity of the destitute – sarvabhūtasthamātmānaṁ [gītā 6-29]. He showed from his work that God resides in all elements. The disciples of the Buddha did not believe in the Atman or the individual soul. So Shankaracharya again propagated the religion of the Vedas. He began to explain the tenets of Advaita and the qualified non-dualism[3] of Ramanuja. After him, Chaitanya Deva incarnated to teach love and devotion. Shankara and Ramanuja distinguished between the castes, but Chaitanya Deva didn't. What castes can there be for devotees?

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1. Dharma.
2. Adharma.
3. Vishishtadvaita.

Next Swamiji spoke of Sri Ramakrishna: In him Shankaracharya's power of knowledge and the intense love of Chaitanya manifested together in the same person. Then Sri Krishna's harmony of religions was spoken of again, followed by the cry of one who wept like Buddha Deva for the poor, the aggrieved and the sinful. It is as if none of these incarnations was a full manifestation. Sri Ramakrishna was the fulfillment of all the sages.

"The one (Sankara) had a great head, the other (Chaitanya) a large heart, and the time was ripe for one to be born, the embodiment of both head and heart; the time was ripe for one to be born who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Sankara and the wonderfully expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya; 'One who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God; one who would see God in every being, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the out-caste, for the down-trodden, for everyone in this world, inside India or outside India; and at the same time whose grand brilliant intellect, would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonise all conflicting sects, not only in India but outside of India, and bring a marvelous harmony, the universal Religion of head and heart, into existence.

"Such a man was born, and I had the good fortune to sit at his feet for years. The time was ripe, it was necessary that such a man should be born, and he came; and the most wonderful part of it was that his life's work was just near a city which was full of western thought, a city which had run mad after these occidental ideas, a city which had become more Europeanised than any other city in India. There he lived without any book-learning whatsoever; this great intellect never learnt even to write his own name, but the most brilliant graduates of our

> University found in him an intellectual giant. He was a strange man, this Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. It is a long, long story, and I have no time to tell anything about him tonight. Let me now only mention the great Sri Ramakrishna, the fulfillment of the Indian sages, the sages for the time, one whose teaching is just now at the present time most beneficial. And mark the Divine power working behind the man. The son of a poor priest, born in a out-of-the-way village, unknown and unthought of, today is worshipped literally by thousands in Europe and America. And tomorrow will be worshipped by thousands more. Who knows the plans of the Lord! Now my brothers, if you do not see the hand, the fingers of Providence, it is because you are blind, born blind indeed." (The Sages of India)

Swamiji continued, "The divine words of the Vedas which the sages had heard on the bank of the Saraswati, those words which once reverberated in the ears of the great yogis and austere hermits practicing austerities on the peaks of the great Himalayas; or the words which, taking the shape of the fast flowing river containing all within itself, encompassing the names of Sri Krishna, Sri Buddha Deva, and Sri Chaitanya, entered this mortal world. Those very words are heard again today. Their great message will reach all places in a short period of time – India to begin with, and then everywhere to the length and breadth of the world. These words are gaining power every day from a new power. These divine words have been heard before many times in earlier ages, but what we hear today is the summation of them all."

> "Once more the wheel is turning up, once more vibrations have been set in motion from India, which are destined at no distant day to reach the farthest

> limits of the earth. One voice has spoken, whose echoes are rolling on and gathering strength every day, a voice even mightier than those which have preceded it, for it is the summation of them all. Once more the voice, that spoke to the sages on the banks of the Saraswati, the voice whose echoes reverberated from peak to peak of the 'Father of Mountains' and descended upon the plains through Krishna, Buddha and Chaitanya, in all-carrying floods has spoken again. Once more the doors have opened. Enter ye into the realms of light, the gates have been opened wide once more." (Reply to Khetri address)

Swamiji said further, "If I have spoken the truth even once, know that it is all Sri Ramakrishna's, and if I have said anything imperfect, those which are not"

> "Only let me say now that if I have told you one word of Truth, it was his and his alone; and if I have told you any things which were not true, were not correct, which were not beneficial to the human race, they were all mine, and on me is the responsibility."

This is how Swami Vivekananda announced the advent of the incarnation Sri Ramakrishna in different places in India. Wherever a Math has been established, Sri Ramakrishna is worshipped daily. In all these places at the time of arati, the hymn composed by Swamiji is sung accompanied by musical instruments. In this hymn Swamiji addresses Sri Ramakrishna as attributeless, with attributes, perfect[1] and Lord of the universe. And he called him the pilot to steer one across the ocean of the world. "You have come as a human being to liberate us from the bonds of the world, to help us to attain union with God. It is by your grace that I

1. Niranjan.

have attained samadhi. You have made me renounce 'lust and greed'. O refuge of devotees, give me devotion to your lotus feet. Your lotus feet are my supreme treasure. If I have them, the ocean of the world appears like a pit made by cow's feet."

Hymn to Sri Ramakrishna composed by Swamiji

Mitra chautal

Breaker of this world's chain,
We adore you, whom all men love;
spotless, taking man's form,
O purifier, you are
Above the gunas three.
Knowledge divine, not flesh;
You whom the cosmos wears,
A diamond, at its heart.

Let us look deep in your eyes –
They are bright with the wisdom of God,
That can wake us from Maya's spell.
Let us hold fast to your feet
Treading the waves of the world
To safety. O drunk with love,
God-drunken lover, in you
all paths of all yogas meet.

Lord of the worlds, you are ours,
Who were born a child of our time,

Easy of access to me.
O merciful, if we take
Any hold upon God in our prayer,
It is by your grace alone,
Since all your austerities
Were practiced for our sake.

How great was your sacrifice;
Freely choosing your birth
In this prison, our Iron Age,
Perfect, whom lust could not taint
Nor passion nor gold draw near;
O master of all who renounce,
Fill our hearts full of love for you.

You have finished with fear and with doubt,
Standing firm in the vision of God:
Refuge to all who have cast
Fame, fortune, and friends away
Without question, you shelter us,
And the world's great sea in its wrath
Seems shrunk to the puddle that fills
A hoof-print in the clay.

Speech cannot hold you, nor mind,
Yet without you we think not, nor speak.
Love, who is partial to none,
We are equal before your sight.

Taker away of our pain,

We salute you, though we are blind;

Come to the heart's black cave

And illumine, O light of the Light!

He who was Rama, He who was Krishna, is now Ramakrishna

Swamiji heard these great words from Sri Ramakrishna in the Cossipore garden house. Remembering them on his return to Calcutta from abroad, Swamiji composed a hymn at Belur Math. In it he said, "He who was the friend of the humble, the poor, the destitute, the beloved of Janki (Sita), the incarnation of knowledge and devotion, Sri Ramachandra – and He who blew the sweet, solemn notes of the Gita at Kurukshetra as Sri Krishna – has now manifested as the renowned person Sri Ramakrishna.

Om namo bhagavate Ramakrishnaye

He who was Sri Rama, whose stream of love flowed with compelling might to even the Chandala (the outcast); O, he who was ever engaged in doing good to the world though by nature he was above it, whose renown is unequalled in the three worlds, Sita's beloved, whose body of knowledge supreme was covered by sweet devotion in the form of Sita;

He who quelled the terrible uproar at the battle (Kurukshetra), who removed terrible night of ignorance born of nature (of Arjuna), and who roared out like a lion the sweet and peaceful Gita; that renowned soul is born now as Sri Ramakrishna.

And another hymn is sung at evening worship at Belur Math, Kashi, Madras, Dhaka and at all other Maths.

In this hymn Swamiji says, "O friend of the lowly, you possess [the three] attributes and yet you are beyond the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. Since I do not worship your lotus feet day and night, I therefore take refuge in you. I repeat your name with my lips, I talk of spiritual wisdom – but I do not realize anything. Therefore I take refuge in you. One conquers death by meditating on your lotus feet – so I take refuge in you. O, friend of the humble! You are the one thing worth aspiring to in this world. I take refuge in you – tvameva śaraṇam mama dīnabandho."

> You are to be adored, you are truth unchanging, you are Lord of the gunas. In my weakness I have failed, O taker-away of delusion to worship your blessed lotus feet earnestly and unceasingly.
>
> Therefore I claim sanctuary in you, O friend of the lowly.
>
> This evil dream called life can be dispelled by love, adoration, and understanding;
>
> These three can bring us quickly to our goal: the truth of Brahman.
>
> But, alas, though I speak these words with my lips, they find no answer in my heart.
>
> Therefore I claim sanctuary in you, O friend of the lowly.
>
> O Ramakrishna, you are the path that leads to truth.
>
> If a man offers you his heart, he soon overcomes the world and finds fullness in eternal life;
>
> For your feet still the waves of death and bring immortality into the world of mortals.
>
> Therefore I take sanctuary in you, O friend of the lowly.
>
> Lord, your name, the name Ramakrishna, is goodness and purity itself; graciously it awakens us from our delusion.

He who chants your name will become a saint, though he be a sinner.

You are the refuge of us all. I have no other refuge but you.

Therefore I take sanctuary in you, O friend of the lowly.

After the arati was over, Swamiji taught how to offer salutations to Sri Ramakrishna. In this he says that Thakur is the greatest of all incarnations:

Om, salutations to you, Ramakrishna, the foundation of virtue and the embodiment of all religion, the most universal of incarnations.[1]

1. om sthāpakāaya ca dharmasya sarvadharmasvarūpiṇe,
avatāravariṣṭhāya rāmakṛṣṇāya te namaḥ.

Appendix II

Sri Ramakrishna and Bankim

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna and devotees sing joyfully at Adharlal Sen's house – conversation with Bankim Chandra Chatterji

Today is Saturday, 6 December 1884, 22nd of Agrahayana, the fourth day of the dark fortnight and Thakur has come to Adhar's house. He has arrived on the day of the pushya constellation of stars.

Adhar is a great devotee. A deputy magistrate, he is twenty-nine or thirty years old. Thakur is very fond of him and Adhar is very devoted to him. Almost every day, after working the whole day at his office, he goes home to wash his face and hands and then goes to see Sri Ramakrishna. His home is in Benetola in Sobhabazar. From there he goes by carriage to visit Thakur at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. He spends two and a half rupees every time to hire a carriage, for the sole joy of seeing Thakur – it is often not possible for him to hear Thakur speak. Reaching Dakshineswar, he would lie prostrate to salute Thakur, and after exchanging polite enquiries, would go to the Kali Temple. Then he would rest on a mat spread on the floor. Thakur himself would ask him to rest. Because of the hard work he had done all day, Adhar would be so tired that he would soon fall asleep. At nine or ten in the evening they would

wake him up. He would get up and salute Thakur and then again board the carriage to return home.

Adhar would often take Thakur to his home in Sobhabazar. These occasions would be a kind of celebration. Adhar thoroughly enjoyed himself in Thakur's company and in the company of the devotees and he fed them with various refreshments to their great pleasure.

One day when Thakur went there Adhar said, "You haven't been here for a long time. The house seems gloomy, even as if it had a smell. But see how nice it looks now, and how fragrant it has become. I prayed to God for a long time today – my eyes even began to water." Thakur said, "My dear, is that true?" He looked at Adhar affectionately and began to smile.

They are going to celebrate today as well. Thakur and the devotees are filled with joy because wherever Thakur is present, there will be no other talk than of God. There are many devotees and also some newcomers. Adhar has invited several deputy magistrates who will meet Thakur and give their opinion as to whether or not Thakur is a genuine saint.

Sri Ramakrishna smiles when he talks with the devotees. Adhar comes in with a number of his friends and sits near Thakur.

Adhar (*to Thakur, pointing to Bankim*): "Sir, he is a very learned man. He has written many books. He has come to see you. His name is Bankim Babu."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Bankim! For whose feelings have you become bankim [bent]?"

Bankim (*smiling*): "Well, sir, it's because of the kicks. (*All laugh*.) I am bent because of the kicks of our foreign bosses."

Bankim and Radha-Krishna – the two-in-one explained

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, my dear. You are bent like Sri Krishna, out of love for Srimati (Radha). Some people explain Krishna's pose as 'thrice bent in love for Radha'. Do you know why he is black and is only fourteen spans of a hand – so short? As long as God is far away, He appears dark, just like ocean water looks blue from a distance. But it is not dark when you go near it and take some in your palm – then it is transparent. The sun, seen from a distance, looks very small, but it is not small if you go near it. When you know God's real and true nature, He is no longer dark. But this is experienced only in samadhi. As long as 'I and you' endures, names and form also exist. It is all God's play. As long as 'I and you' persist, God is manifest in different forms.

"Sri Krishna is Purusha [pure Consciousness] and Radha is Primal Energy, Shakti, its dynamic aspect. They represent different aspects of the same Reality. What is the significance of the dual image? That Purusha and Prakriti are one and the same – they are not separate. Purusha cannot live without Prakriti, and Prakriti cannot exist without Purusha. Talk of one and you have to recognize the other. It's like fire and its power to burn – you can't think of fire without its power to burn. And you

can't think of burning power without fire. So in this dual image the gaze of Sri Krishna is on Radha, and that of Radha on Krishna. Srimati's complexion is white, like lightening, and she wears blue clothes. She also wears a blue jewel.[1] She has anklets on her feet and Sri Krishna also wears them. In other words, the union of Purusha and Prakriti conform both internally and externally."

When this conversation is over, Bankim and Adhar's other friends began to whisper to each other in English.

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to Bankim*): "My dear, what are you talking about in English?" (*All laugh.*)

Adhar: "Just your explanation of Krishna's form."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to all*): "I'm laughing at a story that's come to my mind. Listen. A gentleman went for a haircut. The barber inadvertently nicked him. The gentleman shouted, 'Damn!' The barber didn't know the meaning of damn. He put down the razor and the rest of his equipment and rolled up his sleeves (it was winter). He said, 'You have called me damn. Tell me what it means.' The gentleman said, 'Please go on with your shave. It doesn't mean much. But do it a little more carefully.' But the barber was not the man to leave it alone. He said, 'If damn means good, I am damn, my father is damn and my fourteen generations of ancestors are damn. (*All laugh.*) And if it means bad, then you are damn, your father is

1. Nilkanta mani.

damn and your fourteen generations of ancestors are damn.' (*All laugh.*) Not only damn once but damn, damn, damn and damn!"

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and the work of preaching

When their laughter has abated, Bankim begins the conversation again.

Bankim: "Sir, why don't you preach?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Preaching! It comes from pride. Man is an imperfect creature. Only the one who has created the moon and the sun and is lighting up the world can preach. Is it an ordinary thing? Until He manifests Himself and commands you, preaching is not possible. Why? Unless there is God's command, people go on talking nonsense. Some listen to you for a couple of days but forget – it's only a short-lived fancy and nothing else. As long as you talk people will say, 'Oh, how nicely he speaks.' But when you stop, there's nothing left.

"As long as fire is under the milk pot, the milk will boil and make a gurgling sound. Pull out the firewood and the milk is as it was before. Only it's deflated.

"A person should add to his power by spiritual effort. Without it, preaching is not possible. 'You have no place to sleep and you call out: O Shankara, come here and lie down and sleep with me!' (*Laughter.*)

"People used to defecate daily on the bank of Haldarpukur in the countryside and others would

hurl insults at them the next morning. It did not end in spite of their insults. At last the people petitioned the Company (Government), which put up a notice, 'Defecation and urination are prohibited here. If you do, you will be prosecuted.' It all stopped, immediately – no more trouble. It was the Company's order – everybody had to obey.

"Similarly, preaching is only possible and people able to be taught only if God reveals himself to you and gives you the command to preach. Without it, who will come listen to you?"

Everybody listens intently and with concentration to Thakur's words.

Bankim and the other world

Life after Death – argument from analogy

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bankim*): "Well, you are a very learned man and you have written so many books. What do you say: what is the duty of man? What will go with us when we die? Is there a hereafter?"

Bankim: "Hereafter! What is that?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, after attaining knowledge, you don't have to go to another world – there is no rebirth. But until you attain knowledge, until you realize God, you will have to return to this world – there is no release. The hereafter will exist for you that long. But when you attain knowledge, when you realize God, you are liberated and don't have to be reborn in this world. Boiled paddy will not sprout and grow into a plant. If somebody is boiled in the fire of knowledge, he can no longer

take part in the game of creation – he cannot lead a worldly life – he is not attracted by 'lust and greed.' What can boiled paddy yield in a field?"

Bankim (*laughing*): "Sir, even weeds are useless."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But a man of knowledge is not a useless plant in this sense: a person who has realized God has gained the fruit of immortality, not a gourd. He isn't born again – whether on earth, on the region of the sun, or on the region of the moon. He doesn't have to go anywhere.

"All analogies have only one point of reference. You are a learned man. Haven't you studied logic? When you say a person is 'terrible like a lion', it doesn't mean he has a terrifying tail or a bone in its mouth. (*All laugh.*)

"I said the same thing to Keshab Sen. Keshab asked whether or not there was a hereafter. I didn't talk either of this life or another. I said, 'A potter puts his clay pots in the sun to dry. A few of them are baked, the others are unbaked. Sometimes cows or other animals walk on them. If the baked pots are broken, the potter throws them away. But if the unbaked ones break, he picks them up and mixes them with water again and fashions new pots on his wheel. They're not thrown away.' So I said to Keshab Sen, 'As long as the pots are unbaked, the potter won't throw them away. As long as a person doesn't attain knowledge, realize God, the potter will put him on his wheel again. He won't let him go.' In other words, he will have to be reborn on this earth again – no deliverance for him. A person is

liberated only when he realizes God. Only then will the potter let him go – because he is no longer of any use for Maya's creation. A jnani goes beyond maya. What purpose can he serve again in the world of maya?

"But He keeps some in the world of maya to instruct others. A jnani lives in the world taking refuge in vidya maya. God Himself keeps him there to work for Him – for example, Sukadeva or Shankaracharya.

(*To Bankim*) "Well, what do you say? What is man's duty?"

Bankim (*laughing*): "Since you ask, it is eating, sleeping and procreating."

Sri Ramakrishna (*irritated*): "What! You are a scoundrel! What you do day and night is coming out of your mouth. A man belches what he eats: if he eats radish, he belches radish, or he belches coconut if he eats coconut. You live day and night in the midst of 'lust and greed,' so that's what you're belching out. If you only think of worldly things, you develop the nature of a revenue record-keeper – you become dishonest. By thinking of God, a person becomes trustworthy. Nobody who has attained God will say such a thing."

Bankim – mere learning and 'lust and greed'

(*To Bankim*) "What is the use of being learned if you don't think about God, if you have no discrimination and dispassion? How can learning help if the mind is on 'lust and greed'?

"Kites and the vultures soar high, but their sight is fixed on charnel pits. A pundit reads many books and can quote many scriptures or has written books. But he is only attached to his wife and thinks money and fame is the secret of life. What kind of pundit is he? What is a pundit without God on his mind?

"Some people think that people who talk about God are crazy, that it is a disease of the brain. How clever we are, they say, how we enjoy ourselves with money, fame and sense enjoyments! A crow also thinks it's very clever but when it wakes up in the morning, it eats the excreta of others and then dies. See, how active a crow is. Very clever! (*All laugh.*)

"But those who meditate on God and pray day and night to be rid of attachment to worldly things and their love for 'lust and gold,' those who feel that sense pleasures are bitter, who like nothing but the nectar of the lotus feet of Hari, have the nature of swans. Put milk and water before a swan and it will drink the milk and leave the water. And have you seen the gait of a swan? It walks straight, in one direction. The movement of a pure-minded devotee is directed only towards God. He wants nothing else, he likes nothing else. (*To Bankim, sweetly*) "Please don't mind my words."

Bankim: "I'm not here only to hear pleasant words."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and service to others

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bankim*): "Maya is nothing but thinking that 'lust and gold' is the essence. It keeps you from thinking of or seeing God. After having one or two children, you should live with your wife like a brother and only talk to her about God. In this way the minds of both will go towards Him, and the wife will be a help in his spiritual life. You can't enjoy the bliss of God without first getting rid of animal tendencies. You should pray to God to rid you of these inclinations and you must pray with yearning. He is the controller of our hearts and will surely listen if the prayer is earnest.

"As for gold! Sitting on the bank of the Ganges at the foot of the Panchavati,[1] I threw money away into the water saying, Money is clay, clay is money."

Bankim: "Money is clay! Sir, if you have some money, you can give it to the poor! If money is clay, you can't practice compassion or charity."

Bankim, doing welfare of the world and 'giving up work'

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bankim*): "Compassion! Charity! What ability do you have to do good to others? A man tries to be so clever and runs here and there [doing so many things], but when he

1. A grove of 5 sacred trees that Sri Ramakrishna planted at Rasmani's Kali Temple garden. It was at the foot of one that he practiced many spiritual disciplines. The panchavati is a very secluded spot that brings divine inspiration to the mind effortlessly.

sleeps he doesn't even know if somebody is urinating in his mouth! Where is his pride, ego and arrogance then?

"A sannyasin must renounce 'lust and gold'. He cannot accept them. A person doesn't swallow his own spittle. If a sannyasin gives anybody anything, he doesn't keep it in his mind that he did it. Compassion comes from God. What compassion can a man practice? All charity is by the will of Rama. A genuine sannyasin renounces both internally and externally. Not only does he refuse to eat *gur* [raw sugar], he won't even keep it near him. If he himself should have it and ask others not to take it, nobody would listen to him.

"A householder needs money for his wife and children. He should save it to feed them. Only birds and sannyasins don't hoard. But when a bird has fledglings, it brings food for them in its beak – it also has to save. That's why householders need money – they have to support their families.

"If a householder is pure, he works without attachment. He offers the fruit of his actions – profit, loss, happiness and pain – to God. And he prays day and night for love of God. He has no other desire. This is called work without desire for results,[1] work without attachment. A sannyasin also has to work without expectation of any result. But a sannyasin doesn't engage in worldly activities like a householder.

"If a man of the world gives in charity without expectation of any reward, he does it for his own

1. Nishkama karma.

good, not for the good of others. Lord Hari dwells in all, so it is a way of serving Him. By serving Hari, one serves oneself – it is not by doing good for others. It is service to Lord Hari in all creatures – not merely in human beings, but also service to Him in birds and beasts. If a person doesn't expect name and fame or heaven after death or any return from those he serves, it is genuine work without desire or attachment. Working like this, without expectation of any reward, brings good to himself. This is known as karma yoga, renunciation of work. It is also a path for God-realization. But it is very difficult – it is not for the age of Kali.

"So I say that the man who works unattached in this way shows compassion, gives away in charity, and does good only to himself. It is God who does good to others, brings benefit to others – God who has created the moon and the sun, the father and the mother, fruits and flowers, paddy and creatures. The love that you see in parents is His love – He has endowed them with it for the preservation of living beings. The kindness that you see in a kind heart is His, which He has given to protect the helpless. Whether you show kindness or not, He will get His work done through some medium. His work is never stopped.

"What, then, is man's duty? What else but to take refuge in Him and to pray earnestly to Him that He be attained, be realized."

Only God is real and all else is illusion

"Sambhu said, 'I want to build many dispensaries and hospitals. They will be a great

help to the poor.' I said, 'Yes, it wouldn't be bad if you could do it without attachment. But it's very difficult to remain unattached without sincere love and devotion for God. Besides, if you involve yourself in a lot of different jobs, attachment creeps in from somewhere, you don't know from where. You think you're working unmindful of reward, but you may have a desire for recognition hidden from you – the desire for fame. Also, a person forgets God in the middle of too many engagements.' I also said, 'Sambhu, I ask you this: If God were to manifest Himself to you, would you want Him to give you dispensaries and hospitals?' A person doesn't desire anything else after attaining Him – after tasting candy syrup, who likes molasses?

"Those who enjoy building hospitals and dispensaries are good people, but they belong to a different class. A person who is a true devotee wants nothing but God. If he happens to fall into too much work, he prays earnestly, 'O God, be gracious enough to reduce my work. If there weren't so much work, my mind would be thinking of you every day. It is being wasted now – now it's only involved in thinking of worldly things.' A person who has pure love belongs to a different class. Only God is real, everything else is an illusion. Without realizing this, pure love can't be attained. The world is transitory – a matter of two days. Only He who runs it is real, eternal. Pure love and devotion cannot be attained until this is realized.

"Janaka and others performed work by the command of God.[1]"

1. Pratyadishtha.

Chapter IV

First science or God?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bankim*): "Some people think it isn't possible to realize God without reading books or studying scriptures. They think you should first know the world and the living beings and study science. (*All laugh.*) They say that without understanding God's creation, God can't be known. What do you say? God first, or science?"

Bankim: "Yes, a person has to have an adequate knowledge of the world first. How can God be known without some knowledge of the world? You should educate yourself first and then acquire knowledge of Him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You people say this. But one must know God first, and then His creation. After attaining God, you will know everything you need to know.

"If you can somehow manage a meeting with Jadu Mallick, then, if you want, you can know how many houses, how many shares, how many gardens he has. Jadu Mallick himself will tell you. But if you haven't been introduced to him and talked to him, and his doorkeeper doesn't let you in, how can you know about his houses, his company shares and gardens? Knowing him, you know everything.[1] But then you don't care to know ordinary things. The Vedas say this. Until you see a person you can talk about his virtues, but when he's face to face with

1. tasmin vijñāte sarvamidaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavati।

you, this talk stops. You become engrossed talking to him and don't need to talk about anything else.

"First God-realization, then His creation and anything else. Valmiki was given Rama's mantra to repeat, but he was asked to repeat 'mara', 'mara.' 'Ma' means God and 'ra' the world. First God then the world – by knowing the one, you know all. If you put fifty zeros after the figure "1", it becomes a very big number. But if you put the figure "1" after the zeros, it has no value. It is by having the digit "1" that you have many – first one, then many; first God,[1] then the world and His creation.

"First you need to know God. Why do you talk so much about the world, creation, science and so on? You need to eat mangoes. What need is there for you to know how many hundreds of mango trees there are in the garden, how many thousands of branches, how many millions of leaves? You have come to eat mangoes – eat them and leave. A man has come to this world to attain God. It's not good to forget this and give the mind to so many other things. You have come to eat mangoes. Eat and forget everything else."

Bankim: "But where can I get mangoes?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Pray to Him with yearning. If you are sincere, He will surely listen. He may give you holy company – someone may tell you what to do to enable you to find God."

1. Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven and all other things shall be added unto you – Jesus.

Bankim: "Who? Guru? He takes the better mangoes himself and gives us the inferior ones." (*Laughter.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why, my dear? It's what a person can digest – not everybody can digest fried rice and *kalia* [a meat preparation]. Fish is brought in the house. The mother doesn't serve fried rice and *kalia* to all her sons. She gives fish soup to one with a weak digestion. Does this mean the mother has less love for him?"

Way to attain God – yearning and faith like a child's

"You have to have faith in the words of the guru. The guru himself is Sat-chit-ananda, Sat-chit-ananda alone is the guru. By having faith in his words, by believing like a child, a person attains God. What faith a child has! His mother says, 'This is your elder brother,' immediately the child believes him to be his elder brother – full faith, absolutely one hundred twenty-five percent faith. The boy may be the son of a brahmin and the 'elder brother' a carpenter's or a potter's son. If the mother says, 'There is a hobgoblin in that room,' the boy absolutely believes that there is a hobgoblin in the room. The faith of a child. You have to have this kind of faith in the words of the guru. God can't be realized by cleverness or by a calculating or reasoning mind. You have to have faith and a simple mind – hypocrisy cannot help you. He is very near a guileless person and very far from an insincere one.

"You have to have such yearning for God as a child has when it doesn't find his mother. He

doesn't forget her even if you offer him sandesh or other sweets. There is no way to pacify him and he insists, 'No, I want to go to my mother!' Ah! What a state, a child mad for its mother and crying, 'Mother, Mother!' There's no way to make it forget its mother. The person who finds all joys of the world tasteless, who doesn't care for money, name, fame, physical comforts and sense enjoyments – it is only to the person who wants none of these, who sincerely calls for his mother with pangs of separation, that the mother leaves behind all her work and comes running.

"Such longing! Whatever path – whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Shakta, Brahmo – whichever path you take, the basic condition is yearning of this kind. He is the inner controller of the heart. There is no harm falling into a wrong path if you have yearning. He Himself will put you back on the right path.

"Besides, there are short-comings in all paths. Everybody thinks his own watch gives the right time, but nobody's watch is perfect. But that does not stop anyone's work. If there is yearning, holy company comes to help you correct your watch."

Appendix III

(B) With Keshab at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter One

Saturday, 1st January 1881, 18th day of Pausha, 1287 (B.Y.). The winter festival[1] of the Brahmo Samaj will soon be celebrated. Keshab Sen has come to the Dakshineswar Temple with Pratap, Trailokya, Jaygopal Sen and other Brahmo devotees to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Ram, Manomohan and some others are present.

Many of the Brahmo devotees have reached the Kali Temple before Keshab. They are sitting near Sri Ramakrishna and await Keshab's arrival eagerly, looking to the south for his arrival by steamer. They are restless and talking noisily.

Finally Keshab arrives. He has a bouquet of flowers and two bel fruits in his hand. He touches Sri Ramakrishna's feet and places the articles near, prostrating in salutation. Thakur returns the salutation by his own prostration.

Sri Ramakrishna laughs joyfully. He talks to Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (*with a smile, to Keshab*): "Keshab, you like me, but your disciples don't. I said to them, 'Let's make some noise, be restless so Govinda will come.'"

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1. Maghotsva.

(*To Keshab's disciples*) "Hey brothers, your Govinda has arrived! We've been making noise for a long time, but why would that make you joyful?

"It isn't easy to experience Govinda. Didn't you see in the play about Krishna that he and the cowherd boys and gopis only came after Narada prayed in Vrindavan with a yearning heart: 'O Govinda, my life-breath, my life!' Without yearning, you cannot see the Lord.

(*To Keshab*) "Keshab, do say something. All these people are eager to listen to you."

Keshab (*smiling, humbly*): "Talking here is like selling a needle to a blacksmith."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "But the fact of the matter is that the nature of a devotee is like the nature of a hemp-smoker: 'You take a puff on the pipe so I can also have one.'" (*All laugh.*)

It is four o'clock. Music can be heard coming from the nahabat of the temple garden.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and the others*): "Listen to how nice the music is. One person is playing a monotone and another is raising many waves of other modes. I'm like that. Why should I blow only one note when there are seven available to me? Why should I only say, 'So 'ham, So 'ham?' I like to call on Him in all attitudes – of *shanta* (serenity), of *dasya* (servant toward his master), of *vatsalya* (mother toward her child), of *sakhya* (friend) and of *madhura* (beloved). I'll call on Him in all these attitudes, I'll be happy and enjoy myself in all these moods."

Keshab listens to these words, speechless. He says, "I have never heard such an explanation of knowledge and devotion – amazing, so beautiful!"

Keshab (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "How long will you hide away in solitude like this? Crowds of people are going to fill this place."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you mean? I just eat and drink, enjoy myself and repeat His name. I don't know about gathering people. 'I don't know the names of various villages – what I know is that I am a brahmin from Virbhum.' Hanuman said, 'I don't know the day of the week, the date, or the conjunction of stars. I only contemplate Rama.'"

Keshab: "Well, I'll gather the people. But they will all have to come here."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I am the dust of the dust of the feet of everyone. If they are kind enough to come here, let them come."

Keshab: "Whatever you say, your coming will not be in vain."

Chapter Two

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Arrangements for a kirtan are being made. Many devotees are participating. The kirtan party is coming south from the Panchavati. Hriday is playing a horn[1] and Gopidas is playing a drum.[2] Two devotees are playing cymbals.

1. Shinga.
2. Mridanga.

Sri Ramakrishna sings:

O man, if you want happiness in life, repeat the name of Hari.

You will have a life of joy, go to Vaikuntha and taste the fruit of liberation. That is the merit of repeating Hari's name.

Today I give you the name that Shiva sings with his five mouths.

Sri Ramakrishna dances with the strength of a lion.[1] Soon he goes into samadhi. When he comes out of samadhi, he sits in his room and talks with Keshab and some others.

About the harmony of religions

"God can be realized by all paths. Just like some of you have come here by carriage, some by boat, some by steamer, and some on foot – whatever way is convenient for you or according to your inclination. But the aim is only one, though some reach it earlier than others."

Way to realize God: give up ego

(*To Keshab and others*) "The more you rid yourself of your adjunct, or title, the closer to God you will be. Water doesn't stay on a high mound. It gathers in a hollow below it. It's the same with the shower of God's grace. It doesn't stay where there's ego. Humility is the only right attitude.

"You have to be very cautious in life. Even the clothes a person wears generates ego. I've seen a person with an inflated belly caused by an enlarged

1. Vikrama.

spleen. He was wearing a black-bordered dhoti and singing snatches of Vidhu Babu's love songs.

"People spout English when they wear western style boots.

"Ordinary people putting on the ochre cloth become proud. Only a small mistake on the part of somebody else irritates them."

End of sense enjoyment, yearning, and God-realization

"You can't see God without yearning. And such longing doesn't come until the desire for sense enjoyments has ended. Those who are surrounded by 'lust and greed,' who are not finished with their desires for enjoyment, do not feel yearning for God.

"There, in the countryside [Kamarpukur], Hriday's son used to stay with me the whole day. He was four or five years old. He'd keep himself busy doing this or that and forget everybody else. But as soon as it was evening, he'd say, 'I want to go to my mother.' Howsoever much I tried to get his attention, saying such things as 'I will give you a pigeon,' he couldn't forget his mother. He'd cry to go to her. Play – anything else – couldn't soothe him. Seeing him in that state, I'd cry too.

"This is a childlike cry for God. This is yearning. In this state, not play, not food, nothing else interested him. It is only when the desire for enjoyment ends that such yearning, such crying, comes."

Everyone sits silently, amazed to hear these words.

It is evening. A lamp man has lit the lamp in the room. Keshab and Brahmo devotees will leave after eating. Food is being prepared.

Keshab (*smiling*): "Puffed rice today too?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Hridu knows."

Leaf plates have been laid for the guests. They are first served puffed rice, then luchis, and then ragout. They are all full of joy, with smiles on their faces. It is nearly ten o'clock before it is over.

Thakur talks with Brahmo devotees at the foot of the Panchavati.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to Keshab and others*): "After realizing God you can live well in the world. First touch the Granddame, and then play the game.

"A devotee becomes unattached after he has realized God, like a mudfish. Even while living in muddy water, the body of a mudfish is not stained with mud."

It is about 11 o'clock. Everyone is impatient to leave. Pratap says, "Why not spend the night here?"

Sri Ramakrishna asks Keshab to stay.

Keshab (*smiling*): "I have work to do. I have to leave."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well my dear, can't you sleep without the smell of the fish basket? A fishwife was the guest of a gardener one night. She was given a room full of flowers to sleep in, but she couldn't sleep. (*All laugh.*) She lay there restlessly. The gardener's wife noticed her state and asked her, 'Why can't you sleep?' The fishwife replied, 'I don't

know, sister, but the fragrance of the flowers won't let me sleep. Can you bring my fish basket?' The fishwife sprinkled some water on the basket and fell fast asleep smelling it." (*All laugh.*)

Leaving, Keshab took a few flowers that he had offered at Thakur's feet and salutes him by prostrating. He and the devotees then cry, "Victory to the scriptural prescription!"[1]

Keshab gets into the carriage of the Brahmo devotee, Jaygopal Sen, and they leave for Calcutta.

1. Vidhan.

Appendix IV

Sri Ramakrishna's Visit to Surendra's Home

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna with Ram, Manomohan, Trailokya, Mahendra Goswami and others

Today Sri Ramakrishna and some devotees have come to Surendra's home. It is a day in the month of Ashada, 1881 A.D. It will be dusk soon.

Earlier this afternoon Sri Ramakrishna rested at Manomohan's residence.

Devotees have gathered in Surendra's second floor parlour. Mahendra Goswami, Bholanath Pal and other neighbours are also present. Keshab Sen was expected, but was unable to come. Trailokya Sannyal and some other devotees of the Brahmo Samaj have come.

A cotton carpet with a sheet on it has been spread on the floor of the parlour. A beautiful carpet and bolster have been laid over them. Surendra leads Thakur to the carpet and asks him to sit there.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "But why?" Instead, he sits with Mahendra Goswami. For several months, whenever there has been a festival at Jadu Mallick's garden, Sri Ramakrishna has attended it.

Mahendra Goswami (*to the devotees*): "For months I used to be with him [Sri Ramakrishna]

almost all the time. I've never seen such a great man. His spiritual moods are not ordinary."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the goswami*): "What are you saying? I'm the lowest of the low, poorest of the poor. I am servant to his servants. Only Krishna is great.

"He who is the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda is alone Sri Krishna. From a distance the water of the ocean looks blue, but when you are close to it you see that it has no colour. He is with attributes and He is also without attributes. The being who is the Eternal is the phenomenal as well.

"Why is Sri Krishna bent in three places [*tribhanga*]? Because of his intense love for Radha. That which is the Absolute is also Kali, the Primal Power which creates, preserves and dissolves. He who is Krishna is also Kali. The source is one. All the rest is a game, divine play."

Way to realize God

"You can see God. You can see Him through a pure mind, a pure intellect. Attraction for 'lust and greed' defiles the mind.

"It is the mind that is all important. It's like a newly-laundered cloth that takes the colour it's dipped in. It's the mind alone that makes a person either a man of knowledge or ignorant. 'So and so has gone bad' means that a bad dye has coloured the person's mind."

Trailokya Sannyal and other Brahmo devotees arrive. They sit down.

Surendra comes in with a garland to put around Thakur's neck. Thakur takes the garland in his hand, but throws it away.

Eyes brimming with tears, Surendra goes to the western verandah and sits down. Ram, Manomohan and a few others are with him. Surendra says, "I am very hurt. What does a brahmin from the Rad region[1] know about the value of these things? It costs a lot. I spoke in anger, 'Put the other garlands on the necks of the other devotees!' I understand now that it was my fault. The lord is not bought with money. Nor can he be won by pride. I am proud. Why should He accept my worship? I have no desire to live anymore."

As he says this, streams of tears flow down his face and onto his chest.

Meanwhile, Trailokya is singing in the room. Sri Ramakrishna is dancing, intoxicated. He picks up the garland which he had thrown aside and puts it around his neck. Holding it in one hand, he sings and dances, swinging it with the other hand:

You are the philosopher stone of my heart.

And he adds:

Do I want any other jewel?

I have put on the garland of the moon.

Surendra is overwhelmed with joy that Thakur is dancing with the garland around his neck. He says to himself, "The Lord takes the pride of the

1. A few districts in West Bengal where Sri Ramakrishna was born.

proud. But He is the treasure of the poor, of the humble."

Sri Ramakrishna sings:

Behold the two brothers[1] have come, they who shed tears when chanting Hari's name;

They who offer love even after receiving blows, these two brothers have come.

They who are Kanai and Balai of Vraja, these two brothers have come.

They who embrace even the pariah, these two brothers have come.

Several devotees dance with Sri Ramakrishna. Finally they all sit down and talk with one another.

Sri Ramakrishna says to Surendra, "Won't you give me something to eat?"

Saying this, he gets up and goes to the inner apartments. The women come and salute him by prostrating on the ground with great devotion. After his meal, Thakur rests awhile and then leaves for Dakshineswar.

1. Gauranga and Nityananda.

Appendix V

Sri Ramakrishna at Manomohan's Home

Chapter One

With Keshab Sen, Surendra, Rajendra Mitra, Trailokya and others

At Manomohan's house, 23 Shimulia Street, near Surendra's residence, Saturday, 3 December 1881 today; 19th day of Agrahayana, 1288 (Bengali Year).

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at about four o'clock in the afternoon. Manomohan's is a small one-storeyed house [one upper floor], with a small courtyard. Thakur sits in the parlour overlooking the street, on the ground floor.

Sri Ramakrishna talks with Ishan Mukherji from Bhawanipur.

Ishan: "Why did you renounce family life? The scriptures speak highly of the householder stage of life."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I don't know what is good or bad. I do what He makes me do. I say what He makes me say."

Ishan: "If everyone were to renounce the householder's life, it would be working against God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why should everyone renounce? Is it His will that everybody should be like dogs and jackals with their mouths in 'lust and

greed'? Does He will nothing else? How do you know what He wills and what He doesn't?

"You're saying it is His will that a person leads a family life. Why don't you see it is also His will when a husband or wife and son die? When you starve, when there is poverty, why don't you see that as God's will too?

"Maya doesn't allow us to know what His will is. Because of His maya, the ephemeral appears to us as permanent and the permanent appears transitory. The world is transitory. It is here now and then gone. But His maya doesn't let us see that. It is His maya that makes me think I'm the doer and all these – wives, sons, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, hearth and home – are all mine.

"Maya is both knowledge and ignorance. The world of ignorance makes you forget, and the knowledge aspect of maya, of spiritual knowledge, takes you towards God, towards love for God and holy company.

"But for the person who is beyond maya, by God's grace, they are both the same, knowledge and ignorance.

"There is a lot of enjoyment in the householder life. But what is the enjoyment of 'lust and greed'? Once you swallow sandesh, you don't remember if it was sweet or sour.

"Anyway, why should everybody renounce 'lust and greed'? It isn't even possible to renounce before the time is ripe. When the desire for enjoyment is over, the time for renunciation comes. Can you do it by force?

"There is a kind of renunciation called monkey renunciation. It is the renunciation of people of little understanding. A widowed mother supported herself and her son by spinning. The boy lost the small job that he had. As a consequence he felt he should renounce the world. He put on ochre and went to Kashi. But in a few days he wrote to say that he had found a job paying ten rupees a month. He tried to buy a gold ring, a dhoti and a shirt with it. How could he get rid of that desire for enjoyment?"

Chapter Two

Sri Ramakrishna at Manomohan's

Keshab has arrived with Brahmo devotees. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the courtyard. Keshab salutes him with great devotion. He takes his seat to the left of Thakur, and Ram sits on his right.

After a reading from the Bhagavata, Thakur speaks. Householder devotees are sitting all around the courtyard.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Worldly duty is very difficult to perform. After spinning around quickly, a person feels faint and falls. But if he holds to a pillar while he spins, there is no danger. Do your duty, but do not forget God.

"So you ask, what is the way out if it's so difficult? The way out is the yoga of practice. I've seen carpenters' wives in the village [Kamarpukur] pounding flattened rice with one hand, being careful that the pestle doesn't mangle their fingers. And at the same time they nurse their babies at the

breast and talk to customers, demanding payment before they leave.

"An unfaithful woman attends to all her household work, but her mind is constantly on her lover.

"But some spiritual practice is necessary for this. From time to time you need to go into solitude and call on Him. You should first develop love for God and then do your duty. If you cut a jackfruit with your bare hands, its milky juice will stick to them. But if you rub your hands with oil first, and then cut the jackfruit, its juice won't stick to them."

Now there is music in the courtyard. And then Trailokya sings: "Victory, victory to the All-Blissful Mother, the form of Brahman!"

Thakur dances in joy. Keshab and other devotees dance with him. It is cold, but Thakur's body is covered with perspiration.

Having enjoyed the kirtan, everybody sits down and Sri Ramakrishna asks for something to eat. A plate of sweets is brought to him from the inner apartments. Keshab holds it while Thakur eats from it. He holds a drinking glass as well in this manner. Then he wipes Thakur's mouth with a cloth and begins to fan him.

Sri Ramakrishna again takes up the question of whether or not it is possible to lead a spiritual life in the household.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and others*): "Householders who are able to pray to Him are heroes. They have a very heavy load of twenty seers

on their heads and yet they try to realize God. Such devotees are heroic.

"Even if you say that it's very difficult, in spite of that, what is not possible with God's grace? Even the impossible becomes possible. If you bring a light into a room that's been dark for a thousand years, does it light up little by little? It lights up immediately."

Listening to these words of hope, Keshab and other householder devotees are filled with joy.

Keshab (*smiling, to Rajendra Mitra*): "It would be nice to have a celebration like this at your home."

Rajendra: "All right, that would be nice! Ram, you please take charge of it." (Rajendra is Ram and Manomohan's uncle.)[1]

Thakur is now taken to the inner apartments. He is to be served a meal there. Shyamasundari, Manomohan's mother, has prepared the meal. Sri Ramakrishna sits down and looks at the different sweets and other plates of food. He smiles and says when he eats, "You have done so much for me." He is also given a glass of ice water.

Keshab and the other devotees sit in the courtyard to eat. Coming down to them, Thakur starts feeding them. And he dances and sings of luchis and balls of sweets[2] to entertain them.

---

1. The husband of Ram and Manomohan's mother's sister.
2. Luchi-munda.

It is time for Sri Ramakrishna to go back to Dakshineswar. Keshab and the other devotees take the dust of his feet and see him board the carriage.

Appendix VI

Sri Ramakrishna at Rajendra's House

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna with Ram, Manomohan, Keshab and other devotees. 1881 A.D.

Rajendra Mitra's home is on Bechu Chatterji Street in Thanthania. Keshab had suggested to Rajendra, when they were at the festival at Manomohan's house, that it would be nice if a similar festival were celebrated at his house one day. Rajendra happily arranged one.

Today is Saturday, 10 December 1881, 26th of Agrahayana, 1288 (B.Y.). The celebration is today. It is a very happy occasion. Many devotees are coming, including Keshab and other Brahmo devotees.

Just before the festival, Umanath had informed Rajendra about the death of Bhai Aghornath, a Brahmo devotee. Aghornath had passed away at 2 a.m. in Lucknow on 8 December, 24th Agrahayan. The news had been received by wire the same night and Umanath had brought the message the next day. Keshab and the other Brahmo devotees were in mourning. Rajendra worried whether or not they would be able to come on Saturday.

Ram had said to Rajendra, "Why do you worry whether or not Keshab Babu comes? Thakur is coming. He is always in samadhi, he sees God face to face – the joy of which makes the whole world taste joy."

When Ram, Rajendra and Manomohan visited Keshab, he said, "But I never said I wouldn't go. The paramahamsa is going. How can I stay away? I'll

certainly go. Because I'm in mourning, I can eat separately."

Keshab then talked with Rajendra and other devotees. There is a picture of Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi in the room.

Rajendra (*to Keshab*): "Many people say that the paramahamsa is an incarnation of Chaitanya."

Keshab (*pointing to the picture of samadhi*): "Such samadhi can be seen nowhere. Jesus Christ, Mohammed and Chaitanya used to experience it."

Sri Ramakrishna arrives at Manomohan's house at 3 o'clock. He rests for awhile and has some refreshments. Surendra says, "Come, sir, yesterday you said you wanted to see a camera." He takes Thakur by carriage to the Bengal Photographer Studio. The photographer shows how a photo is taken. A glass plate is covered with silver nitrate on one side to take the image.

Thakur is photographed. He immediately goes into samadhi.

Afterward, he goes to Rajendra Mitra's house. Rajendra is a retired deputy magistrate.

Mahendra Goswami is reading from the *Bhagavata* in the courtyard of the house. A number of devotees are present, but Keshab has not yet arrived. Sri Ramakrishna talks to the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Why should it not be possible in family life? But it is very difficult. Today I came by the Baghbazar bridge. It is held up with so many chains! If one of these chains breaks, the bridge won't be affected because

it's tied with so many other chains. Householders have as many bondages. Without God's grace there's no way to get rid of them.

"After realizing God, there's no danger. There are both knowledge and ignorance in His maya. You become unattached when you realize God. Then you have correct understanding, the state of a paramahamsa. There is water in milk. A swan takes the milk from the mixture and discards the water. A swan can do this, but not a sparrow.[1]"

A Devotee: "Then what is the way for a family man?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Faith in the words of the guru. Follow his instructions. Hold onto them like you're whirling around a pillar then do your duties – that is, do the work of the world.

"Don't think of the guru as a human being. Sat-chit-nanda Himself comes as the guru. By the grace of the guru a person sees the form of his spiritual ideal. And then the guru merges into the ideal.

"What is not possible through simple and unquestioning faith? During the rice-eating ceremony[2] of a guru's son, his disciples contributed to the best of their abilities. There was a poor widow who was also a disciple. She had a cow. She brought a small jug of milk. The guru had expected her to take the responsibility for all the milk and curds of the ceremony. He became angry and threw away the milk she had brought, saying, 'Just go

1. A shalik: A black sparrow with a small yellow beak.
2. Annaprasana.

drown yourself!' Taking it as a command, the woman went to the river to drown herself. Narayana appeared to her and said, 'There's curd in this container. The more you pour, the more there will be. And your guru will be pleased.' When the guru was given the container, he was amazed. When he heard the whole story, he went to the shore of the river and said to the widow, 'If you do not show me Narayana, I will commit suicide in this very river.' Narayana appeared, but the guru could not see Him. The woman then prayed, 'Lord, if you do not reveal yourself to my guru, he will quit his body and I will also die.' Then Narayana showed himself once to the guru.

"You see, because of her devotion to her guru, not only did she attain the vision of God, but her guru also had His vision.

"So I say:

Even if my guru visits a tavern he remains my ever-joyful guru.

"Everybody wants to become a guru, but only a rare few want to be disciples. So notice that rainwater doesn't collect on a hill. It collects in hollows on lower ground.

"You should practice spiritual disciplines with full faith in the name the guru gives at initiation.

"It is said that a pearl oyster opens itself for a drop of rain water that comes from the Svati constellation of stars. As soon as the drop falls into the oyster, it dives deep into the water and stays there till a pearl is formed."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at Rajendra's house

Seeing so many Brahmo devotees, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Is this a Brahmo Samaj gathering or mere show? There is regular worship in the Brahmo Samaj, which is very good, but you have to dive deep. Mere worship and lectures are not enough. You have to pray to God to take away desire for enjoyments and attachment, and to grant you pure love and devotion at His lotus feet.

"An elephant has both inner and outer tusks. The outer tusks are for show, but the inner ones are teeth for eating. Secret desire for the enjoyment of 'lust and greed' harms a person's devotion.

"What is the use of giving lectures? A vulture flies high, but its sight remains fixed on charnel-pits. A rocket first shoots high into the sky, but the next moment it falls to the ground.

"A person only remembers God at the time of death when the desire for enjoyment has been done away with. Otherwise, only things of the world come to the mind – wife, son, home, wealth, prestige, rank and so on. A parrot can learn to say 'Radha Krishna,' but when it's seized by a cat, it only squawks 'caw-caw'.

"That's why practice is essential – to repeat His name and qualities, to sing His glory, to meditate on Him, to contemplate Him, to pray – in order to get rid of the desire for enjoyment and attachment and fix the mind on His lotus feet.

"Be like a maid-servant who attends to all her work but at the same time keeps her mind in her own village. In other words, attend to all your duties while keeping your mind fixed on God. A worldly life sticks to you. A genuine devotee lives like a mudfish – in the mud, but the mud does not stick to his body.

"Brahman and His Primal Power are the same. By calling on Him as Mother, you soon gain love and devotion for God."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing:

The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.

The rough wind of misdeeds made it fall circling to the ground.[1]

And then he sings:

O Mother Shyama! Yashoda would make You dance when she called You her precious blue jewel!

Where have You hidden that form, O terrible Shyama?

Now Thakur stands up and dances as he sings. The devotees also stand up.

Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi now and then. Everyone watches him intently, standing still like images in a picture. Doctor Dukari puts his fingers in Thakur's eyes to test the samadhi. The devotees are irritated to see it.

After this amazing dancing and singing, they all seat themselves again. Just then Keshab and many Brahmo devotees arrive. They salute Thakur and sit as well.

---

1. For complete song, refer Volume III, Section IX.

Rajendra (*to Keshab*): "We had wonderful music and dancing." He then asks Trailokya to sing again.

Keshab (*to Rajendra*): "Since the paramahamsa has already taken his seat, the kirtan will never pick up tempo."

Trailokya and other Brahmo devotees begin to sing:

> But for once, repeat the name of Hari, say the name of Hari, repeat the name of Hari.
>
> Cross the ocean of the world, by repeating, 'Hari, Hari, Hari.'
>
> Hari is present in the water, Hari is on earth, Hari is present in the moon, Hari is present in the sun.
>
> Hari is present in the air and in fire. This vast expanse of earth is filled with Hari.

Arrangements are being made on the first floor for a feast for Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees. He is still sitting in the courtyard talking with Keshab. He tells Keshab that he had been to a photographer in Radha Bazaar.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to Keshab*): "Today I saw a beautiful machine for taking photographs. For one thing I saw that a bare glass does not receive the image, but that first they rub something black on the back side of the glass. Then the photograph appears. Just like this, a person may hear spiritual talks that leave no impression on the mind, it is forgotten the next moment. But if the person has the black ink of love for God within him already, and attraction for Him is rubbed on the mind, then he internalizes the words. Otherwise they are heard and forgotten."

Thakur goes to the first floor. He is given a seat on a beautiful small carpet.

Shyamasundari, Manomohan's mother, serves the food. Manomohan says, "My affectionate mother has saluted Thakur by lying prostrate on the floor. She has also served him food." Rama and others were there then.

Keshab and other devotees sit for their meal on the verandah opposite the room in which Thakur is being fed.

Shailajacharan Mukherji, the present attendant of the Shyamasundar image in the shrine on Bechu Chatterji Street, is present today.

Appendix VII

Sri Ramakrishna at the Grand Festival of the Brahmo Samaj at Shimulia

Chapter One

In the company of Ram, Keshab, Narendra and other devotees

Today Thakur is attending, with devotees, the annual festival of the Brahmo Samaj at Shimulia. It is being held at the house of Jnana Chaudhary. It is Sunday, 1st January 1882, 18th Day of Pausha, 1288 (B.Y.), time about five o'clock.

Keshab Sen, Ram, Manomohan, Balaram, the Brahmo devotee Raj Mohan, Jnana Chaudhary, Kedar, the Brahmo devotee Kantibabu, Kalidas Sarkar, Kalidas Mukherji, Narendra, Rakhal and many devotees are present.

Only a few days ago, Narendra visited Thakur at Dakshineswar with Ram and some others. He is also at the festival today. He visits the Shimulia Brahmo Samaj from time to time and worships and sings there.

The worship will be performed according to the rules of the Brahmo Samaj.

First are readings from scriptures. Narendra, who can sing, sings at their request.

It is evening. Gauri Pandit of Indesh arrives in the dress of a brahmachari.

Gauri: "Where is the gentleman, the paramahamsa?"

In a little while, Keshab arrives with devotees. He salutes Sri Ramakrishna by lying prostrate on the ground. They are all seated in the courtyard enjoying themselves.

Seeing the householder devotees all around, Thakur says with a laugh: "Why shouldn't it be possible in family life? But, you know, there's a problem. The mind is not with you. You can only give it to God if it's with you. And you've enslaved it, enslaved it with 'lust and greed'. So there's a constant need of holy company.

"It is only when the mind is in your possession that it's possible to practice spiritual disciplines. Constant company of the guru, service to him, and the company of holy people is essential. Either you think about Him day and night in seclusion, or have the company of the holy. When the mind is left alone it gradually dries up. It's like if you keep water separately in a jug – it will become dry. But if you keep the jug in the water of the Ganges, it won't dry out.

"The iron in a blacksmith's shop reddens in fire. But if you take it out of the fire, it becomes black as before. That's why it should be put in the furnace from time to time.

"To say that I am the doer, that because of this, the world is running, the house is mine and this is my family, is ignorance. But to feel that I am His servant, His devotee, or His child is very good.

"This I-ness doesn't disappear for good. You can rid yourself of it by reasoning for awhile, but it soon returns, as if from nowhere, like the bleating and jerking of a slaughtered goat.

"The 'I' which God retains in you after His vision is called the 'ripe I' – like a sword turning gold after touching the philosopher's stone. It can't be used for killing anymore."

Sri Ramakrishna, sitting in the worship hall, says this to Keshab and the other devotees. They all listen with rapt attention. It is 8 p.m. The bell rings three times for worship to begin.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and the others*): "What? You haven't started worship yet?"

Keshab: "What else would our worship be? What has been happening is our worship."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, brother. You must perform according to your rules."

Keshab: "Why? Worship is going on very nicely!"

At Sri Ramakrishna's repeated insistence, Keshab rises and begins the worship. During it, Thakur suddenly stands up and goes into samadhi. The Brahmo devotees sing:

O mind, chant the name of Hari once.

By repeating His name, one crosses the sea of the world.

Hari is in water, Hari is on land, Hari is in fire, Hari is in the wind,

Hari in the moon, Hari in the sun, the whole universe is filled with Hari.

Sri Ramakrishna is still standing and in ecstasy. Keshab, holding him by the hand very carefully, brings him down from the hall to the courtyard.

The song continues. Thakur begins to dance to the beat of the song. Devotees all around him also dance.

On the first floor of Jnana Babu's house, arrangements are afoot for a feast for Sri Ramakrishna, Keshab and the others.

After it they all return to the ground floor and take their seats. While talking, Thakur again begins to sing. Keshab joins him:

> The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight to the blue lotus flower of Mother Shyama's feet.[1]
>
> The honey of all worldly things – the flowers of lust and cravings – have lost all charm.

Then they sing:

> The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.
>
> The rough wind of misdeeds made it fall circling to the ground.[2]

Both Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab appear intoxicated. They dance and sing with the others till midnight.

Having rested for awhile, Thakur says to Keshab, "Why did you send me gifts on the occasion of your son's marriage. Please take them back. What do I need them for?"

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1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section II, Chapter VII.
2. For the complete song refer to Volume III, Section IX.

Keshab smiles a little. Then Thakur says, "Why do you publish my name in newspapers? Nobody can be made great by being written about in books and newspapers. If God makes someone great, even a person who lives in a dense forest becomes known. A flower opens out in a dense forest and a honeybee finds it, not flies. What can a man do? Don't look up to a man. Men are just worms. The mouth that speaks well of a man one moment will soon run him down the next. I don't want to be respected. I'd rather be the lowest of the low, the most insignificant of the insignificant."

One day in the month of Ashada in 1881 A.D., Thakur Sri Ramakrishna visited Surendra's mansion. Keshab was also expected, but he couldn't make it. He was busy arranging the marriages of his eldest son and his second daughter.

On Friday, 15 July 1881, the 1st day of Shravana,[1] Keshab, with a number of Brahmo devotees from Calcutta, had enjoyed a cruise to Somra in the steam yacht belonging to his son-in-law, the king of Cooch Bihar. During the cruise he broke his journey at Dakshineswar and took the paramahamsa and Hriday on board. In the yacht were Keshab, Trailokya and other Brahmo devotees and Kumar Gajendra, Narayan, Nagendra and so on.

While talking about God without form, Sri Ramakrishna entered samadhi. Trailokya Sannyal was singing to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. Coming out of samadhi, Thakur sang:

What a machine Mother Shyama has built!

---

1. Nagendra had narrated this to M. two or three months later. Many months later M. met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time, on 26 February 1882 A.D.

What a machine Mother Kali has made!

In this machine, three and a half cubits high, what pranks She plays![1]

On the return journey Thakur disembarked at Dakshineswar. Keshab had been invited to Kalicharan Bannerji's house and got off at the Ahiritola Ghat to go by foot to his house on Masjidvari Street.

1. For the complete song, refer Volume IV, Section XVI.

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